

God's Plan of the Ages

Volume Three

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God's Plan of the Ages

Volume Three ~ Joshua through King Jotham

A historical fiction epic imagining what it may have been like
to accompany the Creator of the universe
from the beginning to the end of time.

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Maps drawn by Nathaniel Santa Cruz, Graphic Illustrator

Note: Volume Two begins this story. I recommend that you read it first, to properly understand Volume Three. Be sure to see the back pages for the timeline, maps, diagrams, and index for this volume.

In the previous volume I bolded everything in the Index of First Mention, to help you locate them. But in this and future volumes there are simply too many names. All that bolding became too distracting. So now I am only bolding key names such as the prophets, judges, high priests, and kings of Israel when they first appear. I do this to create visual sub-headings, to make it easier for you, dear Reader, to correlate this story with the Scriptures.

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God's Plan of the Ages – A Historical Fiction Epic

Volume Three – Joshua through King Jotham

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HISTORICAL NOTE: Many of the ancient cities of Egypt took Greek names after Alexander the Great liberated Egypt from the hated Persians. Egypt fell in love with Alexander and the Greek culture. These Greek names are now most familiar to us, and the old Egyptian names have all but been forgotten. So to avoid confusing you, dear Reader, I have consistently used the Greek names throughout my story – names like Leontopolis, Heliopolis, Herakleopolis, Hermopolis, and Lycopolis – even from long before the Greeks came to Egypt. To me, clarity trumps these anachronisms.

God's Plan of the Ages – Volume Three – Joshua through Jotham

Joshua called for a month of mourning for Moses and Ziporah. It was sweet sorrow for him. Though sad at the loss, he knew that they were in a much better place. Joshua worried about carrying the burden of caring for so great a company. Yet he felt strength from the anointing Moses had given him. For now, he had a month free of important duties, to enjoy his new wife, Jerusha. *What a joy and delight she was!* Joshua thanked YHWH every day for her.

We will leave Joshua there in the camp with Jerusha, while we go with the two spies he sent out across the Jordan. We don't even know their names, for they went humbly, seeking no credit for themselves. Dressing like peasants of the land, they entered the great walled city of Jericho and strolled casually through the marketplace. Truly, it was a good land! Filled with commerce and luxury! Vendors called and jostled them, pushing for a sale. They had no local currency and could not purchase anything, so they tried to just keep quiet. However, the excitement of the marketplace is catching. One casually answered an insistent salesclerk with but a word or two.

"Hey! That sounds like how 'they' talk!"

There was a sudden hush around them. Everyone seemed to know just to whom 'they' referred. Every eye was on them. Faces that moments ago were laughing, seemed lined with fear. "Who are you?" a beady-eyed merchant demanded. "You're new around here. Are you Israelites? Say something, so we can hear your accent."

There was no denying it. They were exposed! They turned and ran for the gates. But shouts from the storekeepers reached there first and the guards blocked their way. So they turned and ran through the streets, hoping to lose their pursuers. Rounding a corner, they came to a dark and empty-looking home beside the wall. It was a rich person's home, with three stories. Surely they could let themselves down over the wall from the top story. The door was unlocked. They ran inside and climbed the stairs. The house was dark, but it was not empty. Tromping up the stairs, they heard the shriek of a startled woman on the third floor. It was a lady of the night, just awakened. She had been sleeping in after her long night's 'work'. They had only seconds. "Help us! Hide us, and we will be good to you. Otherwise we'll have to kill you."

She too recognized their accent, instantly. "You are of Israel," she accused. The look of fear on her face changed to a glimmer of hope as she nodded her acceptance of their offer. She turned and led them to the end of the hall. From there, she pulled down a rope ladder and pointed up. They hurriedly climbed to the roof. Then she unhooked the ladder and stowed it neatly in a dresser drawer. Quickly she ran downstairs to answer the pounding on her door.

"Rahab! Where are the spies who came in here?"

"What? Spies? Are you sure they came in here? I was sleeping. I didn't hear them," she lied, rubbing her eyes. "Help me find them, for I am alone and I would be at their mercy. I must be more careful to lock my door."

She led them through the entire house, searching. When they couldn't find the spies, they asked about her roof. "Oh, they couldn't get up there – they had no ladder. I always keep my rope ladder in my dresser here." She opened the drawer and pointed. "See. It is just as I left it. I know they're not up there. Maybe they got past us and fled back out the door. Hurry! I hope you find them!"

She was a very good liar. Even so, they only half believed her. She did have a 'reputation'. They went to the king of Jericho and told him the whole story. He of course didn't believe her either. He knew her all too well. He sent soldiers to the harlot's house.

Meanwhile, Rahab went up to the roof with food and water for the two men. As they ate, she told them what she had done. But she knew her own people didn't trust her and would no doubt be back to check her story. So she had them lie down, while she covered them with stalks of flax which she had left up there to dry in the sun.

That evening four soldiers arrived at her house. Rahab was wearing her finest, most seductive red silk robe. She flung wide the door to welcome them in just as if they were customers. She immediately began her act, designed from long experience to increase her income. She had gotten very good at this. She focused on the captain.

"No, no! Not now!" He pushed her away. "Where are the two spies who came here a few hours ago?"

"Two spies?" She was a good actress, as harlots often are. Her eyes got big with calculated horror. "What did they look like?" She put fear on her face.

"Just like commoners from the market. They were in disguise. Don't try to lie to us. We know they came here, because the merchants told us."

"No... Uh... Yes! Two men came here. Commoners. Just before suppertime. They had money, and they paid me well for my services. But they left just before you came, as the sun was setting. They said they had to leave before the gate was closed for the night. I'm sorry. I didn't know they were spies. They paid me well..."

"You're disgusting!" the captain snorted. "I don't believe a word you've said. We'll search your house."

"Oh yes, please do! If men are hiding here, I surely need to know!" She led them cheerfully through the house, playing flirtatious games with the captain as they went.

Before they got to the roof, she anticipated them, “It is possible they’re hiding on the roof, though I don’t know how they’d get there, since I keep the ladder coiled up in my dresser drawer next to my red fire-escape rope.” She got it out for them and hooked it in place. With the seeds of doubt already planted, they glanced at the undisturbed flax drying up there and came down shaking their heads.

“Oh dear. I was afraid of that.” Rahab put on her ‘concerned’ look. “They probably made it out before the gate was closed for the night. But they can’t have gone far. If you hurry, you’ll catch them!”

After they were gone, Rahab bolted her door shut and snuffed out her ‘open for business’ lamp in the window. Then she returned to the roof. “I lied for you. I told the soldiers you’d gone out the gate before dark. They will be out searching for you.” She held the trap-door while they made their way down the rope ladder.

They were on the third floor, next to a window overlooking the wall. She pointed out the window. “I have a strong rope. I can let you down over the wall, and I can show you where to hide so they won’t find you.” She smiled slyly, winking at them as she opened the dresser drawer again and got out a strong, scarlet rope.

“Why are you so quick to help us? Don’t you know we’re spies? Why do you want to help your enemies?”

The plastic smile vanished, and she fell on her knees before them. “I know that YHWH your God has given you the land. The terror of you has fallen upon us! We heard how YHWH dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, then brought it crashing back down to drown the Egyptian army behind you. We heard what you did to the mighty armies of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. Our hearts melted within us, and no courage remained in us, even our strongest men, because of you. For YHWH your God, He is the true God in the heavens above and over the earth beneath. He is the All-Powerful God, who gives you success...” She laid it on pretty thick.

She was weeping profusely, but suddenly (with no concept of ‘personal space’) she jumped up and threw her arms tightly around the neck of one of the spies. “Swear to me, by YHWH your God, that you will deal kindly with me and my family when you take this city, as I have dealt kindly with you!”

The spy reached back to pry her fingers off his neck. “Okay. Our life for yours, if you do not tell this business of ours. When YHWH gives us the land, we will deal kindly and faithfully with you. Only you must keep this scarlet rope dangling from your window as a sign, and your family must all be here, or we are free from our pledge. Anyone within this house we will spare, or his blood will be upon our heads. But if anyone of your family leaves this house, his blood will be upon his own head. We swear this in the name of YHWH our God.”

The other spy wasn’t so sure. “YHWH our God is holy, Rahab. He doesn’t take kindly to lies, deceit, or harlotry! Harlotry is a capital offense! I’m not sure He...”

Rahab interrupted him, as if she knew this was coming. “I don’t care what your God does to me. I’m worthless, and I know I deserve to die. But my family, my mother and father, they are good people. And my younger brothers and sisters—they are all innocent. I only took this... ahh... profession, to try to help support them when my aged parents took sick. They’re desperately poor. I want to save them!” She was back on the floor, weeping again. It was, of course, all a very good act to save her skin, as the spies were beginning to discern. But now, Rahab herself wasn’t so sure how much of it was acting.

Satan and a few of his most competent demons were manipulating this woman, like a puppet on a string. Satan gloated over her. This would be his masterpiece! His open door into the camp of Israel.

He wasn’t a bit worried about her or her family. They were all his, body and soul. Her ‘poor’ parents had spent their lives in wild and riotous living. Her mother René had been a temple prostitute when she was young. Her father Reece had been a career military man, who had taken René from the temple in a big fight, in which he had killed several priests. Rahab, their oldest, had been conceived that same wild night. Though not married (yet), they did have a lot of children together. Two of their children had been sacrificed to Chemosh of the Moabites, and a third to Moloch of the Ammonites.

So Rahab’s ‘innocent’ brothers and sisters had grown up in a dysfunctional, hedonistic home, where personal pleasures were king. They had more or less continued in their parent’s profligate ways. All had to some degree suffered the natural consequences. But Reece and René had suffered the worst. They were poor because all their living was now spent on doctors. They had grown to secretly despise the lifestyle they had passed on to their children. They’d finally gotten married and settled down. They stayed away from the house of their youth, where their children regularly gathered for wild orgies.

Unbeknownst to Satan, in their hearts they cried out for something better for their family. Logos heard, but Satan can’t read minds and could not hear their cries.

So when Rahab (plastic smile firmly back in place) sent away the spies, Satan laughed ‘til his sides split. *Rahab’s entire family, the most wicked in Jericho, will be welcomed into the Israelite camp. He has their word on it!*

Rahab arose early the next day (that is, noon, which was early for her). She dressed in her most modest clothes, took a lot of money (for she was very rich), and went to visit her parents, Reece and René. “I’m not sure why I’m doing this...” she began, handing them the money. They didn’t hear Satan’s chuckle. He knew why!

“This is to pay off your debts here. I want you to leave this dump and come back to live with me. As the oldest, I’m responsible to take care of you. With Israel threatening us, we need each other more than ever. I’m going to try to get my sisters and brothers to come, too.”

“Rahab, you’re a harlot. You said your customers don’t like it when your family lives there with you.”

“We’ll make arrangements. I’ll move my own bedroom down to the first floor, and you and the kids can have the upper two floors. My customers don’t need to know.”

“But you sleep during the day. We would...”

“I said we’d work it out, Dad. Maybe I’ll just give up harlotry and take up a day job.” Satan knew he had to get the whole family there, for maximum impact.

Give up harlotry? Reece and René glanced at each other. They knew Rahab had hated them, but maybe she was ready to change. They finally agreed.

We now return to the camp of Israel, where the spies had delivered their encouraging report. YHWH had kept the promise He’d given Moses, that the fear of them would fall over the entire land. Now the thirty days of mourning for Moses was past. Joshua told the people to gather at dawn to find out what God wanted next.

As they were gathering, Logos spoke to Joshua, “Moses My servant is dead. You’re in charge now. So cross the Jordan and begin to take possession of this bountiful land. I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, as I promised Moses. From the wilderness to the Western Sea and from the Negev to Lebanon and the land of the Hittites, even as far as the River Euphrates, will be your territory. No man will be able to withstand you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, so I shall be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you. Only be strong and courageous, and be careful to do according to all the law as Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn aside, to the right or to the left, so you shall have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, to be careful to do all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and have good success. Again I command you: Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed in any way, for I, YHWH your God, am with you wherever you go.”

The vision faded. The people before him grew silent, awaiting his first words as their commander-in-chief. “Pack your duds and prepare provisions,” he called out boldly, “For in three days we shall cross this Jordan and begin to possess the good land which YHWH our God has given to us. Who among you will go with me?”

The people gave a mighty shout. It reverberated off the surrounding hills. Even the people of Jericho, miles away, heard it. They were terrified!

Joshua’s leading general, **Salmon**, answered for the company, “All that you command we will do. Wherever you send we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses, so we shall obey you. And anyone who rebels against your command shall be put to death!” He had spoken loudly enough for the congregation to hear, but now he turned to face them. “Only be strong and very courageous! For the victory is already ours – if we will only take it! Far be it from us to turn back in fear, as our fathers did forty years ago. With YHWH our God we cannot lose! Now go, pack your duds, as Joshua commanded. We’ll start moving down to the bank of the Jordan in two hours.”

So they left Abel-Shittim, to camp beside the Jordan. The armed men of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh said good-bye to their families (leaving them in the protection of the walled cities they had prepared) and joined Israel at the Jordan; they would keep their vow to Moses. All the Israelites purified themselves there beside the Jordan. On the evening of the third day they received their orders. “Follow the Ark of the Covenant. But keep your distance, for the Ark is holy and you have not been this way before.”

Early in the morning of the third day (remember that morning comes after evening in the Hebrew culture) Joshua gathered the people. Again, Logos spoke to him as they were gathering, “This day I will exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so they may know that just as I have been with Moses, so also I am with you. Your mouth is My mouth now. Just speak as I give you utterance.”

The crowd grew silent. They hadn’t seen or heard the vision. “People of Israel, hear the Word of YHWH your God!” Joshua began. “By this you shall know that YHWH is with you and will assuredly dispossess the inhabitants of this good land and give it to you. Behold, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the Earth shall go into the Jordan ahead of you, carried by the priests. When the soles of their feet touch the waters of the Jordan, it shall be cut off, and shall pile up in a heap a great distance away.”

The people glanced over at the Jordan. It was very full, overflowing its banks, for it was late spring (the first of Nisan, our late March). There were indeed some doubters in the group, but they held their peace. “Now select twelve men from among you; leaders, strong in faith and in body, one from each tribe. Line them up along the Jordan, spread out far downstream from the priests. As soon as they see the one upstream go into the water, they also shall start across. Quickly follow those twelve! Run! The flow of the Jordan will stop just long enough for us all to cross. The priests will wait in the middle of the river bed a half-mile upstream of you, until everyone crosses.”

Carrying the Ark on long poles, the priests walked a half-mile upstream and put their feet into the water. As Joshua had said, the water began to dry up. It continued drying up as they walked out to the center of the river. One by one, the twelve leaders of Israel followed their lead.

The people all saw, and gave another mighty shout. The Canaanites heard it, and they saw the waters stop. They were terrified. Everyone began gathering inside the walls. They had spent the last six months stocking up on food, preparing for the long siege that they knew was coming. Jericho was the oldest and strongest fortified city in Canaan. It had been flattened by earthquakes six times before, but it was at a strategic location (at the junction of two major trade routes), so it had always been rebuilt. This latest rebuild (after the catastrophes forty years earlier, at the Exodus) was the best ever. The destroyed city had been leveled about twelve feet above the plain. This plateau was ringed by a double wall. The outer wall was six feet thick and eight feet high (making it twenty feet to the base of the plateau). The inner wall was twelve feet thick and twelve feet high. The six foot gap between the two walls was filled with rubble from the old city. Along the top of the inner wall were guard towers, observation walkways, and the upper stories of rich people's houses built into the wall.

Following their twelve leaders, the people of Israel ran across the Jordan on dry ground. After they were all safely across, Joshua ordered the twelve leaders to go back and each retrieve a large stone from the middle of the river bed. They obeyed, though by now they could hear the thunder of rushing waters upstream. As they were getting their stones, Joshua went back to the priests, who were still standing in the center of the river bed. He gathered twelve more stones and stacked them up as a memorial right there in the middle of the river bed, where the priests were standing. As the twelve leaders were carrying their stones out of the river bed, Joshua led the priests up to the river bank. Their timing was perfect. Just as the feet of the priests reached the banks, they saw a big wave rushing toward them. They quickly hiked up to high ground, barely escaping the flood. The Jordan returned to overflow its banks as before.

Those high on the walls of Jericho could see what the Israelites could not. Eighteen miles north at a town called Adam the west bank of the Jordan had collapsed. It had created a temporary dam, stopping the river's flow. Why had the bank collapsed? No one knew. Though 1410 BC was on the 30 year cycle of great catastrophes, with Jupiter in Leo and Saturn in Aquarius, this was only Nisan 10 (March 20), seven months before the deadly Mars flyby. So it could not have been their god aiding the Israelites!

The Canaanites crowded along the wall saw the priests, carrying the glittering gold Ark, enter the water just as it dried up. The Israelites were still in the river bed when the dam gave way. Those on the wall hoped the flood would catch them and sweep many away. But no, all but the priests made it out in time. *Wait! Their leader returned to the priests, the fool! Couldn't he hear the rushing waters? At least he and his foolish priests would surely drown.* Then at the last possible second, they all got out and hiked above the flood. Their timing was incredible!

The Canaanites stared glumly at one another. Now they knew they were doomed. Only a God much greater than theirs could have pulled off a stunt like that! And this October is the 'appointed time' of major catastrophes. Israel's God will order an earthquake from Mars. Jericho's walls will fall and the city will be destroyed. Again.

Just as they figured, the Israelites merely moved a few miles up from the river and began to set up camp. The Canaanites settled in for the siege that they knew would last until the Mars flyby that October. They sacrificed earnestly to Mars, praying to regain his favor, and pleading for him to send his fiery sword on Israel next time.

Using the stones they had gotten from the Jordan, the twelve leaders of Israel made a memorial beside the camp while the people were pitching their tents. That afternoon, Joshua gathered them all together for another speech. "You see this memorial? When your children and your grandchildren ask about it, tell them, 'This is where we crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land on dry ground. YHWH our God dried up the waters before us, just as He did the Red Sea, until we had all crossed.' Thus all nations of the earth may know that YHWH our God is mighty, so that you will serve and fear Him forever. Now, each family among you take an unblemished lamb into your home tonight, for in four days we will celebrate the Passover, as Moses commanded. Also, all the males among you, make sharp flint knives to circumcise each other today. No one who is uncircumcised may celebrate YHWH's Passover."

They discovered that none of the males born since the Red Sea crossing had been circumcised. It is a lot easier on a baby, as God had commanded. It's extremely painful for an adult. But they did it. They healed up over the next few days so they could celebrate Passover on Nisan 14, which fell on a Sabbath that year.

The Canaanites were bottled up tightly in Jericho. So the next day (the day after the Sabbath, when the high priest offers the Firstfruits) the Israelites discovered their unguarded fields. (The barley was ripe, but the Canaanites had not yet begun the harvest, as they were caught by surprise when God dried up the Jordan for the Israelites.) They helped themselves, and made flatcakes with the freshly harvested barley for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was wonderful! Most of them had been raised all their lives on manna, and had never even tasted barley cakes.

The next morning, when they went out to get their daily manna – there was none. That miracle ceased the very day after they ate of the produce of the land. So for the moment Jericho was mostly ignored, as Israel delighted in the new land God had given them. Logos too was delighted – this generation had faith! They knew the land was theirs, and they weren't worried about being next to the mightiest city in the land. Besides, Joshua also expected to wait until the October 24th pass of Mars before he attacked Jericho. It was just the way great battles were fought in those days.

After Passover week Joshua took Salmon and the two spies up to scope out Jericho. When they got near, the spies pointed out the scarlet rope still dangling from Rahab's window. Of course the Canaanites couldn't see it, for they were all bottled up tightly behind the walls. Joshua and Salmon began to discuss how they might take the city. "It seems impossible. Those walls appear to be impregnable. We'll just have to wait for the flyby of Mars in October to knock them down." So they turned to leave. There, 100 yards behind them, stood a tall man with a drawn sword.

"How long has that dude been standing there?" Salmon whispered. "Why didn't we see him when we came?"

"It matters not," Joshua answered, also drawing his sword. "Cover my back. I'll go see what he wants." As he got close, he called, "Are you for us? Or for our enemies?"

"Neither!" the man responded firmly. "Instead, I have come as commander of the host of YHWH."

Suddenly Joshua recognized Him! It was Logos, the angel he'd seen talking with Moses. Joshua fell on his face, saying, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

"Take off your sandals, for this is holy ground. Then come closer, that I may instruct you."

Joshua did. Logos continued, "Today I have rolled away from you the reproach of Egypt. Finally you are circumcised of heart, soul, and body, and ready to enter the land. Therefore call your campsite Gilgal, 'Rolling'. Now that you are pure, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and its valiant warriors. All the fighting men among you, march silently once around the city each day for six days. Seven priests shall lead the procession with seven trumpets. They shall blow one long blast after each day's circuit is complete. Following them, eight priests shall carry the Ark of the Covenant. Let everyone keep in step with the priests." Logos paused to chuckle. "We don't need to wait for Mars; we can create our own earthquake! On the seventh day, start early, before dawn. Begin as before, but march around the city seven times. Then the priests shall blow their trumpets seven times, and all the men shall respond with a great shout. I assure you, the walls around Jericho will all fall flat, so every man may go straight in to take the city."

"However, I shall honor the spies' vow to Rahab. Her house shall not fall flat. Bring her and her family to Israel and purify them outside the camp seven days."

"But the rest of Jericho you must utterly destroy. Slay everything that lives. Burn the city with fire. Only things which can withstand the fire you shall devote to Me for the tabernacle treasury – things made of metal or precious stones. But put them all under a ban, lest the faithless among you covet them and fall into sin."

"Yes, Logos, my Lord and King!" Joshua nodded his agreement, his face still bowed to the ground.

"Joshua! Look up at me!" Logos commanded.

Joshua did so, to see a big smile on Logos' face. He was laughing! Just as He'd always done with Moses! Waves of comfort and joy washed over Joshua, as he remembered his time on top of Mount Horeb with Him. "I have one question for you, My friend," Logos said. "Why did you set up the twelve stones in the bed of the Jordan? Surely you know they'll be forever covered?"

"Of course," Joshua began laughing, too. "The twelve stones on the river bank will be a reminder for us and our children. But the twelve stones in the river bed will be a reminder for You. You promised to go with us, to fight our battles with us, and to give us this good land. If You are ever tempted to withdraw Your promise, or if we ever displease You so that You turn Your back on us like You did at Mount Sinai, I will use those stones to remind You. I will take Your hand, fly You into the river, and put Your hand upon those stones, and then You will remember us in our weakness and need."

"You? Take My hand? Fly Me...?" His laughter grew.

"Logos, my Lord..." Joshua stopped laughing. Logos did too. When Joshua spoke again, it was with a deeper seriousness than he had ever felt before. "Sir, several times I heard Moses boldly argue with You to spare these people when You were about to destroy them. I swear to You that if it ever comes to that again, I will be ten times as bold as Moses ever was. I'll do whatever it takes to obtain Your promises for these, Your people!"

"And I suppose you, too, want to see My face?" The laughter began again, this time with quiet chuckles.

"No. Actually not. Moses told me about that. I don't have a death wish. I am quite happy to wait on that until I am gathered to my fathers. All I want now is everything that You promised. Not one shoelace less."

"Thank you, My friend. You have My own heart, My Spirit, within you, for that is My desire as well." He raised His arms and looked up toward the heavens.

"Father! Hear him! We still have a man of Spirit on the earth. Rejoice with Me!" The laughter grew. For a split second Joshua heard it echo, as if from a million angels. Then the vision faded and Logos disappeared.

As Logos was welcomed back from the physical realms by the heavenly host, Satan also came. He had come to taunt, still a favorite pastime of his even though he was no longer permitted in the throne room. "I have an advantage over You," he crowed. "I don't have to keep my word, but You bind Yourself, even to the vows of Your people. Those spies foolishly vowed to let Rahab and her family live. Now there is nothing You can do to prevent their coming into Israel!" He laughed. "They're all mine. Filled with my demons. My finest demons. Hordes of them. And I will ensure every kind of demon enters Israel with them!"

It was a valid taunt, and the surrounding angelic host knew it. They'd seen all the wickedness of Jericho, and Rahab's family was among the worst!

But Logos didn't respond as Satan expected. "Satan, have you seen Joshua? His heart is true and pure, with a zeal for My righteousness like no one before. Perhaps he can help deliver Rahab's family from your demons? And Salmon, his aide; between the two of them..."

"Bah! Puny men! Weak! They might be able to block a few, but I've got thousands of demons in that family now, and I'm adding more every day You delay. You should have taken the city on the first day. But no – You just had to 'celebrate the Feast!'" His voice dripped with sarcasm. "*Your delay shall cost You.*"

"They would have failed if they were not pure..." Logos began, but Satan had fled.

Indeed the family of Rahab was growing. After a few days of the massive army of Israel marching in lock-step all around the city, the thunder of their tread shaking the walls, the last few holdouts came running. Now all Rahab's brothers and sisters were there. And nearly all their wives, husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, lovers, and children were there as well. Most of the adults had been involved with multiple partners in the past. Satan was encouraging them also to join the crowd. 'Family' can be a broad word when faithfulness to a single spouse is not the standard. Satan and his demons now filled the house, quite literally. It was pretty gross.

Rahab was sorry that she had offered the 'blank check' to her extended family. No Victorian prude herself, she was disgusted by what was going on in her own house. "There are some ground rules in this home!" she shouted. "Shut up and listen to what the spies told me, or it may cost you your life!" The raucous crowd settled down a bit so Rahab plunged ahead. "First, my red fire escape rope has to stay there in that window or we're all dead." That was easy. More began to listen. "Second, anyone who leaves the house when Israel attacks is dead." She was starting to get their attention. "Third, their God, YHWH, is holy – He hates sin. He punishes it with death. So you'd all better stop sinning, now!"

"What is sinning?" a child innocently asked. Her voice was soft. Suddenly the house grew very quiet as everyone strained to hear.

"Well... the spies told me sin is lies and deceit and... harlotry!" Her face got red, but she bravely pressed on. "Harlotry is what I do for a living, selling sex, so I might be slain by their God. But I'm hoping that if I stop now He won't know I was a harlot. Then He might let me live. So from today on I'm not gonna sin anymore. Each of you does different things. I don't know what sin is for you. Just... well... just stop whatever it is you're doing 'til you find out." She shut up abruptly.

Satan looked at his chief demon prince, the one who ruled over the city of Jericho. "What was that all about? She can't repent, can she? She doesn't even know what sin is. Of course she can't repent."

"Even if she does," the demon prince responded, "it will do her no good. It's only out of fear. She has no love of our Enemy or His ways. Fear-repentance never lasts, as you well know."

"Yes, yes. But just in case, assign more demons to tempt her. And find some suave relative of hers to seduce her again, just to be on the safe side. Make it look like real love. We have too much invested in Rahab to lose her now!"

It was the seventh day. The Israelite army completely surrounded the city in a column 400 men wide, fifty yards outside the walls. They had started marching before dawn, with the thunder of their footsteps waking up everyone in Rahab's house. They tried to turn over and go back to sleep, but the pounding never seemed to stop. Sleepless hours slowly passed. Noon, one... and still they marched. Harrold (a childhood sweetheart of Rahab) came to her room. Everyone else was crowded around the window or on the roof, but Rahab was on her bed, crying softly. "Hey, sweetie. Mind if I come in?" He didn't wait for an answer.

Harrold shut and locked the door behind him, and knelt by her bed. Stroking her hair, he asked, "So, why do you weep? Are you afraid? Our walls are strong. I've got it figured out. If their God is strong enough to break down our walls, then He is strong enough to save us all as the spies promised. So either way, we win. There's no need to fear. But we do have to plan ahead here. If Israel takes the city and if we're saved as you say, we'll have to become Israelites. You know what that means. Everything we've ever known, our family, our culture – all gone forever.

"But I've been thinking about what you said." He bent over and kissed her wet cheek. "Y'know, the only reason I left you was I didn't like your harlotry." (That was a blatant lie. The reason she had become a harlot was because of the way Harrold and his buddies had molested her. But Satan figured in her sad state she'd fall for it.) "But I still love you, honey – I always have. So now that you vowed to give up harlotry, well... we should get back together, to protect each other from the invaders, you know."

He slid onto the bed beside her. She didn't push him away. It felt good to be comforted by an old friend. She didn't even know why she cried. *Maybe Harry was right – they needed to stay together, to preserve their family and culture.* He gently wiped her tears away. She embraced him and they kissed. Just like old times, she thought, when they were young and innocent.

"Wait!" She sat up suddenly and broke their embrace. The word 'innocent' hit her like a ton of bricks. She wasn't 'innocent' when she was having sex with him. That is what led to her harlotry!

She pushed him away. “No. Maybe it wasn’t just the harlotry that was my sin, Harry. Maybe it was the sex! Maybe their God YHWH thinks sex is a sin!”

“No,” Harrold shook his head knowingly. “That can’t be. Just look at how many Israelites there are. You don’t get that many people by not having sex.”

“Well, yeah, but... maybe they don’t have the sex until after they are... uh... married, or something...”

“Nah... That’s impossible, sweetie. Everyone has sex. Or how would you figure out who you wanted to marry? You gotta know someone before you marry ’em.”

Rahab pondered that. *Harrold sounded so logical, but it was her life.* “No, Harry. It’s not worth the gamble. No more sex ’til I figure out what YHWH wants.”

She got up, unlocked the door, and peered past the crowd at the window. “How many times?” she asked.

“This is the seventh. They are just finishing now. See, there are the priests, getting ready to blow their trumpets again. I wonder how many more times...”

The trumpets began to blow. The pounding beat of the marching feet seemed to swell. It made the whole house bounce a little, in a syncopated rhythm since sound travels through the air and the ground at different rates. But they weren’t worried. It had been bouncing like this all week. The walls were strong. An earthquake from Mars was far worse than this little bouncing.

The demon prince of Jericho looked over at Satan. He was scowling. “So, this was going to be so easy?”

“Don’t give up now. Find someone else. We haven’t much time. I will not lose her! She is the key!”

“Michael!” Logos called. “Take some of your angels to cover Rahab’s house. Protect everyone inside, at all costs. Especially Rahab. She is Mine. Did you notice? *She chose Me, even not knowing Me or My ways!*”

Michael leaped to obey. Satan and his demons were crowding around Rahab, screaming lies to her. “In the mighty name of Logos, you are no longer welcome in this house!” Michael drew his sword. “Get out! Now!”

“Oh gimme a break. You and your love-sick Lord have no authority here. None. This house is mine. Always was. Always will be. So go to Sheol already.”

“This house belongs to Rahab. Her choices prevail here. By her own authority, by her choice...”

“Her choice? Ha! She chose me long ago. She knows nothing about sin, or repentance, or Logos... She can’t make any other choice. You’re wasting your...”

“She chose Logos!” Michael thundered, waving his sword. His host caught the signal, and drove Satan and his demons out without another word.

The angelic host had barely secured the house when the seventh trumpet blew and the Israelite army began to shout. It was a great, bold shout, a shout filled with true faith, from the throats of 600,000 fighting men who poured all their energy into it. And as they shouted, they stomped their marching feet with great gusto.

Expelled from Rahab’s house, Satan checked out the city walls. They were still sound, but he was suspicious. “Circle around the city at the base of the outer wall.” He ordered his demon host. “That’s a lot of vibration. Make sure the plateau doesn’t collapse underneath the walls.”

But as they moved to circle the outside wall, Michael sent the remainder of his host to push out on the inside walls. It’s a lot easier to push a wall down than hold it up. They pushed in time with the shock waves coming from the army’s boots. In one minute it was all over. The inner wall pushed the old rubble against the outer wall, so that it all collapsed down the plateau, making a lovely ramp for the Israelite army to run up into the city. Only Rahab’s house remained standing, supported by several hundred of Michael’s angels.

Now the thunder subsided. The dust began to settle. A long moment of silence followed as everyone on both sides paused to survey the carnage. Jericho was lost, it was clear. The Israelite army leaped to the fallen walls and rushed into the city, meeting no resistance.

“Don’t try to flee!” Rahab screamed, her heart in her throat. “Fall on your knees! Pray to their God, YHWH. Pray like you’ve never prayed before. Repent of all your sins. Repent of everything whether you think it’s a sin or not. This is your last chance, or we die!” She fell on her knees crying out loud to YHWH, and confessing everything she’d ever done, most of which was actually sin. Those within earshot began to get the idea, and it spread quickly throughout the house.

It took a while for Satan and his demons to struggle out from under the fallen walls. When a spirit being leaves the realms of spirit to interact with the physical realm, he subjects himself to the dangers of the physical realm, so it took time for Satan’s forces to regroup in the heavenlies. But by then, it was all over. All his willing human hosts were slain, while Israel had not even lost a man. Satan went screaming up to Logos, who was above the city directing the battle. “That wasn’t fair!” he howled. Then recalling what Logos had said about fairness not being one of His criteria, he added, “That wasn’t just! It wasn’t right! These people are all mine! They chose me! They love me and my ways. You can’t do that. I demand my rights!”

“Begone, Satan. Go claim the corpses of those who chose you. They are yours, for death is always the end result of all who choose you and your ways of death.”

“No! Rahab is mine. Everyone in her house is mine! You used force and deceit to take them! You can’t...”

“Silence!” Logos thundered. Satan shut up instantly, terror-stricken at the awesome power of Logos’ Word. “Never accuse Me of that which is your own domain. I do not use force or deceit. I merely spoke words of Truth to Rahab through the mouth of the spies. They obviously bore fruit, did they not? In just those few words, Rahab heard, repented of her sin, and chose Me, even knowing next to nothing about Me. Does that not teach you something about the power of My Word, the power of Truth, and the power of true repentance?”

Satan fled. He had lost. A total and bitter defeat. It had happened so fast, he still couldn’t believe it. Even as he and his demons drank the blood of the slain, he couldn’t really enjoy it. He was filled with doubts about the final outcome of his Great Controversy with Logos. But as he became more drunk, all thoughts of his inadequacy faded and his natural arrogance reasserted itself.

The two spies knocked on Rahab’s door. They heard sounds of weeping and wailing. They knocked louder, then louder yet. They tried the door. It was bolted tight. “Rahab!” they shouted at her third floor window. “Rahab! It’s us. The two spies. We’ve come to keep our vow to you. So open the door already.”

A head poked out the window. It was Rahab. Her first words were, “O my God! I’m still alive! Is it over? Are you going to keep your vow to save my family? Remember, you swore it! I kept my part of the bargain. I left the scarlet rope out, and I...”

“Let us in,” the spies asked, holding out their empty hands. “Do we look dangerous? Just open the door.”

She came down and let them in. “We killed everyone in Jericho,” they told her and her extended ‘family’. There is no one else to help you, so you must trust us. We are about to burn the city. If you obey us, you will be spared, only for Rahab’s sake, because she helped us. Now, gather your clothes and personal things. Bring a bedroll; you’ll be sleeping outside awhile. But leave behind your all your gold, silver, and other valuables. They’re under a ban.” They waited as the motley band gathered their stuff. “Ready now? Then follow us.” They led the way out of the city like the pied pipers.

Without a thought Rahab left behind all her riches to follow the spies. She couldn’t help noticing Joshua and Salmon standing on the fallen city gates giving orders. “This city is now and forever cursed!” Joshua shouted. “Cursed is the man who rebuilds Jericho; his first-born will die the day he lays its foundation; his youngest will die the day he hangs its gates. Touch nothing under the ban. Everything flammable must be burned. Valuables which cannot burn are consecrated for the tabernacle treasury. If you find anything else alive, it must be slain. And anyone who takes any of the spoils for himself shall surely die.”

Wow! Rahab thought. *That guy is really serious!*

They were not led into the camp of Israel. They were led to a small knoll overlooking the camp, and told to wait until the leaders decided what to do with them. At least they had a great view. Rahab sat on top of the hill, watching the army gather the spoils of war. There was a lot. She saw some of her own stuff included. Late in the evening they finished and set the city afire. Then some men from the camp came up with tents and blankets. Rahab recognized their leader as the one had stood beside the commander who had cursed the city.

“My name is Salmon,” he said. “If you obey me, your lives will be spared. But only for Rahab’s sake, because she aided our spies. Which one is Rahab?”

“I am, sir.” She jumped up and came forward.

Salmon stared into her face, unsmiling, for a long minute. Finally he spoke. “You’re a harlot.”

“Yes, sir. Uh... No! No, sir! I was, sir, but I’m not anymore. The spies said YHWH your God doesn’t like harlotry, so I vowed I would give it up. But I don’t want YHWH to know what I was, so please don’t tell Him. The spies said that He might kill me.”

“He already knows. That’s a good vow. If you keep it He might forgive you and cleanse you of your past. The spies also told me that you lied for them.”

“Hey, wait!” Rahab was a bit indignant. “I had to lie for them. That’s what saved their lives. Can’t your God YHWH forgive me for that?”

Now Salmon finally smiled. “He already has. That is why you are here. But now that you are one of us, you had better give up lies and deceit, also, for we in Israel live only by truth. Can you do that?”

“Yes, sir.” Rahab wasn’t sure she could, but she was for certain sure she was going to do her best.

“And now that you are no longer a harlot, how would you like a new job?” His smile grew broader.

She returned the smile. “Yes, sir!”

He spoke loudly enough for the rest to hear, though most of them had been listening pretty closely anyway. “Okay, Rahab, from this moment on, you are in command of this group. You have my authority over them. If they have needs, tell me, and I shall meet them. If they have problems or need discipline, tell me and I will take action. But I will tell you what to do, and I will expect you to enforce it over your people. Can you handle it?”

“Yes, sir. And thank you, sir. I will be faithful!”

“I know you will, Rahab. I can see it in your eyes. We’ve brought food, tents, and blankets. You’ll be living here for a while. If you have discipline problems, signal to those guards at the edge of camp, and I’ll send up armed men. Anyone who rebels against your authority will be slain.”

There were some gasps and shrieks. Salmon knew his point had hit home. He spoke louder yet, to indicate he was talking to everyone. "It's late. Tomorrow I'll explain what you need to do. If you are obedient, you will become Israelites. But if you are not, you'll be slain. There is no third alternative. Do not try to escape. My guards will stand watch day and night. Any questions?"

"Yeah!" It was from a big, burly man who looked half drunk even when he was sober. "Why put her in charge? She's a woman!" He spat out the word as if it were the most despised thing in the world.

"Come here. I'll tell you why," Salmon said, drawing his sword. The big man came, slowing a bit as he eyed the drawn sword. He passed Rahab with a sneer. He stood nearly two heads taller than she.

"Because I said so. Now, I'll give you five seconds to humbly kneel down and apologize to Rahab for your impudence, or I shall have your head here and now!"

He had a lifetime of pride to overcome, and he just couldn't do it. He started to argue. Salmon didn't even listen. He counted slowly to five, then lunged out and sliced off his head, as calmly as if slicing a cucumber. "Any other questions?" Long pause... Deathly silence. "No? Rahab, take over. I'll return tomorrow." He turned on his heel and strode off down the hill.

The group just stood there, stunned. Rahab pondered. *Why had Salmon put her in charge? In her culture, men just don't submit to women – they use and abuse them. The Israelite culture must be very different. Maybe better. At least for women.* She shook her head. The rest of the group was waiting on her. She was not used to being in charge, but after Salmon had stared into her eyes, she would do anything for him. "This body is the dividing line," she shouted. "All the men over there. Women and children over here. Set up tents, or sleep under the stars, I don't care. But no sex. Not until we figure out what this God of theirs wants. Tomorrow we'll bury the body, but tonight, if anyone crosses this line I'll... I'll have his head!" It sounded horrible, but her relatives got the point and obeyed. "Now, thank YHWH that you're still alive, and get some sleep!"

"Hey, Rahab?" Harrold raised his hand. "How do we thank YHWH? Who is He? Where? He's not even here!"

Rahab didn't know the answer. She and her society were accustomed to visible idols. "When I prayed to Him this morning, I just knelt down facing the Israelite camp. It seemed to work. We're alive, aren't we?" Rahab suddenly realized that as their leader, she needed to set the example. "Here. I'll show you. Do it like this." She turned to face the Israelite camp. It had gotten nearly dark, and from their knoll, the fiery glory cloud of YHWH that hung over the tabernacle seemed quite near and spectacular. She gasped and fell to her knees.

"O YHWH, God of the Israelites, thank You!" She cried, in a high-pitched voice overcome with emotion. "Thank You for sparing our lives, and for inviting us to join the Israelites. We beg You, forgive our wickedness. Just show us what You want, and we promise to obey. You are a powerful God, more powerful than any god we've ever known before. We swear to worship You, and You only, now and forever!" She continued on like that for quite a while, unaware of her relatives following her example.

Logos, in the heavenlies above her, called Gavriel and Michael over to look. "There. See? The power of My Word, planted in a hungry heart. When she helped the spies, she only wanted to save her skin. But a few words from Me through the spies and, even though she doesn't really know Me yet, she is praying fervently to Me from the depths of her soul!"

The angelic host rejoiced. Satan felt their net tighten around the Canaanites, blocking many of his demons from their previous hosts. His 'open door' into Israel was closing! He worked frantically with those who remained his, but many of his best tools involved lust, sensuality, and immorality – all of which had just been disarmed by Rahab's orders. He was furious, and such rage begets mistakes. He began planting lewd images in the mind of Harrold, who was still firmly his. It was easy. Harrold had already been aroused when he had lain with Rahab in her bed, but he had not been satisfied. Now he satisfied his lusts with other men in the tent.

It caused a big commotion. Reece was also in that tent, and he wouldn't go along with it. Early the next morning, when Rahab asked him what the commotion was all about, Reece told her.

"Harry!" Rahab screamed. "How dare you! I said no sex! I made it very clear! Do you want to bring down YHWH's wrath upon us all?"

"Hey, babe. Nobody cares. It's just sex. Everyone does it. You're pretty good at it yourself. I told you, YHWH doesn't prohibit sex. If He did, there sure wouldn't be that many Israelites down there!" He laughed, and a few others joined his laughter. "We'll obey you, Rahab, if that's what Salmon wants, but you don't own us, and you can't keep us from having a little fun at night!"

Rahab didn't even answer him. She was shocked and disgusted. She had embraced him the day before; but she had no idea he had become so perverted. She had always enjoyed sex, real sex. The very thought of homosexual relations disgusted her. She turned away. Good. Salmon and his men were coming up the hill with more food and supplies. Seeing him, Rahab's eyes lit up. He would take care of the problem, she knew. "Good morning, sir!" She bowed. "Thank you so much for coming!"

"Good morning Rahab. Did you sleep well? How did it go? Did the others obey you?"

"Yes, sir. Very well, sir. Most of them obeyed fine. Your demonstration with Big Oaf here," she pointed to the dead body with her toe, "really put the fear of God into them. But, there was one small thing..." Rahab hesitated. All of a sudden it seemed so silly – her order to have no sex. *Maybe Harrold was right and YHWH didn't care. Maybe she was overly sensitive, because that had been her own weakness.*

"Tell me, Rahab. I'll take care of it!" It was an order.

"Yes, sir. I separated the men from the women last night, and told them no sex. Really, it was no big thing – I... I just didn't know what YHWH wanted. The spies told me He hates harlotry, and I thought... well... I..."

"Rahab, just tell me. I'll take care of it."

"Well... one of the men disobeyed me. He had sex with some of the other men in their tent."

"Is there a witness? Who saw what happened?"

Reece stepped forward. "I saw it, sir. I am Reece, Rahab's father. I was in their tent. I reported it to Rahab." He turned, pointing. "Harrold initiated it."

"Harrold, is this true?" He drew his sword.

All of a sudden Harrold wasn't feeling quite so bold. "Yes, sir. I'm sorry sir. It won't happen again."

"Who cooperated with you in this detestable act?" Salmon was clearly very serious about it.

Harrold pointed to two others, and Reece nodded. So without another word, Salmon stepped up and in three swift strokes of his sword, they lay dead on the ground.

Carefully wiping the blood from his sword, Salmon glanced at Rahab. "Anyone else who disobeyed you?"

"No! N-no, sir. I don't think anyone will ever dare to disobey again. But..."

"But what? Don't ever be afraid to talk to me."

"Well... does YHWH really hate sex that much?"

He put the sword back into its sheath. Then he came back to Rahab and touched her shoulder, gently, tenderly, as if he had not just killed three men. "Are you eager to learn about YHWH? Or are you just afraid of Him?"

"I... well... both, sir! We saw His fire over that big tent [she pointed] last night. We thanked Him for sparing our lives. He seems to be a good God! I do want to get to know Him. But I fear Him, too. He's... He's powerful!"

"I see. Then I will tell you. YHWH does not hate sex. He loves it and wants us to do it – within the sacred bond of marriage – for that brings forth children for His kingdom. What God hates is sexual perversions, violations of His created order, such as what Harrold did. But that is not why I slew him." His face broke into a smile, the first she'd seen that day. "I slew him because he disobeyed you."

Rahab's eyes grew large. *This man cared! About her! Why?* She didn't know how to respond.

Salmon saw her confusion, and explained, "Authority is everything. You are the authority here, as you were in your own house. If they did not obey you, you threw them out of your house, right? Well, they are only here because you helped the spies, so they're still under your authority. Except here, you are under my authority. As long as you obey me, it is my job to deal with anyone who will not obey you. Just like I am under Joshua's authority and he is under YHWH's authority. If anyone will not obey us, YHWH will deal with them, like I dealt with those three rebellious men. See how it works?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you sir." She was overwhelmed.

"And, Rahab? I want you to know, I'm very glad to hear that you thanked YHWH last night. He accepts that as worship. I am proud of you. You have honored me, and YHWH, by taking charge the way you did last night. I can see I made the right decision in putting you in charge."

He scanned the group. Everyone was listening intently, horrified looks on many faces. "After I leave, bury these bodies – and any others who disobey Rahab or myself before then. Rahab has turned out to be one of my best officers. She knew what I wanted before I said it. I was about to tell you that there'll be no sex this week. YHWH demands a week of purification before we can allow you into the camp – a week of cleansing, both outside and inside. We'll start with circumcision of all the males – that's cutting off an unclean part. You'll see. I have three priests with me. Men, line up over there so they can begin. Ladies, you can start the washing: yourselves, your clothes, your bedrolls, everything in the camp. You will remain strictly segregated. No man is to touch a woman. Your minds and hearts must also be purified. As Rahab taught you last night, just be grateful to YHWH that you are alive, and worship Him and Him only." He hesitated. "Wait... Are there any idols in the group? Anything that you bow to or pray to, or offer sacrifices to?" He scanned. There was no answer. "Tell me now. I'll get rid of them and you will be forgiven. But if we find them later, I swear they will be destroyed and you will be slain along with them!" He waited.

Six in the group hurried back to their tents, soon returning with idols which they carefully placed on the ground before Salmon. Their faces showed fear.

Salmon smiled. "Good. You six have just saved your lives. I hope the rest of you are already free of such foolish bondage!" He took the wooden idols and casually cast them into the fire. He set the gold ones on one rock and beat them with another into an unrecognizable blob.

"Anything else you put your trust in? Anything you love so much, it might keep you from loving YHWH? Any special treasures that might turn away your heart?"

"Sir? I have a little silver. I was saving it because... well, as a backup in case I needed to escape or... uh... bribe somebody, or buy my freedom. It's not a god, but I guess I did put some trust in it. Is that what you mean?"

"That's exactly what I mean. I'll see that you're taken care of so you won't need it. Joshua ordered that all the silver, gold, and other valuables be put under a ban. It must go to YHWH's treasury. Anyone else?" There was. When they finished, Salmon had quiet a stack of stuff. Silver, gold coins, a big gold bar, and some very fine clothes. "Achan. You're in charge of Rahab's stuff. See that the valuables get into YHWH's treasury. And burn those clothes."

"Yes, sir!" Achan began bundling up the pile.

The priests got busy with the circumcisions. The males all permitted it, fearing Salmon's sword. He just chatted with Rahab. "Thank you for taking charge here. Keep up the good work. Looks like the rest of your group won't give us any more trouble. I must go. We're planning our next attack. Don't worry about it. If you need anything, those guards down there are always alert for your signal."

The week went by pretty slowly. They buried the dead bodies. Then Rahab had them scrub everything. They found a few more idols in the process, so Rahab made them take every thing out and lay it in the sun for her inspection. She burned all the idols and made them scrub everything again. Then all the women went down to the stream to scrub their bodies. After they finished, the men followed. Rahab made sure they stayed apart. At the end of the week, they scrubbed everything again.

They saw a small contingent of Israel's army charging bravely up the hill toward Ai. They paid no attention, but that afternoon, the soldiers came limping back, carrying 36 bodies. She scanned the faces of the leaders, but Salmon was not among them. *Was one of those bodies his?* Rahab almost cried out, worried about his safety, suddenly aware of how much she longed to see him and how much she treasured in her heart his brief words of commendation.

The week was past. Finally Salmon returned, alone. *He was still alive!* But he looked sad and distressed.

"What happened?" Rahab blurted out as Salmon got close. "I saw soldiers returning with bodies..."

"We lost the battle at Ai," Salmon admitted bluntly. "We don't know why YHWH is displeased with us. It's not because of you. The camp guards tell me you spent the week scrubbing and purifying yourselves like I asked."

"Yes, sir. Everything, sir. And we searched carefully, and burned the remaining idols, sir. I made sure of it."

"More idols? Were the people disciplined?"

"Yes, sir. I had them scrub everything and everyone all over again. I... I don't think you need to kill them, sir. They didn't know they had them."

Salmon laughed, the first time Rahab had heard him laugh. "I don't question your judgment, Rahab. You're in charge. Whatever you say, goes. In fact, I am pleased with your judgment. You are one bright spot in my otherwise miserable day. Gather your people and follow me. You'll be inspected by our leaders. If you are found to be pure, you may be adopted into a family of one of the thirteen tribes of Israel. You've got to belong to an Israelite family to be an Israelite. Pray they choose wisely and are willing to accept you." He paused, his smile turning to a grimace. "This was a bad day for this. They're all pretty upset."

"Shall we wait for another day, sir?"

"No. I said a week and I keep my word. We made you wait long enough. Our defeat is not your problem."

They followed Salmon down the hill. The people had all gathered around Joshua, who was shouting orders. With each order, people would change places. Salmon brought them near the front. They realized that Joshua was drawing lots from a basket held by a priest, and the ones selected by the lots were being separated. Salmon nudged one of the elders. "What's going on?" he asked.

"YHWH told Joshua that we lost the battle because somebody took stuff under the ban. But no one would confess. So he's trying to find out who did it."

"Achan!" Salmon whispered.

"What? You know who did it?"

"I don't know. But I assigned Achan to take Rahab's stuff down to the treasury. It was a big responsibility. He agreed too quickly. He should have asked for help to carry it all. And I should have been suspicious when..."

"The family of Carmi, front and center!" Joshua shouted. Again the congregation shuffled around.

"Achan!" Rahab gasped. She recognized him as he came forward with the family of Carmi. Salmon heard her gasp, and glanced at her with a knowing nod.

Joshua drew another lot from the basket. He read it and looked up. "Achan." He pointed directly at him. "Achan! Step forward." It was an order.

Achan gave him this innocent "Who, me?" look, then glanced around for someone to defend him.

But Joshua was certain. YHWH's lots never lied. "My son, I implore you. Give glory to YHWH the God of Israel, and confess your sin. Don't try to hide it."

Salmon knew. He stepped up to Joshua's side, and looked Achan in the eye. That did it. Achan bowed his head sadly. "Yes, sir. I sinned against YHWH. I coveted some of the valuables from Rahab's stuff. Salmon told me to put it in YHWH's treasury, and I did – most of it. But I took a small bag of silver coins, a bar of gold, and a lovely Babylonian mantle. I hid them in my tent, in the earth."

“Why is it always, ‘Rahab’s stuff?’” Rahab muttered to no one in particular. “None of it was mine!” She had obeyed the spies and left all her valuables behind.

René, Rahab’s mother, heard her. “Remember what Salmon said about authority? They were all under your authority, so it was all your stuff. Be glad you gave it up, or you might be standing over there instead of Achan!”

Rahab was shocked to realize – her mom was right! It had been a long time since she had agreed with her mom on anything. She reached around her waist to give her a hug, the first in many years. It felt good. Then her dad’s arm wrapped around both of them. She responded with her other arm. Rahab stood between her parents and began to softly cry. It had been a very long time since she had been their little girl. But it felt so, so good.

Joshua sent men to Achan’s tent. They found the stuff. He gave orders for Achan to be taken outside the camp and stoned. Reece looked down at his daughter. There were tears in his eyes, too. “I’m so proud of you, Rahab! You gave up all your riches, everything, even your big house. But you saved all our lives!”

They waited a long time, huddled together. Salmon and all the elders had gone to see the stoning too, so the Canaanites were all alone. Some talked about running off – for the first time there was no one guarding them. But Rahab put her foot down. “If you go beyond that red standard, I swear I will personally see to it that you are captured and slain! Don’t you know that all Canaan is given to Israel? Your only hope for life is right here! We’ve come this far; don’t lose it now! So get back here. Face the cloud over that big tent and kneel down. Pray that you will be found pure enough so that one of the families here will adopt you. That is your only hope!”

When the congregation finally returned, Salmon found them huddled together, facing the tabernacle. They were all kneeling, praying. As the Israelites were gathering, Salmon walked up to Rahab and her parents. “You’ve done very well, Rahab – keeping everyone quietly here, praying. You have made a good impression on the elders. I believe your family will be adopted into Israel with no trouble. But just to be sure, you three come with me. I have a plan. I’ll let you three be first.” He brought them up with him onto the speaking platform.

They had to wait. Joshua was making a speech about YHWH turning away from His fierce anger at Israel – now that Achan had been dealt with – so God had given the city of Ai into their hands. It was very encouraging.

Finally it was Salmon’s turn. “Men of Israel. As you know, our conquest of Jericho, the strongest city in Canaan, was accomplished without losing a single man. This is due in part to these three you see beside me. This is Rahab and her parents Reece and René. Rahab is the one who helped our spies...” He retold their story.

Salmon was a good story-teller. He made it come alive with personal details, most of them correct. But he left out the sordid stuff. When Salmon told how she and her family had already learned to love and worship YHWH, Rahab wondered if that part was actually true.

She was delighted as everyone applauded Salmon’s speech. Rahab and her folks bowed their acceptance. Salmon was saying, “Now each of you has to make three solemn oaths, here in front of the group. First, vow that you will forsake all other gods, to worship only our God YHWH, and keep His laws forever. Second, swear your allegiance to Israel and submission to Israel’s leaders. Third, swear your willingness to accept the family of Israel that adopts you, and be faithful to them as your own family from now on. Rahab, would you like to go first?”

“Sir? If it pleases you, may my father go first? He is our eldest, and I want him to be respected and honored as... as I do!” She looked up at him with love in her eyes. *Now he really knew he had his daughter back.*

Salmon okay’d the request, and Reece, followed by his wife René, swore the proper oaths, both getting loud “Amens” from the congregation when they finished.

Now it was Rahab’s turn. She had been thinking fiercely as they took their vows. She knew YHWH didn’t like lies or deception – the spies had told her that. So she knew she could not make those vows without first clearing up a few things. “I do vow to love and worship YHWH, and Him only, and keep His commands forever. But I have to confess that I don’t really love Him right now. I was just a harlot! I don’t know Him and I don’t know how to love someone I don’t know. But I fear Him. I worship Him out of fear. He’s a very powerful God – much mightier than any I ever knew. When I helped the spies, it wasn’t because I loved and worshiped YHWH – it was because I feared for my own skin! Please, I beg of you, let someone adopt me who will teach me how to love Him, for that is what I want. I’ll be able to keep my vow only when I learn to love Him. But I do swear my allegiance to Israel, and my submission to your leaders, elders, and the family that adopts me.”

She heard laughs and loud “Amens” in the crowd’s response, and Salmon beamed at her, so she hoped she had said the right thing. After all the other Canaanites had spoken their vows; it was time for the adoptions. Salmon introduced them by saying, “Men of Israel. Before you stands forty new sons and daughters of Israel. They have been circumcised, purified, and their vows accepted before God and all of us this day. We welcome them into our camp. But they need families. So pray now, asking YHWH if He wants you take any of these precious ones into your family, by adoption or by marriage. YHWH will guide you. I’ve already prayed, and YHWH has guided me, so I will make the first selection. I choose Rahab and her parents Reece and René. I take them to be members of my own family, now and forever.”

Amid the cheers and clapping, Salmon glanced down at Rahab, still standing between her parents. “If my favorite officer will accept me, of course!”

“As my lord wishes, sir. But sir, what did...?” She was interrupted by the other adoptions. Soon her entire family was chosen by families of various tribes of Israel.

That night Salmon introduced Rahab and her parents to his own parents, Nahshon, the son of Aminadab, and Nan’re, an Egyptian woman who had come with Israel through the Red Sea as an infant. They were of the tribe of Judah. Aminadab was one of the elders of Israel who had been slain by Prince Cain. Nahshon’s sister (Aminadab’s daughter) Elishiva had married Moses’ brother Aaron. When they finished the introductions, Salmon asked, “Rahab, as we were making our choices for your family, you had a question. What was it?”

“Oh!” She thought fast. “Uh... Sir? Will you teach me about YHWH, so that I may learn to actually love Him?”

“Of course. But that was not it.” His penetrating gaze stared into her eyes, as they had the first time.

Suddenly she knew she would never be able to keep secrets from him. She’d always been a first class actress. Her whole life had been an act. *But now she had better open up and get real.* This was going to be tough for her. “No sir.” She looked down. “I’m just a whore. How can you care about me? Why do you say nice things about me?”

“You’re not a whore anymore. You’re forgiven and cleansed. Now you’re a pure daughter of Israel. In your culture life was cheap, but in my culture life is infinitely precious. That’s why I care. That’s why I slay rebels who hate God and His ways of life – they would bring their ways of death upon us all. I say nice things about you because I see in you one of the most lovely, capable, and intelligent women in Israel. But that wasn’t your question either. Look up at me. Never be afraid to talk to me.”

Rahab’s eyes grew large. Her heart was pounding. How could this mighty man of Israel say such things about her? Encouraged, she finally looked directly into his eyes. “Yes, sir. You said, ‘by adoption or by marriage’. I just wanted to know which... uh... what did you mean?”

Salmon leaned back and laughed uproariously. “Yes. That was indeed your question. I saw it in your eyes when I said those words. Well, I have made my choice. It’s your turn. Which do you choose?”

“Huh? You mean, I get a choice?”

“Of course. In my culture, women aren’t slaves.”

Rahab had always been pretty bold with men, but this was overwhelming. She admired Salmon almost like a god – now he seemed to be proposing marriage? If she chose? “Please sir, may we ask your God about it first?” She turned and knelt facing the tabernacle.

Rahab wasn’t sure how to pray. But it seemed like YHWH had heard her prayers of repentance – or else why would she be here now? So now, she prayed the same way, out loud. “Lord YHWH, God of the Israelites, You are a mighty God. I’ve repented of all my sins and chosen to worship only You, forever, and to obey Your commands. Please sir, Salmon has asked me to choose. Just adoption, or marriage. Which do You command?”

She heard laughter – and singing. She risked a glance back at Salmon, but it wasn’t him. He was staring at her, wide-eyed, as if her prayer had caught him by surprise. But suddenly she heard a deep voice, a laughing voice, “Do not be afraid to accept Salmon as your husband. For I have chosen him to give you a son for Me, a son whose name will be mighty in Israel.” Salmon smiled. He had heard it too.

She jumped up and looked around. Salmon’s family and her own parents were staring at her, listening with great interest, but not interrupting. It wasn’t them. It must have been YHWH Himself who had answered her! But she wasn’t sure. She had never heard any god speak before. “Dad? Would you please...” she hesitated, a bit confused. She wasn’t sure what she wanted him to do.

But Reece was. “Yes, my dear. I sure will!” He wasn’t about to let this opportunity pass for his daughter. He gently took her hand, led her to Salmon, and put it in his. “She chooses to marry you, and I approve her choice. Thank you. You are most kind, and we are greatly honored to be a part of your family.” He bowed.

Salmon and Joshua spent the next day planning and preparing for another assault on Ai, to take place very early the following morning. Rahab spent the two days in prayer for her betrothed. She trusted that YHWH would keep His promise, but she was taking no chances. As she prayed, an angel appeared to her in a vision. He lifted her soul from her body and brought her up high above Ai, where she could see Joshua leading his troops to attack the city. She saw the men of Ai come out in battle array, the successful counter attack, and the army of Israel fleeing before them back towards their camp. The victorious defenders of Ai gave chase. Then she saw another army of Israel, just as large, rise up from their hiding place in the valley west of Ai, between Ai and Bethel. She was delighted to see Salmon leading them. *Her beloved!* They charged up the hill into the now unprotected city. “Pray for him!” the angel beside her commanded. “He is in mortal danger!”

Rahab was already praying. But seeing her beloved in danger, her prayers redoubled. “O Lord YHWH, You are the powerful God! Protect Salmon by Your great power!” Suddenly she saw it: a woman standing on the city wall, above the gate. She had a huge stone; she was hoisting it over her head, to heave down just as her enemies entered. Salmon was leading the charge! The woman hurled the stone down with all her might, aiming it to intercept the leader. Her aim was perfect!

Rahab's prayer never faltered. *The heavy stone, already loosed, must be redirected. It must not hit Salmon. It must fall harmlessly behind him.* Rahab shouted at the stone in YHWH's name. It moved to her command.

At the last second Salmon instinctively looked up and ducked. But he was too late; the stone was sure to crush his head. But then it hesitated, just long enough for him to run past. It caught the heel of his sandal, making a jagged cut in the leather.

Now at peace, Rahab's soul drifted up to where she could see the whole battle. Salmon and his men quickly captured the city and set a signal fire. When Joshua saw the smoke, he turned his army to face the men of Ai. "Shout!" Joshua ordered. "For YHWH has given us the victory!" The Israelites responded with a mighty shout.

The men of Ai were caught between the two armies. They were quickly slain to the last man. Their king was hanged on a tree until sundown. Ai was plundered and totally burned. A heap of stones was piled over its gate, and Joshua cursed it as he had done to Jericho.

Late that night, Salmon returned to his father's tent. Rahab was first to greet him, running directly into his embrace. No longer shy about her status, she hugged him tightly and praised his victory.

"How do you know I was victorious? I haven't said a word to anyone here yet!"

She flashed him her most lovely smile. "I know by the jagged cut in the back of your sandal. If today were not a victory, that cut would have been in your skull!"

Salmon looked back to inspect the cut. He didn't even remember feeling it. "How did you know...?"

"I prayed for you," was all she said. Salmon suddenly knew he had more than just a fine officer. He had a partner in battle, one who would stand with him, and even fight with him, from the heavenly realms.

The next day Joshua called the congregation together and ordered them to pack for a three day trip up onto the highlands. "Moses commanded us to go to Mount Ebal and re-commit ourselves to the laws of YHWH. All the cities of Canaan are in terror of us already. They will not trouble us while we obey." So early the next morning, they traveled north to the Wadi Far'a, then hiked up the wadi around Shechem and up to the top of Mount Ebal. There Joshua built a stone altar, and made sacrifices to YHWH. With the help of thirty volunteers he also built a stone monument with the Ten Commandments chiseled on it. It was beautiful, made to last forever. The next morning, Joshua stationed the Levites with the Ark of the Covenant in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. He separated the rest of the people into two groups facing the Ark, one with their backs to Mount Ebal, the other with their backs to Mount Gerizim.

Joshua had the two groups shout back and forth to each other the blessings and curses Moses had given. The group at Mount Gerizim shouted the blessings for obeying YHWH's Law, while the group at Mount Ebal shouted the confessions and the curses for forsaking YHWH's Law. Finally Joshua stood with his wife Jerusha just below the altar on Mount Ebal. All the elders and leaders of Israel stood below him, with their wives and families. Salmon was there too, with his family to his left, and Rahab and her parents to his right.

Joshua read the laws of Moses, while all the people stood and listened intently. Even the little children were silent before him. There was just something about that place, the resounding echo between the two mountains, that inspired reverential awe in the congregation.

They finished at sundown. They planned to return to Gilgal first thing next morning. Joshua closed with the Aaronic Benediction and then bade them all good night.

Before they had dispersed, Salmon turned to Joshua. "Sir? Rahab has consented to marry me, and our parents have agreed. Would you please sanctify our marriage here, now, before the holy altar? We will never forget this day of consecration to the laws of YHWH. We would like every wedding anniversary to be a commemoration of it."

Rahab nodded her agreement, whispering, "This was beautiful!" So Joshua blessed and sanctified their wedding then and there, finishing by torchlight.

That night, Joshua and Jerusha remained on Mount Ebal by the altar, praying together. Logos met with them. They enjoyed sweet fellowship with Him until dawn. But just before He left, Logos reminded Joshua of the curse that Moses had placed on the 9th of Av, the date that the Israelites had made the golden bull at Mount Sinai.

"Yes, Lord. I do remember. But I must admit I didn't understand it then, and I don't understand it any better now. Why do You mention it?"

"On what date did Israel first attack Ai?"

Suddenly Joshua got it. "On the 9th of Av!"

"So then, you had no excuse for not coming to Me, or at least praying about it before attacking Ai. You had been duly warned."

"Yes, Lord!" Joshua determined that he would never again assume; he would always pray about each step of the conquest of Canaan. Thus he gained wisdom.

The Israelites returned to Gilgal the next day. There they remained encamped as summer changed to fall – the months of Elul and Tishri. They celebrated the Feasts of Trumpets (Tishri 1), the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10) and Sukkot (Tishri 15-21). Tishri passed, and still the camp was at peace. The surrounding nations and city-states remained bottled up in their cities, terrified.

CHAPTER 2 – GIBEON AND THE FIVE KINGS

Each day, Joshua and Jerusha would pray, “YHWH, faithful and true, is today the day You would have us go up to take Bethel, or Jebus, or Gibeah, or Ramah?” But Logos did not answer. The waiting grew long. Heshvan (our October) rolled around, the third month since Ai was taken. Joshua grew impatient with God.

One Canaanite nation, the Hivites, couldn’t take the waiting. They had heard all the stories of Israel and her God, even the ones about Him keeping His promises. They decided to take advantage of that. They had four strong cities; Gibeon was the largest. It was only seven miles southwest of Ai. The wise men of Gibeon developed a plan to trick the Israelites into signing a peace treaty. Dressed in rags, with worn-out sandals and stale bread, they came to Israel, pretending they were from a far-off country.

Joshua, tired of waiting, didn’t have a problem with that. He knew they were to conquer all the surrounding nations, but it sure sounded like a good idea to have peace treaties with all the far-off nations beyond. He signed the treaty, and sent the Hivites away with his blessing.

That very night Logos answered Joshua’s prayer. “Get up tomorrow. Take your army to Gibeon and set up an encampment against them.”

Joshua was delighted to finally get some action. Three days later, with his entire army around the city, he prepared to blow the trumpet to sound the attack. To his surprise, the city gates were flung open, and the king and elders of the Hivites came out, this time dressed far better than the tatters they had worn before.

They bowed, waving the peace covenant he had signed and saying, “We are your servants.” Joshua was furious, but what could he do? He couldn’t go back on his word. He sadly realized that even after his recent commitment, he had forgotten to ask Logos before signing it.

So he ordered the army back to Gilgal. “We have sworn to the Gibeonites by YHWH, so now we cannot touch them.” Let me tell you, there was a lot of grumbling against Joshua that night. He repented before the Lord. Logos was pleased and promised to turn it around for good.

The Amorites in the area had a huge problem with it! They knew their only defense against this invading horde was if they stuck together. To have the Hivites make a peace treaty with their enemies was just unforgivable. Israel was still at Gilgal, resting on the Sabbath. They would be unable to help. Five Amorite and Jebusite city-kings banded their armies together to teach the foolish Gibeonites, and the world, a lesson they’d never forget.

[Note: Moses had only conquered the Amorites east of the Jordan. West of the Jordan, Amorites still ruled from Lachish and Hebron (Kiriath-Arba). They were allied with the giant Anakim and the fierce Jebusites at Jebus-Salem.]

Gibeon barely managed to dispatch a runner before the siege began. He ran hard over eighteen miles, past Ai and down to Gilgal. We’ll call this brave runner Gary. Utterly exhausted, he called at the edges of the camp for Joshua. Some men pointed him to the tent of meeting. Though ready to drop, Gary ran to the tent and cried: “Oh King Joshua! Do not abandon your servants! Come quickly! Save us! Five kings have mustered their armies against us!” Then Gary collapsed facedown in the dirt.

They did their best to revive him, but they were too late. Joshua was shocked. *The Gibeonites must be pretty serious!* He prayed, “Oh YHWH! What would You have me do?”

“Go. Defend Gibeon, as you have sworn. Do not fear the Amorites or the Jebusites. I have given their five armies into your hand this day. Not one shall stand before you.”

Joshua yelled for Salmon and his army captains. “Quickly! Muster all the troops. We leave for Gibeon at sunset.” That gave them barely an hour to gather their gear and provisions before setting off up the hill.

They marched all night, arriving behind the five armies one hour before dawn. Without even waiting to rest, Joshua blew the trumpet call to attack.

The five armies woke up, confused and confounded by YHWH. This was the appointed time for the flyby of Mars, Heshvan 20 – our Sunday, October 24th, 1410 BC. With Jupiter and Saturn lined up, this was the year of terrible catastrophes, and they knew it. At night Mars was on the opposite side of the earth, but the ground under them began to violently quake and groan. They were terrified! Many simply fled, leaving most of their gear behind. They ran west, down the Valley of Aijalon past Beth-horon. They might have escaped, except a violent storm whipped up around them, dumping big hailstones mixed with fire. They could not escape the hail, which followed them as they ran south all the way past Azekah. Most of them died.

But many remained. Urged on by their five kings, they began to fight. Salmon shouted to his men, “Do not fear! YHWH fights for us! Look down the Valley of Aijalon!” They looked. In the dawning light they saw the fleeing soldiers falling in the hail. Encouraged, Salmon’s men surged forward, mowing down all who opposed them.

The battle was over quickly. Now they were chasing fleeing stragglers before they reached the fortified cities. They pursued the remnants of the Amorites through the Valley of Aijalon, south past Azekah, and all the way to the royal city of Lachish. The five kings tried to hide in a cave at Makkedah, but the Israelites saw and rolled a stone over the cave to prevent their escape. Joshua stood on a hill over the cave at Makkedah, directing the battle. It became a big mop-up job. There were still too many enemy soldiers, fleeing too many ways. There’s just no way they could get them all before dark. Then all they didn’t capture would reach the cities and escape to fight again another day.

The ground was shaking violently. The storm was blowing. Suddenly Joshua saw things more clearly than he'd ever seen. This was God's battle. His own battle was simply believing YHWH and holding Him to His promises. He suddenly remembered what Moses had told God: "Morning shall not begin until You keep Your promise!" Filled with faith, Joshua knew he had to do the same. "Logos, my Master and Commander!" he shouted into the teeth of the storm. "You promised to give the five armies of the Amorites into my hand this day, and that not one shall stand before me. *Therefore this day shall not end until Your promise is fulfilled!*" He then pointed his sword east to the still rising sun, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon. And you, Moon," he pointed up to the half-moon high in the sky, "stand still above the Valley of Aijalon!"

Now he had more time. Joshua divided up his army, sending a contingent toward each city to slay any trying to escape. Then he ordered that the stone be rolled away from the cave. Out came the five city-kings: the kings of Eglon, Hebron (still Kiriath-Arba to the Anakim), Jebus-Salem, Jarmuth, and Lachish. Joshua had his commanders each put their feet on the necks of the five kings (as a symbol of their hand in the victory), and then ordered them slain.

But the name Adonai-zedek, Jebusite king of Salem, sparked a distant memory in Joshua's mind. He recalled a Hebrew legend about Melchi-zedek, an ancient king of Salem, who had been a friend of Abraham. The similarity in names caused Joshua to call a halt to his execution. "Where did you get your name?" Joshua asked him.

He bowed low. Maybe this was his ticket to freedom. "My name is traditional among the great kings of Salem, sir. It means, 'lord of righteousness'. It has been so for thousands of years, long before the Jebusites captured Salem. A legend says that this tradition began with Adonai Melchi-zedek during the days of Noah. My father..."

He wanted to ramble on, but Joshua cut him short. "When did the Jebusites capture Salem?"

"Well, about 240 years ago, sir, a hundred years after the legend claims Adonai Melchi-zedek was 'translated', whatever that means. The good people of Jebus-Salem still talk about his long reign as one of unbelievable peace and prosperity. My father and I took his title, shortened a bit." He smiled, wryly. "But I fear that our reign has never achieved the glory of the legend of Adonai Melchi-zedek."

"I wonder why?" Joshua said, rhetorically.

Adonai-zedek wanted to talk. Perhaps he could make friends with this guy. "Oh, it's not that bad, sir. Under him, they were intolerant bigots, only serving one God, and keeping separate from the surrounding nations. When we Jebusites took over, we introduced them to our gods, too. And taught them to worship gods of the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites... Broadened their horizons. We're tolerant! Multicultural! We serve all the gods now!"

"That's what I thought!" Joshua interrupted, drawing his sword and stepping forward.

"No! Wait! Who is your God? I'm sure we serve..." He was indignant. But Joshua wasted not another minute. The five allied kings were quickly slain. Joshua ordered, "Do not fear or be dismayed. Be strong and courageous, for thus YHWH shall do to all your enemies. Hang them up on five trees, as an example to the Canaanites."

Many of the Amorite warriors had escaped to the nearby walled city of Makkedah. But it was small. Joshua glanced at the sun, still hanging over Gibeon. *He had time, barely.* He rounded up his army. The ground was still quaking violently, as always during a close pass of Mars. Mars was just passing overhead. It was now at its closest approach. He will not waste it!

They surrounded Makkedah. Joshua thundered, "O ye walls of Makkedah, hear the Word of YHWH! Come down at the sound of our shout!" He raised his sword. At his signal the army shouted and stamped their feet. Like at Jericho, the earth heaved and the walls fell flat. His army rushed in from all sides, slew all the people, took out the spoils of war, and set the city afire.

Joshua looked again at the sun. *Huh. It was still above Gibeon, and the moon still hung high in the sky. He still had time.* He led his army back to Libnah, a strong walled city where many of the Amorites had holed up while he was chasing the five kings. He took it like Makkedah.

After Libnah was destroyed and set afire, the sun still hung over Gibeon. The moon still had not set. *Good! He had time for one more city.* "Back down to Lachish!" he commanded, jogging on ahead. Lachish was a large, well fortified royal city beyond Makkedah where the last of the Amorite warriors had escaped. As the Israelite army surrounded the city Salmon caught up to Joshua. "Sir? The men are tired. They marched all night and fought all day. We did so much, it seemed like two days!"

"Oh? You don't think we should take all of Canaan in one day?" Joshua laughed. He was only invigorated by the multiple victories, and didn't want to lose momentum.

Salmon reminded him of God's promise to drive out the inhabitants of the land a little at a time. Joshua couldn't deny it. But he still wanted to claim Logos' promise to him of defeating all five kings on this day. Besides, the ground was still shaking. Joshua wanted to make use of it. So he gave the signal for the army to shout and stamp their feet. As before, the city's mighty walls cracked, crumbled, and collapsed. Joshua signalled his army to wait, while he strode forward toward the fallen gates.

"Where are the Amorite soldiers who escaped here?"

The rest of the populace of Lachish, hoping to spare their own lives, pushed the soldiers out of the city. Joshua had them all slain, to the last man.

“Now Logos has fulfilled His promise. This day the five kings with their armies who attacked Gibeon are slain to the last man!” Joshua shouted. “Everyone take the rest of the day off. Relax. Refresh yourselves. You’ve won an incredible victory! We’ll camp here at Lachish. Oh yes. You sun and moon, return now to your normal courses.”

The earth gave one last shudder, flattening what remained of the walls of Lachish. Then it lay still. Mars and its earthquakes had past. The sun finally passed high noon and the moon set beyond the Western Sea. Peace descended. The men celebrated their victories.

The citizens of Lachish breathed a sigh of relief. They would be spared. They too, began to celebrate. First, they offered Israel’s army food and drink, even strong drink. It was gratefully accepted. Their walls were flat and their army slain anyway, so the bolder among them began to mingle among the Israelite soldiers, offering them medical attention, blankets, pillows; then pastries, trinkets, idols, talismans; and as darkness fell, entertainers, musicians, dancing girls, and harlots.

Joshua, Salmon, and their officers were back at the cave of Makkedah. They took the bodies of the five kings down from the trees at sunset and threw them back into the cave. They blocked the mouth of the cave with stones, and piled up more stones as a monument, so that everyone would remember the awesome victory that had been achieved. Finally they returned to the camp at Lachish.

Joshua was horrified! They had only been gone a few hours! He immediately ordered the Canaanites back to Lachish, and commanded his men to get some sleep. Tomorrow would be another big day of battles. Thank YHWH he had returned in time. None of his men had yet fallen to immorality or idolatry. But Joshua saw how quickly it could happen, realizing for the first time the great danger of living next to these heathen idolaters!

Some in Lachish were not partying that night. Their king and his army were slain. The elders were scared. While their townspeople were out tempting Israel’s army, they sent a runner to King Horam of the city of Gezer, twenty-three miles north. He agreed to mobilize his army immediately. They would reach Lachish by noon.

Joshua didn’t wait until noon. He was furious with the citizens of Lachish for coming out to seduce his soldiers! He gave his orders that morning, and by noon, every man, woman, and child in Lachish were slain.

King Horam and his army came over the hill as they were gathering the spoils. He caught them off guard. Even Israel’s lookouts were focused on Lachish and its riches. Only Salmon looked up and spotted them. He ordered his trumpeter to quickly blow the attack. The startled soldiers dropped their goodies and turned to face the mighty army charging up behind them. They were in time—barely. King Horam’s army was wiped out to the last man.

“That was close! Thank you, Salmon, for being alert. No more stopping to gather the spoils until we’ve taken all these fortified cities!” Joshua gathered the troops and marched down to Eglon. It was evening, but Joshua was not in the mood for camping next to another heathen city. Its walls were already fallen; they rushed in and slew all its inhabitants. Then they set up camp beside it.

The Canaanites were so terrified they could not fight. The mighty royal city of Kiriath-Arba (Hebron) that Israel had been so afraid of forty years earlier fell in one day. In the next three days they took the last of the royal cities in the area, Debir, Adullam, and Jarmuth.

On Preparation Day, Joshua finally allowed them to collect their spoils of war as they headed home. They reached Gilgal by the sundown beginning the Sabbath. Salmon was enthusiastically welcomed into the embrace of his new wife, Rahab. “This has been a very long week!” he exclaimed. “We conquered all the fortified cities in Canaan’s southern highlands. YHWH fought for us!”

“Surely He did!” Rahab agreed. “Never has there been a week like this in the history of mankind, and never shall be again! You and Joshua are heroes before God and man! Your mighty exploits shall be told and retold forever!”

“Yes?” Salmon looked closely at Rahab. “Has someone been reporting back to you?” Her delightfully plump body seemed to be a bit more slender than the week before.

She lifted her skirts, showing off the callouses on her knees. “I spent the week fasting and praying for you. I’ve not eaten since you left. You didn’t get all the fun! I was with you every step of the way. YHWH took me into the heavenlies. I saw Joshua command the sun to stop. I saw Mars as it shook the earth. I saw it reach out and grab the crust of the earth, pulling it back to keep it from rotating for over half a day. I saw you take city after city, army after army.” She paused to laugh. “Didn’t you feel me? Like the time I nudged you into action just as Horam’s army came sneaking up behind you?”

“That... that was you?”

She laughed, slumping against him. “A good officer is sensitive to the needs of her commander!” She quoted back to him. “But I am famished, and our Sabbath meal is already prepared. I’ve had enough of fasting. Now it’s time for feasting!” Thus they celebrated the Sabbath, according to the commandment. Logos was very pleased.

Over the next month they mopped up all the towns in the southern highlands and down to Kadesh in the Negev. As Logos had ordered, they left no survivors.

But at Gaza they learned that Philistia was still under the protection of their old Amalekite friend Yakubher and his son Anat-Har. Recalling their peace treaty at Beersheba 40 years ago, they did not attack any further west. They collected their spoils and returned to Gilgal each Sabbath.

CHAPTER 3 – CONQUEST OF CANAAN

Hearing the news that Joshua and his army were wiping out all the pagan cultures in the southern highlands, the Canaanites in the north knew their turn was coming. When their King Horam and his army did not return, the elders of Gezer feared the worst. They were defenseless. What could they do? They called for a fast, in sack-cloth and ashes. They also sent a trusted runner ninety miles north to King **Jabin**, the mighty Amorite ruler of Hazor, which is by Lake Huleh in the upper Jordan Valley.

King Jabin was a large man, of large influence and a large army! He called himself the king of kings. He had unified all the Canaanites six years earlier, to finally throw off the yoke of the Amalekite Pharaohs (who had fallen to Egyptian idolatry). He had killed Anat-Har and forced old Yakubher to sign a peace treaty. That left the Amalekites in control of Philistia and the Casluhim there, but gave the rest of Canaan to the Amorites. King Jabin worshiped the ancestral gods of Canaan, supposing that they had helped to free him from the oppression of the Amalekites.

Now, once again, he assembled the confederation of kings who had served under him before. Jobab, king of Madon, as well as the kings of Bethel, Tappuah, Hepher, Aphek LaSharon, Shimron, Achshaph, Taanach, Tirzah, Kedesh, Megiddo, and Dor. “You stood with me before, and with the help of Chemosh, Molech, Astarte, and all the other Baals we succeeded in driving out the Egyptian oppressors. Now that we have tasted freedom, do you want to submit to the yoke of these new invaders? A runner from Gezer tells me they have slain the five kings of the south and destroyed their cities. Only Gibeon has a peace treaty with them – now they are subject to heavy tribute and bondage! How many here wish to go that route?”

It was a rhetorical question, of course. “No? Then we must band our armies together. They attack one city at a time. But if we face them with our combined strength, we can easily defeat them!” The kings of the north all agreed and again signed an alliance. So Jabin sent the runner back to Gezer with assurances that his powerful coalition of kings would come to their aid. Very soon!

But all this actually took weeks. The elders of Gezer were frantic. *Their runner was taking too long. Did he not get through? Or had Jabin just refused to come?* Gezer was defenseless! Her gods had failed them.

The elders gathered the fasting people. “The name of the victorious Israelite God is YHWH. From this day forth, you are forbidden to pray in any other name! Cry out to YHWH for mercy. We will go plead with Israel.”

The delegation of elders from Gezer reached Gilgal the morning after the Sabbath. Joshua had just finished mopping up in the south. Logos had told him to go north to Merom. Their army was rested and about to begin the march. Salmon gave Rahab a quick good-bye hug.

The elders of Gezer saw the parting hug, and ran up, bowing low before them. They pled with Joshua, “Please, kind sir! We are defenseless and at your mercy. Our king and our army are slain. Our wives and little ones are your servants. We have seen what you have done to all the nations who hate you and YHWH your God. We swear to you, kind sir, we have forsaken all the gods of the land. We’ve gotten rid of our idols. Even now we are fasting and praying fervently to YHWH, and to Him only!”

Joshua didn’t particularly believe them, and he didn’t have time to deal with it. Merom was a two-day march. But their plea intrigued him. He made a snap decision which he thought should be pretty safe. “Okay. I accept your plea. Gezer shall be spared from destruction, on one condition: that you continue to pray to YHWH and worship only Him. The minute I hear your people have returned to the gods of the Canaanites, Gezer is fair game. Agreed?”

“Agreed! Praise YHWH! He is powerful! We will never return to the gods of Canaan. You will not regret this, sir. We will be your valuable friends and allies as you take this land, for your God YHWH shall surely give it to you!” They kept on like that for a bit but Joshua and Salmon had to catch up to the army and didn’t really hear the rest.

But Rahab, standing beside her beloved Salmon, heard it all. As he left with the army, she continued listening, and watching their faces. When the elders realized that no one but this woman was listening, they turned to leave. “Wait!” Rahab said. “I’m the wife of Joshua’s second-in-command. And I am from Jericho.” Now, that got their attention! “My family was the only one spared when Jericho fell. I first prayed to YHWH only to save my skin, just as you’re doing now.” They nodded at that.

“I discovered YHWH to be a powerful God, but also a loving and faithful God, who answers the prayers of those who pray to Him in truth. But He is also a holy God, who hates lies, deception, and... harlotry. I was a harlot! But YHWH forgave me and changed me. Now I’m the respected wife of a leader in Israel!”

She could see she was losing them. She hurried on. “The reason Israel’s army has to destroy our people is, our immorality and idolatry. If you just pray to save your skin, you won’t change, and soon you’ll also have to be destroyed. But if you pray for YHWH to forgive and change you – to get rid of all the lies and harlotry, He will. Then you can become an Israelite, like me!”

The elders frowned and turned to leave without so much as a thank you. Rahab realized that she had been preaching at them. In her culture, men, especially city elders, do not tolerate being preached at by a woman! Rahab bowed her head. “O Lord YHWH, I tried!”

“Yes, My beloved,” Logos quietly responded. “You planted a seed. It shall grow, and I shall receive great glory through you. Thank you!”

That seed did indeed grow. The elders returned to Gezer to tell of their covenant with Joshua. They took it seriously. They put all their idols in a big pile and burned them. They forbade anyone to pray to any but YHWH, on punishment of death. When they heard what happened at Merom, they even got serious about immorality in the city, crying to YHWH for forgiveness and cleansing. For years Gezer pretty much kept their promise. When Joshua caught some of them going back to idolatry, he chastened them severely. The tribe of Ephraim (who inherited Gezer) allowed them to live among them for nearly 400 years. But by the time of King Saul, Gezer's descendants had abandoned YHWH to return to the idolatrous and immoral ways of the Canaanites. So Saul conquered them, reducing them to forced servitude in about 1035 BC. In 999 BC, Horemheb (Pharaoh Tutankhamen's general) restored Egyptian control over the west coast of Canaan, capturing Gezer in the process. He slew all its inhabitants and burned it. God allowed it, as they had not kept their vows. Later on as Pharaoh, Horemheb gave Gezer as a dowry to Solomon and Muwet at their wedding.

But I've gotten ahead of my story. *What did happen at Merom, anyway?* Before I tell this story, I must review the historical background, with apologies to my dear Readers who have endured past historical rabbit trails.

The Hittite offensive to Babylon in 1595 BC had greatly weakened the Amorites. Taking advantage of that, King Barattarna led the Hurrians down from Urartu in 1570 BC and drove them out, flooding the land from Mari to Aleppo. This was the very beginning of the Mitanni Empire. They basically owned northern Syria for nearly 800 years. The Amorites fled south to Canaan. But then the Mitanni faced the Hittites west of Aleppo, who tried to halt their advance. In 1502 BC, Hittite king Telepinu allied with the Hurrians of Kizzuwatna to finally block those aggressive Mitanni.

While the fiesty Mitanni duked it out with the Hittites, the Amorites were ignored. This left them free to conquer Canaan, which they did. They grew strong. By 1550 BC they pretty much controlled all of Canaan. Egypt's proud and corrupt Pharaohs of the 13th and 14th Dynasties certainly couldn't stop them! Egypt was then trying to control the growing threat of their own Hebrew slaves.

After the Exodus in 1451 BC, the 'Hyksos' (Amalekite rulers from Arabia) took Egypt without a fight. They also took Philistia, Phoenicia, and western Canaan, including Lachish and Kiriath-Arba, all the way to the Jordan River. That subdued the Amorites in the west, though Amorite kings still ruled across the Jordan in Bashan and Gilead.

In 1415 BC, Amorite king Jabin ruled at Hazor. He was a real firebrand! Young and ambitious, he organized the kings of twelve other royal cities of the Canaan highlands and drove out their Amalekite overlords. He was a warrior king like no other. He'd never known defeat. Ruthless and arrogant, he spoke of himself as "the king of kings."

Wisely, Jabin had forged a mutual defense pact with the Hittites. They swore to defend each other from their shared enemies, the Mitanni, and the Amalekite invaders from Egypt. Now they had a new threat, the Hebrews! Jabin asked for military support, according to their pact.

So now in 1409 BC we catch up to our story. Egypt was a divided country; the 17th Dynasty of Egyptian Pharaohs at Thebes maintained an uneasy truce with Bnon (the son of Salitis and Kharsi) who ruled lower Egypt at Avaris. When Yakubher's forces were driven out of Phoenicia and the Canaan highlands by King Jabin and his twelve allies, Bnon frankly didn't care. Yakubher's son Prince Anat-Har and most of his army had been slain. Bnon didn't care about that either. He only cared about his own pleasures and his royal glory as the Pharaoh Meruserre. Sad.

Remember that megalomaniac vizier, Djehuti? He had stolen Pharaoh Rahotep's throne in upper Egypt in 1413 BC. Now he saw an opportunity to expand his empire into lower Egypt as well. He sensed a weakness in the hated Amalekite invaders. Perhaps the enemy of his enemies might be his friend. Djehuti led his small but well-trained army secretly toward Hazor to negotiate with King Jabin. If he helped Jabin conquer the Hebrews, Jabin might help him drive the Amalekites out of Philistia, paving the way for them to be driven out of Egypt altogether.

Djehuti traveled up the central highlands to avoid detection by the Amalekites along the coast. In the Negev, he began finding ruined and burned cities, one after another. He was appalled! He arrived east of Gezer just as the city elders were returning from their pact with Joshua. They were in good spirits – only too happy to tell him all about the Hebrew conquest of southern Canaan, and their successful negotiations. "The Hebrews are easy!" They affirmed. "Just swear loyalty to YHWH their God and they will be your friend forever!" In exchange for that valuable information, Djehuti let them go free.

He hurried over the hill to peek down at the Hebrew encampment. He was just in time to see Joshua and his army marching north. He felt fear like never before! These are the Hebrews who had devastated Egypt in the plagues! It was their God YHWH who had destroyed the Egyptian armies in the Red Sea! Thoroughly shaken by what he had seen and heard, Djehuti hurried toward Hazor. *Devastated and burning cities from the Negev to Ai! Only Gibeon and Gezer protected by peace treaties with the mighty Hebrews, who now are on the march north!* He only hoped he could reach Jabin in time.

As they neared Hazor, Djehuti and his elite troops topped a low pass in the highlands and quickly pulled to a halt. For there, spread out before him across the plain south of Merom was a sight to delight his eyes. Clearly Jabin had already gotten the word, and had assembled all his troops here to defeat those fearsome Hebrews, once and for all.

Djehuti spent an hour on that hill, gazing down and trying to estimate the extent of the troops below him. Obviously the group in the center was Jabin's own large army, surrounded by the small armies of the thirteen cities of the north Canaan highlands. But to their west he saw the magnificent Hittite army. South of them camped a vast number of Perizzites. (We know them as the citizens of the many unwall'd villages of middle Canaan.) Beside them were the mighty warriors of the Jebusites. On the far side were a large contingent of Hivites from Mount Hermon in the land of Mizpeh (not Hivites from Gibeon). Sprinkled among them were other Canaanite armies he didn't even recognize. And throughout the camps he saw horses and chariots by the thousands! Djehuti finally gave up. There were simply too many – uncountable as the sands of the seashore. Easily five times the size of the Hebrew force he had seen. And the Hebrews had no war horses or chariots. Delighted, he marched his army down to join Jabin. After he helped Jabin annihilate the Hebrews, Jabin would surely help him eliminate the hated Amalekites from all of the land of Egypt!

Djehuti briefed Jabin on all he had seen and heard. The Hebrews had reached the other side of the hills, and had camped for the night. The battle would no doubt be engaged the next day. Jabin's commanders wanted to attack the Hebrews at dawn, but he laughed and refused. "We hold all the aces here. Let them come to us. We can sleep in an extra hour or two while they muster their troops. Then we'll be fresh, and they will already be tired from climbing up over that pass." So the kings, generals, and their officers laughed, partied, and drank away the evening, confident of an easy victory.

But Joshua was not so confident. His scouts had told him of the uncountable confederation of armies with their horses and chariots on the far side of the pass. As his army was making camp, Joshua was on his knees in fervent prayer. Logos responded with His characteristic chuckles. "I called you up to Merom, my friend. Remember? Are you now having second thoughts about coming?"

"No, my Lord. Not at all. I just want to be very sure that I continue to obey You, every step of the way."

"Now, that is what I like to hear. Fear them not, for tomorrow by this time they will all be slain before you. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire. You simply have to make good use of the night, and awaken before they do!"

Joshua gave thanks for YHWH's salvation. Now he knew just what to do. He called for his commanders. "Order the troops to sleep as soon as they finish dinner. No partying. Tell them we will arise silently three hours before the dawn. We will succeed only if we are over that pass before the dawning! No noise above a whisper from now until the battle is joined. And Salmon, gather twenty of your finest men and meet me here right away."

Soon Salmon and his twenty men were in a huddle around Joshua. "This is the most critical part. You cannot fail me, or all is lost. There are scouts in the hills above us, watching our every move. Your job is to kill them all before they can report back to Jabin. Don't let them sound an alarm! Put on clothes that blend in with the bushes and the rocks, and pray that YHWH will blind the scouts to your approach. Slay them silently. Search until you are sure there are no more, even if it takes all night. We must be ready to attack before the dawn, and we cannot allow our enemy to awaken."

After saying a prayer for them, Salmon directed his men to split up. They put on their camo outfits and slipped silently into the twilight. As he walked, Salmon continued praying. "YHWH my God and King! Protect us! Give us eyes to see, even in the darkness." Suddenly he became aware that his own lovely little officer back home, Rahab, was praying for him at that very moment. "Thank you, God, for Rahab! May she continue in prayer for us until every scout is found and slain!"

Rahab had indeed been praying, worshiping, singing to YHWH. Suddenly she grew alert, sensing a presence in her tent. She opened her eyes to see that same friendly angel. "Come. Once again your husband is in desperate danger."

Rahab jumped up and took the angel's hand. Instantly she was transported to a vantage point above her husband. He was sneaking up a tiny wadi peering into the bushes all around. NO! There was an enemy scout hidden in the bushes, with an arrow drawn and pointed two steps ahead of him! "Stop!" Rahab screamed, even as she realized he couldn't hear her. She released the angel's hand and dropped down in front of her beloved. *Go back!* She spoke this time to his mind. *The easy path is the most dangerous. Go back. Find the way less traveled. Try to get up the hill without being seen, then come down on them from above.*

Salmon stopped suddenly. He heard nothing, but the thought flashed through his mind that this easy path might be dangerous – a scout might be hiding just off to one side, ready to pick him off. Salmon turned back, to search for some other less-obvious way up the hill. Rahab continued to nudge him, whisper to his mind, and direct him and his twenty troops, until every scout was found and eliminated. It was tense work, even with the angel's help. Finally he smiled. "Your task is finished. You have won a great victory here!" She found herself back in her tent at Gilgal, breathing hard, covered in sweat. She cried, laughed, and worshiped until dawn.

And by dawn the forces of Israel had crossed the pass and had come upon Jabin's sleeping armies. It was an utter rout. Many, still groggy from partying the night before, were slain in their bedrolls. The rest were slain as they fled to Hazor (which Joshua burned), and as far north as Sidon or the land of Mizpeh. So by sunset not an enemy soldier remained alive of all that numberless host.

Joshua spent the rest of the week visiting the towns and cities of the armies he had slain. He expected them to try to make peace treaties with him, now that their protection was gone, but no. Their hearts were hard and bitter. This would take a long time. There were far too many cities to visit in one week. He'll deal with the rest later. He worked his way back to Gilgal by sundown on the Sabbath, so the army could rest with their families.

Salmon heard singing as he approached his tent. It was Rahab, singing one of the songs of Moses. Salmon paused just outside the door to listen, but the mouth-watering smells drew him quickly in. Dinner was all prepared. Rahab was singing and dancing in a long flowing gown before her parents. Seeing him, she ran to throw herself into his arms. "I knew you would come for the Sabbath. We're celebrating our great victory!"

"Our great victory?" He raised his eyebrows. "Were you hovering over me in spirit again?"

She laughed. "Find the way less traveled..."

Salmon whistled. "Oh! That was you?"

"If you had taken two steps further up the wadi, you would have died by a scout's arrow. That scout would have sounded the alarm when our army awakened, alerting Jabin's armies. Our small army would have been defeated. It all rested on those two steps."

Salmon hugged her close. Rahab seemed a bit pudgy. He patted her tummy. "Do we have another victory here?"

"Victory?" Rahab was puzzled. "Oh, that. I'm sorry. I'm pregnant. If you don't want it, I'll deal with it."

Salmon laughed. "When you were a harlot you never knew the joy of motherhood, did you? But we Hebrews love families. We never abort our children. Never!"

That Sabbath, in fact each Sabbath thereafter, became a victory celebration. Salmon spent each week fighting in Canaan while Rahab fought alongside in the heavenlies. They were undefeatable – the best military team ever.

The annihilation of that huge army at Merom ended Hittite aggression for a generation. The Mitanni gained the upper hand. They convinced their kin in Kizzuwatna to shift alliances in their favor. The Mitanni grew in power during the reign of King Shaushtatar. He sacked Assur, making Assyria a vassal state in 1407 BC. He expanded their dominion west to the Great Sea and south to Hamath. But he feared the Hebrews! (Note: in 1376 BC, the Hittites killed his son and reconquered the western third of Syria.)

Egypt likewise was stopped cold. With Djehuti and his army slain, the Intef royal line in upper Egypt was restored under Mentuhotep VII. He kept the delicate truce between upper and lower Egypt. And with old Yakubher in his mid 70s, the remaining Amalekites and Casluhim in Philistia also ceased their aggression.

This left the Hebrews free to conquer Canaan, which they did. Joshua's unbroken string of victories almost gets boring. So let's skip the next four long years of fighting, up to the fall of 1404 BC. Joshua was nearly 90. Caleb was 85. One Sabbath in Gilgal Logos came to Joshua as he worshiped. "You are old, My friend, and ready to retire, yet much land remains to be conquered." He then listed the unconquered cities, beginning with those in Philistia.

Joshua respectfully waited until He was through, then objected. "But Lord, we don't want to conquer Philistia, because our friends the Amalekites still rule there, under Anat-Har the son of Yakubher."

"No," Logos corrected him. "Anat-Har is dead. Old Yakubher died today. Bnon son of Salitis has turned away from Me. Philistia is My land. I have given it forever to the sons of Israel. If they don't conquer it completely, it will be a thorn in their sides, for the Casluhim are very wicked and their Amalekite overlords have become more wicked than they. But I'm not asking you to do it, dear Joshua! Offer the next generation the opportunity to rise up in faith and conquer the land. You've been a warrior long enough. Now I have new jobs for you. And I have a surprise!"

"Yes Lord!" Joshua bowed in worship. He had never wanted to be a warrior anyway. He'd rather just dwell in Logos' presence, do His will, and claim His promises!

Logos was delighted with his attitude. For a time, no words were spoken, or needed. Then, "Joshua, My beloved. Aren't you curious?"

Joshua laughed. "You know I am. I've spent much of my life peppering You with questions. But nothing, not even my insatiable curiosity, should take precedence over my love and worship to You, my Lord, my King."

Logos joined his laughter. For a time, that was all they could do. They understood one another. Finally, "Your surprise awaits you at home. The new jobs I had in mind (while you continue to lead My people) are, first: allot to them their inheritance in the land as Moses directed; and second, finish the book Moses began." [the Pentateuch]

Joshua was delighted. He had a servant's heart, and to serve Logos and Moses were his highest two goals. After a time of worship and laughter with Logos, he went home. Jerusha did indeed have a surprise awaiting. She had just learned she was pregnant with Joshua's first child.

The next day, his field commander, Salmon, came to his tent, hat in hand. "Sir, I have a request. I have prayed about this for some time. Last night YHWH confirmed it. I want to be relieved of my command. YHWH told me that Caleb the son of Jephunneh is to command the army of Judah. I am to serve under him."

"My old buddy Caleb? Command the army of Judah? Caleb is a Kenizite, of Edom. He's old! Why should he be in command? How did YHWH confirm it to you?"

“Rahab is pregnant again. I found out last night. YHWH came to us, and my world is still spinning. He prophesied great things! This will be our third son, but he will be...” He stopped. He was wasting Joshua’s time. “Please, sir. Just talk to Caleb.”

Joshua laughed. “I’ll talk to Caleb later. I want to hear more about your family. Rahab has sure learned to love children, hasn’t she! I just found out last night that we’re pregnant too, Jerusha and I. It does rather change one’s perspective, doesn’t it.” They chatted together.

Later, Joshua went back to the tabernacle to talk with Logos. Kneeling there in front of the veil, he sensed a peace like never before. After a time of sweet worship, Logos’ familiar chuckles came to him. “What did I tell you, my friend? Your days of fighting are over. How could Salmon still be your field commander when you are no longer his commander-in-chief? It’s time for you to delegate. Let each tribe elect its own leaders, and let them appoint their own commander. Caleb is not too old! He will make a good commander of the army of Judah. You have already broken the power of the Anakim and defeated the Amorite kings in Canaan. The rest of the mopping up battles will not need the force of Israel’s combined armies. Move My tabernacle to Shiloh. From there, exhort each tribe to rise up to take possession of their inheritance as Moses allotted.”

“Yes, Lord!” Joshua arose to go.

But Logos stopped him. “Joshua! Don’t ever look down on those who are adopted into My family Israel, nor give preference to direct descendants of Abraham. Why should the Kenizites be second-class citizens just because they came from the son of Esau? Is your wife a second-class citizen because she is from Midian? What about Rahab, the Canaanite? Surely her prayers have saved all of Israel! Many of My adopted children have become the truest sons of all! My son Israel is growing strong with the Kasdim, the Egyptians, Midianites, Amalekites, Edomites, and many others who have forsaken their culture, repented of their sins, fallen in love with Me, and become part of My family. Caleb the Kenizite is My beloved son, of whom Abraham the father of these many nations is justifiably proud.”

Joshua accepted the reproof gracefully. When he returned to his tent, Caleb was waiting for him, together with the elders of Judah. Caleb stepped up and bowed. “Sir? Remember the promise which YHWH gave Moses for me when I was one of the spies from Kadesh, forty-five years ago? Moses swore to me that all the land on which my foot trod shall be my family’s inheritance forever, because I followed YHWH wholeheartedly. Now I’m 85, but I’m as strong as I was then. I want... uh... I believe God wants me to command the army of Judah to possess our inheritance. We shall conquer the land and drive out its inhabitants, even the mighty cities of the Anakim, from Jebus-Salem south to the Negev. Before you say no, I’ve already talked with the elders of Judah, and they are...”

“Yes,” interrupted Joshua. “With my blessing.”

“I know that I am just a Kenizite...”

“You’re a true Israelite! Would to God all Israelites were as faithful to YHWH and as zealous to claim His promises! He shall reward you. Start with your own family heritage, the area right around Kiriath-Arba (Hebron). Continue to the sea, for the Amalekites have turned against YHWH, and He wants them annihilated, too.”

Then Salmon stepped up to Caleb. “Sir? May I have the privilege of serving under your command?” He bowed. The elders of Judah gasped. Salmon was a great war hero! Everyone knew he was Joshua’s right-hand man. Caleb glanced at Joshua, a question mark on his face.

Joshua smiled and nodded. “He is yours, Caleb my friend. May YHWH give you good success!”

So it was settled. Joshua moved the camp from Gilgal up to Shiloh, nine miles north of Bethel. It was in the middle of the land assigned to the tribe of Ephraim, to which Joshua belonged. The Levites set up the tabernacle in the center of the camp. Joshua began the laborious task of ensuring that all the tribes and their families knew which land was theirs (as Moses had assigned), and had the resources to take possession of it. In his free time, he worked on Moses’ book and prepared for his baby.

Caleb and Salmon’s families did not go with them. YHWH led the tribes of Judah and Simeon to join forces to be the first to attack the remaining Canaanites in the land.

Kiriath-Arba was a strongly fortified city at the time. Its king and his army had been wiped out 5 years earlier by Joshua, and all its people slain, but there is another side to that story. It had been the capital city of the wicked Anakim since the time of Ishtar. When the Amorites had conquered Canaan about 1550 BC, they had made it their capital, too. But they didn’t drive out the Anakim, who were giants, feared and respected all over the world. Instead, they forged a treaty and joined forces. They called the city Hebron, meaning ‘alliance’, and made it stronger than ever. Likewise when the Amalekites ruled the area after subduing the Canaanites, they forced peace treaties with each of them. When the twelve Amorite kings under King Jabin had killed Anat-Har, the Amalekite army under general Staan (son of Bnon) had fled in panic. In keeping with their treaty, the Anakim giants had retreated with Staan to help protect Philistia at Gath, Gaza, and Ashdod. When the Anakim turned against him, King Jabin wisely called off the attack. He forged a treaty with Staan which granted Philistia to the Amalekites. He kept the highlands, including Hebron, which he gave to Amorite king Hoham (out of anger with the Anakim for betraying him). Jabin then went around eliminating all traces of Amalekite influence in the highlands, installing loyal Amorite kings in all the royal cities, and improving their fortifications to keep the Amalekites (and Anakim) from ever returning.

Their focus sure changed when Joshua came. While the Amorite kings tried to hold the line along the mountain ridge, from Jebus-Salem through Bezek, Hebron, and Debir (with a fall-back position of Gezer, Ekron, Gath, Lachish, Eglon, and Gerar) the Anakim and Amalekites protected the seacoast cities of Philistia. Joshua had taken out their first two lines of defense, but he had left Philistia. When Joshua had come down to Gaza asking about his old Amalekite friends Yakubher and Anat-Har, Staan had lied! He knew what Joshua had been doing in city after city. His army was still too weak (thanks to Jabin) to confront the Israelites. So Staan just renewed the peace pact negotiated between Moses and Yakubher 45 years before. But it was a lie. The Amalekites had become wicked, as Logos had said.

Joshua had killed King Hoham and left Hebron empty. *Thank you, Joshua!* As soon as he left, the Anakim (who still called it Kiriath-Arba) returned from Philistia and took over. Thus they began re-fortifying all the royal cities.

So here is how it looked when Caleb arrived in 1404 BC. The Jebusites had regained full control of the area around Jebus-Salem. The Perizzites under King Adonai-Bezek had 10,000 warriors from the surrounding cities in the ancient fortress of Bezek (modern Beth-Zur) six miles north of Hebron. The three kings of the Anakim (Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai) had returned all their forces to their city, Kiriath-Arba. Old Yakubher had just died, so Bnon's son Staan ruled Philistia. He had brought the remnants of the Amalekite army from Philistia up to the fortified city of Debir, ten miles southwest of Hebron. They hoped that they were still under the protection of Egypt's army under Amalekite Pharaoh Bnon, but he had not yet responded to their appeals for help. *This would be their last stand.*

In prayer, Caleb and Salmon decided to take Bezek first. The Canaanites were expecting them to come directly up from Gilgal to attack Jebus-Salem, so they did not. Instead, they led the combined armies of Judah and Simeon past Jebus-Salem (waving cheerily to the massed defenders as they passed) and continued on south to Bezek.

The Perizzite king Adonai-Bezek was a violent and ruthless man. He had conquered seventy cities in the past. His fortress in the rocks of the 'Judean' highlands was impregnable. It was perfect for either outlasting a lengthy siege or massing an army to defend the entire area of the western highlands. But many of his trained army had been defeated and destroyed by Joshua six years before. He now had only 10,000 men, and they were untrained. So he chose to just hole up in his fortress. He was sure he could withstand a siege until Bnon's army came.

Old Caleb wasn't willing to wait around. He'd waited long enough. He was not at all interested in a siege. He was a zealous firebrand, full of faith (though perhaps just a tad impatient and overconfident). So, putting his trust in his most-seasoned commander, Caleb assigned Salmon to determine how to take the city.

Salmon and his first officer Rahab went to YHWH. Logos showed them in a vision where to find the city's water supply. The fortress wall had been built out around it, with guard towers on all sides.

Salmon and Rahab went out to study it. The wall was built right on solid rock, and was unassailable. The guards in the towers wouldn't let anyone get close. But Rahab suddenly brightened up with an idea. "Salmon, why don't we salt their water!"

Salmon saw the possibilities, and went back to give the orders. They made hundreds of two-pound bags of crushed salt. Then they set up two small catapults near the wall, and began to lob salt bags up and over the wall where they thought the water springs might be.

A frenzy of activity inside the fortress indicated they were right on target. It should only be a matter of time now. Salmon sent scouts out to watch the escape routes.

Sure enough, in a few weeks the men inside were thirsty enough to venture a getaway. They attempted a midnight breakout down the back side of the hills toward En-gedi. They didn't get far. Salmon was ready for that. He expertly directed his army in a giant pincer, forcing the Perizzites to fight on two fronts at once. They were crushed, while the army of Judah hardly lost a man. Salmon was the hero.

Cruel old King Adonai-Bezek tried to escape, but Caleb ran after him, caught him, and sliced off his thumbs and big toes. Adonai-Bezek had to admit God's justice in that. He confessed he had done exactly that to the seventy kings he had conquered.

They next headed north from Bezek to Jebus-Salem. Six years earlier, Joshua had killed King Adonai-zedek, and had wiped out their army, but had never taken the city. The Jebusites who lived there had strengthened their fortifications south of the ancient temple site, between the Kidron and Tyropoeon Valleys. There they had built an impregnable fortress, with water from the Gihon Spring. Caleb took the main city and set it afire, but decided not to try to besiege the fortress. Later, maybe. The Jebusites were presently no threat to Israel (since they still had no army). Instead, he slew King Adonai-Bezek and hung his hide on their fortress gate as a warning.

Jebus-Salem was on Judah's north border, so they turned south, to Hebron. Again, Salmon, with his vast amount of battle experience, was in charge, with Rahab, his favorite officer, on duty back in her tent. Salmon had never lost a battle, and nobody expected him to lose this one. The walls of Hebron, though high and strong, were not built on solid rock like Jebus-Salem and Bezek. The Anakim there, though giants, were few in comparison to Judah and Simeon's combined armies. Salmon decided to just level the city with a quarter-million marching feet. What had worked at Jericho would work here, too. His army encircled the city. All was ready. He raised his hand.

But at the last second before he dropped his hand to signal the attack, a vision swam before his eyes. It was a vision of defeat, of powerful demonic forces overcoming them, of giants swinging heavy battle axes and his own warriors flying in all directions, of many good men slain or dragging their wounded bodies away from Hebron.

Was it just fear? Salmon had never known fear. He prayed, but the heavens were dark and cold. He had no choice. He signaled Judah's retreat.

Caleb was furious with him. He still retained a vivid memory of forty-five years earlier, when the ten spies had rebelled in fear after seeing the Anakim. "Salmon, what in blazes is going on? I thought you were a fearless warrior! You make us look like faint-hearted dogs!"

Salmon bowed respectfully. "Sir, you hired me as your commander because you trusted me. Please, trust me now. This isn't right. We are not ready. There is sin in the camp. I'd rather look like a faint-hearted dog than lose a battle that we aren't ready to fight. Don't you remember the affair with Achan at Ai?"

Caleb bit his lip. "Okay, Salmon. Deal with it, and let's get on with it already."

"Yes, sir. I, uh, need to talk with one of my officers first." Salmon rushed back to his tent.

Rahab was beside herself, weeping in terrified agony. Salmon comforted her awhile, until she was able to talk. "Why do you weep? What did you see, my love?"

"I saw nothing but the blackness of death!"

"What did YHWH say?"

"I could not find Him! He's not here with us!"

"Then we must find Him. We cannot fight without Him," he said as he wiped her tears. They put food and water in a pack, and went back to Caleb. "YHWH is not among us. With your permission, Rahab and I will go seek Him," he said. "We'll return as soon as we can. Please, tell the sons of Judah and Simeon to spend a few days in fasting and prayer, and in purifying themselves."

"Where are you going?" Caleb was obviously miffed at the delay.

"I don't know. We may have to go to Shiloh to have Joshua or Eleazar the priest draw lots to find out who sinned. Or perhaps you can get someone to confess."

"Okay. But if they confess, and you're still gone...?"

Salmon looked at Rahab and smiled. "Don't worry. We'll know immediately if YHWH returns to the camp."

As they left the camp to head north, a young boy came running up to them with a yearling male lamb cavorting alongside. "Please, sir, take my pet ram with you," he puffed. "You may need him."

"No, son, I would never take..." Salmon began, but then he saw YHWH in the boy's pleading eyes. "Well... just why do you think I might need your pet lamb?"

"He's a perfect ram, sir. There is sin in the camp, so you'll need a perfect ram for a sacrifice."

"Huh? How do you know there's sin in the camp?"

The boy looked up at Salmon, admiration in his eyes. "You wouldn't stop the battle for any other reason."

So, Salmon and Rahab headed north with a frisky young ram in tow. They reached Jebus-Salem intending to pass by, but Rahab's gaze was drawn to the hill north of the heathen temple. It had nothing but scrub on it.

"What do you see up there, my love?"

"YHWH is there," she breathed. "I just know it."

Salmon couldn't disagree with that. They turned and headed up the hill. At the top, they discovered, hidden among the brush, the old altar that their ancestors had used to worship YHWH. They cleared away the brush, sacrificed the ram as a sin offering, and worshiped.

Logos came to them just as the sun set. "My beloved! Thank you for seeking My face. The curse is past."

"The curse...?" Salmon began, then remembered Moses' curse in memory of the golden bull at Mount Sinai. It was the 9th of Av! How could they all have forgotten? "O Lord, please forgive us! Whose sin was it that drove away Your presence from the camp?"

"You all have sinned. That is why you need the lamb. However, your own arrogance, thinking you could take Hebron without first consulting Me, gave My adversary occasion against you. Satan wants to slay you all. I suggest you humble yourself here and let Caleb conquer Hebron, for I have given it to him. But caution him first! He also could fall into the same pride as you."

"Yes, Lord..." Salmon paused. There was something else, but he couldn't pin it down. Rahab came up with it first. "YHWH, what is special about this hill? Why is this old altar here? Is this Your altar?"

"I'm delighted that you ask!" It was now getting quite dark but Logos seemed in no hurry. He told the stories of Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, and Joseph, and their pilgrimages to meet Him on this hill. He told of their desire "to reach the Holy City, not made with hands, whose builder is God Himself. They would not rest until they had found it!" He finished excitedly, "and find it they did, by faith, seeing it not with their physical eyes, but eyes of spirit, as pilgrims from afar."

All the while He talked, the hearts of Salmon and Rahab burned within them. When He paused, Rahab was first to burst forth with the all-important request: "Lord YHWH, please. May we too see the Holy City?"

It was very dark. The flames from the sacrifice had dwindled to a few glowing coals on the altar. The stars were out, but the moon had not yet risen. The silence lengthened. Prostrate before the altar, Salmon spoke. "YHWH, my Lord and my God, we too will not rest until we have seen the Holy City. You would not have told us about it only to refuse us now. We will wait in worship until we see it. Caleb wants us back, but this is more important. Much more important!"

"Yes indeed!" Logos responded. They heard laughter all around them. "Thank you for asking, and thank you for choosing what is most important. Here. Take My hand." The coals on the altar brightened into flames, and an angel appeared in them.

Leaving their bodies behind, their souls reached for His outstretched hands. Instantly the darkness blazed with light, as the eyes of their spirits were opened. It was not a city; it was an entire world, filled with beauty and color and music, with flowers and animals and busy, happy people everywhere. They saw the hill they had climbed and the old altar at the top, but it was now transformed into a garden paradise. The old altar was a golden throne. Two streams, clear as crystal, ran down the hill from the throne, with fruit trees lining them. The briars and scrub brush were replaced with glorious meadows and flowering trees and bushes. Looking out over the landscape, it seemed that they could see for a thousand miles. A grand chorus of angels circled in rank after rank around them. Before them was a Person, obviously King of this splendid realm. It was Logos, smiling down at them. "This is My city!" He said, sweeping His arm around a full 360 degrees. "My dwelling place for all time. I am preparing a place for you here, too. Do you like it?"

"What could there be not to like?" Salmon and Rahab were stunned that He should even ask.

"It is not finished..." the King began, again taking their hands. Together they flew across the lovely landscape. Then they saw a dark patch below, as if a cloud had passed over the sun; except there was no sun, and no clouds. Coming closer, they saw it was demons, swirling masses of them! They were over Hebron. Now they could see other dark masses; one over Debir to the south; a huge one over Philistia to the west; and others dotted here and there. "Please, O My beloved, help Me finish My Holy City," the King asked softly. But before they could answer, the vision faded, the sky darkened, and they found themselves back at camp. Overcome with glory, they knelt in worship until the dawning.

Caleb was an early riser. He strode out of his tent to greet the dawn. There, on the ground facing each other, were Salmon and Rahab, still engaged in worship. "That was fast!" he called, startling them. "You must have found YHWH nearby. So who sinned this time? Slay him and make atonement, and let's get on with it already!"

"Yes, sir." They jumped up. "It was I, sir." They both said it together, then looked at each other and smiled. "We sinned in not consulting YHWH before the battle. He would have reminded us that it was the 9th of Av, the date Moses cursed, and asked us to wait one day. Today we shall conquer Hebron."

"Aha. So... Then we don't need to slay you to gain YHWH's favor on this battle?"

"No, sir. I hope not sir!" Salmon couldn't help a smile. "But I'm afraid that I will not be leading the battle this time. Our punishment is that we must remain in our tent."

"Everyone will think you're a yellow chicken!"

"So be it. But this is not about me. Rahab and I will be praying for you. YHWH said He has given you the city. He suggests you... well... ah... take it. Yourself."

Caleb hesitated, his mouth half open. "Just... walk right in and claim it, eh? 'YHWH says it's mine, so hand it over.' Isn't that a bit presumptuous?"

"Well, He did warn me about pride. He said that you could fall into the same pride as I, if you don't remain sensitive to His leading, by His Spirit. The real battle is in the spirit realm. YHWH is our Commander-in-chief."

The sun had just popped up above the Salt Sea, in a spectacular sunrise. They turned to face it. Caleb fell to his knees. "Pray with me, that YHWH will give me wisdom."

They prayed together for an hour. The rest of the camp had risen and finished breakfast. Achsah, Caleb's lovely daughter, finally found him and tapped his shoulder. "Mom says you need to come to breakfast. You will need your strength for the day."

Caleb rose. "Thank you my dear. Your mom is wise." He took her hand and headed for the tent, calling over his shoulder, "I'll be fifteen minutes. Muster the troops."

When they had gathered, Caleb gave his orders. He was dressed in his finest military outfit, brilliant red plumed commander's helmet and all. "I'll need twenty volunteers – get your armor and come with me. All the rest hide your armor and weapons. Play with your kids. Pretend like you won't be fighting today. But be ready to join the fight the instant you hear the battle cry."

He started to go, then noticed some men looking at Salmon, frowning. "The real battle today," he shouted out, "is in the spirit realm, against the demonic forces who empower the Anakim. So I assigned Salmon and Rahab as our prayer support. We cannot win the battle over the Anakim if they do not win it first in the spirit realm. Please, everyone, you be in constant prayer today as well."

"Thank you, sir," Salmon said. "That was very kind."

After Caleb had selected his twenty volunteers, the rest of the army hid their weapons and 'played'.

Caleb marched beside his twenty troops to the city gates. Hebron had been built for the giant Anakim (who still called it Kiriath-Arba after their king Arba). Its gates were huge and imposing. In full view of the defenders of the city, Caleb removed his red-plumed commander's helmet, handing it to one of his men with a ceremonial bow. Then he shook out his long, white hair, which made him look all of his 85 years. Deliberately walking with a slight stoop, he went to the guardhouse window. "I have a message for your king!" he called.

"Throw down your sword!" came the answer.

"Does your king fear one old man with a sword?"

"We have three kings, each worth ten of you!" the guard sneered. "They are afraid of nothing. You shall fear them before this battle is done."

"Then allow me entrance, that I may give them a very important message from YHWH my God."

The guard opened the side door to the guard house, and led Caleb through a maze of passages into the courtyard. Caleb risked a glance at the inside of the main gates; they were indeed well fortified, guarded with eight huge giants, and locked with immense beams that looked too heavy for him to even lift. Caleb was sorely tempted to fear for his life. "I believe this is how You have led me, YHWH. I place my trust in You. I claim Your promise to give me the city. I give You my fears." He continued praying all the way to the king's court.

The battle in the spirit realm had been going badly. This was a 'last stand' for Satan and his demons as well as for the Anakim. Satan had thrown into it everything he had. The demons were so thick the air was hard to breathe. Caleb felt like he was walking through pea soup. All around him, he saw mighty warriors more than a head taller than him, carrying weapons too heavy for him to even swing. Caleb was a big man – by Israeli standards! But here he was the smallest man in the city.

As Caleb continued to pray, the battle shifted. His prayers empowered his personal angel to blaze with the light of Logos, dispelling the demonic darkness. His angel called for more reinforcements, and the host of YHWH responded. Caleb couldn't see it, but Salmon and Rahab could. "The angelic host have come! We cannot lose!" Rahab breathed, wiping tears from her eyes.

"Praise YHWH! He's here! That darkness we saw over Hebron is dissipating in the light of His glory!"

"Wait. I see the adversary! He's rising up from the city to meet YHWH. He's arguing with God!"

"I hear him, too. He is shouting, 'This is my city... my people... You have no right... there is no repentance... no prayers... You can't do this...'"

"Hush, my lord. They're coming here!"

Satan and Logos were no longer above Hebron, but above Salmon and Rahab's tent. Logos pointed down at them. There was no hiding now; they were exposed. Salmon leaped out of the tent, with Rahab close behind. The sky was clear and the vision past, but they knew.

They lifted their arms to heaven and prophesied, "We are on YHWH's side. He has already gained the victory. In YHWH's name we declare to Satan and all you demons of hell, your weakness, witlessness, and wickedness run like water today. You cannot stand before the wisdom, power, and righteousness of YHWH and His host. As darkness flees ahead of the dawning, as cockroaches flee the light, so you must flee the glory of YHWH in His people!"

Caleb was led into a fortress in the center of the city. There were hundreds of men gathered here, weapons in hand, obviously awaiting orders. Still praying furiously, he smiled and nodded at them as he passed. Up several flights of stairs, Caleb saw more warriors on each floor. At each turn, the situation looked more impossible. This was not at all like the vision of victory YHWH had given him in his prayers that morning. At the top of the stairs he glanced out the window; it was four stories – too far to jump. He was whisked past a force of twenty guards, through a huge double door, and into a large chamber with grand views from windows on all four sides. It was the king's throne room, the highest room in the city.

Caleb surveyed the room. In the center he saw three kings, on three thrones. While the guards went up to announce his presence, Caleb tried to count the other warriors in the room. He gave up. There were too many. He had no chance against them, none at all. He would have to outrun them back to the stairs. There was no other exit. Only four guards stood at the double doors – he might be able to take them down and get out. But the twenty guards in the foyer? He would have to be quick. He continued to pray as he strode forward.

The kings grinned at him in obvious amusement. They were giants, taller seated than he was standing. He smiled back, putting on an air of confidence he did not feel. *This is it, YHWH. I'm sure glad You are the God who keeps Your promises. I have zero chance without You.*

"So!" laughed the middle king. "What scared you yesterday? Are you here to bargain? Or to surrender!"

"Neither. I have a message for you from YHWH my God, King of all the Earth."

"King of all the Earth? Ha. What kind of God would send His message by the likes of you, little man?"

"The almighty God, the God of love, who supports the weak who turn to Him in truth, and brings down the proud oppressor and those who put their trust in men."

"Ah. I understand. A God of the weak. Now I see why He sent a runt like you. So what is His message?"

“Just this. YHWH has given me this city. Your lives are forfeit.” With the word ‘forfeit’, Caleb drew his sword and lunged for the kings. The sheer audacity of his lightning move froze the guards in horror, as he swung his sword in a full circle around his head, slashing the throats of all three kings in one mighty stroke.

He dodged past the guards who had brought him and sprinted for the doors. Time seemed to slow for him as his battle-awen kicked into gear. The warriors in the room were lethargic, sluggish; he made no attempt to engage them. But the guards at the door had their swords raised high, ready to come crashing down upon his bare head. Caleb turned, as if to head for a window, then at the last second turned back, ducked, and slashed across the four guards’ bare knees. Amid howls of rage and pain, he pushed open the doors and plowed through the twenty startled guards in the foyer.

The stairs were empty. He flew down each flight in one great leap, long white hair whipping behind, cushioning each landing by grabbing the bannister. As he circled around at each floor to the next flight of stairs, still at a dead run, he again smiled and nodded to the startled warriors. A few dodos even waved good-bye. He made no attempt to engage them either. He was gone before any could raise a weapon. He burst into the courtyard, just as a belated alarm sounded from above.

The gate! It was a long hundred-yard dash away. His troops stood just outside, but all was lost if he could not get that gate open for them. There was no time for cute tricks. Again he sprinted, dodging burly warriors like a halfback at a football game. The entire courtyard was alerted now. Giants were shouldering weapons heavy enough to flatten his skull. He had to get through! He darted between them, barely flicking his sword when he saw bare skin, to just slow them down. He knew that if he ever stopped to slay one, he could, but in the brief time it would take, a dozen more would be on him.

They were big and strong, but slow. He reached the gate. The two beams locking the twin doors in place were even bigger than he had thought. Eight huge guards stood in front of the beams, weapons raised. With the thunder of many feet pounding up behind him, he had mere seconds to get it open. It looked impossible, but then, YHWH is the God of the impossible. “In the name of YHWH, God of Israel!” He shouted, charging directly at the eight guards.

The next ten seconds were indescribable. 85-year-old Caleb was a blaze of fury, darting between the guards, slashing wherever he saw an opportunity, ducking and dodging their mighty swords and axes. They had armor, but he went for the bare skin, knees, faces, hands, using only the tip of his blade to scratch or slice. He dared not let that tip ever stop to implant itself, or that one lost second could be his last. “YHWH, give me strength!” he cried. “The battle belongs to You!”

One was down. The heavy maul of his comrade felled him when Caleb jumped out from between them. Two were on their knees, blinded from the tip of Caleb’s sword. Two others were hopping away on one leg, their kneecaps shattered. A deep throaty battle cry sounded right behind him. Caleb knew his time was up. Ignoring the last three guards even as they began their fatal swings, he went for the heavy beams on the gate.

With almost super-human strength he hoisted the upper beam off its raceway and let it drop. It landed right on the foot of the closest guard. He ducked to the bottom beam even as the last two guards’ weapons crashed into the gate where his bare head had been. With a mighty heave, he pulled it also from its raceway, then jumped between the legs of the oncoming horde from the courtyard. Fifteen burly giants plowed into the now-unlocked gate, pushing it open from the inside.

The battle was joined. With a mighty shout, Caleb’s twenty troops surged through the gate. The entire army of Judah was close behind. Now Caleb had time to do a more thorough job. He ran from one giant to another, slashing at kneecaps and then slicing the throats of the falling bodies. Their size and strength were no match for his lightning speed. Their armor could not protect them from the flying tip of his sword. His hair streamed out behind him like a banner, inspiring his men on to victory. In one hour it was over. They dragged the bodies of the slain Anakim out of the city and burned them. Not one remained alive. Hebron belonged to Caleb.

At the celebration that evening, Caleb stood to the wild cheers of the camps of Judah and Simeon. He raised his hand for silence, motioning for Salmon and Rahab to come forward. “Today’s victory was not mine, as you suppose,” he began. “Here was your victory!” He pointed up to the heavens. “And here!” He pointed at Salmon and Rahab. “Your prayers and faith in YHWH have gained the victory! I have one request: Salmon and Rahab, please teach me and my wife to pray like you do. I could feel your prayers, like an unseen warrior at my side. I would like the covering all the time that your prayers provided for me today.”

Salmon responded for them both. “Thank you sir. We will. Today it did take both of us, praying together. YHWH showed me that my original plan to level the city was wrong. He didn’t want Hebron destroyed. He wants you to use this city and this beautiful fortress as your own capital. I repent for my lack of prayer before the attack yesterday. That 9th of Av curse must have blinded me.”

The celebrations went on late into the night. Caleb invited Salmon and Rahab’s family into his own tent, where they celebrated with his family. Achsah, Caleb’s eldest daughter, served them. Her great admiration for her father was clear to all. But when she said good night and turned to retire, Caleb stopped her. “Achsah, my dear. I know what you want. I see it in your eyes.”

“Yes, my father. I want you always to be my hero as you were today. Never was a daughter more proud of her father than I am of you!”

“Nay, you want more than that!” Caleb laughed off the compliment, though it touched him deeply. “You are of marriageable age. You want a husband who can take a city like I took today.”

Achsah blushed and tried to cover her smile with her hand as she fled to her sleeping quarters.

Salmon and Rahab found the boy who had given them the lamb. “Son, you were right. There was sin in the camp. Your lamb and the faith and prayers you sent with it won the battle yesterday. We sacrificed your lamb on an ancient altar on top of Mount Moriah. There we saw the Holy City, and YHWH came and showed us what to do.” Then, intending to reward him, Salmon invited him to bring his family to dinner with him that night.

But the boy admitted that he had no family. His father had died in the battle for Ai. His mother had recently gone to join him. He had offered his only lamb, his pet, with a prayer for new parents. Upon hearing this, there was no question what they must do. Salmon and Rahab adopted him as their third son.

That twelve-year-old boy’s name was **Elimelech**. When he grew up, he married a lovely daughter of Caleb named **Naomi**. They settled in Ephrathah, where they had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion.

It took a month for Caleb to finish cleaning out and moving in to Hebron, making it Judah’s capital city. Then he gathered the armies of Judah and Simeon again. “Debir was conquered by Joshua in the first campaign five years ago,” he said. “But Staan, the son of Bnon the Amalekite, has now occupied and fortified it. He has turned against us and against YHWH! They think they can withstand us if we attack Debir, but we know that even one among us can take the city, if YHWH is with him. Even an 85-year-old like myself. You already know that. Hebron is my proof. Any one of you could too! *Your proof is Debir!* Which one of you will rise up and take the city? We will stand behind you in prayer, and follow you into the city to capture it in the name of YHWH. Who will lead?”

He paused, but not a man stepped forward. They still feared the Amalekites. Caleb had expected that. So he waved forward his beautiful daughter. “Achsah here is of marriageable age. But she wants a man! *A real man!* A hero who is able to walk boldly in all the strength that YHWH provides, in faith that He who promised to give us the land will empower us to rise up and take it. The one who takes Debir shall win Achsah as his wife!” There was a gasp near the front, and a brief struggle as a thin young man pushed others aside and ran forward. He was **Othniel**, son of Kenaz (Caleb’s younger brother) the son of Jephunneh the Kenizite, who was a grandson of Kenaz son of Esau.

You should know that Othniel had had his eye on lovely Achsah ever since their childhood. As Caleb’s nephew, he was often with the family, and had early been smitten by her beauty and grace. He was only 23, too young to marry. But he would rather die than lose her now. He stepped boldly forward. “Sir. I will take Debir.”

“Othniel? You are but a wee lad. You’ve barely learned to swing a sword. What motivates you to...”

“I love her! If I die, so be it; I will die for her. But if what you say is true, that any one of us could take a city if YHWH is with him, then, young and thin though I be, I shall not die, for YHWH is with me!”

“Hmm... I like your attitude, Othniel.” He turned to Achsah. “What do you think, my dear? Shall we let him try to win your hand?” (Now you must understand, dear Reader – Achsah was also 23. In those days there was a double standard. Men rarely married before the age of 40 or so, as they had to establish themselves in a trade and earn a home before taking a wife. But girls usually married around the age of 20, or even before, to allow more time for bearing and rearing babies. Caleb was really asking, “Do you want a husband so young?”)

Achsah nodded. She was no fool. Having a young husband who had conquered a city to win her love, was far better than getting some old geezer who had everything and only wanted her to breed heirs for his family name. Othniel may be young and poor, but if he succeeded, he would be a great hero, with the world at his command.

So the next day Othniel mustered the army, and they captured Debir. It was over before Caleb had a chance to ask how he planned to do it. He never found out, either. All Othniel ever told him about it was, “YHWH, and my great love for Achsah, gave me courage.”

The next evening as the crowd gathered to celebrate the victory, Othniel came up to the front to claim his bride. Everyone was clapping and cheering, and saying great things about him, but he had eyes only for Achsah.

Caleb tried to get him to give a speech. “So, my son. You are now a famous hero. Do you want to continue to lead our armies? They’re ready to crown you their king!”

“No, sir. As you said, sir, anybody can take a city if YHWH is with him. I would rather you give others their opportunity. I want nothing more than the hand of your daughter in marriage, as you promised.”

“Is that all? What about the spoils of war?”

“Is that all?” Othniel was indignant. “Ha! All the spoils in the land – all the treasures of Canaan, can not compare to this one treasure you promised me.”

Caleb was pleased. Here was a man who truly would care for his daughter. He called her forward and placed her hand in his to seal their marriage.

But as the newlyweds sat and talked together in a room of her father's home in Hebron, reality set in. "Othniel, you're my hero! I will love you forever for the brave way you fought for me and honored me in the congregation. But face it, as romantic as it may have sounded, you were a bit light-headed in not asking for more. You have nothing, and here we are living with my folks. Please, my father will give you anything. At least ask him for some land of our own, so we can build a home and start a family."

Hugging her, Othniel laughed. "You mean we can't just live on love? What else could we possibly need?"

"Now I know why men usually don't marry this young. I did not marry you to continue living in my father's house! I want to live in your house, take care of your things, and raise your children! Now, you go to my father tomorrow and ask him for a piece of land. He loves you, Othniel. He'll give you anything."

"Yes, my love. I may have conquered a city, but you have conquered me! I will do anything for you." So he did. He was given both riches and land. They settled down to live on a large plot a few miles south of Debir. They were very happy there through the winter, but the next summer they realized they needed one more thing. Achsah (who was the more ambitious of the two) decided to handle it herself. She got on her donkey and went back to Hebron. Besides, she had news.

Caleb saw her and called, "Achsah, my dear! What a delightful surprise! How have you been?"

"We're doing just wonderful, father. And I have news. Our home is finally built, and just in time. For I discovered that I'm pregnant with your first grand-baby!"

"Oh! My dear! Praise YHWH! We rejoice with you! We shall celebrate! What can I do for you?"

"Give me a blessing, my father. The summer is hot and the Negev is dry. To survive, we need the springs of water in that valley just below the land you gave us."

Caleb was delighted to do that. So Othniel's family prospered. Their firstborn was a son, whom they named Socoh. Their homestead grew into a town, named after their son. We hear no more about them for many years.

Caleb and Salmon kept up their campaign to possess the inheritance of Judah and Simeon. They continued south down the highlands, taking city after city as led by YHWH in prayer. When they took Zephath in the territory of Simeon, they destroyed it so utterly that it was renamed Hormah, 'Destruction'. After finishing in the highlands, they headed down into Philistia. Having seen at Debir how wicked the Amalekites had become, they drove them and the Casluhim out of Philistia, and took over the Philistine cities Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza. Then they drove the Casluhim and Caphtorim (later together called Philistines) out of the Negev entirely, and toward Egypt.

[Historical Note: Caphtor, brother to Casluh son of Mizraim of Egypt, had founded the Minoan civilization in Crete. However, the Thera volcano in 1620 BC had so devastated Crete that many of the Caphtorim had sailed to the land of their brothers the Casluhim. However, at that time, Philistia was also having a famine and could not help the Caphtorim, so they had moved into the Negev. There they conquered and displaced the Av'vim, south of Gaza at Sharuhin, where they were living when Caleb came.]

Caleb probably should have killed all the inhabitants of Philistia and the Negev as God had commanded, for they were very wicked. Instead, he let them live for the sake of King Salitis. But he drove them all farther south.

Staan and the surviving Amalekites were grateful to have been spared. They joined with the Edomites and Midianites to become good neighbors for a while.

The Casluhim, however, were a different story. They joined up with their displaced brothers the Caphtorim in the Negev and fled to Avaris in Egypt, demanding that Bnon honor their protection treaty and come to their aid. *This is why they had been paying tribute, for all these years!* Bnon was an Amalekite. The Casluhim and Caphtorim were Egyptians, whom he despised. But he did care about protecting his major trade route, the Via Maris, 'Way of the Sea', which the Casluhim had been guarding. So he finally agreed to send up his army to reconquer 'their' land (ownership which is in dispute to this day). They were led by his youngest son, Yacobaam (Staan's brother). They decided to reconquer Philistia the next spring.

In the year 1403 BC a lot of babies were born to the daughters of Israel. Among them was a son born to Caleb and his wife Carol, and a daughter born to Joshua and his wife Jerusha. But the most famous baby that year was born to Salmon and Rahab (their fourth son, because of their adoption of Elimelech). His name is **Boaz**, and he is in the line of the Messiah. This is surprising, as Rahab had been a harlot. But even the most wicked can become the greatest of saints with but a touch of the Master's hand.

Genealogies are as boring as watching paint dry, but no good historical record is complete without them. Besides, though everyone knows Salmon's heritage, nobody knows Rahab's. So here goes, starting with Noah, from whom we all descend. Noah's son Shem was born before the Flood, which occurred on our October 24, 3450 BC. His son Arphaxad was born three years after the flood when Shem was 100. Cainan was born of Arphaxad aged 135. But at 55 (remember from Volume Two?) Cainan joined Ishtar's temple as a male prostitute, so the names of his next three generations are lost from history. One was born when Cainan was 130; his son was born when Cainan was 260; and his son was born when Cainan was 364. Then when Cainan was 442, after he had repented, that third unknown son had Shelah. (Remember that Cainan is not Canaan son of Ham. That is an entirely different line.)

For Salmon, the rest is straightforward. Shelah had Heber in 2740 BC at the age of 130. Heber had Peleg at 134. Peleg had Reu at 130. Reu had Serug at 132. Serug had Nahor at 130. Nahor had Terah at 179. Terah had Father Abraham at 76 in 1959 BC. Abraham had Isaac at 100 in the year after the destruction of Sodom. Isaac had Jacob and Esau at 60. Jacob had Judah at 81. Judah had Pharez by Tamar at 53. Pharez (who started young and was prolific) had Hezron at 35. Hezron had Aram (or just Ram) in Egypt at 54. Aram had Aminadab at 40. Aminadab had Nahshon at 40. And Nahshon (Aaron's brother-in-law) had Salmon at 49 in 1447 BC, four years after the Exodus.

For Rahab, it is more difficult. Cainan fathered an awful lot of kids during 309 years as the high priest in Ishtar's temple, but all of their names are forever lost to history. They were, well, nobodies, street rats, low life. But they still bore kids, loads of them. Cainan had (and still has) a very large family. Cainan was horrified when Ishtar died in 2948 BC; she was his 'goddess' as well as his consort, and gods and goddesses are not supposed to die! Yet she died, a gruesome death of venereal diseases, wasting away for weeks in screaming pain. There was nothing Cainan could do. She spent her final hours with her head cradled in Cainan's arms, a hideous shell of her former beauty. Cainan did not know that his parents, Arphaxad and Aimee, had been praying for him every night for 309 years. He only knew that Ishtar's religion had failed. She had tried to elevate him to godhood so he could take over when she died. But watching her die, any desire he had for power and glory died, too. He just walked away from her temple, never to look back.

Cainan tried for a year to get his extended family to repent too, but their hearts were hard. He had children now to the fourth generation, and not one would listen to him. Finally he migrated back to Aratta, where his parents took him in and restored his faith in YHWH. Of course he was grateful for his parent's intercession for him, and he immediately began praying for his own descendants. His prayer bore fruit in 2870 BC when his third generation grandson repented. His name is unknown to history, but it was he who bore Shelah that year (in the line of Messiah) and later, another son (whose name is also unknown). This second son, Shelah's younger brother became the father of another line of more-or-less godly descendants.

Covered by their repentant parents' prayers, they flourished, but again we lose them for five generations. They surfaced in about 2050 BC. A daughter of Terah and Trisha was named Nina, the first wife of Nahor, brother of Abraham. If you remember, Nina was abducted by the Chaldeans when Terah and his family left Ur. She and her half-sister Ammi were forced into temple prostitution. You heard all this in Volume Two. What you didn't hear then was: many years later Nina escaped, with the help of a 'customer' who took pity on her, stole her away from the temple, and made her one of his wives.

We don't know his name either, but we know he was a descendant of Shelah's brother. Finally allowed to keep her babies, Nina bore a son, whom she named Nahor after her first husband. She raised him to love YHWH and His Law, and covered him with prayer. Again, we don't know the names in between, but Reece (Rahab's father) was a 10th generation descendant of Nina's son Nahor. So you see, Rahab had prostitution and violence all throughout her sordid heritage, but she also had praying ancestors! YHWH does answer prayer.

Thank you for indulging me in my hysterical... er... historical bunny trail. Back to 1403 BC. The rest of the year was spent in easy mop-up operations. They had indeed conquered the land, just as YHWH had promised them. Though there were still a few pockets of resistance left, such as those Jebusites in their fortress at Jebus-Salem, the power of the Canaanites had been broken and most of them had been wiped out. *The land was at peace.*

Then in the spring of 1402 BC, tragedy turned up in Caleb's backyard. He was still cleaning out cities, taking spoils, and making sure each family got its inheritance. Then the army of Pharaoh Nbon, led by his youngest son Yacobaam, swept into the largely empty Philistia, followed by the entire mob of angry Casluhim and Caphtorim.

This presented Caleb with a major dilemma. His army had mostly dissipated, as his men had resigned to settle down and build their homes. Simeon's army had also left. Caleb did not have a lot to negotiate with. He had gotten over-confident and had been caught napping.

Yacobaam was blunt. "The Casluhim and Caphtorim are under my protection. I want their land back. Besides their 200,000 warriors, I have 40,000 battle-hardened Egyptian troops, plus 4,000 cavalry, 800 expert archers, and 600 iron chariots. We want Philistia, from Gaza to Ashdod, from Ekron to Gath and Gerar. I'll give you a week to withdraw. If you refuse, I'll walk through all your cities in the highlands, looting and burning. But if you withdraw from Philistia, I will set up five kings of the Casluhim under me, and order them to leave your cities in peace."

You and I know what Caleb should have done. Though his position was clearly impossible, YHWH is God of the impossible, and he knew that. He should have pled for time to go and pray with Carol about it, and to ask Salmon and Rahab to pray as well. They should have prayed until they got an answer, regardless of the immensity of the threat. But standing before Yacobaam, Caleb succumbed to a subtle pride. *He just had to make this decision himself. He couldn't tuck his tail between his legs and run off to pray! Besides, he was feeling his age. He wanted to retire to Hebron with Carol and their one-year-old son. Anyway, who cares if the Casluhim and Caphtorim live in Philistia? He never planned to go down there anyway.* "Okay, Yacobaam. If you swear that the five kings of the Casluhim will leave me in peace, it's a deal."

This later turned out to be a major tragedy, as we shall see. But at first, it seemed to work just fine. The Casluhim returned to their empty homes, joined by the delighted Caphtorim. (These two races merged into one, later called the Philistines. They still had a few of the Anakim living among them. They also made treaties with the Amorites along the coast, and later absorbed them. I'll call them all Philistines from now on.) There they flourished, under the protection of the Egyptian army. True to his word, Yacobaam set up five kings, one at each royal city, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. But he went one step further. Before returning to Egypt, Yacobaam gave them iron weapons and chariots, and taught them iron-working technology. That gave them a military advantage over the Hebrews, whose only weapons were what they had taken from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea, fifty years before!

We have reached 1401 BC, the first of Nisan. All the families of Israel have received their inheritance, except a few families of Dan. But half of Dan's inheritance, a fertile slice of land in between Judah and Ephraim and stretching down to the sea, was now occupied by those 'Philistines' under the protection of Yacobaam! Oops!

Now we see the problem. Once the rest of the tribes had mostly claimed and settled into their inheritance, they got so busy building homes and raising families that they quickly forgot about helping each other rid the land of its previous inhabitants. They were tired of war. They never did get rid of the Philistines, who shall enter into our story later, more than once. Those few families of Dan finally gave up and moved way north to the land of Mizpeh. There they captured the town of Laish and renamed it Dan, making two separate tribes of Dan.

It wasn't just Dan that had this problem. Ephraim also tolerated the Amorites living along their southwestern borders. That came about in a rather interesting way. Joshua was directing the mop-up operations, cleaning out the inhabitants of his own tribe's inheritance. But he was old, and tired. He had enough good land in the highlands. He decided to leave the Amorites in the western lowlands alone. So Logos sent a plague of black hornets from the north, driving the Amorites south to his border with Dan. That was a pretty big clue what God wanted! But Joshua missed it, and never followed up. The Amorites remained.

The Gibeonites also continued to live in Ephraim, thanks to the treaty which they had tricked Joshua into accepting. The Canaanites in Gezer also remained for a long time. When Joshua later caught them failing in their promise to serve YHWH, he punished them by making them Israel's servants, but didn't destroy them.

Neither Benjamin (to the north) nor Judah (to the south) ever drove out the remaining Jebusites living in the inner fortified city of Jebus-Salem. They were afraid, as the Jebusites were well-known as fierce warriors. They grew strong. Many years later King David took them out.

There were five city-states that West Manasseh never got around to capturing. Zebulun decided to enslave the Canaanites in two cities, rather than eliminating them. Naphtali likewise enslaved the Canaanites in two of their cities. Worst of all, Asher simply moved in among the Canaanites, not even attempting to drive them out.

Joshua wasn't worried about all that. He knew that YHWH had promised to drive out the Canaanites "a little at a time." He totally trusted YHWH to do it, too!

So with the division of Canaan among the twelve tribes, establishing six Cities of Refuge, plus giving to the Levites 48 cities among the other tribes, the land finally had rest from war (except for Dan).

It had been fifty years since the Exodus, and ten since Moses had first led them into the Promised Land. The Venus / Mercury binary was again nearby on its 50 year cycle. It was time to celebrate the Year of Jubilee.

Joshua called all the men of Israel to Shiloh. "This year the land has rest from war. You are free to build your homes and farm your lands. All the land has been divided among the sons of Israel by their families as a permanent possession. As long as you follow YHWH wholeheartedly by obeying His commandments and keeping yourselves pure from the idols of the heathen nations and from their worship of the planets, I know that YHWH will continue to drive out all those nations from before you until you have possessed the entire land. Moses commanded you to observe a Sabbatical year for the land each seven years, and a Jubilee year in the fiftieth year after seven Sabbatical years have passed. This year marks the beginning of that cycle, for YHWH our God has now fulfilled every promise that He made to us. None of our enemies could stand before us. He has given us peace."

Joshua reiterated the laws of Moses, encouraging the Sons of Israel to be diligent in keeping them, that they may forever enjoy this good land that YHWH had given them. He explained the Sabbatical year, in which the land lies free from cultivation, and its owners eat only what grows naturally. He also explained the Jubilee, in which all the Hebrew slaves go free, all the land is returned to its original owners, and the land gets a second Sabbatical rest.

During his retirement from war, Joshua had worked hard to finish the books Moses had started, which we know as the **Pentateuch**. "This is the book of Moses!" he cried out, unwilling to take any credit for it himself. "Make copies for each of your tribes. Treasure it! Read it aloud whenever you assemble, so you will not forget the laws YHWH has given or the good things He has done for us."

Now the real celebration began. You have never known such a party. For two weeks they feasted, played, danced, and sang. Afterwards they kept the Passover according to the law, the first time they had kept it all together since crossing the Jordan.

Joshua gratefully summoned forward the heads of the armies of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. “For ten years you have kept the vow you swore to Moses, to help us conquer the land. You have not forsaken your brothers. And you have remained faithful to YHWH. Now therefore, return to your inheritance beyond the Jordan, to your wives and your little ones. Only be careful to observe the commandments of Moses, to love YHWH your God with all your heart and soul, to walk in His ways and hold fast to Him.” So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, each tribe with a copy of his book. He likewise sent home the rest of Israel, satisfied and rejoicing.

I wish the story ended there, for I love good endings, but it does not. Joshua and Jerusha remained faithful, raising their children and writing the book of Joshua. That is all Logos asked of him. But the leaders of Israel who should have taken over after him – the elders and heads of each tribe – didn’t. Oh, they served YHWH, and kept His commandments and appointed festivals, and they raised their children to do the same. But this one thing they did not do: *they did not finish driving out or annihilating the wicked inhabitants of the land.*

Eighteen years after that famous Jubilee celebration, in 1383 BC, Joshua gathered the men of Israel at Shechem, the ‘place of listening’. This is the place between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, where, after their victory at Ai, they had rehearsed the Blessings and Cursings written by Moses. (This is also the place where, 500 years earlier, Father Abraham had built his very first altar in the land of Canaan.) Joshua was 110 years old, and he had led Israel for 27 years. He had now finished his own book, the book of Joshua, up through chapter 23. This included writing out a prepared speech. He knew his time had come.

Over the last fifteen years Joshua had grown a bit feeble. His commanding voice had softened, though the natural amphitheater effect of the mountains allowed everyone to hear. He gave a lovely speech, which I won’t repeat (since it is all recorded in the last two chapters of his book). He reminded them that God had kept all His promises. He urged them to remember and do all that Moses had written in the five books of the law. He told them to love and cling only to YHWH. He exhorted them to never associate with the heathen nations remaining in the land, or intermarry with them, or serve their gods, or even mention the name of their gods, but rather to drive them out, just like their great war heroes Caleb, Salmon, and Othniel had done. He also warned them exactly what would happen if they did turn away from YHWH to violate His covenant which they had sworn to keep: He would NOT continue to drive out the remaining inhabitants of the land. They would become a snare, a trap, to them – a whip on their sides and thorns in their eyes until they were slain or expelled from the land. (That is exactly what eventually happened, but Joshua didn’t know that. He still had faith that his many warnings would be heeded.)

Joshua was filled with the spirit, and prophesied to them. He reminded them of all that YHWH had done for them in the past, in bringing their fathers from beyond the Euphrates into Canaan, then into Egypt, then out from Egypt to Mount Sinai and into the Promised Land, with mighty miracles and wonders. Finally, he pleaded with the congregation to always fear YHWH and serve Him only, in sincerity and truth, rejecting the heathen gods around them. He swore he would always do so, and he made them swear it too, three times. They all did. So with those vows he made a sacred covenant with them at Shechem.

Joshua had brought the tabernacle from Shiloh for the occasion. They set it up next to the giant oak tree under which Abram had built his altar, northwest of Shechem. (Abram’s altar was long gone.) Joshua wrote out the terms of the covenant, and had the priests put it into the Ark of the Covenant, along with the Law of Moses (which was now complete). But Joshua did something else which was much more visible. He brought a huge white limestone slab, which he called a ‘Witness Stone’. He made the elders swear their oaths of fealty over the stone, then he erected it as a permanent memorial of their solemn vows to keep YHWH’s covenant. *That stone remains at Shechem today.*

They did find Jacob’s old altar. It was still standing on the plot that he had purchased from the sons of Hamor (Shechem’s father) in 1695 BC. They re-buried Joseph’s bones (which they had brought up from Egypt and kept throughout their travels in the wilderness) beneath an honored memorial to Joseph, facing Jacob’s altar.

After celebrating the Passover there with the people, Joshua returned to Shiloh with the tabernacle. There he lived until after the festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot). Then, with his health failing, he returned to his homestead in Timnath-Serah (Double Portion), which is about 18 miles NW of Jerusalem. He died in peace as the year ended, at the age of 110, with Jerusha and their seven children at his side. There he was buried with honors, as befits a man who wholeheartedly followed YHWH all his days. Likewise his good friend and fellow leader Caleb died in Hebron the next year at the age of 107. Both were great heroes of Israel. Their welcomes in the heavenlies were every bit as grand as for Moses and Ziporah, I’m sure.

Salmon, the dearest friend of Caleb and Joshua, wrote out the concluding remarks of Joshua’s speech with Joshua’s epitaph as the 24th chapter of the book of **Joshua**. (Note: Salmon’s first verse refers to the same gathering Joshua described in Joshua 23:1-2; it didn’t happen twice.) The book of **Judges** was written much later by Samuel.

Joshua’s oaths and the Witness Stone must have had an effect. As long as the leaders of his generation lived, the Israelites were faithful to YHWH, and He continued to bless their new land. Sadly, by 1376 BC they had all died, and another generation arose who did not know YHWH and who had forgotten His mighty works.

CHAPTER 4 – ANOTHER GENERATION WHICH KNEW NOT YHWH – THE JUDGES

This is a sad chapter in the history of the Bride. I'm sorry, dear Reader. I like happy stories, or stories with happy endings. This is not. But it has a few bright spots, so for their sake I'll grit my teeth and rush through it.

One bright spot began in 1380 BC, when Elimelech (the boy who had given Salmon the lamb, now 36 years old) married a lovely daughter of Caleb named Naomi. They settled in Ephrathah (Bethlehem). They had two sons in the next few years, Mahlon and Chilion. They did love and fear YHWH, and kept His commandments, and tried to teach their children to do so. Sadly, as with many young people today, their sons rebelled.

In fact, it seems that the entire next 200 years can be summarized by this. The Israelites did evil, intermarrying with the Canaanites, forsaking YHWH, and serving the pagan gods of the nations. God allowed them to fall into bondage. They cried out in repentance. He sent a judge to deliver them. Then when the judge died, that old cycle of apostasy began again, as the next generation acted even more corruptly than their fathers. Need I say more?

So YHWH's anger burned against them, because they had forsaken the covenant which they had so solemnly sworn to keep. As YHWH had promised, He no longer drove out the heathen nations, but left them in the land to test Israel and chastise them when they turned away. So it remains to this day.

The first cycle of Israel's apostasy began in 1376 BC. Within two years Israel was enslaved to aggressive Hittite king Cushan-Rishathaim after he defeated the Mitanni in western Syria. Israel groaned under the bondage for eight years. Though it had been forty years since Othniel had won Achsah's hand by taking Debir, the Israelites still remembered their hero. They pled with him for help. His children were grown and gone by then. He and Achsah prayed about it. Surprisingly, Logos agreed, so he gathered an army and drove the invaders back to Syria, just like that.

Othniel then judged Israel for the next forty years. They returned halfheartedly to YHWH most of that time. YHWH did chastise them again, with a famine, caused by a volcano after the flyby of Mars in 1350 BC. It was a Jubilee, so damage was minimal. But the famine afterwards got so bad that righteous Elimelech and Naomi left Ephrathah and went to Moab, where it was not so bad. There they and their two sons lived with some of the descendants of the family of Reuel, Moses' father-in-law. Sadly Reuel's family had nearly all intermarried with the Moabites, and they now served heathen gods. So Elimelech was unable to find godly girls for his sons to marry.

Elimelech still prohibited the intermarriage of his sons with the idolaters, according to God's Law. But he died at the age of 76 in 1340 BC.

After Elimelech's death, his sons rebelled against their father's command. They married Moabite girls and even bowed to their gods. Chilion married Orpah and Mahlon married **Ruth**. Logos was not pleased with them. They had violated Israel's sworn covenant with Himself. He saw the Moabite culture, now steeped in idolatry, and He knew this would destroy the family of Elimelech. So out of love, He took Mahlon and Chilion in 1339 BC.

When they died, poor Naomi was crushed. Within two years she had lost her husband and her two sons. Her new daughters-in-law tried to help, but she was inconsolable. She decided to return to Ephrathah. Orpah and Ruth said they'd go with her, but Naomi refused. "I have no more sons in my womb for you to marry! Return to your own people and to your own gods."

Orpah kissed her and returned home. But young Ruth would not let go of Naomi. She swore an oath, one of the most touching in the history of mankind. "Please don't make me leave you, Naomi. *I swear by YHWH your God that wherever you go, there I will also go. Where you lodge, there I shall lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God. Where you die, there I shall die, and there I will be buried. Thus may YHWH do to me, and worse, if anything but death ever part us.*"

Now, who is so hard-hearted they could refuse that? Not Naomi! So they packed up and returned to Ephrathah together. Surprisingly, when they got home, everyone still remembered Naomi, even though they had been gone for ten years. But she told them, "No longer call me Naomi ['Pleasant'], but call me Mara ['Bitter'], for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went out full, but YHWH has brought me back empty."

They took over Elimelech's old homestead. The house was broken down and the land overgrown with weeds. They worked hard to get the roof repaired and the home liveable, but the growing season already was upon them, and they had no way to till or plant the field and no money to buy food, much less seed. Naomi sadly realized that they would have to sell their field, just to survive. Ruth was a godsend during this time. She took care of old Naomi and worked hard to provide for her. One of the jobs she took was gleaning barley behind the reapers, a privilege which Israeli culture afforded the needy. Ruth did not know the area, so it was just divine providence that led her to glean in one of the fields of **Boaz**, the fourth son of Salmon and Rahab. They had passed away, but had left behind a large family. Remember that Elimelech was the adopted older brother of Boaz.

When Boaz came back from Ephrathah and went to the fields to see how his reapers were doing, he saw a lovely young maiden sitting exhausted under the shade of his roof. Fortunately his servants had already talked to her, and had heard all the news about Naomi as well. They told him everything.

So Boaz, being a caring man, came to Ruth and gave her a drink. After she had revived a bit, he introduced himself. "My reapers tell me you gleaned all morning here in the hot sun. From now on, don't go to any other field but mine. Follow right after my reapers. Rest when they rest and drink freely from the same water jars that they draw for themselves. I have commanded my servants to watch out for you and not hinder you."

Ruth bowed in the eastern custom. "Thank you, my lord. You are most kind and generous. But good sir, why have I found favor in your sight, since I am a foreigner?"

Boaz grinned. Knowledge is power. "Ruth! You are no foreigner! Your father-in-law is my older brother. All that you have done for Naomi after the deaths of Elimelech and Mahlon has been reported to me. You left your own people and their gods, and you joined yourself with my people and vowed to worship our God. May YHWH reward you! And may your wages be from the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."

Ruth bowed even lower. "Thank you, my lord. I am very pleased to find favor in your sight. You have greatly comforted your maidservant, even though I was born a different race from your other maidservants."

As they were talking, lunch-time rolled around. The reapers gathered. "Come, Ruth!" Boaz stooped down to grab her hand. "Eat with my reapers!" He hurried her over, sat her down, and personally served her, giving her even more than she could eat.

Ruth continued gleaning, following the reapers, until evening. When she threshed out her day's work, it came to seven gallons of the finest barley! She ran back home and showed it to Naomi. Then she left her just enough for their dinner and sold the rest of it for a good price at the market. Naomi had dinner ready when she returned. When Ruth gave her the money, Naomi exclaimed, "Wow! So much! Whose field did you glean in today? May the one who took pity on you be blessed!"

"It was Boaz, Mom."

Naomi's eyes lit up. "Boaz? Elimelech's brother?"

"Yes, and he said to remain in his own fields and stay close to his reapers until the harvest is done!"

After dinner, Naomi sat Ruth down on the porch to explain the old Hebrew law of the 'Kinsman Redeemer'. "When a man of Israel marries, but dies without an heir, his closest relative (usually a brother or a cousin) is required to take his widow for a wife and to raise up an heir for the dead. Perhaps Boaz will take you, to raise up an heir by you for Elimelech. He is wealthy enough."

"Why does he need to be wealthy?"

"He has to buy our land. That's the whole idea. Then Elimelech's heir will own it when he grows up."

"Boaz has plenty of land. Why would he want to buy ours, just to raise up a son for Elimelech and then give it away to him? That doesn't make any sense at all."

"Perhaps, but that is what the law commands, and Boaz is a good and law-abiding man. I think he'll do it! Hmm... I have an idea. Quickly, Ruth! Bathe, anoint yourself, and put on your best gown. Boaz harvested a lot of barley today, so he'll probably be at the threshing floor until late. Hide nearby. When he retires, watch where he lies down. After he falls asleep, lie down at his feet and pull his cover over you, too. If he yanks it off, just come home. But if his covering remains over you all night, tradition says that he will be your Kinsman Redeemer!"

Ruth's head was spinning. These old Israeli customs were so strange! But she did as she was told. Boaz did indeed have a lot of barely to thresh. As with any land-owner, it was his responsibility to ensure none was wasted, so he continued working by lantern until very late. Ruth found him by the light of his lantern, and waited. He finally finished up, exhausted, and had a bite to eat with some wine to refresh himself. Then, glad to have gotten so much done, he pulled up a big blanket, turned off the lantern, and lay down right there on the threshing floor to guard his huge pile of prime grain.

Ruth waited, her brain whirring. *What if he wakes up? What if he thinks I'm an intruder? What if he's angry with me? He might think I'm stealing more grain, after all he did for me today! Or what if he thinks I'm a harlot?* She almost chickened out. But she remembered her promise to Naomi. She had vowed to care for her mother-in-law, and this is what Naomi had asked. She didn't understand, but she would do it. It's called faith.

The night had gotten chilly, and Ruth's gown was not very warm. Boaz was cutting some heavy duty Z's, so Ruth figured the creaking floor wouldn't waken him. She crept up to the foot of his bedroll, carefully lifted the top of the blanket, and slid in over the bottom part, pulling the top back over her. Then she snuggled up until she felt his warm feet on her back. The floor was hard, even through the blanket. Her heart was pounding and her brain still whirled. She was sure there was no way she'd be able to fall asleep. She rehearsed all that Naomi had told her. She had obeyed. The rest was in the hand of Naomi's God. She prayed to Him, relaxing, trusting.

Boaz awoke in the middle of the night. There were movements, warmth, and soft breathing at his feet! A calf or goat? How could an animal get into his threshing floor? He quickly bent down, to feel a homespun gown, with soft curves in all the right places. It was a woman!

"Who are you?" he called into the blackness.

Very sound asleep, it took her a bit to figure out who she was, and where. "Uh... Who am I? Ruth, my lord! Your maidservant. Please! Be not angry with me."

“Ruth? Ahh yes... What do you want? Why are you here on my cold, hard threshing floor?”

“You are my kinsman and I want to remain under your covering.” She repeated Naomi’s exact words.

“Ahh...” He understood instantly. He knew the law. “You want me to redeem Elimelech’s land.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“I am willing. But I have an older brother, who lives nearby. The law commands him to redeem you. But if he will not, then as YHWH lives I shall! Remain under my covering tonight to seal my vow that I accepted you. Then first thing tomorrow, I’ll go talk to my brother.”

“Thank you, my lord.”

“Thank you! May YHWH bless you for this kindness you have shown me. I will be honored to raise up an heir for Elimelech. But even more than that, I will be honored to take you as my wife, for you are young and lovely, and everyone knows your excellent character!”

“Kindness that I showed you? Oh, my lord! I have only received your kindness!”

“Nay. I am 65. You couldn’t be a day over 25. You easily might have been out chasing the younger men. I am most honored that you came to me.” So they slept together until dawn, again with Ruth’s back against Boaz’ feet. Then he woke her, saying, “Don’t let anyone know that a woman was on my threshing floor. Go home now. But I will not let you go empty handed.” He lifted up the hem of her gown and poured a gallon of barley into it. “Now you won’t need to glean today.”

While Ruth went home to tell Naomi the story, Boaz went to the city gates. There he gathered ten elders and his older brother (Salmon and Rahab’s second-born son). “Naomi, widow of Elimelech, has returned destitute from the land of Moab.” Boaz said. “She is being forced to sell the inheritance of Elimelech. As the oldest living brother, you have the right of redemption. But you need to decide right now. I am next in line if you won’t redeem it.”

“Why sure. I’ll redeem it.”

“Okay. But remember, on the day you buy the field, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow. You must take her and raise up an heir for Elimelech.”

“Oh! Uh... No. I can’t do it. That would jeopardize my son’s inheritance. You buy it, Boaz.” He took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz as evidence of his decision.

Boaz held up the sandal before the elders. “You all are witnesses today that I have bought from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and his sons. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, widow of Mahlon, in order to raise up an heir for Elimelech, so that the esteemed name of the family of Elimelech will not perish from the earth.”

“We are witnesses.” The elders and other people at the city gate cheered and clapped. Everyone wanted to see Elimelech’s family restored, but none of them were willing to accept the responsibility. “May YHWH make Ruth like Rachel and Leah, mothers of the house of Israel. May you achieve great wealth in Ephrathah, and may your name become famous. May your house be like the house of Perez, filled with the many children which YHWH gives you through this beautiful young woman!”

So Boaz and Ruth got married and lived happily ever after. Boaz restored Naomi’s land and home. The next year Boaz gave Ruth a son, when he was 66 and she 29. They named him **Obed**, ‘Servant’. Everyone knew that he was special. When the priest circumcised him, he prophesied great things over him, like the elders had.

Ruth, still young and strong, worked in the fields with her husband, while old Naomi joyfully took care of her grandson. The neighbors echoed the priest’s prophecy, “A son is born to Naomi in her old age! Blessed be YHWH, who has not left you without a redeemer! May his name become famous in Israel! May his descendants be great in the land! May Obed also restore your life and sustain you in your old age! Your daughter-in-law Ruth has become better to you than seven sons, for she loves you truly and has borne you an heir to carry on your family name!”

So everyone was happy and blessed. I wish all stories could end that way. But sadly, they don’t, so I’ll hurry over the next sad tale. It began at the same time as the marriage of Elimelech, shortly after Joshua’s death. The tribe of Dan, although it had the second largest army (Judah had the largest), had never fully possessed their inheritance. It was a wonderfully beautiful and fertile land, with a great seacoast and some lovely cities. But the lower half was occupied by the Philistines under the protection of the Amalekite Pharaohs still ruling Egypt.

The families of Dan who should have settled there were afraid. They waited around for a long time for someone to come help them, but the others seemed only interested in claiming their own inheritances. Finally in 1380 BC, they had waited long enough. They still didn’t have the faith to claim their inheritance, but they got impatient waiting around for somebody to do something. So they sent scouts around the countryside, looking for some place to settle that was not already claimed by another of Israel’s tribes.

Their lack of faith opened the door to a major moral failure. They found Micah, an apostate Ephraimite, who had hired Jonathan (son of Gershom, son of Moses!) as a priest for his family. They stole his family idols, and made his venal priest a better offer. Then their scouts found the quiet, peaceful trading village of Laish, just north of Israel’s borders. Laish had no military, so Dan just killed them all, burned their city, then rebuilt it as the city of Dan. They set up Micah’s idols and installed his corrupt priest to lead their worship.

For a while they were as happy as clams at high tide. But Logos was not pleased with them. Their false priest gave them an excuse to not travel all the way down to Shiloh to worship YHWH, so they rarely did. By not observing the festivals that YHWH had commanded, these families of Dan also neglected His other laws. This brought God's judgment upon them. The city of Dan was never blessed by YHWH. It was destroyed much later (881 BC) by King Ben-Hadad I, of Damascus. End of story.

In 1326 BC Othniel died, at the age of 104. Israel had been getting more wicked anyway, having forgotten the oppression under the Hittites and the Syrians, but when Othniel died, all restraint evaporated. Immorality and idolatry got worse than ever before. It was so bad that I'm not even going to tell the next repulsive story, which is painfully recorded in the last three chapters of Judges. Yuk. Thus began Israel's second cycle of apostasy.

In 1325 BC Eglon the fat king of Moab gathered an army of Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites. They crossed the Jordan and conquered the city of Palm Trees, ancient Jericho. (The Israelites had never tried to rebuild the walls, but had restored the city.) Eglon built a palace. From there he ruled the land like an evil tyrant, demanding tribute. For eighteen years, Israel endured the heavy bondage, repenting and pleading with YHWH for deliverance.

Logos heard. In 1307 BC He inspired **Ehud**, son of Gera of Benjamin, to stand up to Moab. He managed to get the job of regularly delivering the tribute to fat old Eglon. After the guards got to know him a bit, he strapped a short sword to his thigh under his cloak and pulled the old 'I've got a secret message for you' trick. Eglon fell for it. He left the busy throne room and invited Ehud up to a secluded roof chamber. From there, they had a grand view. The first thing Ehud saw was the detestable idol of Chemosh set up just down the hill at Gilgal. Incensed, he turned his back. "O King," he said, "The message I have for you is from YHWH, the God of Israel!" As he spoke he pulled out his sword and thrust it deep into Eglon's ample belly.

Ehud closed and locked the door behind him, then coolly walked out, smiling at the guards along the way. By the time they got the doors unlocked and discovered their king was dead, Ehud had escaped. The first thing he did was to go down to Gilgal, where he smashed their hideous Chemosh statue, and other idols, to pieces. Then he fled to Seirah, a forest in the hills of Ephraim. He blew a ram's horn to summon Israel's militia. The men of Israel came, some of them anyway, wondering what was going on.

"Eglon is dead! Pursue your enemies the Moabites, for YHWH has given them into your hands." He himself led the charge down the hill. Surprisingly, quite a few of the frightened men of Israel followed him. When they reached Jericho, their enemies hadn't even mustered their army. They were at Gilgal, still weeping over their destroyed idols! Ehud and his faithful few slew them all.

Still no armies from Jericho. Ehud realized that they had gone home for a pagan holiday. Divine providence! Ehud seized the ford at the Jordan River to prevent them from returning, then slaughtered the Moabites west of the Jordan. Not a one remained by sundown.

For the next eighty years Israel maintained guards at the ford and kept any wicked Moabites or Ammonites from crossing. Thus Israel's river valley lands west of the Jordan had peace for eighty years (though in the northern highlands the peace didn't last that long, as we shall see).

Ehud, young as he was, was appointed the judge over Israel. He didn't make a very good one. Within ten years Israel was again a'whoring after heathen women and their gods, beginning cycle #3 of Israel's apostasy. Sad.

Logos was not happy. He allowed the five kings of the Philistines to break their peace treaty with Israel. Don't forget, they had a corner on the iron-working business, and had plenty of iron weapons and chariots. They sent their armies to Shiloh in 1296 BC. They believed that if they destroyed the tabernacle and the famous Ark, Israel's terrifying God YHWH would no longer protect them.

They very nearly succeeded, too. Israel was not ready for war. But at the last minute Logos raised up one man, **Shamgar** the son of Anath, who saw what was at stake. He had no weapons, but he took a long light wooden ox goad and used it as a spear. He charged in holy fury among the charioteers, stabbing horse and rider alike, until 600 had fallen. The rest of the Philistines fled back home. Thus Israel and that precious tabernacle were saved.

But did the cycles of backsliding finally end? Nope. Ehud died in 1289 BC. Shamgar wasn't really a judge, so for a time, Israel had no judge at all. Cycle #4 of Israel's apostasy began. Therefore Logos let Jabin III king of Hazor (grandson of the Jabin of Joshua's time), subdue northern Israel in 1280 BC. His army commander was Sisera, who was a ruthless, proud warrior who had never lost a battle. He terrorized the land. He controlled the roads with heavy tolls. Traders had to travel at night or through the woods.

Five years later, Logos raised up another judge. She was **Deborah**, a prophetess. At first no one believed it; who ever heard of a woman judge? She would sit beside her husband Lappidoth under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel, and people would come to her for judgment. In time the whole land knew that YHWH was with her, for her judgments were true and just. But when they pled with her to prophesy against Jabin and Sisera, she refused. "When you have repented of your own wicked ways, then YHWH will deliver you from your oppressors, and not before!" This went on for 11 years.

Sisera's brutality got worse. In 1264 BC, Deborah's judgments began to have an effect. Israel again began to cry out to YHWH in repentance, and Deborah began to prophesy the defeat of their oppressors.

However, no one stepped up to lead the attack. After four years Deborah finally accepted that God had called her to take the initiative! In October, 1260 BC, near the time of the Mars flyby, she finally took action.

She summoned **Barak** son of Abinoam of Kedesh. “YHWH, God of Israel, has commanded you: ‘Take ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and Zebulun. Prepare for battle. March them to Mount Tabor. I will draw out Sisera, Jabin’s army commander, to the river Kishon. There I will give his army into your hand.’”

Barak was skeptical. “Are you sure that was YHWH? What about you? Why didn’t He command you to lead? You seem to be the only one here with the Word of YHWH. You’re quite willing to risk my life, but not willing to risk your own. If you won’t go with me, then I will not go either. How could we win? We have almost no weapons!” He had trouble taking orders from a woman, and it showed.

Deborah just smiled. “Your sarcasm is not lost on me, Barak. I and my husband will go with you, for we fear no one but YHWH. You will still win the battle, for YHWH will fight for you. But because of your unbelief, the honor of killing Sisera himself shall not be yours. *YHWH will dispatch him by the hands of a brave woman.*”

So Barak obeyed, and YHWH kept His promise. As the ten thousand troops of Israel gathered on Mount Tabor, Deborah yelled out to Barak, “Arise! This day YHWH has given Sisera into your hands! Behold how YHWH has already gone before you!”

They looked down to the Kishon River. There Sisera, with his 50,000 troops and his 900 iron chariots, were being pelted by hail mixed with fire, as is common during a close pass of Mars. Then the hail turned to torrential rain. The earth began to undulate and shiver. Mount Tabor gave a mighty quake just as Barak blew the call to attack. Even before the army of Israel reached the valley, Sisera’s troops were in a panic. The river rose rapidly behind them like a flash flood. The quaking ground turned to quicksand and mud under their feet. Many of the heavy chariots bogged down in the mud. The Kishon became a raging torrent, sweeping away those stuck in the mud along its banks.

Barak and his troops waded into the fray. They had few weapons, so they collected the weapons dropped by the fleeing army. Barak chased them north toward Sisera’s home-base, a town called Harosheth (Smithy) of the Nations. On the way there, they passed the Hebrew town of Meroz, whose men stood watching the battle, but would not even help their fellow Israelites. The angel of YHWH told Deborah, “Curse Meroz and its people, for I granted them the opportunity to help you and they refused Me!”

At Mars’ closest approach at noon, two of its three moons came swooping by, terrifying Sisera’s forces even more. They had no fight left in them. Barak’s army slew every one, even those who had made it to Harosheth.

Except Sisera! Where had he gone? No one knew. They found his chariot stuck in the mud, and noticed the royal boot-prints. Barak was determined to get him. He picked up the fleeing royal boot-prints again around Mount Tabor. Barak and a cadre of his men gave chase. They reached the tents of Heber the Kenite. (Kenai was the son of Hobab, the husband of Hanani, Ziporah’s sister.) Heber was a spy. For years he had pretended friendship with Jabin, only in order to report back to Israel.

A smug young woman stood in the doorway of the tent. It was Jael, Heber’s wife. She saw Barak coming, and called, “Sir? I bet you’re looking for someone. A missing soldier? Perhaps the commander of King Jabin’s army who has oppressed Israel for so long?” She giggled roguishly.

Barak bowed stiffly. “I am Barak, commander of the army of YHWH. He has commissioned me to destroy Jabin’s army. They’re all destroyed now except Sisera, whom I have tracked here. Do you know where he is?”

Laughing, she returned the bow. “I do. Follow me.” She led him into the tent and showed him the mighty warrior, nailed to the ground with a tent peg through his temples. So Barak swallowed his pride, and honored her and Heber with wealth and fame. Thus to this day their name also is great among the heroes of Israel.

Barak cut off Sisera’s head and took it north to Hazor with his army. Holding up the bloody head by the hair, he demanded that King Jabin open the gates to the city. With his army gone, Jabin had no choice.

“Your rule has terrorized Israel for three generations. It’s time for it to end!” He slew all the males and gave Hazor to Naphtali, ending the Amorite dynasty of Jabin.

Thus Barak and Deborah judged Israel, giving the Promised Land rest for forty years up in the highlands.

As I said, one reason Canaan was left alone was that the other powerful nations of the world were fighting among themselves. Shortly after the time of Shamgar, Tao I ‘the Elder’ had staged a coup d’état against the weak Intef VII. Then, with the help of his fiesty wife Tetisheri, he began preparing upper Egypt to fight the hated Amalekites in lower Egypt. Their delicate truce was over.

Tao I made his son Tao II co-regent in 1270 BC. Tao II ‘the Brave’ married his sister Aahotep. She is known as the ancestress of Egypt’s famous New Kingdom, as she bore Kamose, Ahmose, and Nefertari. Threats, insults, and military posturing flew between upper and lower Egypt. This feuding degenerated into multiple wars between the Theban kings and the Amalekites (Aamu) at Avaris.

A mighty Amalekite king named Apepi (Apophis) was Pharaoh of lower Egypt. For over sixty years he kept his military strong and remained just one step ahead of Tao I. He proclaimed his son Khamudi as co-regent at birth, 1266 BC, and trained him early in the art of war.

Old Tao I died in 1250 BC, leaving his son sole ruler at Thebes. Tao II hated the Amalekites with a purple passion (a hatred he passed down to his family). He gathered his forces and assaulted Avaris the next year, but lost. Some say he was killed in the battle. Others say he was captured and executed by Khamudi. Regardless, his son Kamose took over at Thebes, while his widow Aahotep continued to direct the military operations against the hated Aamu.

In the third year of his reign, Kamose overran the southernmost garrison of the Aamu at Nefrusy, north of Qis, then led his army as far north as the borders of Avaris itself. Khamudi sent an urgent appeal for support to the king of Nubia, but his courier was captured. Kamose failed to take Avaris, but he cleared the Amalekites out the cities south of it. This drove the hated Aamu from middle Egypt. Even more important, aged King Apepi died in the battle! Kamose returned to Thebes for a joyous victory feast.

Again in 1244 BC Kamose tried to take Avaris, but failed. This time he was captured and brutally executed by Khamudi in revenge for Apepi's death. Thus his little brother Ahmose became Pharaoh at Thebes, though the queen mother Aahotep actually ruled as regent.

Under King Eriba-adad, Assyria grew strong and broke free of the Mitanni (who were weakened fighting Hittites). Thus 1242 BC began Assyria's Middle Kingdom. Assyria even subdued the Kassite kings in Babylon, several times, though it took the Elamites in 1013 BC to end their rule.

Young Ahmose took over from his mother in 1235 BC. His general, Ahmose son of Ebana, won a decisive victory against the hated Aamu the next year at Avaris. He first put Avaris under a tight siege, using almost a half-million troops. Then he offered them a generous peace treaty, allowing them to take their families, valuables, and herds and leave Egypt to freely go anywhere else they wanted. They accepted, and completely vacated Egypt. Thus Pharaoh Ahmose, at the age of twenty, began the famous New Kingdom 18th Dynasty as ruler over a unified Egypt.

Some quarter million of the Amalekites, still led by Khamudi, went north into the Negev, where they took over Sharuhén and fortified it. Others went to Edom to join their brothers there. But Pharaoh Ahmose was still consumed with anger against the hated Aamu. He was furious that his general had been so generous. For six years beginning in 1232 BC he campaigned against them. After a three year siege he captured Sharuhén and killed Khamudi and the Amalekites there. Then he attacked those who had fled to Edom, driving them out of the Sinai Peninsula. He next went up the coast all the way to Gebal (Byblos) in Phoenicia, destroying every Amalekite city or settlement and every vestige of their rule throughout the land. In his rage against the Aamu, he ignored the Israelites. He also foolishly ignored all the other major powers in the area, most notably the aggressive Mitanni, who promptly swept in and took over Egypt's lucrative coastal trade routes.

The remnants of the Amalekites fled to Midian to team up with the Midianites. They all had become very wicked. Until now all that bickering in Egypt had left the Hebrews in peace. Now that was about to change. *Driven out of Egypt, the Sinai, and Philistia, the Amalekites asked the Midianites to help them take the land of Israel instead.*

It was 1224 BC. Cycle #5 of Israel's apostasy had begun. Barak and Deborah were dead. There was no judge in Israel, so everyone did whatever seemed right in his own eyes. Again Logos was displeased. He strengthened the ambitions of Midian and Amalek. First, they allied with the Assyrians (the 'sons of the east') and helped them subdue the Mitanni and drive them all out of Canaan. Then they swarmed over the Promised Land, with their vast flocks and herds protected by expert archers trained by the Egyptians. Their herds ate up the grasslands, while they confiscated all the produce, leaving Israel destitute.

Pharaoh Ahmose died at 35, his health destroyed by hatred. His son Amenhotep I was only ten, so the queen mother Nefertari was regent. Egypt's responsibilities in the Levant were forgotten for a time. This allowed the Assyrians total control of Egypt's vital coastal trade route.

Midian's oppression of Israel continued for seven long years. Israel was starving. All their own flocks and herds had been taken. It got so bad that Israelites were reduced to hiding in caves, harvesting at night, and threshing their grain in a winepress to hide it from the invaders. That is what **Gideon** was doing as our story begins. (He lived in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites, between Shiloh and Bethel. His father Joash was an elder there.)

An angel came to Gideon in the winepress. "YHWH is with you, O valiant warrior!" he said.

"Yeah, right. So why are we so oppressed? My father told me stories of the miracles YHWH did to bring us out of Egypt, but where is He now?"

The angel blazed up with a fiery glory. Suddenly Gideon knew he was talking with YHWH Himself. He fell to his knees and cried. "O Lord! Why have You abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian and their allies?"

Logos ignored the question. "Take your father's lead bull and his seven-year-old unblemished bull. Yoke them together and pull down your father's altar of Baal from the town square. Cut down the wooden Asherah beside it. Then build an altar to YHWH your God in its place, and sacrifice the unblemished bull on it, using the wood from the Asherah. Thus you shall atone for your sins and the sins of your fathers. Then you shall deliver Israel from the hand of Midian, for I have chosen you."

"Me? How can I deliver Israel? My family is the least in West Manasseh and I am youngest in my family."

"Surely, I shall be with you. You shall defeat Midian even if no one else assists you."

Gideon bowed low. "Please wait here. I'll prepare an offering for You. Then if I have truly found favor in Your sight, please show me a sign according to the law." He ran to prepare meat and some unleavened bread.

"Put the meat and the bread on this rock, and pour that pot of broth all over it," the angel said.

Gideon obeyed. Then the angel touched the food with the tip of his staff. It burst into flames, instantly consumed. The angel disappeared.

Gideon fell on his face, terrified. "Alas, Lord YHWH! For I have seen God face to face!"

"Peace. Stop being so fearful, you mighty man of valor. You shall not die." Logos comforted his soul.

Gideon obeyed the angel. He hadn't yet overcome his fears, so he did it at night. Using the yoke of bulls and ten of his father's servants, he broke down the big altar of Baal (Mars), and cut down the Asherim (poles carved in human female form used to worship Venus). Then he and the ten servants built an altar of uncut stone to YHWH. They named it 'YHWH is Peace'. On it, they sacrificed the unblemished bull as a sin offering. They burned the carved Asherim under the sacrifice, as the angel had commanded. They barely finished all this by first light.

Of course the men of the city quickly discovered what Gideon had done to their beloved idols. They were incensed. But surprisingly, Gideon's father Joash boldly backed him up. "You fools! Must you contend for Baal? Do you have to deliver your god? If he is actually a god, let him contend for himself when someone tears down his altar!" He turned to his son. "Gideon, from now on I dub you 'Jerubaal', meaning 'let Baal himself contend against you for tearing down his altar, if he is a god!'"

Gideon stood in front of the town. Up until now he had been fearful, but suddenly he was filled with the Spirit of YHWH. "Thank you, father. I accept that name, for I know that Baal is a false god. I call on all Israel to join me in contending against Baal. Blow the trumpet of war! Send messengers throughout the land. Gather together the armies of YHWH at the base of Mount Gilboa, for there we shall finally throw off the yoke of Midian and their allies!"

He didn't really expect anyone to follow him, for after all, who was he? A nobody. But many others also had been groaning under the oppression. They were inspired and immediately hailed him as their leader.

That night, Gideon was still fearful, resulting in the two famous 'fleece' tests. God had no problem with Gideon's lack of faith. He willingly made the fleece wet when the ground was dry, then the fleece dry when the ground was wet, to build faith in His chosen vessel. So Jerubaal (Gideon) knew God was with him. He took a final, fateful act of no return. He paid a visit to the nearest Midianite camp and called, "I have a message for King Zebah!"

"Ahh... That old 'secret message' trick! We're not as stupid as fat old King Eglon!"

"I have no dagger. Search me. I have only an honest message. I assure you, your king must hear it!"

Soon he stood before the king, guards on each side and a sword firmly against his back. He stood tall. "My message is from YHWH, God of Israel. He wants you and all your armies to appear before Him in the Valley of Jezreel beside Mount Moreh. Then we shall see who is God – YHWH, or your detestable gods Chemosh, Astarte, and all the Baals. If you refuse to come, the army of Israel will drive you and your allies out of Canaan back to Midian and Arabia where you belong."

King Zebah chuckled. "The army of Israel? Hah! Israel has no army. You amuse me! But if you choose to gather a few pitiful men, I will be delighted to face you in the Valley of Jezreel. Name your date."

"Passover, March 21st." (*This is 1217 BC. Mars will be at its closest approach on the far side of Earth at midnight.*)

Now Zebah roared with laughter. "Baal is our god! What makes you think he will fight for you? I thought YHWH didn't like you putting your trust in our gods!"

"I do not trust your gods. I challenge your gods! My name is Jerubaal! If Baal is a god, I defy him to contend against me and against the army of Israel. I picked that date to show you and all the world that YHWH is the true God, even on your most high holy day!"

Jerubaal / Gideon left. Zebah began to gather his army. He also sent messages to the other kings of the Midianite confederation: his old Amalekite friend King Zalmunna, Zeeb commander of their Egyptian archers, and Oreb local commander of the Assyrians from the east. Zebah decided to take no chances. Everyone who could draw a sword or bow was to meet below Mount Moreh before March 21st.

Gideon managed to gather a pitiful 32,000 men by the springs of Harod at the foot of Mount Gilboa. King Zebah, on the other side of the stream (the south side of Mount Moreh), had assembled 74,500 Midianite swordsmen, 25,000 Amalekite cavalry on fast Arabian camels, 12,500 Egyptian archers, and 35,500 Assyrian mercenaries. They nearly filled the valley, covering the ground like locusts. Surveying them, Gideon's heart sank. "O YHWH," he prayed. "I know You promised to deliver us, but it looks impossible. They are too many! We are far too few. Please, O Lord, give me another sign!"

Logos responded instantly, laughing. "So, my friend. You wish another sign. Okay. Here it is. You have far too many soldiers with you! You just might be tempted to become proud – to say, 'My own power has delivered me from the hand of Midian!' So give everyone a good look at your enemy and order those who are afraid to go home!" He continued laughing. It was getting irritating.

Now, Gideon was not in a laughing mood, and this was not the sign he wanted. But there was no mistaking the angel as the same one who had zapped the offering with His staff. Gideon gulped. “Yes, my Lord.”

22,000 of his troops went home in grateful relief after considering the size of the enemy armies. Gideon prayed again. “Okay, Lord, I did what You asked. Now may I have a sign that You’ve given me the victory?”

Again Logos appeared. He was still laughing. “Ahh... You wish to do it again, do you? I can play this game as long as you like. There are still far too many of you. Take them down to the stream and have them drink.”

“Yes, Lord,” He obeyed. Logos told him to take only those who drank by lifting the water to their mouths in cupped hands. All those who knelt or lapped to drink were sent home. That left only 300 men with Gideon.

“Okay, Lord. I will never ask for any more signs! Just tell me what to do. The battle is in Your hands!”

“Are you still afraid?”

“Of course I am! I’m terrified, and You know it!”

“Then take your servant Purah and visit the enemy camp. Just listen to how they feel!” He laughed heartily.

They obeyed, creeping up to a scout outpost near the camp. There they overheard a man relating his dream to his buddy. Interpreting the dream, his friend said, “That is nothing less than the sword of Gideon son of Joash! Mars has turned against us! Now I know we’re doomed!”

Gideon and Purah returned to their own camp, much encouraged. *So, the Midianites really feared Mars, eh?* Its closest approach would be at midnight tonight, though it would pose little danger since it was in the middle of the 30 year cycle (Jupiter was lined up, but Saturn was not), and Mars would pass on the far side of Earth. But it could, and often did, project fearsome electric discharges anywhere on Earth. This appeared as a curved lightning strike from its magneto-head or tail. Everyone feared that! Israel called this ‘the sword of YHWH’ or ‘the angel of YHWH’. Suddenly he felt a surge of confidence.

“Arise!” Gideon commanded his 300 brave men. “YHWH has given the camp of Midian into our hands!”

They crowded around as he outlined his plan. Before midnight they were in their places at the near edge of the enemy. They waited while the middle watch changed guards, crying out, “Midnight, and all’s well!” Right at that moment, they removed the clay pitchers from over their torches, held the torches high while smashing the pitchers to the ground, and screamed out as if in terror, “The sword of YHWH and of Gideon!” Some kept on screaming, while others blew trumpets, beat on their shields, and made as much bedlam as possible with 300 men. The torches were rather pathetic compared to a real lightning strike.

But it had the desired effect. Their pretended ‘panic’ spread through the camp, as bewildered troops awoke to the thought that their god Mars had turned on them, and its lightning sword was even now sweeping the camp. They scrambled out of their tents to flee.

But remember, there were four armies in that valley, the Midianite swordsmen, the Amalekite camel cavalry, the Egyptian archers, and the Assyrian mercenaries. They had all seen Gideon’s army of 32,000, and they didn’t know he had only 300 left. As they trampled over one another in their haste, each one assumed the soldier running toward him must be from Gideon’s army!

So in the darkness they were killing one another as they fled in panic. Gideon and his 300 chased them for a time, but didn’t really need to fight. All the way down the Harod Valley past Beth-Shan they fought each other.

Dawn broke. Now the enemy could see, so they stopped killing each other. The Assyrian mercenaries and Egyptian archers under Oreb and Zeeb separated, and fled toward the fords at Gilgal, while the Midianites and Amalekites under kings Zebah and Zalmunna fled across the Jordan at the fords of Abel-Meholah. Gideon prayed. “Thank you, Lord YHWH! You have won an awesome victory! But now some are getting away and we are too few to chase them all. Would You like to finish the job, or shall I call others?”

Gideon again heard the familiar laughter which he was beginning to enjoy. He paused in worship. Finally, “I am pleased with your obedience, and with your attitude of submission to Me. Now I choose to share My victory with all who will participate. Call for others.”

Gideon was glad to obey. He gave orders to recall his own troops who had gone home. He sent runners to call for troops from Naphtali, Asher, and West Manasseh. He also sent runners south to Ephraim, asking them to block Oreb and Zeeb from crossing the fords down at Gilgal.

Sadly, the only ones who responded to his call were the men of Ephraim. But they succeeded, bringing the heads of the fleeing commanders back to Gideon at the fords of Abel-Meholah. They were upset that they hadn’t been called to help in the battle, but Gideon’s humility disarmed them. “Are not the gleanings from the grapes of Ephraim better than the best of Abi-ezer’s vintage? God has already given these two commanders Oreb and Zeeb into your hands, but I have yet to capture the men I am chasing. What am I in comparison to you?”

No one else responded to his call, so Gideon crossed the Jordan with just his 300 men, following the trail of the fleeing enemies. They came to Succoth, where he begged for food for his tired men. But the elders there laughed at his rag-tag band. “You’re chasing a 15,000 warrior army! And you think you can take them all on with only 300? What a silly venture! We’ll help when we see the heads of Zebah and Zalmunna in your hands.”

“When I have captured them, I will return and thrash your bodies with thorns and briars.”

The same thing happened at the next town, Penuel. This was getting old. “When I have captured them I will return and knock down your proud tower!”

They spent the night at Mahanaim, where they found food and refreshed themselves. Then they continued following the trail for a hundred miles into the Arabian wilderness. Late the next night they caught up with their enemies sleeping along the Wadi Sirhan near Karkor. Confident of their escape, they hadn’t even set a guard!

Gideon and his men were tired, too. But the moon was bright. They looked out over the camp of 15,000 men. Gideon prayed, “YHWH, You are not limited to save by many or by few.” He quietly walked to the nearest tent and began slashing with his sword. His men followed. They killed half the Midianites before the alert even sounded.

By dawn the remnants of the army had fled into the desert, and Gideon had captured their kings Zebah and Zalmunna. He also took all the spoils from the camp, and all their camels. He and his men rode back in style, while the two kings walked ahead of him back to Penuel. There his men tore down their tower, killing the elders hiding inside. Then the kings walked ahead of him to Succoth. There Gideon’s men lashed the elders with briar whips.

Along the way, he interrogated the captured kings. “Zebah, a few years ago you Midianites killed a group of Israelites on Mount Tabor. Do you know why?”

“Yes, sir. I was there. I personally commanded them to be slain. They were interfering with our worship.”

“What kind of men were they?”

“Actually, they looked just like you, sir. They were all valiant warriors, like the sons of a king!”

“Yes. They were my older brothers. And yes, they were indeed trying to stop your idolatrous worship, since idol worship is an abomination to YHWH our God. As YHWH lives, if you had spared their lives I would have spared yours. Prepare to die.”

“Rise up now and kill them.” Gideon said to Jether, his first-born son. But young Jether, having inherited his dad’s natural fearfulness, was too afraid of the kings to do it.

“You are so valiant! Why don’t you do it yourself!” taunted the kings. So Gideon got off his camel and hacked off their heads, then took their purple robes and the gold from their corpses. ‘Ishmaelite’ (Arabian) men, especially kings, like to wear gold jewelry, and the kings’ camels were adorned with gold too, so Gideon’s personal spoils of war included a lot of gold. Though Gideon’s father had been rich, his family had been impoverished by the Midianites. Satan saw an opportunity for temptation! Gideon took a large share of the spoils. He had earned it!

When they returned into Israel, everyone wanted to crown Gideon king, but he refused, telling them that it was better to have YHWH as their only king. All he wanted was one gold earring each from their spoils. They gladly gave it – roughly 50 pounds of gold! Of course he didn’t cast it into an idol. Instead, he went home and self-righteously cast it into a priest’s ephod. But that became a snare, as did his new riches and the many wives he got as a result. It led him, and Israel, away from the pure worship of YHWH.

The balance of powers shifted after Gideon’s victory. The Assyrians had been at the peak of their power. Israel would surely be their next victim! But Gideon’s victory stopped them cold. Both in Mesopotamia and the Levant, the Assyrians had badly overextended themselves. The Kassites quickly regained control of Babylon. Assyria lost control of the vital coast road and Syria’s lucrative trade routes. The growing power of the Hittites to their west further weakened the Assyrians, paving the way for the Mitanni still living there to recover most of Syria. After his victory, Gideon should have had the faith to pursue his advantage and take control of Canaan’s entire west coast from Egypt through Phoenicia. Instead, seeing the shift of power, he allied with young Pharaoh Amenhotep I. Thus Gideon wimped out. He was expecting Egypt to man up, drive the Mitanni entirely out of the Levant, subdue the Philistines along the coast, reestablish control over their vital trade routes, and block those three powerful warring empires to the north (Assyria, Mitanni, and Hittite).

It didn’t happen. Amenhotep I made a lousy Pharaoh. When his dad Ahmose I had died in 1219 BC, he had left him with a mess in the Levant. Yeah, the hated Aamu were gone, but he had left a power vacuum. Gideon’s incredible victory had cleaned up the mess, but Amenhotep never followed up. He did maintain Egyptian dominance over Nubia and the Nile Delta, but he neglected nearly everything else, foolishly allowing the Mitanni, the Philistines, the Amorites, and even the Amalekites to again grow strong. He didn’t learn from his parents’ mistakes (as brother and sister, Ahmose and Nefertari’s first two sons had been slain because of inbreeding defects). Instead, he married his own sister Meritamon, which perpetuated the inbreeding problem. Thus his sole heir was imperfect and had to be killed in infancy. So when Amenhotep I died tragically at the age of thirty, his sister, Princess Aahmes, married his military general Thutmose to succeed him.

Pharaoh Thutmose I was old and wise. He first quelled a rebellion in Nubia. Then in 1197 BC, his second year, he went on a campaign to regain control of Egypt’s trade route by the sea, the Via Maris. By then the aggressive Mitanni had already moved south and taken over the entire coast road, almost to Egypt. Thutmose drove the overly extended Mitanni out of Philistia and Phoenicia, and reestablished the Philistines as his ‘policemen’ there. He also subdued the Mitanni living in Syria and all the way to the Euphrates river at Carchemish.

In the process, Pharaoh Thutmose I annihilated the hated Amalekites from the entire Levant for the first time. (Though some remained in Arabia, we don't hear about them until the time of King Saul.) Gideon honored his treaty with Amenhotep by helping Thutmose I restore Egyptian hegemony over the western coastlands. Egypt was now supreme. The Promised Land was at peace.

Thutmose I was killed in battle in his thirteenth year, 1186 BC. His first two sons had already died. His third son, Thutmose II, was inept, but he made a fine figurehead. The real power behind the throne for the next thirteen years was his wife / half-sister Hatshepsut. She was brilliant and overall a good ruler. She honored Gideon's treaty.

Even after succumbing to temptation, Gideon made a pretty good judge for forty years (up to 1177 BC). Israel remained relatively true to YHWH. But Gideon did make another fatal error. Even with all his many wives, he just couldn't resist having an affair with a whore in Shechem. She bore Gideon's bastard son **Abimelech**.

This is a sordid story. I hate tales with sad endings. But I summarize it to show God's judgment against Gideon's indiscretion. After Gideon's death, Israel fell back into idol worship, especially Baal-berith, the 'lord of the covenant'. This began cycle #6 of Israel's apostasy. This time, Logos' tool of judgment was not oppression by a foreign power – it was Abimelech.

Abimelech decided to make himself king. He got the men of Shechem to give him money from the treasury of Baal-berith. He used it to recruit thugs to kill Gideon's seventy sons. (Only the youngest, Jotham, escaped.) So the men of Shechem crowned Abimelech king of Israel.

Jotham went to the top of nearby Mount Gerizim where he shouted a parable to the city of Shechem. In it, the great trees of the forest foolishly chose a bramble to be king over them. Jotham reminded Shechem how his father Gideon had saved Israel from the Midianite oppression, but how poorly Abimelech had treated his seventy sons in return. So Jotham pronounced God's curse on Shechem and on Abimelech, then fled to hide.

Logos gave Abimelech 3 years to repent. It was filled with bloodshed and shame. Even Shechem couldn't take his wickedness and turned against him. He repaid them by capturing their city, razing it, and sowing it with salt. They fled to the big temple of Baal-berith on Mount Zalmon. Abimelech killed a thousand of them there by lighting a huge fire in an inner chamber of their temple, filling the temple with smoke and asphyxiating those inside.

Abimelech should have stopped there, but no, he still wanted to be king of all Israel. He attacked the next city, Thebez. They had never supported Abimelech, and had never been cursed by Jotham. As far as we know, none of them ever worshiped Baal-berith, either, thus they had Logos' protection rather than His curse.

Abimelech tried to burn them out of their emergency tower, but a woman dropped a millstone on his head, cracking open his skull. Why he became concerned about his sorry reputation at this late date I'll never know, but he had his own armor bearer kill him, "... lest it be said that a woman killed me!" Thus Jotham's curse was thankfully fulfilled. The date was 1174 BC.

Tola (the son of Puah, son of Dodo, grandson of Tola, the oldest son of Issachar) correctly recognized Abimelech to be God's judgment on Israel's apostasy. With his death, it was time to move on. Tola was filled with the Spirit of YHWH, and accepted His call to be Israel's next judge. However, the first thing he did was to look up Jotham, Gideon's only living son. Perhaps Jotham would accept his responsibility as Gideon's successor. Instead, he found Jotham was angry and bitter, and had taken to drinking.

"Israel is not worth saving!" Jotham swore. "If you think you can save it, then you be king. I will not!"

"I believe Israel is YHWH's people, and therefore is always worth saving, no matter how wicked we get. But I don't want to be a king. YHWH is our King. So if you won't follow your father as our next judge, will you pass along the mantle and give me your blessing to be Israel's judge?"

Jotham blinked in amazement. "You don't want to be the king?" Somehow he found that hard to believe. "Okay Tola, I'll give you my blessing as our next judge. In fact, I'll give you more than that. I'll give you my older sister Taliya in marriage. That ought'a do it."

"Why Taliya, and not one of your other sisters?"

"Oh, I don't know. She's just really ambitious in that way. She would jump at the chance to be judge-in-law. Haw, haw! She might even want to be a judge herself!" That was indeed an amusing thought, but Tola withheld comment. He received Jotham's blessing and went back to Ophrah. There he sought out what remained of Gideon's large family. He found the four virgin daughters of Gideon hiding after escaping the slaughter of their brothers. They lived under the protection of a kind neighbor, Segub Ben-Hezron. He welcomed Tola and introduced him to the girls. Taliya was ambitious, as well as strong-willed and a bit bossy. Tola wondered why he had come.

Segub had an adult son, named **Jair**, who was clearly interested in Taliya's younger sister Judi. When Tola met Jair, he suddenly knew why he had come. That night when the others had retired, Tola requested a private meeting with Segub, to ask, "Have you considered your son Jair as Gideon's successor, as judge in Israel?"

"I have. I believe YHWH has called him to exactly that. However, Jair doesn't seem to think so. All he seems to be interested in is marrying Gideon's daughter!"

"Is that a bad thing? After they're married, he may find that Gideon's ministry comes with his daughter!"

Segub hesitated. "I never thought of it that way. You're right, I'm sure. But I told him it was not proper for Judi to get married before her elder sister, Taliya. And Jair certainly doesn't want Taliya! Not a chance!"

All of a sudden it became clear. Tola bowed his head in prayer. *Is it right, YHWH? I only want what You want. If You want me to be a judge in Israel, please give me discernment!* He was at peace. He looked back to Segub. "Jotham gave me his blessing to marry Taliya and be Israel's judge. But perhaps YHWH wants me to judge only the lands of West Manasseh and Ephraim. That leaves Jair free to marry Judi and judge Gilead and all the land east of the Jordan."

"You'd marry Taliya? She's a real firebrand!"

"She is indeed. But surely I will marry her if YHWH wills it, for I do whatever YHWH wills."

Segub's admiration went up a notch for this visitor of his. "With that attitude I believe you will make a great judge. I give you my permission to marry Taliya."

Now, they had been talking in private, but a certain curious girl had been eavesdropping. They heard a loud squeal behind the curtain, and her evil deed was exposed. It was Taliya. "Hey! Are you not even going to ask me? Don't my desires count for anything?"

While Tola was considering how he should answer, Segub beat him to it. "Taliya! Your own father is dead, and I am as your father now. That was wrong of you to eavesdrop. You only make this more difficult on yourself. I will make the decision for you, and you must trust me just as you would have trusted your father."

"You are not my father! I will not marry someone I don't even know, and I will darn well eavesdrop whenever the subject concerns me!" Taliya stalked off in a huff.

"I told you she was a firebrand. This is not going to work, I'm afraid. Once she makes up her mind..."

"If YHWH wills it, it will work. Let's just give it time." Tola smiled. "I don't give up easily."

The next month got a little tense in the Segub household. He and his wife put subtle, or not so subtle, pressure on Taliya. Then Jair saw the possibilities and began to put pressure on her, too. Everyone told her she was a fool to turn down such an offer. They threatened her with forever being an old maid. Even her younger sisters, especially Judi, complained that Taliya was throwing away her life and ruining theirs in the process.

Tola held his peace, preferring to allow YHWH time to work. He was an early riser, often getting up before the dawn to worship awhile before the household stirred. One morning, Taliya was there before him. She didn't even bid him good morning. "I have to know what you think of me. You haven't asked me, or even talked to me, about Dad's offer to... uh... g-give me to you."

"Dad's offer"? You swore he was not your father!"

She blushed. "Oh. Uh... He's not, but he has taken good care of us girls and I do respect him. But that's not the issue. Everybody is pressuring me to marry you, except you! Don't you even care?"

Tola smiled into her eyes. She was very lovely, even when she was angry. "Yes, Taliya, I care; very much. I care to be sure that YHWH's perfect will is done in each of us. For if it is, then we shall both be happy, regardless of where we are. If it is not, we would both be miserable."

"What kind of an answer is that, Tola? What is YHWH's will? I want to hear you say it. Do you love me or not? Can you ever love me? Do you actually want me, or is this all just a 'duty for YHWH'?" Her eyes blazed flashes of fire.

Tola paused, knowing his response would be crucial. He prayed for wisdom. He was still smiling. His obvious refusal to return anger for anger was having an effect. "You haven't given me much opportunity to get to know you," he chuckled. "As you yourself said, how can you love someone you don't even know? But I'm willing. Are you?"

"You're laughing at me!"

"I invite you to laugh with me, and give me a chance. Who knows? You may discover that you like me!"

There was a long pause. Finally, a slight smile tugged at Taliya's lips. "I'm surprised that you don't hate me, after my foolish and angry outburst behind the curtain."

Tola chuckled again. "Ha! That was forgiven long ago. I suppose I would have been just as indignant as you. And who wouldn't eavesdrop behind a curtain if someone is plotting the rest of her life for her!"

"You are very generous. Thank you."

"Does that mean you'll give me a chance?"

"Now I feel ashamed of myself. Why do you care? Why don't you just criticize me like everyone else?"

"I'm sorry you've lived with criticism for so long. You are obviously a leader – bold, decisive, brilliant, creative, ambitious – your brother Jotham kindly called you that. Everyone criticizes a leader, you know, especially if she's a woman. It's been that way from the dawn..."

"Jotham! Did he also promise me to you?"

"Why, yes, he did, as a matter of fact. He thought that your personality would fit me and my calling perfectly."

"What is your calling?"

"YHWH has called me to be a judge over Israel."

Finally Taliya smiled. It was beautiful. "That explains why you're so cautious about judging me. A good judge never decides until he hears the whole story. I..." Taliya hesitated slightly. "I think you'll make a great judge."

“If YHWH has truly called me, so it will be, for He made me and empowers me. What about you, Taliya? Tell me... What has YHWH called you to be?”

The smile faded and Taliya bowed her head. “You won’t believe it after I made such a fool of myself, but YHWH also called me to be a judge. I knew that long ago, but everyone, even my father, thought I was crazy. I looked up to Gideon like no daughter ever admired her father! But when he criticized me, I grew angry, and maybe a little bitter. It seemed impossible. It’s a male world. Deborah was always my ideal, my hero! I thought, if she can be a judge, so can I! But my father... well... he just laughed at me.”

“I’m sorry, Taliya. Of all people, Gideon should have known that if YHWH calls you to something, He will make a way, even when it looks impossible.”

Taliya’s head popped up. “Tola! You’re the first person who hasn’t laughed at me, about my calling, I mean. Do you really think it’s possible? Is there any place for me?”

“It’s impossible to not fulfill your calling, if you let YHWH empower and guide you. He made you a leader! Will you walk the hills of Ephraim with me and help me lead Israel? I will give you a place, here by my side.”

“You’d let me be a judge? A... leader? You’re the first person who has called me that without making it sound like... like wicked! ... for a woman to be a leader!”

“Taliya, a good leader is only good because he or she is under authority. I could never be a leader in Israel if I were not under YHWH’s authority. I am asking you to come under my authority, just like Deborah was always under Lappidath’s authority; like Rahab was under Salmon’s authority; like Ziporah was under Moses’ authority, who was under YHWH’s authority. If you can do that, I believe YHWH will make you a great leader.”

“You sound like my father used to sound, back when I admired him so much. He was a great leader! Well... when he was totally committed to following YHWH!” She paused, light dawning in her eyes. “I never thought of it that way before. Gideon was great, but only when he was submitted to YHWH, under YHWH’s authority!”

“Will you marry me... and come under my authority? Submit yourself to me as I am submitted to YHWH, so that He can make you all He created you to be?”

Taliya paused, thinking. This was a big decision. Tola understood. “You’re afraid I’ll manipulate you, use you, control you – for my own ambitions and desires.”

“Frankly, yes! That is all men have ever tried to do to me. I’m afraid I don’t tolerate it very well.”

“I believe the right person for you, the man God made for you, will not control you. He will cover and protect you, and empower you to be your best, so that everyone will respect you, and want to follow you.”

“You say that like you already respect me!”

“I do. You are made in YHWH’s image. I see Him in you. I will want to follow you as you follow Him.”

Taliya gasped. “You do? You will?” Again she paused wide-eyed, mouth open. “I have never heard any man so understanding, so caring, or so loving! In my foolish pride, I always wanted to be in control. I thought I knew what was best for me. You have just shown me that I will never amount to anything at all unless I come under the covering of someone wiser than I... much wiser... like... you.” Tears began to streak her cheeks, but she continued on bravely. “Can you forgive my self-centered pride? And my arrogance? And the lack of respect I had for you?”

Tola smiled. He had won her heart. “I already forgave all that. One mark of a great leader is that he’s willing to admit when he – or she – was wrong. I hope I can also be as humble and quick to repent with you when I’m wrong!” He held out his hand. The rest of the house was now awake, and their talk could be interrupted any second. “Will you come with me to ask your ‘dad’?”

So they were married, in a lovely double wedding, side by side with Jair and Judi. Tola and Taliya made great judges for 23 years, in the highlands of Ephraim.

Within a year Jair had also stepped up to his calling with Judi. They made great judges in the land of Gilead across the Jordan for 22 years. In fact, once he caught the ‘bug’, Jair got very fervent in his service for YHWH and for Israel. He gathered together thirty of his relatives and taught a ‘School of Prophet-Judges’. When they learned to hear the voice of YHWH and speak the Word of YHWH, he sent them out on thirty donkeys across Gilead and Bashan to call people to account for their sins, and draw them back to righteousness. He called them his ‘sons’, and thus they are known even to this day. It worked! Wickedness was kept in check. Righteousness increased. This was a blessed and blissful time in Israel’s history. The land was at peace, the people prospered, and Logos was happy with them.

In 1169 BC Arik-den-ili became king of Assyria. Also that year Pharaoh Thutmose II became deathly sick. As he was dying he appointed his young son Thutmose III (by Isis, a harem girl) as Egypt’s next Pharaoh. However, since his son was only ten, he made his capable wife Hatshepsut swear to rule for him – but only until he grew up.

As I said, Hatshepsut was a pretty good ruler. But after six years as regent for young Thutmose III, she decided she liked being Pharaoh and simply took over, all in his name of course. When he got old enough, she kept him out of the way by appointing him to lead her armies on campaigns to protect Egypt’s interests. He enjoyed that, and was very good at it. Thus Hatshepsut’s reign was mostly peaceful; trading, building temples, public works. But she naïvely allowed the Mitanni way too much slack. Soon they were back in the Levant in control of the vital trade routes again!

Thutmose III was pretty patient, but that was going too far. Egypt's prosperity depended on their control of those trade routes! The Mitanni were getting rich and powerful while Egypt was losing out. In 1153 BC, Hatshepsut died of bone cancer. Thutmose III was ready. The next spring he gathered his army and marched up the Levantine coast, properly subduing the resident Philistines and driving out the Mitanni invaders city by city from Gaza to Megiddo.

Tola and Taliya wisely did not contend with him; they allied with him. The Philistines and Mitanni had gotten too powerful. They needed to be restrained. All Israel breathed a sigh of relief in 1152 BC when the rebellious and cruel Mitanni prince of Kadesh was finally slain in the battle for Megiddo after a seven month siege.

By the next year, Thutmose had set up five vassal kings in Philistia and Phoenicia, and the land was again at peace. As he was leaving for Egypt, Tola and Taliya met him, thanked him for setting things right along the coast, and renewed their alliance with Egypt. They promised to visit those five new kings to try to gain alliances with them, too. Then they went home to prepare. They sent word asking Jair and Judi to accompany them. They wore their finest, and brought 20 courtiers to make their visit look official.

That turned out to be a mistake. I'm sorry to report that they were all slain, and their donkeys were sacrificed to the Philistine gods. An entire garrison of Egyptian soldiers was nearby, but they did nothing at all to aid them, in spite of the solid alliance that Israel had with Egypt. Tragic.

Worse, Israel responded to this outrage exactly the opposite from the way Logos intended. They knew what God wanted, for He had told them from the beginning. He wanted them to slay the wicked Philistines and possess the land! I know – that looked impossible, because of their Egyptian overlords. But YHWH is God of the impossible. They already had that alliance with Egypt. They knew that Egypt cared only about her financial interest in their trade routes to Mesopotamia. Now, they certainly had occasion. If Israel had wiped out the Philistines, taken their cities and taken control of the trade routes, and then made a new treaty to help Egypt protect them, Pharaoh Thutmose III would have loved it. He was tired of dealing with the aggressive and rebellious Philistines as his 'policemen'. Both Egypt and Israel would have prospered after those pesky Philistines were finally gone. *That was Logos' intent.*

God had granted Israel lawful grounds to destroy the Philistines. So how did Israel respond to this outrageous offense? They submitted to the Philistines, and began to worship their gods! Sad. Thus began cycle #7 of Israel's apostasy. It is called 'peace by compromise', otherwise known as capitulation or surrender. And once that dam was broken, Israel began to compromise with the other surrounding nations, too! Syria, Phoenicia, Ammon, Moab – it was horrible! Satan had gotten his camel's nose under the tent, and pretty soon he had the whole tent!

Thutmose III had the western seacoast under his belt. Now he began a series of campaigns which was to earn him the title of the Napoleon of Egypt. Over the next eighteen years he conquered city after city (something on the order of 350 cities), reaching clear up to Kadesh on the Orontes River in Syria. He did not destroy those cities; oh no! He simply established vassal kings who would protect his interests and pay him tribute. Any rebellious kings were slain and replaced. The areas he subdued prospered under his rule as long as they remained obedient.

Thus the surrounding nations grew strong at Israel's expense – and bold! After a few years they were no longer content to merely have Israel trade with them in peace, intermarry with them, and worship their gods. They began to covet Israel's land.

This time it was the Ammonites. They moved into Gilead, taking whatever they wanted and impoverishing the tribes of East Manasseh, Gad, and Reuben. Later they crossed the Jordan to similarly oppress Benjamin, Judah, and Ephraim. For eighteen years their oppression steadily got worse. Satan worked slowly. Like the proverbial frog in the pot, the Israelites did nothing. Soon Satan would have all thirteen tribes!

Satan found Logos above Mount Moriah and gloated. "Do You see that? They don't love You. They just love peace and security. They will always compromise with me and my ways to get peace. Soon I will have Your entire Bride worshipping me, as I crush the life out of them! You have no one left!"

He went on like that for a while, but it gets rather boring so I won't repeat it all here. Logos let him rant until he ran down, then responded quietly, "You have forgotten Tola and Taliya, and Jair and Judi."

"Ha! I took care of them long ago! I slew them when they foolishly tried to compromise with me in Philistia!"

"They were intercessors. They took My promises, believed them, and returned them back to Me with faith that I would keep them. Remember the seed I have hidden in My heart? The one that I said was the strongest force in the universe? Members of My Bride may die, but that seed of intercessory prayer just keeps on growing."

"Human agent! You have got to have a human agent! I know the law. You have no one left to bring that seed to fruition on the earth. No one at all."

"But I do. I have the thirty sons of Jair."

"Huh?" Satan had forgotten them. He went looking. He found them fearful, hiding from the oppression of the Ammonites. Now, he really should have left them alone. As fearful as they were, they were going nowhere. But he over-reacted to Logos' challenge and tried to kill them. They repented and cried out to YHWH for help. He forgave them, and empowered them with His Word.

This was the message He gave them: “Israel is crying out to Me in their oppression. Tell them, ‘Did I not deliver you already from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon and Moab, the Midianites, the Amalekites, the Philistines, the Assyrians, the Sidonians, and the Mitanni? They oppressed you when you sinned against Me, but when you cried out to Me I delivered you from their hands. Yet you have again forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go! Cry out to the gods you have chosen. See if they will deliver you in this time of your distress!’” It was a sad prophecy, but the sons of Jair carried it faithfully. Spreading out across the land, they took it to every city and town.

The people heard, and began to wake up from their spiritual lethargy. They discovered that they were the frog, and the pot was starting to boil! They finally began to cry out to YHWH, “We have sinned! We will accept whatever punishment You choose, only deliver us!” The heavens were cold as brass. The oppression got worse. Some among them said, “YHWH told us to cry out to the gods we have chosen. So we ought to obey. Maybe they will deliver us?”

“No!” the wisest of them responded. “He was just being sarcastic. You know the gods of the nations will never deliver us. We’ve been crying out to them for seventeen years, but things only get worse. Remember six years ago (October 24, 1140 BC) when we celebrated the close pass of Mars with the Ammonites? We called upon Baal with all our might, we wore his talisman, we even made sacrifices on his altar. Did that endear us to the Ammonites? No! They oppressed us even more! They consider us weak if we submit to their gods. It’s time to put away their gods and serve only YHWH!”

“That pagan festival for Baal [Mars] is coming again this October. All of you who really think Baal can deliver us, those who still worship Astarte [Ishtar or Venus] and all the host of heaven, even after the last seventeen years of oppression by the nations who worship them, you go ahead and celebrate with the pagans. I think it is stupid to worship with those who oppress us. As for me and my house, we will worship YHWH!”

So they did. Others followed. By that October many in Israel had turned away from Astarte and the Baals of the surrounding nations. The thirty sons of Jair discerned the change in attitude, and got enthusiastic about it. Maybe if they really demonstrated their repentance and faith, YHWH would change His mind and deliver them.

October 24th rolled around. When the Ammonites began gathering at Shechem to celebrate their sixth-year festival for the close pass of Mars, the thirty sons of Jair were already there. They had finished tearing down all the pagan altars of Baal and Astarte that had dotted the area around Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. They had sacrificed a sin offering to YHWH at the ancient altar built by Jacob many years before. Now they were bowed in worship to YHWH.

The Ammonites were furious that their altars were torn down and their holy place violated. They prepared to slay the thirty sons of Jair. But as he was being tied to the altar, Jared spoke up. “It was not really your altars that we tore down. It was the altars of your gods, Baal and Astarte. Israel has prayed to them these seventeen years, and they have not helped us one bit. We decided to see if they were real gods or not. So we tore down their altars and defied Baal to punish us. If you kill us, Israel will never know. But Baal is coming close overhead in only a few hours. Please, tie us together at the top of Mount Ebal. If Baal decides to slay us for destroying his altar, then everyone will know that Baal is god. But if our God protects us and sets us free, then everyone will know that YHWH is God.”

That was a reasonable plan. The Ammonites agreed. They took the thirty sons of Jair to the top of Mount Ebal, rebuilt the altar of Baal, and tied them all around it. They spent the rest of the morning with their ritualistic prayers, dancing, and calling for their god of war to show himself strong and slay these impudent rebels with a mighty bolt of lightning. As Baal got near and the earthquakes got severe, they went down the mountain, sure they would never again see the sons of Jair alive.

Mars passed directly overhead. It was not nearly as close as six years before, since Saturn was not lined up (though Jupiter was). There was a lot of static electricity (as always), but no bolt of lightning from Mars. The Ammonites were disappointed. They screamed and danced all the harder, even cutting themselves with knives, knowing that Baal loved the taste of blood. Then finally, as Mars was going out of range, a tiny flicker of electricity bent from its magneto-tail down to the top of Mount Ebal, where it struck with a single bright flash.

The Ammonites jumped for joy, and ran back up the mountain to see the slain bodies of the sons of Jair. But they found them, alive, untied, and looking rather fierce with their hair sticking straight out all around their heads. The altar to which they had been tied was gone. A smoking black hole was in its place.

Again, they were furious! Baal had failed them! They raised their knives and rushed upon the sons of Jair to slay them. But each time they touched one, the residual static zapped them and knocked them to the ground. Within seconds they had all dropped their knives and were fleeing from before the sons of Jair. With wild hair streaming out behind, the sons of Jair picked up the knives and chased them off the mountain.

Overcome with fear, the Ammonites fled across the Jordan. There they regrouped and prepared to fight the sons of Jair. By the next March they had returned in force. They set up camp beside the town of Gilead. But the thirty sons of Jair had also been busy. They told the story of their deliverance on Mount Ebal. “YHWH has heard our cries! He will deliver us! Meet us at Mizpah of Gilead!”

The response was rather lukewarm. Ephraim didn't send anyone at all. And no military leaders showed up. Those who did come searched to find a battle-seasoned warrior to lead them. The sons of Jair couldn't lead the offensive. They were prayer warriors, not fighters!

The elders of Gilead suggested **Jepthah**, the oldest son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh. He had been born of a harlot before Gilead had married. Since then, Jepthah's half-brothers had driven him out of the house, refusing him any inheritance with Gilead's true sons. So he had gone north to the border of Syria. There he had gathered a band of warriors, partly for protection, and partly just because he loved to harass the Syrians to the north. Jepthah had gained a reputation as a fearless fighter. He had considered it his main mission in life to prevent the Syrians from coming down to raid East Manasseh. But Thutmose III had subdued the Syrians and negotiated a peace treaty with them at Kadesh on the Orontes. When they broke it and rebelled, he had punished them severely. He had nearly wiped out Syrian army, so they no longer troubled Israel. Now Jepthah was basically out of work.

The elders of Gilead sent messengers up to find him. Jepthah was still miffed at what his half-brothers had done, but when they promised to make him a general over all the men of Gilead, he returned with them.

Looking out over the vast army of Ammon, he decided that a little diplomacy couldn't hurt. He sent a masterful letter to try to resolve their differences with Ammon. He reminded them of how carefully and respectfully Moses had treated Ammon when they first came into the land, and how Moses had only conquered the lands belonging to the rebellious Amorites. It was all wasted. The Ammonites just coveted Israel's land.

Jepthah prayed. The Spirit of YHWH fell upon him. He knew he had the victory. In his excitement, he made a rather rash vow to YHWH, that whatever first came out of his house to greet him when he returned after gaining peace from Ammon, he would forever dedicate to YHWH or sacrifice as a burnt offering on His altar.

As was his faith, so was Jepthah's success. He struck the army of Ammon with a great slaughter, driving them out of all their settlements in Gilead and back to their own land. Then he pronounced a terrible curse over them, prophesying by the Spirit that someday they and their detestable god Molech (Milcom) would be utterly cut off from the face of the earth. So it is to this day.

When he returned victorious from the battle, word of his mighty victory had gone before him. The first one to greet him was Joy, his fourteen-year-old daughter. She was his only child! She ran to him with singing and dancing to celebrate his victory. Boy did he ever regret his rash vow!

Jepthah tore his clothes, heartbroken. But there was no breaking his vow. He told her his promise.

Joy was very understanding. She agreed that her hero father must keep his vow, asking only a couple months to prepare herself. After that, she shaved off her hair, bathed, and presented herself at the tabernacle to be a lifetime Nazirite. She vowed to remain a virgin, never cutting her hair or tasting any fruit of the vine from that day forth. She served continually in what would later be called the 'house of women'. This became a custom in Israel for females who were dedicated to YHWH. The virgin girls of Gilead held a four-day celebration each year for any other women who likewise took the Nazirite vow. To this day it is called 'the Celebration of Joy', though most have forgotten why.

But this was a huge shame and tragedy for Jepthah. As his only child, Joy was to marry and bear him an heir to carry on his family name. While he was still in mourning, the army of Ephraim finally came (after hearing about his victory over the Ammonites). They threatened to burn down his house because he hadn't let them fight with him. They brought 42,000 warriors!

"But I did call you. You didn't send anyone!"

"So now you're calling us liars? You're just an arrogant megalomaniac who wants all the glory for yourself!"

Jepthah could see that, once again, this was not going to get resolved by diplomacy. "My brothers, go in peace. I have no wish to quarrel with you. But if you do not go in peace, then the men of Gilead are able to drive you out, for YHWH is on our side here."

The army of Ephraim would not go in peace. They burned down Jepthah's house, then went on a rampage and began burning down the houses around his. Jepthah quickly called up his army to put a stop to their wanton destruction. But when they came, the men of Ephraim didn't leave. They attacked them! It quickly escalated into a full scale civil war, much to Jepthah's horror. He realized these were not really his Ephraimite brothers. These were demon possessed men who had rebelled against the recent cleansing of the idols out of Israel, as initiated by the thirty sons of Jair. He prayed for wisdom.

Jepthah sent fifty men down to the Jordan to secure the ford. Then he led the army of Gilead against the demonic attackers. He was easily successful, for God was with him. As the fleeing remnants came down to the ford to return to Ephraim, Jepthah slew them all. He could not allow these wicked men to live. Some disguised themselves, but he made everyone pronounce 'shibboleth' (an ear of corn), as he knew that Ephraimites always pronounced it as 'sibboleth'. That way he got all 42,000; not a single one remained to infect Israel with their demonic rebellion.

Logos was pleased. He never held it against Jepthah that he was born of a harlot. Israel had peace during the six years that Jepthah was judge. But his hard-drinking, hard-fighting, hard-partying ways eventually caught up with him. He died without an heir in 1127 BC.

Ibzan, a rich merchant from Ephrathah in Zebulun (not Judah), was judge after him. He had a lot of money and a lot of kids so people assumed that he had a lot of wisdom, too. They were wrong. He never even tried to call people to holiness, so they grew more wicked during this time. Logos gave him seven years to repent and seek His face, but he never did. So Logos took him in 1120 BC. Thus began cycle #8 of Israel's apostasy.

During Ibzan's seven year tenure King Tudhaliya I ruled the Hittites. Shalmaneser I was king of Assyria. The aggressive Mitanni had again grown strong! Crown Prince Amenemhat died, so his half-brother Amenhotep II took his place in 1122 BC as co-regent with their dad, Thutmose III the Great. The very month he was crowned, three pivotal stories began unfolding in tiny Israel at the births of three very special boys: **Samuel**, **Samson**, and **Jesse**. I'll start with Samuel – or rather, his father Elkanah. He had two wives, Peninnah, who had many children, and Hannah, who was barren. Elkanah, a simple Ephraimite farmer, loved them all.

Back in 1127 BC (the same year Jephthah died) Logos had called Satan into His presence. "Behold my servant Elkanah! See how faithful he is to Me?"

"Faithful? Bah!" Satan retorted. "Your protection is around him and all he has. Remove Your covering, and we'll see how quickly a little affliction will cause him to curse You to Your face!"

Surprisingly, Logos agreed to the test. "Okay. You may trouble his house, but not his body or his possessions."

Satan jumped at that chance. He still had not learned that when Logos gave him permission to harm the Bride it always turned out for good. Satan began by instigating division in the home. He inspired Peninnah to despise and mock Hannah's barrenness, bitterly provoking her. He encouraged Hannah to fall into deep depression and despair. And he nudged Elkanah to take sides, showing favoritism to Hannah. It was tearing the household apart. Four years of this passed, yet Elkanah remained true to YHWH and refused to curse God.

The priesthood had died out after the deaths of Barak and Deborah, as the descendants of Eleazar had become apostate. Then the descendants of Aaron had managed to re-establish it through Ithamar. In that line, Eli became high priest at the tabernacle in Shiloh in 1123 BC. He would serve there for forty years. Eli also acted as judge, concurrent with a few other judges of his time. Sadly, he didn't 'judge' his own sons very well. Though he began as a man of God with a true heart for worship and for God's tabernacle, yet he also was beset by the sins of gluttony, self-indulgence, and lust. The sins he tolerated in himself in moderation, his sons got away with in excess. Logos judged him severely for that, as we shall see.

But we cannot criticize Eli's indulgence or gluttony too much, as he remained faithful over the house of God and called the people to holiness. He also took care of those who served in the tabernacle, especially lovely young Joy. He often looked longingly at her. But aware of his sons' weaknesses, he determined to guard her virginity.

Samuel's story begins in Eli's first year as high priest. Eli was relaxing on a quiet evening, seated by the gate of the tabernacle at Shiloh, when Hannah returned from town. She was dressed poorly, with a black scarf over her long hair. Tears ran down her weathered old face. She staggered slightly, and fell to her knees at the gate.

She prayed silently, her lips moving in the agony of her soul. Of course Eli thought she was drunk. He was pretty new as high priest; he had no idea she had been coming like this for four years. He hadn't seen her earlier in the day, when she had been in the sanctuary worshiping with Elkanah and Peninnah.

"How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine, and worship in holiness!" Even as he said it, he thought of his own sons. He wished he had the courage to stand up to them like this! But drunkenness was the least of his son's sins, and he feared them.

"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied. "I have drunk no wine at all. I am oppressed in spirit. I have poured out my soul unto YHWH. Do not look on me as a worthless woman. I pray only out of bitter provocation!"

Eli realized his error, and was humble enough to admit it. "I am sorry, my child. I misjudged you. Please come with me to the house of women. Joy, daughter of Jephthah, will minister to you there." He led her there.

Joy had been at the tabernacle for 10 years. She had accepted her calling. She comforted Hannah and prayed with her. She was startled to find herself even prophesying over her. "YHWH has heard your prayer. The ashes of your mourning rise as a fragrant offering before His throne. Before this time next year you shall bear a son, who shall be great in Israel. He shall prepare the way for the coming King. He shall be a Nazirite, dedicated unto YHWH all the days of his life. After you release him to the service of YHWH at the tabernacle, you shall become the joyous mother of other children, yes even in your old age."

Hannah bowed in acceptance of this happy prophecy. It was just as she had vowed in silent prayer, that she would dedicate her son to YHWH all the days of his life. So she knew this answer was from YHWH. As she left, she passed by the gates of the tabernacle, where Eli still sat. "Thank you my lord. I am comforted."

"Go in peace. And may YHWH the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of Him."

"Thank you, sir." She bowed again. "He already has!" She joyfully returned to Elkanah.

At the same time that Hannah was being comforted by YHWH through Joy, Logos, disguised as a holy man, visited Mona, the wife of Manoah, an older gentleman of the tribe of Dan. Like Hannah, Mona had been barren for many years. And like Hannah, Logos told her that she would bear a son, who would be a Nazirite to God from the womb. "He shall be strong, and shall begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines," Logos promised.

Mona told her husband as soon as he returned. She claimed that her visitor was "a man of God." So Manoah entreated YHWH to send Him back. Logos came and told Manoah exactly what He had earlier told Mona. Manoah had trouble believing. He grilled Him about the prophecy. "Why did You say he'd deliver Israel from the Philistines? We're not in bondage to them. We trade with them. We live at peace with all the nations around us."

"You see a superficial peace, because the eyes of your spirit are blinded. But I see the sons of Israel falling into sin, intermarrying with the surrounding nations, and turning to worship their gods. This has opened up the door to the adversary, and his dark forces are even now streaming in to oppress the sons of Israel. Soon that will become visible to you as oppression by the Philistines, whom you foolishly allowed to remain among you."

About this time, Manoah correctly discerned that this was more than just a 'man of God'. He offered to prepare dinner for him. "I will neither eat your food nor drink your wine," He responded. "However, if you wish to prepare a burnt offering, offer it to YHWH."

"What is your name? When Your word comes to pass, we want to honor You." He was beginning to believe.

Logos smiled and Manoah heard a soft chuckle. "Why do you ask? Surely you realize by now that My many names are a mystery!" His eyes twinkled.

Manoah hurried to prepare the sacrifice. He offered it on a large rock to YHWH, as the angel directed him. When he lit the fire, Logos stepped up to the rock, walked into the flames, and ascended into the heavens.

Manoah and Mona fell facedown. "We shall surely die, for we have seen the face of God!" Manoah cried.

"If YHWH had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted the burnt offering from your hands," Mona responded. "Besides, if we die, His word couldn't come to pass, so then He couldn't be YHWH whose word is always true, and seeing His face would not slay us!"

"Huh?" Manoah couldn't quite follow her logic. But he believed. They both believed. They ate the sacrificial meal in silence and reverential awe, very aware that they were taking that which was holy into themselves. That night they slept together with a fresh awareness of the presence of God in their union. They delighted in their small part in fulfilling His higher purposes.

Also that same time (1123 BC) Logos, again disguised as a holy man, visited some poor shepherds in the hills of Ephrathah. "Obed son of Boaz!" He called. A middle-aged shepherd stood up. "Sir? I am Obed son of Obed. Boaz is my grandfather 5 generations removed."

"Are you aware of the prophecies that were proclaimed over the name of Obed son of Boaz?"

"Yes, Sir. It was prophesied that his name would be famous in Israel, and that his descendants would be great in the land. My fathers have been passing that prophecy down to their sons for six generations now. That's why I too was named Obed."

"And do you believe it?"

"Well, Sir. We still have hopes. My father does, anyway. I'm beginning to think that we'll never be more than impoverished shepherds, like me. Nobodies."

"The next year at this time your wife shall bear a son. *Do not name him Obed.* Name him Jesse [to be solid, stand firm], for YHWH keeps His promises!"

Obed bowed. When he looked up, the holy man was gone. The rough shepherd fell facedown to the ground, realizing that he was an angel. He believed the promise.

So three special sons were conceived that same night. The following year during the festival of Shavuot, three baby boys were born on the same day, Sivan 6, 1122 BC: **Samuel**, son of Elkanah and Hannah; **Samson**, son of Manoah and Mona; and **Jesse**, son of Obed and Ollie. All three grew up strong and healthy. Jesse, as his fathers for generations before, became just a shepherd and farmer. Samuel and Samson were given the vow of the Nazirite from birth. Their hair was never cut, and no wine or grapes or any unclean thing ever touched their lips.

The next year, Thutmose III decided to teach his son Amenhotep II the ropes. He took him on a campaign up the coast and through Syria to his collect annual tribute and re-establish the allegiance of Egypt's vassal states. From Carchemish, they sailed down the Euphrates River to Emar (Meskene) and returned home via Syria. (The Mitanni in Syria only pretended to submit. They actually were gathering their forces for the inevitable show-down.) The Philistines and Phoenicians had remained faithfully submitted to Egypt. Thutmose authorized the Philistines to begin taxing Israel as the angel had warned.

The following year Ibzan died. **Elon** the Zebulunite took his place and judged Israel for ten years. Thutmose III also died. His son Amenhotep II, now barely eighteen, became the Pharaoh. He determined to be even stronger than his illustrious father. He married Tiaa, daughter of one of his father's advisors. Then he learned that the Mitanni rebellion had boiled over in Syria. He gathered his army that same year and marched north along the Via Maris, reinforcing Egyptian sovereignty all along the way.

Amenhotep II was an athlete. He once boasted that no one else could bend his bow. He was admired for his strength even among the Philistines. So in this land where the strong are gods and the weak are despised, the mighty Philistines begin to clamp down on tiny Israel, with the full authority of Egypt. The oppression resulting from apostasy cycle #8 had finally begun.

Except for killing Tola and Jair, the Philistines had been pretty good neighbors until now, in compliance with the compromise that Caleb had made with Yacobaam in 1402 BC. The five kings of the Philistines had kept a tenuous peace with Israel, usually respecting her borders. They had allowed free trade between the two nations. They had punished the brigands of their own people who entered Israel to harass or plunder. One thing they did not do, was share their metal-working technology or their weapons. They would make (or repair) iron tools for the Israelites, for a fee! Now, however, they put a tax on Israel's use of their own roads, and on their trade in the markets. Yes, the taxes started small. But every year they crept higher.

The Mitanni gave Amenhotep II a lot of trouble. They had decided years before that they would rebel against Egypt when his illustrious father Thutmose III died, so they were well prepared. It took him two years to capture their seven princes and bring them to Egypt. There he slew six and sent the seventh back to Mitanni much subdued and with a strict treaty. In 1118 BC, he became Mitanni King Artatama I. He kept the treaty. Thus Egyptian power was supreme over Philistia, Phoenicia, and Syria.

Elon the Zebulunite turned out to be a pompous fool, who ruled by bribes and corruption. He was even worse than Ibzan, who had never called Israel to repentance. Their sins, even the sins of Eli's sons, grieved the righteous Judge of all the earth. A Word from YHWH was rare in those days. Visions or prophecies were infrequent.

But during Elon's tenure as judge, an interesting story is told of young Samuel. His mother Hannah had kept her vow. For her faithfulness, Logos gave Hannah seven other sons and daughters. But Samuel had remained a Nazirite, serving Eli in the tabernacle at Shiloh.

In 1112 BC Eli was 69; Samuel was just ten. Eli was going blind, so Samuel had become his right-hand man. Joy (Jephthah's daughter, now 35) was like a second mother to Samuel, and he looked up to Eli almost as a second father. Our story begins with Samuel sleeping on a tiny cot in a small room just behind the most holy place where the Ark of the Covenant rested in the tabernacle.

He was awakened by a voice, "Samuel! Samuel!"

He jumped up and ran to Eli's room. "Here am I!"

"No, no, my son. I did not call. Go back to sleep."

Samuel barely got back into bed, when he again heard the voice. It was loud! Again he ran to Eli.

"No, I did not call you, my son. Return to sleep."

This happened a third time. Samuel ran to Eli. "Here I am, for you did call me!" Samuel was indignant.

Fat old Eli sat up and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Samuel stood there, arms akimbo, determined to make Eli 'fess up. "This voice... Could it have been Joy?"

"No. It was a deep, loud man's voice. Like yours."

"It was YHWH! Go lie down again. If you hear that voice again, answer like this, 'Speak Lord YHWH, for Your servant is listening.' He will tell you what to do."

Samuel ate his breakfast with Joy the next morning, then hurried over to open up the gates to the courts of the tabernacle. He was afraid to talk to Eli.

When Eli woke up, late, he was sweating with dread. *What had YHWH told Samuel?* He hurried out to find him. "Samuel, my son!" he called out.

"Here I am, my lord."

"What is the word that YHWH spoke to you?"

"Oh... Uh... my lord... It was not a very good message. Let us just wait, to see if it comes to pass..."

"No, my son! Do not hide it. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide one word of all He spoke!"

"Yes, my father." Young Samuel bowed his head and put his hands over his eyes. Then with a deep breath he began. "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the ears of everyone who hears will tingle. I am about to judge the house of Eli forever, because his sons brought a curse upon themselves, and even knowing their iniquity Eli still would not rebuke them. Therefore I have sworn that neither sacrifice nor sin offerings shall atone for the iniquity of the house of Eli." He stopped, uncovered his eyes, and looked up at Eli in horror.

"Samuel!" He heard an exclamation behind him. Joy had heard the whole thing. "Did you remember all that correctly? Word for word? Are you sure?"

"Yes, Miss Joy. How could I forget?"

"Was there no more, my son?" Tears were running down old Eli's cheeks.

"No, sir."

"Thank you, my son. It is YHWH, I know! Let Him do to me whatever seems good to Him." He turned away sadly, wishing that his wife were still alive. She always was better at discipline than he. He would simply have to have another talk with his sons.

Hophni and Phinehas were now in their thirty's. They had always been a bit rebellious and arrogant, but ever since their father had become high priest, they lorded it over the people like petty tyrants.

Eli sat his sons down in front of him on the day after the Sabbath. “Hophni! Phinehas! You are priests of the most high God! He is holy. You must be examples of holiness to the people. You are here to serve the people, not rule them! I hear reports that you take more than your share of the people’s offerings, you eat more than your share of their sacrifices, you yell at people like they were your servants, you get drunk and behave lewdly, carousing with wicked men, and even seducing the women who come to worship at the tabernacle. YHWH tells me that you even...”

“YHWH doesn’t speak to you any more than He does to us, Dad. What about you? Look at that fat belly of yours! You’ve done your share of eating and drinking. And I’ve seen the way you leer lustfully at Joy! Don’t preach to us about holiness!” They got up and began to walk off.

Eli had a plan B. “Wait! I have a surprise for you!” They turned to listen. “I’ve arranged with Alazar for you to marry his daughters Hansi and Petra. They’re young and lovely! A good Levite family! They will bear you many children to carry on our family name.” Eli was hoping that marriage and family would settle them down.

For a while, it actually worked. Eli’s sons became more respectful and diligent, especially when his grandsons began coming along. **Ahitub** son of Phinehas and Petra was the first, and what a joy he was!

The same year he was born (1110 BC) Elon died. Old **Abdon** son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him. And you thought Elon the Zebulunite was a pompous fool! Abdon was a wealthy pompous fool. He virtually bought the judgeship by bribes. With dozens of wives, he had forty sons and thirty grandsons. He made all of them judges, crisscrossing Israel with their foolish judgments and enriching themselves at Israel’s expense.

The sons of Israel groaned under the oppression, not just by the Philistines and their high taxation, but also by Abdon and his unjust judging. The word of YHWH was scarce. Wickedness ruled the land.

In 1107 BC, Satan found Logos as He brooded over the hills of Ephrathah. “I hope You’re keeping score. Your precious ‘Bride’ is all mine now, You know. I’ll bet You’re getting pretty frantic about it.”

“Not at all!” Logos smiled at him. “Remember that powerful seed of intercession I carry in My heart? It has borne good fruit. Would you like to see?” He beckoned the curious archangel to follow. They flew over a grassy field. A small flock of sheep grazed quietly. A fifteen-year-old boy played a flute and meditated near them. They listened awhile. But Satan can’t read thoughts and soon got bored. “So? He still worships You. By the time he’s twenty that will change. I know how to reach him.”

“Wait, Satan. Patience. He has a song.”

“I don’t have time for...” But the song had begun.

Obed son of Obed son of Boaz our father,
YHWH has not left you without a Redeemer!
A son has been born, a child brought to birth.
His name shall be famous o’er all of the earth.
His descendants are great in the Promised Land.
Call his name Jesse, for God’s promises stand!”

It was beautiful; a haunting melody, springing up from soul to spirit. Satan was puzzled. “Famous? Why does Jesse still believe that old prophecy? He’s still herding a few pitiful sheep among the hills!”

“Oh? I see a man mighty in spirit, mighty in faith!” Logos smiled. “It’s that seed of intercession again. It is the most powerful force on earth. *It cannot be denied!*”

“Balderdash! He only worships You because of Your angelic protection around him. Remove Your covering, and we shall see just how quickly a little affliction will cause him to curse You to Your face!”

“How well did that work with Elkanah? Or with the sons of Jair? Or Moses? Or Job? Do you never learn?”

Startled, Satan realized that all the troubles he had inflicted on them had only driven them closer to Logos. The house of Elkanah was now more blessed than ever, and the sons of Jair had called Israel to repentance. Logos read his thoughts, and laughed. “Do you give up? Will you concede that I have won? That My ways are the only ways that truly work for the human race?”

“Give up? When I own most of Your Bride? You have got to be kidding!”

“I don’t kid. All I need is one in each generation to wholeheartedly believe Me. And now I have four. Come with Me.” He took him to Shiloh where they hovered over the tabernacle. Satan watched fat old Eli gazing lustfully at Joy, whose hair by now had grown long and lovely. Eli’s sons were at it again, proudly receiving the acclaim of the people while they stole from their offerings and sacrifices. Satan smiled in delight at his masterpieces.

“No, not them. Look here!” Logos pointed to the tiny room behind the most holy place. There a fifteen-year-old boy was intently waiting on God. His vivid experience hearing YHWH’s voice when he was ten had left him with a deep hunger for more of God. Samuel loved to listen for that still, small voice and eagerly do whatever Logos told him. “And look here!” Logos brought Satan to Zorah on the border of the land of the Philistines. All the people in town served the gods of the Philistines. The wickedness in Zorah was as bad as any pagan city – except in the home of Manoah and Mona. They taught their fifteen-year-old son Samson the ways of YHWH. “Why do you not cut my hair? Why may I never drink grape juice?” He would ask. And they would answer, “It is because you are a Nazirite. We committed you to YHWH. He will use you in mighty ways to deliver Israel.”

“Do you see their faith? Do you see their love of Me and My ways? Do you see your own defeat?”

“My defeat? By three out of three million? Give me a break! You can have them. I’ve got the rest.”

“Actually, I want you to trouble them. To test their faith. That is why I let you find Me in Ephrathah.”

“No. I won’t. I’m not that stupid. If it will only cause them to get closer to You, then I refuse.”

“Do you only torment those who hate Me?”

Now that made Satan think. “Actually no. It’s a lot more fun tormenting those who love You.”

“Even if it makes them love Me more?”

Satan realized that as much as he loved the blood and shrieks of pain, his greatest delight was the challenge of tormenting a child of God, trying to make him lose his faith. Even though he failed with a few, his pleasure in his successes outweighed his anger at the few he lost.

“Okay, Logos. I’ll do it. And I’ll bet You that I’ll get two out of the three. Then You’ll be back to your pitiful one! Which is about all You’ll ever have!”

“Your foolish bet would lose. You may trouble them, but you may not take their lives or molest their families. And there were four, not just three.”

“Huh? Samson, Samuel, and Jesse. The rest are mine. Unless You count children separate from their parents.”

“You were so attracted to Eli that you missed Joy. Her heart is pure. Her service to My precious ones, especially Samuel, is a joyous delight!” Logos laughed.

Satan fled. He couldn’t stand to hear that laughter or see that joy. He got right to work.

First, Jesse. This would be easy. He sent a small pack of wolves. Then a bear. Then a lion. He knew he couldn’t kill Jesse, but he could sure ravage his flock! Then young Jesse would curse God and run in panic to Papa.

Except he didn’t! When the flock was attacked, that stupid little boy would put himself between the animal and his sheep. He would cry out to YHWH as he beat the attacker with his staff. He was fearless! Even with the great lion, Jesse thoughtlessly risked his own life for the sheep. Satan was so angry that he tried to make the lion kill him, but according to the word of Logos, the most he could get was a bloodied arm. He gave up.

Samuel could be difficult. Satan studied him for a bit. Joy loved and covered him like a mother. Satan realized that he’d have to destroy both at once. Well, he surely had the material to work with. Fat old Eli was too weak and slow to try anything, but his lust had opened a moral hole as big as a barn door to his sons. So Satan filled Hophni and Phinehas with lust toward Joy.

Eli really did care about Joy. He diligently guarded her. But Satan had a way around that, too. Eli loved his dinner! And he loved his wine! Satan inspired his sons to get him very full, and then very drunk, late one night. He vomited all over the dining room floor. Joy and Samuel helped him to his bed, where he collapsed in drunken stupor. Samuel went to his own bedroom to be near in case Eli awoke, while dutiful Joy returned to the empty dining hall to clean up the mess. Hophni and Phinehas were hiding in wait for her. Everyone else was sleeping by then, so no one heard her screams as the demon-possessed sons of Eli raped her right there on the floor.

The next day, the accuser filled Eli with such shame at his own drunken gluttony, that He never punished his sons. Samuel respectfully tried to intercede for Joy, but Eli just said, “It is YHWH, punishing me for my own sins. Blessed be the name of YHWH. His will be done.”

Satan laughed with glee! That was the response he’d hoped for. Now to flood Joy and Samuel with anger and bitterness, hatred and despair. He got right to work.

Joy was utterly crushed. Her Nazirite vow was broken. Her virginity was stolen. The tempter nearly succeeded in driving her to suicide over the next few months. Especially after she discovered that she was pregnant!

Samuel too, was very near to lashing out in anger against Eli and his sons. He walked through the Valley of the Shadow, treading that fragile line between deepest grief and mental suicide. They had done everything right! They were serving in the house of YHWH! How could YHWH have so forsaken them? How could He let this happen to Joy? Samuel cried all day, fell asleep crying each night, and awoke still crying the next morning.

Over the next four months Samuel read through the book of Moses several times. Through his tears he kept finding more reasons why Hophni and Phinehas should be punished, even slain, for their crimes. It wasn’t just their treatment of Joy and the other women who served at the tabernacle. What about Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, who had been slain by YHWH for offering incense while drunk? Hophni and Phinehas did that all the time. And they cursed their father Eli whenever he tried to talk to them; that, too, was a capital offense. Samuel struggled against his own anger and bitterness.

But he kept coming back to the well-known passage where Moses had said, “You shall not hate your fellow-countryman in your heart. You may surely reprove your neighbor if he sins, but you shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear a grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am YHWH.” (Lev 19:17)

“Okay, YHWH!” Samuel cried. “I give up. I will not take vengeance. I give it to You. You deal righteously with the house of Eli. I will trust You, no matter what.”

Samuel still cried himself to sleep that night. He could not hear the cheers or the celebration in the heavenlies over the great victory that he had won.

Joy, too, was crying in deep despair. She determined this would be her last night. She had mentally said her good-byes to all she held dear. Tonight she would slit her wrists with a kitchen knife she had borrowed. She knelt beside her bed for one last prayer. “YHWH, my God and my King. I repent that I have failed You; failed to keep my vow; failed to keep myself pure for You; even failed my father in the keeping of his vow. Please forgive me, and take me home to my fathers now.”

She put the knife to her wrist, “Let me die with worship on my lips! O YHWH my God, I’ll worship You forever...” At that moment her womb felt a little bump as the tiny life within her kicked. With horror, she dropped the knife. The life within! She could not end her life! That would be murder, for her baby would surely die. “O Lord YHWH! My baby did nothing to deserve death!” She cried herself to sleep. By morning she had determined to live, even to give her own life for the precious life she carried within. She also did not hear the celebration still going on in the heavenlies over the decisions made that night.

So she endured the shame, and bore a son early the next year. When he was circumcised, Eli named him Jephthah after his grandfather. Joy eventually left the tabernacle to care for him while he grew to manhood. Eli made sure the lost heritage of Jephthah was restored to him. Though Joy never married, young Jephthah did. Thus the honor of her father’s house was restored in him.

Satan was disgusted. That was three he had lost. His own impatience had cost him far too many battles. He would be more cautious with Samson. He studied him, biding his time. Samson’s parents were always reverent and modest. But Satan noticed that Samson’s eyes tended to stray to the lewd images of the Asherim whenever he went out. In those days, Israelites were intermarrying with Philistines, so their pagan gods were everywhere, even in Israelite towns. The female goddess of Venus, or Ishtar, known as Astarte, was often carved in a suggestive way. Samson fell prey to pornographic images, harassing his mind day and night. He didn’t know that it was demons tormenting him. He thought it was perfectly normal for a young man to lust after every voluptuous woman he saw. *He was a Nazirite in his body, but not in his heart.*

As I said, I love stories with happy endings. This story is not. It gets so bad in some places that I don’t even want to tell it. If you must hear it, read Judges 13 through 16. Satan won this one. Though Samson never forgot YHWH, he never got that lust out of his heart, either. He did kill a lot of Philistines, but lust for wicked Philistine women stole his great strength and ultimately ended his life. It even dragged his righteous parents to an early grave in shame. He left no heir.

Wealthy, pompous old Abdon judged Israel from 1110 to 1102 BC before God took him. **Samson** judged Israel (if you can even call it that) from then until he died at the age of 40 in 1082 BC. As you can see, the progression of judges in Israel had gone from bad to worse with each succeeding judge. These were dark days. There was no king in Israel, and no word from YHWH through the judges anymore, either. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Pharaoh Amenhotep II died in 1096 BC after ruling 26 years. His arrogant son Prince Amenhotep then became Pharaoh. He reigned a full 20 years, but you have never heard of him before. He was so cruel and wicked that even his own people later erased his name from history. He strutted about the land making people bow, but was so consumed with pride and his own pleasures that he did nothing to aid Egypt. He was delighted that the Philistines were maintaining such a strangle-hold on the Hebrews.

Let’s go back to Samuel. About the same time as filthy-minded Samson was ravishing lewd Philistine whores, Samuel finally heard from YHWH about the punishment God planned for the family of Eli. Samuel was 32 years old, still a Nazirite, his hair now nearly to his waist.

Yet Samuel did not want to confront Eli. He was still young. He had been raised to respect his elders—especially the high priest! So one day at the entrance to the tabernacle YHWH took over his tongue and prophesied through him.

“Did I not reveal Myself to your father Levi when he was in bondage in Egypt? And did I not choose him from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to serve in My house? And did I not give to your father’s house your portion from among all the offerings in Israel? Why then do you kick at My offerings, and honor your sons above Me by making yourself fat with the choicest of the offerings of My people Israel? Even though I did promise that the house of your fathers shall endure before Me forever, yet only those who honor Me will I honor. Those who despise Me will be despised. For when your sons fail to uphold My law and despise My commandments, My holy name is dishonored as much as if you despised Me yourself. Days are coming, therefore, when I will break your strength and the strength of your father’s house, so that there will not be an old man in your house – the increase of your house will die in the prime of life. *This will be the sign that this has come to pass, when your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, die on the same day.* Then I shall raise up for Myself a faithful priest, who will do what is in My heart. I will build for him an enduring house, and he shall walk before My anointed always.”

Samuel ran back to his room, shocked that it had come out so bold, so loud! Many elders of Israel had gathered at the tabernacle that day, and his prophecy became the talk of Shiloh. Eli heard, and again tried to reprove his sons. But they swore at him and continued in their wicked ways. Eli found himself bound – unable to discipline his sons for the sins he still held in his own heart. Nothing changed.

The Hebrews were desperate. In 1083 BC they gathered seventy elders, the wisest of the thirteen tribes, and met Amenhotep when he was talking with the Philistines in Gaza. They told how the Philistines were always taking advantage of them, oppressing and over-taxing them, and not even allowing them to make their own tools. They pled with Pharaoh to make an alliance with them, and to treat them with respect like he treated any other nation. They reminded him of how Tola had allied with Thutmose III, and before him how Gideon had allied with Ahmose, Amenhotep I, Thutmose I, and Hatshepsut.

Amenhotep laughed at them. "Tola and Gideon were mighty men, men of honor and valor! Like these mighty kings of the Philistines you see before you. Why should my fathers not ally themselves to such mighty men as these? But you? You're not royalty. You're just peasants. Scum. Shepherds and farmers. Get out of my presence and trouble me no more!" He drove them away. Then he advised the five Philistine kings, "These Hebrew peasants have gotten inflated ideas of themselves. They are too ambitious, and likely to rebel. It's time to discipline them a bit. Incite them into battle and slay their valiant young men. After that they will trouble us no more."

Amenhotep returned to Egypt, caring not how many Hebrews might die. That fall, at the time kings go out to battle, the five kings of the Philistines decided to take his advice. They assembled their forces at their northern border city of Aphek LaSharon. A frantic call went out, and the sons of Israel began to gather at the fortress of Mizpah, a few miles up the hills in the land of Ephraim.

Their first skirmish was a terrible defeat for Israel. More than 4000 lay dead on the battlefield, while the Philistines had hardly lost a man. They had to do something to encourage the people. The elders put their heads together to figure out what had gone wrong. *YHWH was the missing ingredient!* His Ark must be brought into the next battle. So early the next morning they came to Shiloh to get the Ark of the Covenant.

Hophni and Phinehas agreed with the elders and went to haul the Ark out of the tabernacle. They were carrying it out the gate on two long poles, when Samuel saw what was going on. Of course he was indignant.

"The only way to ensure YHWH is on our side is to be on His side. Tell all Israel, 'Repent of your idolatry. Cease your wickedness.' Until that happens, the Ark will not help you one bit. God is not with you."

"Not so!" the elders insisted. "The Ark will surely help! The sons of Israel are discouraged by the results of the last battle. The Ark will be a big encouragement to them."

Samuel was about to respond, but at that point old Eli reached the group, huffing and puffing from the exertion. He was blind, but he still had ears. "What's this I hear about taking the Ark out to battle?"

"Yes, Father." It was Phinehas. "The Philistines have gathered an army to defy the armies of the living God! YHWH has heard the cries of His people Israel, and has commissioned us to take His Ark before us into battle. The Philistines must see that there is a God in Israel!"

He knew all the right words, and somehow old Eli didn't catch the disconnect between the lofty words and his sons' habitual actions. "Yes. Go, my son, and may YHWH be with you and grant you victory!"

Samuel bowed his head. He knew this was wrong but dared not publicly contradict the high priest. The group marched out the gate followed by a long procession of priests. "Please, Samuel, lead me to my seat by the road. I'll intercede until the Ark safely returns."

"Yes, my lord. You know, my lord, that the Ark, and your sons, are in grave danger – mortal danger."

"I know, my son. But YHWH is a God of mercy and compassion. I will pray, Perhaps YHWH will have mercy. But if not, His will be done."

"*His will be done?* My lord! He has already told you His will! That both of your sons will die in one day, and from then on, not an old man will remain alive in your house! Don't you hope to change that?"

"Oh, I cannot change it. It is the will of YHWH. Let Him do whatever seems best in His sight."

"My lord, true repentance does change things! It's not too late. Let me call Hophni and Phinehas back. God does not want to judge your house. He wants your house to return wholeheartedly to Him."

Eli heard, but Satan was screaming in his other ear, accusing him of his own lustful self-indulgence, and he couldn't do it. "No. YHWH's will be done." So Eli sat by the road all day, his body trembling at the thought of what he had done. Satan was no longer accusing him. He was laughing at him. His own heart smote him. He spent the day crying and repenting and pleading with YHWH for one more chance. *He will discipline his sons. He will be stern and not waver. He will discipline himself. He will fast, for a whole week – even for a month if necessary!*

Michael could stand no more. He entered the throne room on bended knee. "Logos! My Lord and my King! Eli is repenting. He really is, this time! His heart has turned. Please, send me to his sons to turn them back to Shiloh with Your Ark before it's too late."

"No, Michael." Logos looked severe. "Remember what I said about Satan and Pharaoh during the ten plagues? Eli had forty years to repent and discipline his sons. He is the high priest. The example to all My people. Now his time of repentance is past. Do not interfere."

"Yes, my Lord." Michael wept. Logos bowed His fiery head and wept with him for a long time.

A cry arose from Shiloh. Eli screamed out in fear. "What happened? What is it? Who won the battle?"

A runner came toward the tabernacle from the town. Seeing blind old Eli sitting by the road, he knelt before him. "Sir, I brought news of the battle to Shiloh – indeed, I barely escaped from the battle line."

"How did it go, my son? Is the Ark safe?"

"The army of Israel fled before the Philistines, sir. There was a terrible slaughter. Over 30,000 men of Israel are dead. I'm so sorry sir. Your sons... every single priest died. And... the Ark... It has been taken by our enemies."

At the mention of the Ark, Eli's worst fears of the last forty years fell down on him. His heart seized in mid-beat. He fell backwards, broke his neck, and died on the spot.

That night, the news was confirmed to Petra, the wife of Phinehas. She had been a good influence on him. She had remained faithful when he was faithless, and had raised his children in the fear of YHWH. She had stood firm as a rock while the character of her husband had flowed like water. She had always pointed him back to YHWH, to the Law of Moses, and to his responsibilities as a priest. She had borne him four sons and six daughters. She was now pregnant with his eleventh child and ready to be delivered.

But when Petra heard the sad news that her husband and father-in-law were dead and the Ark was taken by the pagans, the rock crumbled. She fell to her knees. Her heart began to race and skip beats. Birth pangs came suddenly upon her. She shrieked in pain, keeping up the blood-curdling screams all through the delivery.

Her nursemaid tried to cheer her. "Don't fear any more, Petra, for you have borne a healthy son!"

She wouldn't even open her eyes to look at him. "The glory has departed from Israel! His name shall be called Ichabod – 'No Glory!' – for the Ark of God is taken, and the glory of the tabernacle... It is no more." Petra died that night without ever even seeing her son.

With Eli dead and the priests all slain, Samuel saw no sense keeping the tabernacle open. He was no priest! So he snuffed out all the lamps, extinguished the eternal fire on the altar, locked the doors, and barred the gates. Then he left and went into town to stay with friends. The tabernacle at Shiloh was abandoned, dark and empty.

Deep mourning and shock covered the land. Many traveled to Shiloh to cry out to YHWH at the tabernacle, but they found it closed and desolate. So they searched out Samuel and besieged him with tears. "Why do you come to me now?" He answered. "Go, call on the gods you have chosen. See if they will deliver you."

"No!" they insisted. "But you know YHWH's voice." (They had heard those prophecies Samuel had given.) "You have His words of truth. You deliver us!"

"I will not deliver you. I have no part in rebels. But if you put away the foreign gods from among you, Astarte and the Baals, and direct your hearts to YHWH, to serve Him and Him alone, then He might send you a deliverer. Only He can save you from the hand of the Philistines."

The seventy elders of Israel praised Samuel before the people. "Samuel speaks the true Words of YHWH!" they shouted. "He is the prophet in Israel! Every word he has ever spoken has come to pass! Hear, O Israel! This is now your leader! **Samuel** is now the judge over Israel!"

They would have gone on like that for a long time, but when they looked for him, Samuel was gone. He didn't want to hear their words; he wanted to see some changes. He left Shiloh entirely. He found a home twelve miles south, in Ramah. Since the tabernacle was now shut down, he built a small altar to YHWH just outside his home, and ministered to the people there. People from all over Israel came. He preached the law, blessed them, and encouraged them toward righteousness. He was now forty years old.

Thus Samuel became Israel's judge. But as everyone knows, a judge needs a wife. Samuel was still a Nazirite, intending to remain celibate all his life. A year passed.

One evening in early 1082 BC, Logos came to him as he knelt at the altar. The familiar chuckles were music to his ears. "My beloved, you delight me. May we chat?"

"Of course, my Lord and my King."

"The Ark is back, you know."

"I did not know! Where is it? What happened?"

Logos laughed. The flames on the altar danced, and took the form of an angel. "Everywhere the Philistines took the Ark, adversity and plague followed. The plague is now spreading down the coastlands, being carried by mice to the borders of Egypt. Only Israel is exempt, since you still practice My laws of cleanliness." A pause, for more laughter. "The five Philistine kings panicked. They sent the Ark back, with an offering. Five gold mice and five gold cancer tumors to appease the plague. Can you imagine?" He roared with laughter.

But suddenly the laughter stopped, as if it were turned off with a switch. "The men of Beth-shemesh saw the Ark returning on a wooden cart pulled by a yoke of milk cows. They sacrificed the cows to Me. The Levites there handled My Ark respectfully."

"Why then are You not rejoicing any longer?"

"I am sad that the men of Beth-shemesh did not treat Me as holy among them. Seventy of them, including all fifty of their elders, just had to open it and peek inside. They were slain by the holy fire that always surrounds My Ark. So they sent it away, to a hill above Kiriath-Jearim. It now rests in the house of My servant **Abinadab** and his son **Eleazar**. It is safe among the Gibeonites."

“Thank You Lord, for telling me. I’m glad it’s safe there. Perhaps the Gibeonites will return to You. Tell me when it’s time to bring it back to Shiloh.”

“You shall never return it. Shiloh is dead. Instead, move the entire tabernacle up to the home of Abinadab. After that, I have someone for you, now that Samson is dead.” Samuel didn’t catch the connection, so Logos explained. “As My only remaining judge in Israel, you must marry.”

“I am a Nazirite. I vowed to keep myself pure before You and serve in the tabernacle all the days of my life.”

“You were freed from that vow when Shiloh died. Besides, marriage is pure before Me. I like marriage. After all, I made it. And I made a woman especially for you.”

“Okay, my Lord. Whatever You say. Who is she?”

The laughter erupted. “Whichever one you choose!” He disappeared, and the flame over the altar was gone.

Samuel had no current choices and was not anxious. Many men in Israel did not marry until after forty, so he was in no hurry. He established an annual circuit and rode throughout the towns of Israel judging the people at each town. He always called them to righteousness, and urged them to give up their foreign wives and their idols. His first circuit was in 1081 BC. It was while he was on this circuit that a special son was born to Kish and Kerry in Gibeah of Benjamin, which is south of Ramah.

Kish and Kerry came to Samuel with their new baby. They entreated Samuel to bless the infant, circumcise him, and name him, for they had heard that he was a prophet and judge. He took the baby and circumcised him. (As assistant to the high priest he had done that many times.) Then he held him up toward the heavens. Suddenly he saw him clothed in royal purple, but that shifted slowly to red, then to yellow, and finally to black. He gave the infant back to Kerry. “This one is a chosen vessel of YHWH, to lead and defend the sons of Israel. His name is **Labaya**.” (Great Lion of YHWH – it was a popular name back then.)

Kerry was very perceptive. “Why then, sir, are you not happy for him, if he is to be great in Israel?”

“Because I also see that in the end he will turn away from YHWH in pride and become the adversary of YHWH and His people.” He paused, remembering Eli. “Discipline him faithfully. Lead him to repentance and humility. And pray for him, that he fall not into pride!”

Kish and Kerry bowed their thanks, committing to do all that. But as they turned to leave. Kerry hesitated and turned back. “Kind sir, we have a brokenhearted young woman from the tabernacle at Shiloh living with us. We’ve been unable to help her. Is it asking too much... might you have time to come to our home to see her?”

“Of course.” In spite of himself, Samuel’s heart gave a little leap. *A woman from Shiloh?*

Her name was Sarah, ‘Beloved Princess’, but she sure didn’t look like a princess. Samuel hardly recognized her. She had been one of the Nazirite women serving at the house of women with Joy, before Eli and his sons had died. Sarah had withdrawn into herself with the horror of it all. She would only sit by herself all day, rocking back and forth and moaning. Rivers of tears streaked her pale face. She cried all the time, even in her sleep.

“Sarah! Remember me? It’s Samuel!” He was filled with compassion. But there was no smile; no response at all; no indication that she heard or recognized him.

He looked at Kish, who just shrugged. “She won’t eat. We’ve tried to feed her, but she chokes or spits it up. We don’t know what else to do. She seems to want to die.”

Samuel sat down in front of her, and took both her hands in his. But she yanked them away and rocked back and forth even more violently. Samuel suddenly knew what to do. “Remember Joy and baby Jephthah? Did Eli ever tell you their story?” (Sarah had taken their room after Joy had moved out.) No response at all. Well, it didn’t matter. Samuel continued talking quietly, gently.

He told the story of Joy, the whole story. Her father’s rash vow. Her Nazirite vows of purity and dedication to YHWH. Her service as a loving mother, to him and to many others who came to the tabernacle. Her cruel abuse and violation by Eli’s sons. Her near suicide. Her baby. And finally, raising her son to redeem her father’s name.

Samuel had been through it with Joy. He understood the horror of it all. He spoke as only one who has walked through the same Valley of the Shadow can speak. He, too, began to weep as he told the story, as the unspeakable nightmare again unfolded in his mind.

At first there was no response. Samuel wasn’t even sure that Sarah had heard him. But then her rocking came a little closer, until she bumped him with her head. At the fourth bump, she stopped rocking to grab his arm, and soon their tears were mingling together. Her soft crying changed to sobs, as if her heart were broken. She clutched Samuel like she would never let him go.

Samuel held her close, crying quietly with her. She wasn’t very pretty, with her tangled hair, tear-stained face, and soiled clothes. She didn’t smell very nice, either. Her breath stank. She probably hadn’t had a bath in months. She was frightfully skinny from too much fasting. “Feed her! Feed her words of Truth. Cleansing and healing starts from the inside...” Samuel heard a gentle voice in his soul. He knew it was YHWH. He began to prophesy Words of Truth to her; Words of life and love, peace and safety by faith in YHWH. He didn’t try to condemn Eli or his sons – surely she had done enough of that herself. She didn’t need to hear any more criticism or blame to feed her anger and bitterness. Now that she knew he understood, she only needed the healing power of self-sacrificing love.

The sobbing went on for almost an hour, while he caressed her lovingly with his words. Kish and Kerry stood beside him in amazement the whole time, holding their baby as they prayed for Samuel and for Sarah.

Suddenly she stopped crying, in mid-sob, as if aware for the first time that Samuel was talking to her. He was just saying, "YHWH created you to be beautiful, like a beloved princess. YHWH really loves you..." Samuel paused, but Sarah lifted her face and looked into his eyes as if yearning for him to continue. "YHWH is your Healer. He is your Sustainer. He wants to restore you to be all He made you to be. Eli's family is gone, but YHWH wants to fulfill your vows in a new way, if you let Him."

She nodded her understanding and acceptance. Then she tried to stand. But she was too weak, and collapsed back into Samuel's arms. "I hunger," she said simply.

Kerry passed Labaya to Kish and ran for the kitchen. She returned with a cup of hot lamb and noodle broth. Sarah drank it and wanted more. After the second cup, she rested her head on Samuel's beard and began to talk.

"I made a Nazirite vow when I was fifteen years old. I was lovely back then, and all the men in the village wanted me. But they all were wicked. They served all the gods of the heathen nations around us, and hated YHWH and His pure Law. I could not marry any of them. So I went to the Celebration of Joy and made a vow to serve only YHWH in His tabernacle forever. Eli let me join the Nazirite women at Shiloh. He promised to protect me from the wicked men who pursued me. At first I was very happy there, but then I discovered that Eli's own sons were just as wicked as those who had pursued me. They leered at me, pawed at my blouse, and made lewd remarks. I ran to Eli. He had me move, into that room near yours – the one where Joy and baby Jephthah had lived. He swore he would protect me there. Again, I was happy there for a time. You always spoke kindly to me, Samuel. I thank you. I always felt safe with you around." She paused and shuddered.

"I tried hard to stay away from Eli's sons, but they tricked me and caught me when no one else was there." The tears were falling freely now. "All night they abused me, horribly. I told Eli the next morning, and he swore he would rebuke them, and that he would protect me from them. But they did it again, the next week, and again, two weeks later. I was just about to kill myself, when I heard that they were all dead! Even old Eli! I fled from Shiloh in horror. I don't remember how I got here or anything, until you began talking to me. You have saved my life."

Samuel smiled down at her. She smiled weakly back, a lovely smile, in spite of the thinness of her pale face. But suddenly the smile vanished and her brows furrowed. "Oh! I must get back to the tabernacle. My vow. I..."

"The tabernacle is closed, Sarah. Shiloh has died. There's no one there. YHWH told me to..."

"Well, it must be re-opened! Where can the people worship? Where are all the priests? The Levites? They have a job to do! Who is the high priest now? What..."

"Sarah!" Samuel didn't know any way to break this to her gently. "All the priests were slain. The Ark was taken by the Philistines, and then it..." Sarah shrieked. Her eyes glassed over, her face went white, and she fainted against Samuel's chest. He didn't try to wake her. He just prayed, "YHWH? Is this the one You made for me?"

Again he heard, "Whichever one you choose."

"YHWH, this one may not be very beautiful outside, but she has a pure heart. May I choose her?"

The voice echoed, "Whichever one you choose." This time it was accompanied by distant laughter.

When she came to, Sarah's face was still white. "If the tabernacle is closed and the Ark is gone, then I have no place to go – nothing left to live for. Let me die."

"I have built an altar to YHWH at my home in Ramah. People come there to worship. You may come to serve YHWH there... with me... if you want."

Sarah stared at Samuel, eyes wide in astonishment. "You would let me do that?"

"I would love to have you come. I have no one else to help me serve those who come to worship there with me. Also, God has me travel around the towns and villages of Israel, judging the people. You could be a big help to me on my judging circuit, too. A man can only see from a male perspective, you know, unless he has..."

"I, uh... need to go!" She jumped up, took a step, and blacked out. Kerry caught her as she slumped down, and helped her out of the room. She was gone a long time. Kerry made a nice dinner, while Kish and Samuel played with baby Labaya. When Kerry had dinner ready – still no Sarah. She went to find her. They both were gone awhile. When they returned, Sarah was bathed and dressed in a lovely long gown of Kerry's. Her hair was brushed out in glorious wavelets to her waist. She smiled, standing tall and straight like a true princess.

Her smile was only for Samuel. "Sir? I accept your offer. You're the only one who understands me. I know I'm safe with you. You saved my life! So I now return my life to you, for as long as YHWH lets me live. I've prayed and YHWH has assured me that I will keep my vow of service to His tabernacle by serving you now and forever." She said it like she had been rehearsing the words over and over the whole time she was gone. As she finished, she knelt in front of him. Taking his hand, she held it to her lips for a long minute, her eyes closed.

"Well, my princess. To make myself perfectly clear so we understand each other, I am asking you to be both my partner in ministry, and also my wife."

Sarah nodded, her grin betraying the fact that this is what she had been hoping for. “Yes, my lord. Your servant will be whatever my lord wishes her to be. But you have seen me at my ugliest and you know I’m no longer a virgin. How can you want me as a wife?”

“I want no wife but you! It is at one’s ugliest that the true character from within the soul is seen the clearest. Virginity comes from the heart. External beauty always fades, but the virtuous beauty of a pure heart lasts forever. Because I saw you at your worst, I can now see you as the loveliest woman in all Israel!” He held out his arms.

Sarah leaned into his embrace, content. Kerry, trying not to be impatient, reminded them, “Dinner is getting cold. Can you two return to earth long enough to eat?”

So they married, and Sarah returned to Ramah with Samuel to become all that a man could ever ask of a wife and partner in ministry. She proved herself a true princess, in body, mind, and soul. She also bore him two sons (Joel and Abijah) and four daughters. But my love for stories with happy endings cannot change the fact that when their sons grew up, they did not follow in Samuel’s ways. They did not have the same heart for YHWH that their parents had. But that is a later story.

Jesse, son of Obed, had a friend, a true and faithful friend, who understood him and cared. She was a cute young shepherdess with light brown hair and a dimpled smile. Her name was Jeanie, meaning ‘gracious, gifted’, and she was all that and more. She often met him on the hills of Ephraim, where they helped each other tend their sheep and played duets together on their flutes. Jeanie loved Jesse’s poetry and singing. He loved her down-to-earth practical wisdom and her solid faith. It was clear to all their friends that they were made for each other.

But life is rarely that simple. Jesse knew the prophecies over his family – that his name would be famous and his descendants great in Israel. Satan had worked long and hard to turn that into a subtle pride. Jesse was a dreamer. He developed this daydream of just how it would turn out. *He would discover a beautiful princess. She would fall in love with him and plead with her father to let them marry. The king would discern Jesse’s sterling character and leadership qualities and gratefully accept him as his son-in-law and heir. So after the king died, Jesse and his sweet princess would live happily ever after as king and queen of all the land. Of course their firstborn son, the crown prince, would grow up to become Israel’s promised Redeemer...*

Jesse never tired of relating his daydreams to Jeanie, with many variations and embellishments. She would understand, and laugh with him, and encourage him to pursue his vision, as good friends always do.

But how to find a princess here in the backwaters of Israel? Ever-practical Jeanie suggested asking Samuel, who now had a reputation as a wise prophet in the land.

“Last spring Samuel made a circuit, judging all the towns and villages of Ephraim. Perhaps he will come again next year, so you can talk with him.”

They didn’t know Samuel had married. They knew him only as a Nazirite, celibate, with waist length hair and beard, devoted to serve in YHWH’s house. The next spring as he came down the road, they ran to meet him.

Beside him in the donkey cart was a princess! Sarah! Now filled out and shining with the splendor and glory of natural beauty in the flower of youth – the kind of beauty over which kings have fought wars – the kind of beauty for which lovers have risked their lives.

Jesse was immediately smitten. He was certain this was the one for whom he waited. *Samuel, the great Nazirite prophet, had known his destiny and had brought her to him. He would sweep her off her feet, and carry her back to her father the king, who would be only too happy to bless their marriage. The prophecies would be fulfilled. He would become the greatest king the world has ever known.*

So, as I’m sure you can guess, Jesse made a fool of himself, bowing and gushing as he tried to act noble and humble at the same time. Jeanie tried not to laugh, but then Samuel snickered, and Sarah laughed outright.

Jesse was a bit indignant. “Thou laughest at my rude clothes and humble surroundings, fair maid? Thou shalt know me better hereafter! I am a prince! I come in a long line of princes, through whom mysterious prophecies long ago foretold the coming of the greatest King of all the earth, the Redeemer who shall rule the world in truth and righteousness! Will’st thou not join me in this valiant quest?” He bowed deeply with an elaborate flourish, and his shepherd’s cap fell in front of him with a plop.

Face turning red, he maintained the bow while his audience roared with laughter. But he stood up abruptly when Sarah clapped, saying. “Bravo, brave shepherd! Bravo! And whither liest thy kingdom?”

Not a trace of a smile lit his face. “My kingdom, fair maid, is yet to come. We must win it, you and I, as we cling to the prophecies and see them unfold before our eyes. For now I promise you only poverty and hardship, but our son... If you will join me in my quest, I assure you he shall be the greatest king of all, a mighty man of war and peace, who bears the heart of God Himself. This I know of a surety, for so it was foretold!”

“Why, I do believe you are serious!” The laughter ceased, though Sarah’s kindly smile remained. “My dear shepherd, for that you must gain permission from my husband who sits beside me. For I am bound only to him, and already I bear his son within my womb.”

Poor Jesse gasped, the color draining from his face. He glanced in horror back and forth between the long-haired prophet and the lovely smiling princess.

Samuel understood. He quickly stepped in to fill the awkward silence. “Hang on to your vision by faith, my friend. Do not let it go! I assure you it is a true vision. Every prophecy you have believed shall come to pass, except this. The fair princess you seek is not the one sitting next to me; she is the one standing next to you.”

Now it was Jeanie’s turn to gasp. She reached out to grasp Jesse’s arm. He turned to her with a question in his eyes. She relaxed and gave him that dimpled smile which always melted his heart. Samuel saw it. He knew. “I believe I shall come to your father’s house to dinner. It seems we have some business to discuss.”

So in 1081 BC they married. Jesse was 41 and Jeanie was 21. And no, they didn’t become rich or famous, at least not right away. But Jeanie was a good and faithful wife. Once Jesse’s eyes were opened to the true beauty of this humble shepherdess, she was his constant delight. And over the next thirty years she bore him five daughters and eight sons, the youngest of which was *Tadua*.

Satan was pretty grumpy at being summoned back into Logos’ presence. So Logos got right to the point. “I want to express My gratefulness to you for the way you helped to refine My beloved ones...”

“I may not have gotten as many as I had hoped, but I sure got one! Your precious Samson is mine to torment to the ends of the ages!”

“He does have many sins for which he shall be called to account,” Logos admitted. “But you have forgotten My law of greatest love. When one willingly lays down his life in love for...”

“Love? Ha! Samson gave his life out of pure hate for the Philistines. Not out of love for anyone at all.”

“We shall see... at the judgment when the intentions of hearts are weighed. But I wanted to thank you for Samuel and Sarah, Joy and Jepthah, Jesse and Jeanie, and now for Kish and Kerry and baby Labaya. My Bride multiplies and matures under your disciplinary hand. Have you noticed, the faithfulness of a few is beginning to turn the many back to Me? Perhaps I can finally begin to deliver them from the oppression of the Philistines!”

“Not if I can help it!” Satan sneered. He fled to see if he could whip up the Philistines to war. Israel was not pure, yet. If he could get the Philistines to attack now, he could wipe out the Bride. However, this time Satan failed. The Philistines just weren’t interested in going to war. They were busy getting rich off their Israelite ‘slaves’ and had no reason to go to war. They laughed all the way to the bank as they squeezed the taxes out of Israel.

Samuel and Sarah finished their circuit in 1080 BC. Shortly after returning to Ramah their baby Joel was born. Toward the end of that year, Jesse and Jeanie had their first, a beautiful daughter named Zeruiah.

The Israelite ‘slaves’ groaned under their bondage, and began to heed what Samuel had been telling them for over twenty years. They finally began clearing out the Asherah poles and Baal idols from within their borders. Oh, there were objections. But this time the elders of each city and town overruled them. “We’ve worshiped the host of heaven for forty years,” they said. “Where has it got us? Astarte [Venus] and Baal [Mars] do come close, but no longer trouble us. It is the nations who worship them who trouble us! That’s because we’ve forgotten our own God, YHWH, who brought us out of Egypt, did miracles for us in the wilderness, subdued nations mightier than us, and gave us this good land. *Now YHWH has turned against us.* So if you continue worshiping Astarte and all the Baals, everlasting shame [‘bosheth’] be upon you! From now on, speaking the names of false gods is forbidden. Combine their names with ‘bosheth’. Astarte becomes Ashtoreth, for example. So get rid of your talismans, Asherah poles, and idols. From now on we fear and serve only YHWH our God. He will deliver us from the hand of the Philistines.”

Samuel responded. In March, 1079 BC, he called for Israel to gather at Mizpah (just northwest of Ramah). There he prayed with them, exhorted them, judged them, sacrificed for them, and fasted with them. After the fast, they celebrated the Passover together. It was glorious! Finally Logos saw true repentance. He was pleased.

But the Philistines were not! They assumed that the Israelites had gathered to rebel! Rejecting their gods was tantamount to rebelling against Philistine authority. Next they would stop paying taxes and buying their goods. Now there was reason to go to war, good reason! The five lords of the Philistines mustered their armies and marched quickly to catch them before they left Mizpah.

The Israelites were terrified! They had no weapons. They had come to worship, not to battle. Near panic, they cried out to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry to YHWH our God, to deliver us from the hand of the Philistines!”

Samuel offered a final Passover sacrifice: one last lamb, offered for the sins of the people. He then lifted his hands toward heaven to pray, just as the Philistines closed in. “YHWH, save us, we beseech You! We are in Your hands! Please, defend us now!”

The Philistines (Casluhim, Caphtorim, Anakim, and Amorites) had weapons and chariots made of iron. Lots of soldiers meant lots of iron. Mars had returned to cross Earth’s orbit at Passover, March 21, 1079 BC, after flying between Earth and Sol since October 24th 1080 BC. This was on the 30 year cycle of catastrophes; both Jupiter and Saturn were lined up. Mars approached as the Philistines reached Mizpah. They expected Mars to aid them (though its closest approach would not be until midnight on the far side of the earth). But as Samuel was praying, the magneto-head of Mars projected a bolt of lightning ahead to the area of greatest conductivity: the iron!

Thousands of Philistines were instantly slain. The rest were deafened and stunned. The men of Israel went after them, took the weapons from their quivering hands, and slew them with their own spears or swords. The slaughter continued from Mizpah down to the coastal plain. The five Philistine kings were also slain, as were all their idolatrous priests and advisors and nearly their entire army.

At Samuel's urging, the men of Israel pursued their advantage to subdue the cities of Gath, Ekron, Eglon, and Gerar, and down to the coastal cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Gaza. They seized the Via Maris, the major Egyptian trade route by the sea. They put the remaining Philistines under bondage, as they themselves had been in bondage for forty years. But they showed mercy in the end, and did not annihilate them or burn their cities.

Samuel and Sarah paid a visit to the Egyptian garrison at Ekron. Sarah was dressed in her finest, every inch the princess, utterly stunning in her beauty. In the prime of life at 43, Samuel was also tall, strong, and handsome with his regal black beard and long flowing hair. He also dressed in his finest. Surrounded by adoring attendants, they came to the gates of the garrison.

"I am Samuel," he thundered fearlessly. "I am a servant of YHWH the most High God, and the leader of His people Israel. I desire an audience with your king!"

Of course the garrison had no king, but the captain there was flattered to be so treated. After the typical polite formalities, Samuel told him, "The Philistines were cruel, wicked, and greedy. They were hard to control, and they stole money belonging to you. They harassed the traders on the Via Maris, suppressing trade and reducing your profits." The Egyptians nodded. It was all true. This 'king' was speaking their language.

Samuel smiled and nodded knowingly back at them. Sarah also smiled. The blazing radiance of her beauty nearly brought these crude soldiers to their knees.

"I have slain the unruly Philistine army for you, with their five egotistical kings and all their corrupt leaders," Samuel continued. "They shall trouble you no more!"

He made it sound like he had just done them a huge favor. The Egyptians smiled back. Perhaps he had. "In the name of YHWH our God, I would make a treaty with you. We will guard the Via Maris and the rest of your illustrious Pharaoh's prosperous trade routes across this land. We will eliminate the robbers and brigands, to make the trade routes safe for all. We will collect only fees imposed by you, and never fail to give you every penny. We ask no profit, except that which comes through our own dealings with the passing traders. We will honor you, honor your illustrious Pharaoh, and welcome your presence in the land. And if the Mitanni, the Hittites, or the Assyrians ever again venture south to start causing trouble, we can defeat them, as we defeated the Philistines."

That was a bold promise! Though Egypt had subdued the Mitanni, they feared them, and were only too happy to have a strong ally against them. "O mighty King Samuel!" The captain bowed low. (He didn't know that Samuel wasn't actually a king, and Samuel made no attempt to correct his mis-impression.) "We are glad to accept your generous offer. We will send it to our Pharaoh right away and recommend that he approve it immediately."

They did the paperwork, which Samuel signed with a flourish. Pharaoh Amenhotep approved the alliance. He didn't care who guarded his coastal trade routes. Thus the Philistines were subdued, and Israel finally possessed what Logos had intended for them when Tola and Jair were slain by the Philistines seventy years before.

The alliance was profitable for all sides. The land was at peace for the next twenty years, and trade and prosperity blossomed. Samuel and Sarah continued their judging circuit from Ramah. Their sons Joel and Abijah grew strong. Jesse and Jeanie had another baby daughter, named Abigail, and then finally their firstborn son, Eliab. Perhaps he would be the promised King, the coming Redeemer! Their hopes and faith were high. Kish and Kerry became rich in Benjamin. Their firstborn, Labaya, grew strong and handsome. Other children followed.

During this period, Egypt was going through a time of deep soul-searching. Amenhotep was so arrogant and cruel, so self-centered and callous to his own people's needs – something had to be done. The Egyptians had always honored their Pharaoh as a god, but this was too much. Mighty Egypt was being shamed before the world! But Amenhotep had a little brother, Thutmose. He had been only ten when their father had died. Now, at the age of thirty, he forged a plan. The great Sphinx was buried in sand up to its neck, another shame for Egypt. Thutmose cleared away the sand and claimed that the Sphinx had promised him the crown for setting him free. Everyone loved it. The despised Amenhotep just 'disappeared', and Thutmose IV became Pharaoh in 1076 BC. Thutmose was delighted with the Hebrew control of the Via Maris, and extended their treaty. He also renewed control over the Mitanni in Syria, by an alliance with King Artatama I, and wed his daughter, princess Mutemwiya, to seal the deal.

In Mesopotamia, Assyria grew strong and the Kassites weak. Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta slew Kassite king Kashtiliash IV in 1071 BC, and installed puppet kings Enlil-Nadin-Shumi and (next year) Adad-Shuma-Iddina, to rule Babylon. Hittite King Arnuwanda replaced King Tudhaliya II in 1070 BC. Philistia remained submitted to Israel. Israel and the surrounding nations prospered.

Samuel kept his promises to the Egyptians. He was firm with Israel, insisting that they take no profits out of the fees they collected for the Egyptians. Their profits would come from YHWH, through honest trade. For a long time, that actually worked. The land remained at peace.

Every few years Pharaoh Thutmose IV would tour his vassal states. His Mitanni queen, Mutemwiya, bore him a perfect heir, whom we know as Amenhotep III. He was a bit younger than Joel and Abijah. The royal family became friends with Samuel and Sarah, who always welcomed him at Ekron with royal grace, as promised. This was Israel's 'Golden Age', rather than the reign of King Solomon as so many believe. Their prosperity was not measured in gold, fine buildings, or mighty armies; it was measured in peace and friendship, kindness, and widespread prosperity, so that even the least among them never went hungry.

Thutmose IV died in 1062 BC. His son Amenhotep III took his place. Under his reign Egypt reached the peak of its power and prosperity. But Samuel was old and tired. His judging circuit had gotten extensive and laborious. With so many children, Sarah no longer went with him. So in 1061 BC at the age of 61, Samuel appointed his sons Joel and Abijah to be judges for him in southern Judah, Simeon, and the Negev, clear down to Beersheba.

That turned out to be a mistake. They did not know YHWH. Relieved from the watchful eye of their parents, they abused their power. They took bribes, overcharged on tolls and fees, and perverted justice. Worse, it was not fellow Israelites who first notified Samuel – it was the Pharaoh! Abused traders went to Egypt and complained to Amenhotep III, who came to Ramah to visit Samuel.

It raised a big stink. Samuel wasn't expecting a Pharaoh in Ramah. He'd always met Thutmose in the royal city of Ekron. His humble home at Ramah was not a proper palace to entertain a Pharaoh, especially an angry one! Worse, he did not know what his sons had been doing, and could not accept or deny the charge. And worst of all, Amenhotep accused Samuel of lying about being a king! This was an unforgivable offense to the Egyptians, who strictly separated the social classes.

"My father said you were a king! You're not royalty. Why have you deceived us? Your 'palace' is a cottage. You're nothing but a peasant, just like the shepherds around you." The Egyptians despised shepherds.

"I never said that I was a king!" Samuel tried to explain. "I said YHWH is our King. I am just YHWH's servant, and therefore the leader of His people. Your illustrious father must have misunderstood."

But the damage was done. The Pharaoh stalked off in a seething snit, and suddenly the alliance that had been so successful was in jeopardy. Appalled, the elders at Ramah sent word to gather elders from across the land.

Samuel called for his sons to come and give an account, but the elders got to Ramah first. "Behold, you've grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. So appoint a king for us, to rule over us like all the other nations. If we do not establish a royal family, we cannot even negotiate with the Egyptians!"

CHAPTER 6 – KING SAUL

For the first time, Samuel became aware of his mistake. He had gotten so comfortable at being the 'great prophet' of YHWH, that he had begun to trust in his own wisdom. He had not pursued YHWH for divine wisdom for years. That one failure had resulted in some serious mistakes, which were now coming back to haunt him. He had not asked YHWH about making his sons judges in the Negev. He had not even asked Him about sparing the Philistines. In his own human sympathy he had allowed them to remain in their cities. They had prospered and grown strong, elected kings over themselves, and once again had become a threat to Israel.

But worse, he had not asked YHWH before making his alliance with the arrogant Pharaoh Amenhotep III. The Pharaoh's accusation was true. Oh, he had never said he was a king; he wouldn't tell a lie. But he had sure worked to give that impression! Now his integrity had been impugned by a heathen. Samuel was devastated. He cried out to YHWH, in repentance and despair.

"My beloved! How delighted I am that you have returned to Me! I accept your repentance. I forgive your sins. Let us have sweet fellowship together."

"My Lord! I have failed You! I have failed with my sons. I have failed with the Philistines, and with Egypt. I have failed to teach Your wisdom to the pagans. Instead, I learned heathen ideas of royalty from them, and tried to impress them rather than trusting in You."

"I said, I have forgiven you already. It is past. Let us have sweet fellowship together."

"Yes, Lord. But... but... it is not past! Israel now wants a king, a real one, so they can negotiate..."

"It is past! You see only your own weaknesses, dear Samuel. But I see all of Israel. I see their love of peace and prosperity. And I see their growing reliance on treaties and alliances with other nations. As always with the leaders of men, your weaknesses were only a reflection of the desires of your people. They have not rejected you, dear Samuel. They have rejected Me as King over them. Like all the deeds they have done since the day I brought them out of Egypt until now, they have rebelled against Me and placed their trust in the gods of this world. So listen to them, and do as they ask. But solemnly warn them about the nature of the king who will rule them!"

"Yes, Lord!" Samuel bowed. They finally had the sweet fellowship that Logos so eagerly desired.

So Samuel told the elders what YHWH had said. He told them how much better it was for YHWH to be their King, and how an earthly king would tax them, abuse them, make servants of them, and lord it over them. They wouldn't listen. The loss of their precious alliance with Egypt was a threat that drove them to insist on a king.

So Samuel went back to YHWH (he wasn't going to make that mistake again!) and repeated to Him all their demands. Again, Logos agreed, "Yes. Listen to them. Appoint them a king." So Samuel promised the elders he would, and sent them back home.

Finally Samuel's sons showed up at Ramah. He was furious. "What grave dishonor you have brought upon my house, and all the house of Israel this day! I taught you the ways of YHWH, and appointed you to a high and holy calling as leaders of His people Israel. Instead of being examples to the people you judged, instead of calling them to righteousness, instead of protecting them and covering them with the pure laws of God, you have trashed His ways with your own selfish greed, and opened the doors for wickedness and trouble to sweep across the land!"

Oh, how Joel and Abijah repented! Then the accuser came to Samuel, just as he had to old Eli, reminding him of all his own sins. Samuel fell to his knees in repentance beside his sons. "I do not judge you, for my own sins are ever before me. YHWH is a God of forgiveness and mercy. He has forgiven us. Yet the consequences for our sins have fallen on all Israel this day. Until Redeemer comes, peace and prosperity will be rare in Israel."

Satan left him in disgust. Tempting Samuel just didn't seem to work like it always had with old Eli.

Samuel had moved the tabernacle from Shiloh to the hill above Kiriath-Jearim beside the house of Abinadab, as Logos had asked. The Ark was safely hidden in the most holy place, and nearly forgotten. The blessings of YHWH and even a revival of His Spirit had swept the four cities of the Gibeonites. However, the rest of Israel now suffered under a famine for the Word of YHWH.

As in the previous 8 cycles, the peace and prosperity had led to widespread forgetfulness of Him from whom their blessings flow. The recall of Samuel's sons and the scandal and shame that fell on Israel with the Pharaoh's visit further alienated the people. Israel's Golden Age was over. Cycle #9 of Israel's apostasy had begun. That fall, 1061 BC, most of Israel refused to even celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Instead, they worked themselves into a tizzy yearning to be like the nations around them.

Still, thirty families came up to Ramah to celebrate the Feast with Samuel. Before the final day of the festivities, who should show up at the gate of the city but Labaya, looking for 'the Seer' to help recover Kish's lost donkeys. Pre-warned by YHWH, Samuel was ready for him. "Labaya! Welcome! I am Samuel, the Seer that you seek. Worry no more about your father's donkeys; they have already been found. Come up yon hilltop to celebrate the Feast with me at YHWH's altar. I have 'seen' your coming and have reserved a place of honor for you."

"Why would you want to honor me, kind sir? I'm just a Benjamite, and my father is the least in our tribe."

"Not so, my son. Your father Kish is a mighty man of valor, great in faith and righteousness, and your mother Kerry is also mighty in faith, compassion, and good deeds, as my own wife Sarah will testify." He chuckled. "Don't you know, your parents saved Sarah's life and brought me to her after I circumcised you and named you Labaya."

So Labaya followed Samuel up the hill. He was given a place of honor at the Feast, and a double portion of roast lamb. That was a good thing, as he was a huge lad, a head taller than average, with an appetite to match.

Labaya slept next to Samuel on a flat roof under the stars that night. Before they fell asleep, Samuel talked of many things; of ambitions and choices; of prophecies and destinies; of kings and princes; of alliances between nations; of YHWH's Plan of the Ages and the humility, submission, and service by which great men fulfill His plan. Labaya listened, overwhelmed. Surely, what could all these things have to do with him? He was awed that so great a prophet as Samuel should even talk to him.

The next morning, he found out. At the gate, Samuel asked Labaya's servant to go on ahead, then he reached up with a bottle of oil and dumped it all over Labaya's head. "The name I gave you is Labaya (Great Lion of YHWH). But from this day forth you shall be known as Saul (requested, asked for), for the sons of Israel have requested a king from YHWH and He has selected you."

"What is this you have done?"

"Not I, Saul. YHWH Himself has anointed you to be king of Israel, to be the ruler over His inheritance."

"Me? I can't believe it! I'm nobody special!"

"God will give you a sign according to the law. Then you will believe. I swear – He shall give you three signs! If YHWH has not chosen you, then these things will not come to pass." Samuel then described to Labaya-Saul in detail the things that were about to happen, ending with Saul prophesying with the School of Prophets.

Saul ran to catch up with his servant. The Spirit of God gave him faith. The signs came to pass exactly as Samuel had described. When Saul reached the School of Prophets, he prophesied so mightily among them that the gossip flew over the land, "Is Labaya the son of Kish also among the prophets?" But when he got home, Saul's incredible meeting with YHWH was too amazing and unbelievable to share. All he would say was that Samuel had told him that the donkeys had been found.

Saul longed to return to the School of Prophets for the rest of his days. But Samuel called all the families of Israel together at Mizpah, the place where they had defeated the Philistines 28 years earlier. "YHWH the God of Israel says, 'I brought you up from Egypt and delivered you from the Egyptians and all the other nations oppressing you. But you have rejected Me, and instead demanded a king.'

“Now present yourselves by your tribes, clans, and families before YHWH, that He may grant your request, for He will no longer be your King.”

They did. Samuel drew successive lots. The tribe of Benjamin, the clan of Matri, the family of Kish, and his son Labaya were drawn. But he wasn't there! A murmur arose. Was their new king a coward? Or a disobedient rebel? After asking YHWH, Samuel found him hiding in with the baggage. “Saul! I have told you your destiny. You cannot escape it. You cannot hide from God.”

“I know you told me, but you're wrong. I'm not Saul. I'm just Labaya, son of a farmer. I don't want to be king. But sir, I would like to be a prophet, and go back to the...”

“Just Labaya, ‘Great Lion of YHWH?’” Samuel roared. “You were made to be a king, not a prophet. And so you shall be, now that you have been asked for, and chosen.” He took his arm and towed him over to the altar.

“Behold the one whom YHWH has chosen!” he shouted to the people. “He is Saul, for you asked for him from YHWH!” Saul stood beside him. He looked young, but he was tall, handsome, and regal.

Some of the people responded with cheers, “Long live the king!” But others sneered, “It's just Labaya, son of Kish the farmer. How can a farm boy deliver us?”

Samuel concluded the meeting by reminding them of YHWH's laws and their duties to Him. He also reminded them, especially Kish and Kerry, to pray for Saul, saying, “This is a crucial time for him. The choices he makes this year will affect all Israel.” Then he sent them home. As they left, some came and bowed to Saul vowing their allegiance. But again, others despised him and made fun of him.

He held his peace. When he went home, a few of his supporters followed him, wanting to be of service. For months thereafter families came visiting Kish, to pledge themselves to Saul should he ever have need.

That touched him greatly. His father's home in Gibeah became rather hectic with admiring visitors – visitors with gifts! He thanked them profusely, swearing he would call on them when he needed them. However, they were still officially at peace with the other nations, and frankly young ‘Saul’ didn't have a clue what to do. He blessed them and sent them away. Well, most of them.

The family of Ahimaaz visited one day, and for the first time, Saul began to feel, and act, more like a king. He stood tall, bowed graciously, and even insisted that they stay for dinner. After dinner he delivered an animated monologue on all the things YHWH had done for him and told him through Samuel. Then he begged them to stay the night. By the next day, it had become pretty clear to Kish and Kerry and the visiting family where his true interest lay. They could see him making eyes at a certain lovely young daughter of Ahimaaz!

Ahimaaz was happy to oblige. What better way to serve the new king than to offer his daughter Ahinoam to Saul in marriage? She was all starry-eyed as well, so it was settled. They stayed a few more days to iron out the details. They planned the wedding for the first of the year to have time for the families to get to know each other. After all, Saul and Ahinoam were barely 20 years old.

Choices have consequences. Just before the wedding, Ahimaaz discovered that Ahinoam was pregnant. She and Saul had been ‘sleeping’ together every chance they got, from that first night that their family had visited.

They married anyway, trying to cover up their shame. In less than five months, their baby was born. They named him Ishael (man of God), but the neighbors dubbed him Ishbaal (man of a false god) or Ishbosheth (man of shame). That latter nickname stuck. Rumors flew across the land. The consequences to Saul's life had only just begun.

As always when the fragile bond of trust is broken before a marriage, they struggled in their relationship. Ahinoam expected to be marrying a king, but Saul was only a farmer. Worse, he was still quite immature. He was moody, sometimes sullen, given to angry outbursts, sometimes fearful and humble, but sometimes rash and proud. Poor Ahinoam simply could not figure out this man she had married. She began to wish she had gotten to know him a bit better before deciding to marry him. She tried to be a dutiful wife, but her efforts to aid his character growth came across to him as nagging and criticism. Baby Ishael suffered, too, crying and throwing temper tantrums. They decided to give Samuel another visit.

Egypt was at the height of her power. We know this as the wealthy Amarna period. Amenhotep III (oldest son of Thutmose IV and Mutemwiya) had taken the throne of Egypt in 1062 BC. He was strong, smart, and he cared for his people. He broke with tradition the next spring to marry outside the royal family. (He knew that inbreeding rarely produces a perfect heir.) He chose Tiy, the lovely daughter of a noble land-owner and military leader named Yuya and his wife Tuya. As his principle queen, Tiy was to give him two fine sons and four daughters. His reign was peaceful. He believed in diplomacy rather than war. All nations prospered as a result. The land was at peace.

But in the summer of 1059 BC ‘King’ Saul was in no position to negotiate a treaty with Amenhotep III. Saul and Ahinoam came to Samuel for counsel. They brought their baby, and they had discovered they were pregnant again. Samuel was pretty blunt. “I didn't choose you as king over Israel. YHWH did. Go to Him.”

“He doesn't speak to me any more! Not since...”

“Weren't you listening to me up on my roof in Ramah? Have you sought Him as I instructed you? Have you waited on Him with fasting and tears? Have you pledged to obey Him whenever He speaks to you?”

“Well... no. I don’t know how.”

“Well learn how! It’s time you grew up. If you’re going to be a king in Israel, you must hear and follow the voice of YHWH for yourself. I can’t always be there telling you what to do. What about you, young lady? Are you pulling with your husband, or against him?”

“Against me!” Saul snarled to drown out his wife’s response. “She always nags and criticizes!”

“I see...” Samuel looked across at Sarah, lovely as always even though they were both in their 60s. What a treasure he had! He couldn’t remember a single time when she had nagged or been critical of him. She had supported him, respected him, and cared for him even in his failures. In a flash of insight he remembered her Nazirite vow before they married – to serve YHWH in His tabernacle. She was fulfilling that every day, by serving Samuel the man of God, as YHWH had told her. The happiness and fulfillment they had achieved in their married life as a result had become legendary. “Ahinoam, have you ever made a vow to YHWH?”

“No. I don’t even know YHWH. I’m still trying to get to know my husband, so I can love him like I’m supposed to. He’s not always very easy to love!”

Samuel nodded. “That’s your problem. You have it backwards. Both of you, get to know YHWH first. Learn to love Him; love His Law; love His wisdom. Then make a vow to serve Him forever; to do everything He tells you to do, with all your heart. Your marriage will work only when He gives you His love for each other.”

They looked at each other. This was not the counsel they had expected. They both were sorely tempted to get up and walk out. This ‘man of God’ didn’t have a clue as to how the real world worked! He had his head in the clouds. “He’s so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly good,” as the ancient saying goes. But Saul was desperate. With one baby and another in the oven, he realized he hadn’t even learned how to be a father, much less a king.

“Yes, sir. We’ll do it, sir. Will you pray for us?”

“Of course.” Samuel smiled. The heavenly host were smiling and cheering as well. Samuel prayed, and kept on praying after he sent them home. By the time Jonathan was born, Saul and Ahinoam had done quite a bit of fasting and praying also. Logos was pleased. He covered them, forgave them, and began restoring their marriage.

Ashur-nadin-apli became king of Assyria in 1058 BC, and his son Assur-nirari III began a line of priest-kings. Jonathan was only six months old. Logos came to Saul and Ahinoam, saying. “I am pleased that you seek Me. I want to bless you, to guide you and give you wisdom. Learn of Me, obey My Law, and you shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel. But if you turn away from Me, I will turn away from you, and give the kingdom to another.”

“Yes, Lord!” they both responded, overawed.

“What would you like Me to do for you, Saul?”

“I would like to learn how to be a king. So far, I’ve been nothing but a farmer. What do I do? Nobody listens to me, follows me, or obeys me, or anything.”

“A valid request. I am pleased to grant it. Trust Me now. You learn how to be king by learning to rule over your wife in love. How can you rule My people if you haven’t yet learned to cherish your wife? Work on that for a while, then I will teach you to rule your children in love. When you are ready I’ll give you a larger task. But be patient. I’ll let you know when it’s time. I’ll make it very clear.

“What about you, Ahinoam? What is your request?”

“I want to know how to be a good mother. Ishael is only two years old, and already he is strong-willed and unruly. I don’t want my baby to ever get that way.”

“Again, a valid request which I delight to answer. Ishael was conceived without the covering of a father; thus the adversary gained occasion against him. So pray mightily that the adversary be bound. Confess your sin and purify your souls by blood sacrifice, both of you. Pray a covering over your family, and keep away from iniquity so that the adversary gain no further occasion. Your love for your children is strong. Let them feel that love. Do not dissipate it with anger toward each other. Rather, multiply it with fervent love for each other. That will spill out to bathe your children in love. True love keeps the adversary at bay.”

When Logos left, Ahinoam faced Saul and took his hands. “Labaya, I’m sorry that I doubted you. It is clear that you are Saul, the one who was ‘asked for’, ‘chosen’. I will never criticize you again. I will respect you, and obey you as my lord and king, for that is what you are, even if I never get to see you as king over Israel. I’m sorry that I seduced you that first night. I repent. I thought... well... I just wanted to be the wife of a king! I wanted you to have to marry me. That was wrong of me, and it has caused us both much grief. Will you forgive me?”

“Of course, my love. But... I thought I was the one who seduced you! I sure have not been worthy of your honor and respect. Will you forgive me for yelling at you, and being so moody and grumpy? I didn’t even want to be king at first. After everybody came to honor me and give me neat stuff I decided being king might be fun, but I still haven’t a clue what kings are supposed to do. I need to grow up. I don’t even know what a husband and father is supposed to be like! Will you forgive me?”

So, that one meeting with Logos changed their lives. They worked at what He had given them. The result: Ishael settled down, their marriage slowly healed, the outbursts of anger dwindled, and the nagging stopped. True love finally conquered their hearts, displacing the childish infatuation that had first drawn them together.

Satan was miffed. He was so sure he'd owned them! He came complaining to Logos. "You claim to be a God of Law, then You pull a stunt like that! They were mine, through and through. They chose me and my ways from their first meeting. That was just wrong of You to appear and manipulate them to turn back to You."

"Satan, after all these years you still don't understand the power of true repentance and prayer. Saul and his wife went to Samuel with real needs. Samuel directed them to Me. They came to Me, with fasting, humility, and true repentance. How could I NOT respond to them?"

"Samuel..." Recognition dawned. "I see. So... what if Samuel had not been there to direct them to you?"

"Then I might have lost them entirely. But that could never happen, because I always have one in every..."

Satan interrupted, "That's why You said You only need one in each generation. That one intercedes for and helps any others who are humble and repentant enough to seek for something other than me and my ways."

Logos smiled broadly, almost bursting out laughing. But he restrained Himself, knowing Satan hated that. "Very good, My beloved adversary! Maybe I was wrong about your time of repentance being past. Would you also humble yourself long enough to learn of Me?"

"Ha! Not a chance. And You can stop calling me 'My beloved adversary'. Now I know how to defeat You, You ninny! All I have to do is discover and destroy that one, in any generation. Even though Your angels keep him covered, eventually I will find a way. Then I have won!"

The years flowed by. Saul began to wonder if the people had all forgotten him. But YHWH had said He would let him know... So he and Ahinoam used the time wisely. They learned to really love one another. They had two more boys, Malchi-shua ('in the King is Salvation') and Abinadab ('Noble Father') whom they nicknamed Ishvi ('Little Man') until he actually became a noble father. They also had two lovely daughters, Merab, and finally Michal, Saul's youngest and the delight of his heart.

Many other things occurred during this long period of inaction for Saul. Egypt grew exceedingly wealthy and powerful. The Philistines, too, grew powerful. Again they sent their kings down to Egypt, to confirm their alliance with Amenhotep III instead of "those despised Hebrew shepherds." Thus the Philistines again took control of the Via Maris. They built stone pillars at each town asserting their authority, and extending it! The legendary treaty between Samuel and Thutmose IV was forgotten. The Amarna letters between Egypt, Philistia, and Syria during this time refer to Hebrew ('Habiru') clans with contempt.

In one of these clans, Jesse and Jeanie became the proud parents of Tadua, whom we know as **David**, the youngest of now eight brothers and five sisters. This was 1051 BC.

In 1052 BC, the Hittites conquered the Kizzuwatna. Mitanni king Shuttarna II was terrified. He sent his lovely daughter Gilukhipa to Pharaoh Amenhotep III (now in his tenth regnal year) renewing the treaty that their fathers had made way back in 1076 BC. Egypt and its allies were supreme in all the earth, and there was peace.

Saul began to grow up. He saw a few things that he could do to help Israel, such as deal with the Philistines and cement a fresh alliance with Egypt – typical king stuff. But Logos remained silent. So he waited. Those who had not supported his being king continued to harass him, publicly oppose him, and smear his good name. Finally in 1041 BC when Saul was 40 and Jonathan was 17, they were coming in from the field behind a yoke of oxen, when they heard weeping and wailing from Gibeah, the town nearest their farm. "What is the matter with everyone?" They both were immediately filled with compassion and concern.

"Haven't you heard? The Ammonite king Nahash ['Serpent'] has besieged Jabesh-Gilead with a great army. He has sworn to gouge out the right eye of everyone in Jabesh-Gilead, and make them all his slaves!"

Saul was horrified, but before he could utter a word, the Spirit of YHWH filled him and declared, "Now is the time, my friend. Israel needs a king. So take charge! I am with you to lead and empower you." Suddenly, Saul was filled with the righteous wrath of YHWH! "If twelve valiant men remain among you, follow me!" he shouted to the weeping crowd. Then he ran home.

Twelve men followed Saul to his house. First he got his sword and strapped it on. It was a nice one, given him by one of his many visitors. Then he went out and chopped up his yoke of oxen into twelve pieces, and told the twelve men, "Take a piece to each of the twelve tribes, and tell them, 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel this day, thus shall be done to his oxen!'"

The valiant men delivered the meat and the message, *and the fear of God went with it!* Every man of fighting age responded. It was unbelievable how many came, and how rapidly they responded. Saul sent word to the besieged city, telling them when to expect them. Then he led his 330,000 troops down toward the Jordan, urging them to get across even sooner than he had promised.

Saul's strategies were brilliant, his execution superb, and his bearing kingly. His victory against the wicked Ammonites was achieved with hardly a man of Israel lost. Everyone loved him, especially the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead! They celebrated this great day of Saul's deliverance for the rest of his life. After the battle, some enthusiasts told Samuel that all those who had despised and rejected Saul as king must be identified and slain.

But Saul refused. "Not so! No one shall die today because of me. It is YHWH who has accomplished this awesome deliverance!" Thus he gave glory to God.

Samuel was very pleased. He had had his doubts, but YHWH's choice was clearly right on. He led the people back from Gilead just across the Jordan, to the old altar at Gilgal. There he prepared sacrifices of peace offerings to YHWH. Then, for the first time, Samuel publicly anointed **Saul** as the king of Israel. Everyone celebrated joyously, even those who had opposed him.

Samuel delivered a speech, basically reminding them of how good it had been during the Golden Years when he was their judge and YHWH was their King. But did they really appreciate it? No. They just wanted to have a king like all the other nations. He concluded with an amazing statement. "So here is Saul, the king you asked for, whom YHWH set over you. If you will fear YHWH, heed His voice, and not rebel against His commands, then both you and the king who reigns over you will follow YHWH your God. But if you will not listen to the voice of YHWH, but rebel against His command, then your king, whom you asked for, will turn against you! He will chastise you, and will multiply wives and slaves, and take the food from your mouths and the mouths of your children to feed his slaves. Then in your oppression you will cry out to YHWH your God, but He will not hear you, for you have rejected Him so that you could have a king and be like the nations around you.

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you now. Is it not the wheat harvest, the driest part of the year? So I will ask YHWH, if He agrees with me against you, to send rain, in a thunder and lightning storm. So you will see that in forsaking your trust in YHWH and demanding a king, you acted wickedly toward Him!"

Nobody believed it. The sky was hot and clear. The Promised Land never rained during wheat harvest. That was impossible. But within minutes a storm whipped up, drenching everyone with rain and frightening them with awesome thunder and lightning. "It is God's hand upon us!" they cried to Samuel. "Pray for us that we not die, for now we know that we have added to our many sins this great evil, in asking for a king!"

"Do not fear. Though you have sinned, repent now and follow YHWH with all your heart, for He will not abandon you. He chose you as a special people unto Himself, and He will honor His great name among you. Far be it from me that I should sin against YHWH by ceasing to pray for you! I will instruct you in His ways. Only fear Him and serve Him in truth. But if you do evil, both you and your king will be swept away." They swore they would serve YHWH and obey the king.

Saul selected 3000 for his personal guard and sent the rest home. Then he set about this business of being king. First things first. He started construction of a nice palace on the farm of his father Kish. *A king must have a palace!* Then he began preparing to go down to Egypt to negotiate that all-important treaty with Amenhotep III.

In spring 1038 BC, King Saul and Queen Ahinoam dressed in their finest (which frankly wasn't much). They brought some attendants and left for Egypt. Their second son Jonathan ruled in the king's absence. They knew that Jonathan was obedient and responsible, unlike their eldest son Ishael, who still was often willful and rash. Saul told Jonathan that when he returned they could deal with the Philistines, *with Egypt's blessing!*

After they were gone, responsible, obedient Jonathan pulled a rash stunt. The Philistines had installed stone pillars as a mark of their authority over each town. They would post on these pillars their laws, and the punishment for any who rebelled. In anticipation of his dad's return from Egypt, Jonathan smashed the pillar at Geba (north of Jebus-Salem near Michmash). So the next time a Philistine detachment came to Geba to post new laws (which had gotten numerous and odious) there was no pillar to post them on. The Philistines were enraged! *This was open rebellion! It was a declaration of war!*

Saul and Ahinoam returned sadly from Egypt. "I didn't succeed," he told his son. "Amenhotep III didn't recognize me as a king. He wouldn't even talk to me. He had me thrown out of Egypt. I don't understand why. Samuel had a good treaty with his father. I guess we'll have to put up with the Philistines until I get stronger."

"Uh... Dad? I tore down their pillar at Geba. They are already amassing their armies at Michmash."

"Oh my God... You did what?" Saul was aghast. All his old fears began to return.

"It's all good, Dad. YHWH will fight for us, just as at Jabesh-Gilead. What can the Philistines do against us?"

Saul was furious, but what could he do? His son was a big strapping twenty-year-old now; too big to take over his knee. Saul hurried to find Samuel. He was unconcerned. "Okay. Command that Israel's army gather around the old altar at Gilgal. Seven days from today, I'll meet you there and offer a sacrifice to YHWH. After that He will bless the battle and fight for you to ensure your victory."

Pretty simple instructions. Saul summoned the men of war to Gilgal. Then he waited. The Philistine army at Michmash grew larger and larger. They covered the land, nearly down to Jericho. Saul's men saw them multiply to 30,000 chariots, 6,000 cavalry, and 500,000 swordsmen. At a distance they looked like the sand of the sea.

It was terrifying. Worse, many of their footsoldiers were Hebrews! Whether they had been forced to join their enemies, or had volunteered just to be on the winning side, or really loved the Philistines and their gods, nobody knew; but there they were.

Oh, Saul's army grew, too. But many who came were terrified at the sight. They fled to hide in the caves of the cliffs, and in the hills of Ephraim.

The seven days came and went. The Philistines were itching to fight. They'd start down the hill toward Gilgal any minute. *Where was Samuel? He said he'd be here.* Saul grew impatient and decided to offer the sacrifice himself. He must have YHWH's blessing or all was lost!

He had barely finished when Samuel showed up. He couldn't believe that Saul had disobeyed such simple instructions! "You acted foolishly, O King, in not keeping the command of YHWH. If you had obeyed His command, He would have established your kingdom forever. But now your kingdom cannot endure. YHWH will seek out another, one after His own heart." Samuel left in disgust.

Now Saul was really terrified. He counted his men again. Only 600 were still with him – the rest had fled to hide. So he left Gilgal and brought his army back to his father's farm in Gibeah of Benjamin, where his new palace lay yet unfinished. The Philistines just ignored him. His pitifully small army wasn't even a threat. The Philistines began sending out raiding parties just to harass Israel. Their obvious intention was to goad Saul to attack and be slaughtered... or just surrender!

Saul considered that. After all, his men didn't even have swords. The Philistines still wouldn't allow the Israelites to have any blacksmiths. They guarded their iron-working technology, so the Israelites couldn't make weapons. Saul and Jonathan were the only ones with real swords and spears. The rest carried garden tools, though some still had Egyptian weapons from the Red Sea over 400 years before.

But young Jonathan wasn't sitting around fearfully wondering what to do. Without telling his dad, he and his bodyguard went up to Geba to spy out a Philistine outpost on a hill above their main encampment. There were only thirty or forty men there. "YHWH is not limited to save by many, or by few," Jonathan told his guard. "Let's reveal ourselves to them. If they invite us up, it is a sign that YHWH wants to give them into our hands."

Sure enough, the men of the garrison saw them and laughed. "Look at that. More Hebrews coming out of the caves where they were hiding. I'll bet they want to join us, to avoid the coming slaughter!" Their commander called down to Jonathan, "Hey, you! Come on up here. We've got something to tell you."

"That's the sign," Jonathan said. "Follow me!" His guard agreed, and together they started up the hill.

They had to climb up the slope on their hands and knees. At the top, the Philistine commander offered to let them join his army. "Most of Israel already has, you know. Any men who don't join with us will surely die."

"We are your servants..." Jonathan replied. "On one condition: that you defeat me in single combat!"

The Philistine commander laughed him to scorn. "Ha! A ruddy youth against a seasoned warrior?"

So Jonathan drew his sword and with a lightning blow, lopped off the commander's head. Suddenly forty burly soldiers had their swords drawn and were rushing upon him. He stood his ground. His guard grabbed the dead commander's sword and stood behind him. Back to back they fought, with enemy soldiers rushing at them from all directions. The Philistines were big and powerful, but Jonathan and his guard were just a little bit quicker. Soon the heap of dead Philistines began to pile up.

Jonathan realized this was a 'God thing' and shouted out, "YHWH is fighting for us like He did for Joshua at Gibeon!" But instead of asking for God to halt the sun in its course, he shouted, "O YHWH, shake the earth! Let these uncircumcised Philistines know You are God! Bring upon them great fear and confusion this day!"

Yes, this was October 1038 BC, after the fall harvest, in the time when kings go to battle. Mars, the god of war, was close in the sky. But though Jupiter was lined up, Saturn was not; Mars was just too far away to cause any significant damage. So when the earth began to rumble, everyone was surprised. The Philistines looked up at their god of war. *Would Baal fight for them? Or would they be struck down by lightning as in 1079 BC at Mizpah?*

Since Samuel was gone, Saul sent to Gibeah to find a priest. They brought Ahijah (a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub), who was high priest that year. "Run to the hill above Kiriath-Jearim, to the house of Abinadab," Saul told him. "Tell Eleazar, the keeper of the Ark, to bring it here as fast as he can." But just as Ahijah turned to obey, the ground gave a lurch and began rolling and undulating. Saul looked up. The Philistine camp was trembling. He scanned the hillside. He saw Philistines fighting each other, some running in fear. There, off in the distance near Geba, Philistines were flowing down the hill like water, spreading panic throughout the camp. *Somebody up there was fighting them! Who was it?*

Saul shouted to his captains, "Muster your troops. Tell me who is missing." They did, and Saul discovered that only Jonathan and his bodyguard were missing. Even as he took the report, the quaking of the ground increased, as did the panic now clearly evident in the Philistine camp. Saul called to Ahijah, "Wait. Come back here. Tell me what YHWH has to say about this." But the priest could not tell him a word, for he did not know the voice of YHWH.

Saul fell to his knees. "O YHWH! I thought You had left me. But this can only be by Your almighty hand! If You now allow us to win this battle, I swear I will never disobey you again!" His faith was strengthened. He got back to his feet. The ground was now quaking in earnest. Panic and confusion had obviously spread throughout the Philistine army. "They're killing each other!" he shouted to his men. "Find a dead Philistine, take his sword, and attack! For YHWH has given us the victory!" Thus, once again, Saul repented, humbled himself, and gave God the glory.

This became the most confusing battle in history. First, it's hard to keep your feet, or your sanity, when the entire ground under you is constantly shifting like waves of the sea. Second, it was really hard to tell who was on which side. Many Hebrews had joined the Philistine army, some because they had intermarried and actually thought of themselves as Philistines, others out of fear, to save their own skin, and a few because they trusted their pagan gods. They began switching sides right during the battle. Plus, none of the Hebrews had any armor. They just took it off the dead Philistines and put it on. Soon everyone looked like a Philistine. Then the Hebrews who had hidden in the caves and hills began coming back to fight, while terrified Philistines began fleeing to the caves and hills. Was it a Philistine or a Hebrew returning to the fight in Philistine armor? It was utter nuts! The battle spread to a thousand skirmishes all across the hills and forests.

One thing became clear: the Hebrews were winning. At noon Saul sent his commanders out with a sacred oath, cursing the man who tasted food before sundown, until that numberless Philistine army was completely subdued. Jonathan and his guard, still fighting by themselves on the far side of the battle, did not hear the order. When he joined up with the troops in the forest, they rejoiced at his safe return, but forgot to tell him about the curse.

A huge old honey-tree was there, with honey flowing down the trunk. The rest of the men just passed it by because of the curse, but Jonathan reached up his staff to snag a piece of honeycomb, shouting, "Surely, this is a good land, flowing with milk and honey! Praise YHWH!" He had already begun to eat it when they told him about the curse.

"What? That is sad!" Jonathan responded. "My father has troubled us this day. We are all weak with hunger. Think how much greater our victory would be if the men were permitted to eat freely of the spoil."

The instant the sun disappeared below the hills, the starving men rushed on the spoils, butchering sheep, oxen, and calves and roasting them on the spot. They did not even take the time to drain out the blood first, as is required by YHWH's Law. When Saul heard that, he was afraid. He had just vowed to be obedient if YHWH granted him the victory. He leveled a stone slab on the plain, and gave his commanders orders for the animals to be brought and butchered on the stone in the proper way, draining the blood for ceremonial purity.

Saul knelt before the altar. "So You see, YHWH, I am trying to be obedient. Thank You for this victory. I vow to never again disobey Your command or turn away from Your Word through Your prophet Samuel. I vow to always seek You first in all things and do Your will. Please Lord, I plead with You, send Samuel back to reverse the curse he placed on my kingdom!" He wept there in the agony of his soul. YHWH heard him, but did not respond.

Saul wanted to continue the battle through the night. Now that the men had eaten and were strengthened, Saul didn't want a single Philistine soldier to escape. They'd slain less than half of that vast Philistine army. Saul asked Ahijah if YHWH would bless their fighting at night, but again, Ahijah had no answer for him.

"Why does YHWH not answer? He ought to be pleased with me today!" Ahijah just shook his head. Again Saul knelt down and pled with YHWH to answer. Suddenly he got suspicious – *there must be sin in the camp!*

Saul was furious. All of Israel suffered because of one man's sin. "Draw near and we'll draw lots. The one who has sinned must die, even if it be Jonathan my son!"

Ahijah agreed, and prayed with Saul for a perfect lot. His son Jonathan was chosen, right off the bat! "Oh, my son! Tell me what you have done."

"Well Dad, you see... I was famished and exhausted from killing so many Philistines. I saw a honey tree and reached up my staff to get some. I had already tasted it when the others told me about your curse. So, here I am. By your word, I must die."

Saul knew the injustice of that. It is always right to show mercy on one who has sinned out of ignorance. But he had just sworn before the people, and he didn't want to look bad by breaking his oath just to spare his son. He ordered Jonathan to be slain. Fortunately, the people were not that dense. "Why should we kill Jonathan, who has brought about this victory? Not a hair shall fall from his head, for God used him to save Israel today!" Thus they delivered Jonathan from Saul's foolish oath.

Sadly, Saul never did hear from YHWH that day. Thus he failed to pursue those who remained of the Philistine army. Most of them returned to their cities to lick their wounds and regain their strength.

Determined to take advantage of his amazing victory, Saul returned to Egypt to secure that elusive alliance with Pharaoh. He seemed to feel that the approval of Egypt was more important than the approval of God.

But once again Pharaoh Amenhotep III rebuffed him. "Your victory? Over the Philistines? That was no victory. So you killed a few Philistines and pushed them back. Their army is still five times yours. And they are still in control of my trade routes. What could you do for me?"

"Our army is mighty, O Pharaoh! We hardly lost a man against the Philistines! Now we have driven them out from all our borders. We wish a treaty with you to let us protect our borders from them in the future."

"I don't care about your borders. If you are not strong enough to protect them yourself, why should I make a treaty with you? How can it benefit me?"

"Then what can I do that will benefit you?"

“Well,” he responded. “I don’t believe you’re strong enough, but if you would take out the pesky Amalekites that still roam the Negev and the peninsula between our countries, that would benefit us both. I don’t believe you can do it, but you have my permission to try.”

The Pharaoh’s permission. That was the next best thing to having a treaty. Saul was pleased. He returned to Israel, praying all the way. “O YHWH, if only You will make me victorious over the Amalekites, we can have an alliance with Egypt. But I won’t do it without Your approval, for I know we would fail. I vowed to seek You in all things and do Your will. Just tell me what You want. I swear I’ll do it!”

Saul did not hear YHWH’s answer, but Samuel did. He was waiting for Saul when he got home. “Saul Labaya! Even as YHWH sent me to anoint you as king over Israel, now hear His Word through me. ‘I met with you and blessed you when you humbly sought Me at the School of the Prophets. I gave the sons of Ammon into your hand, and made you the king over My people. I would have given the Philistines into your hand as well, but you disobeyed Me, so I gave that victory to Jonathan and threatened to take away the kingdom. Then you repented and vowed to seek Me wholeheartedly and obey Me. After all that, you still put your trust in Egypt! They cannot aid you if your heart is not right with Me. But again, you were seeking Me as you returned, so I shall give you one more chance.’”

“Thank You, YHWH! Ask anything! I will do it!”

Samuel smiled. “Thus says YHWH of Hosts, ‘I swore an everlasting curse upon the sons of Amalek for what Salitis did to the sons of Israel, when he attacked them without cause at Rephidim. Though Salitis repented and I forgave him and postponed the curse, now his descendants have completely turned against Me; there is none left among them who is righteous; not even one remains to intercede. Therefore go and strike Amalek. Utterly destroy all that he has. Do not spare anything! Put to death every man, woman, child, infant, sheep, ox, camel, and donkey, and burn all his possessions.’”

Saul bowed. “Yes, YHWH. I will do all that You ask!”

Samuel was pleased. “If you’re obedient, YHWH will bless you, make your way successful, and establish your kingdom forever. But if you disobey, you will not get a third chance. YHWH has shown me your heart, O King. You do not purely seek after Him, to bless and worship Him, as you did at the first, when you were humble and wanted only to return to the School of Prophets. Now you seek Him to benefit you. You seek only His blessings and His victories. You desire the approval of men, and alliances with the surrounding nations.

“But I know you met YHWH when you were young and needed His wisdom for your wife and children. So seek Him now. You know how! Pursue Him. Wait on Him. Heed His voice. Then He will give you success.”

Saul swore he would do all that Samuel had said. This time he would not fail! He ordered the armies of Israel to assemble at Telaim, on the southern border of Judah. 220,000 foot soldiers responded, half with swords or spears taken from the Philistines. Saul was very pleased.

Saul marched his army south to Kadesh, where Israel had first come to the Promised Land after leaving Mount Sinai. It was no longer just a green oasis surrounded by fertile pasture land. The Amalekites had turned it into a city, and had built there a mighty fortress. (They called it Barnea, so the city became known as Kadesh-Barnea.)

However, remember Hobab, Moses’ brother-in-law, and his son Kenai? Many of their descendants lived among the Amalekites at Barnea. When the Israelite army camped in the wadi beneath the city, blocking the main road from Edom, who should be caught traveling that road, but a group of elders of the Kenites. They were interrogated and brought to Saul. Saul truly wanted to obey YHWH, so he prayed about them. “Allow the Kenites to go free. I have no quarrel with them,” Logos said, glad that he should ask.

So Saul told them, “I’ll give you one week to take your families and all your possessions and flee the city, for YHWH has given the Amalekites into our hands. Anyone who remains will be slain with the Amalekites, for YHWH has commanded me to leave not one alive.”

The Kenites obeyed. Saul’s army was instructed to allow them safe passage on their way to their brothers in Edom and Moab. Meanwhile, Saul took a bodyguard and entered the city to present his ultimatum to King Agag. Agag invited them right up to his fortress throne room.

After the polite formalities, Saul told Agag what Samuel had said to him. “Thus says YHWH, God of Israel, ‘Prepare your army for battle, for you have turned against Me. There is none left who is righteous, so upon you has fallen the eternal curse that YHWH pronounced upon Salitis when he attacked Israel at Rephidim without cause.’”

“Upon me? What have I done to deserve His curse? We have been good neighbors. We’ve neither attacked you nor encroached upon your land. Why should we suffer for what Salitis did over 400 years ago?”

Saul didn’t know the answer. He quickly prayed, “YHWH, what do I say?” There was no answer. So he opened his mouth to tell Agag that he didn’t know why. But then the Spirit overwhelmed him, like when he had prophesied at the School of Prophets. The Spirit said through Saul, “I swore that the eternal curse would not fall on Salitis or his descendants as long as they remained faithful to worship only Me, which they did for many years. But you have turned aside to worship the false gods of the nations, the heavenly host, and the detestable gods of Moab and Ammon. The last righteous one among you died this very day. You have no one left to stand in the gap, so the eternal curse must now fall.”

Agag had half arisen from his throne. His face was white, and his eyes wide with terror. He knew this was the voice of God, and that all He had said was entirely true. He had his chance to repent; to fall on his knees before Saul and beg for mercy; beg for one last chance to forsake his false gods, repent of his sins, and turn again to worship YHWH. He wanted to do it. And Logos wanted him to do it, too, for He always prefers mercy.

Sadly, Agag was only accustomed to hearing the voice of Satan, who was screaming battle cries in his right ear, while his chief demon prince was pouring pride and hate in his left. Agag's mouth snapped shut and he stood tall. "Get out of my fortress. Give me one week to prepare my troops, then we shall meet you in battle in front of my gates, and may the devil take the weak!"

Saul nodded. "One week from this morning. We'll be ready. May YHWH, God of Israel, creator of the heavens and earth, take the wicked and avenge the righteous!"

The Amalekites gathered; a numberless host like the sands of the seas. But Saul feared them not, for he had the Word of YHWH. Logos was very pleased. When the battle was joined, the angelic host covered Israel, so that not a man was stricken, not so much as a scratched knee or bruised knuckle. But the hordes of Amalek were slain on the edge of the sword, every last man, woman, and child, with their animals, too. Then all they owned was burned, exactly as YHWH had commanded.

Except Saul spared King Agag, and only the best of the animals to be offered as a sacrifice to YHWH in thanks for this wondrous victory. Saul was jubilant! He sent troops throughout the Negev in all directions, to ensure that not a single Amalekite encampment remained. Everything was razed; even the mighty stone fortress was pulled to the ground. It has not been rebuilt to this day.

Saul and his troops celebrated all the way to Carmel of Judah (nine miles south of Hebron). There they cleared out a park and built a monument to Saul's great victory.

Then they took the animals and headed on down the hill toward the old altar at Gilgal to do the sacrifice. Saul sent for Samuel to meet them. This time he would not offend YHWH by offering the sacrifice himself.

But Samuel was not so happy. Logos had come to him the night before, and told him about Saul's disobedience. "I regret that I have made Saul king. Once again, he has disobeyed Me to serve his own honor." There would be no third chance. Samuel cried about it all night. He trudged down to Gilgal, brokenhearted.

Saul saw him coming, and ran to greet him. "Blessed are you of YHWH! I have carried out the commands of YHWH and have achieved a great victory!"

"Huh. What then is this sound of the bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen that I hear?"

"Oh, those are the animals that the people have brought to sacrifice to YHWH. Only the best of the sheep and oxen, I assure you – all the rest I destroyed utterly."

"The people have brought... right. You can't even admit your own failures." The smile died on Saul's face. "Well, this is what YHWH says about it. 'When you were humble in your own eyes, I anointed you king over Israel, and sent you on a mission for Me, to drive the Philistines from the land. But by doing the sacrifice yourself you failed to honor Me before the people, so I was not with you in the battle and you did not gain the victory. You repented and swore to obey Me, so I granted you a second chance. I sent you on a new mission for Me, to utterly exterminate Amalek from the earth. But a second time you did not obey. You took of the spoil and did evil...'"

"But the people took them to sacrifice to YHWH!"

"Has YHWH as much delight in burnt offerings as in simply obeying His voice? To obey is better than sacrifice. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and the iniquity of insubordination is as serious as idolatry. Because you have rejected the Word of YHWH, He has rejected you from being king."

"Oh, Samuel! I understand now. I have sinned! I have transgressed YHWH's command. I repent. Please, pardon my sin and return with me, to worship YHWH with me."

"No, I will not go with you to worship YHWH, for you have rejected YHWH and He has rejected you."

As Samuel turned to go, Saul grabbed his garment to drag him back. It tore his robe. "You see," Samuel responded. "YHWH has torn the kingdom away from you this day, and given it to someone better than you, who will obey Him. For the Glorious One of Israel is not a man, that He should tell lies or change His mind!"

"I have sinned! But please, honor me now before the people by going back with me to the sacrifice."

"I will not. Don't you see, Saul, it's all about you and your honor before the people! You don't really desire to worship God or give Him glory. It is all an act to get glory for yourself. Your own pride is your downfall."

"Samuel, I am the king here! You may have anointed me, but I am still your king! I order you to go back with me! Are you going to be rebellious and insubordinate?" Saul stood tall, his face angry.

Without another word, Samuel followed Saul back to the altar and performed the sacrifice. When he finished, he looked around. There was Saul, putting on a good act of worshiping in front of the people. Kneeling with him was Agag, who had been trying to befriend Saul in the hope of sparing his life. By worshiping Saul's God with him, Agag thought he had it made.

"King Saul! Bring me the Amalekite king!"

“Yes, sir! I’m here sir!” Agag happily jumped up and came with Saul. “I gladly worship your God...”

“As your sword has made many women childless; even so shall your mother be made childless this day!” He took Saul’s sword and hacked Agag to pieces, right there in front of the altar. Then without another word, he turned his back on Saul and went home to Ramah. Samuel never again went to visit Saul (though Saul came to him once, at Naioth). But he grieved over Saul for the rest of his life.

Saul was angry with Samuel. His job was just to offer the sacrifice. It was the king’s job to place his foot on the neck of the captured king and slay him before the people. That’s how the Pharaohs did it. He had seen their monuments. Samuel had robbed him of that honor. He returned home from his victory in a sour mood.

Jonathan noticed, and challenged him on it. “Why are you so grumpy, Dad? YHWH just won an incredible victory through you. Now you can get that alliance that Amenhotep promised you. And all Israel looks up to you, and trusts you. So what’s to be grumpy about?”

“I’m sorry, Jonathan. You’re right. But Samuel told me that I wasn’t obedient enough for YHWH, even though I did everything He asked. He’s going to take the kingdom away from me and give it to another. That means you won’t get to be king. That will make even you grumpy!”

“Not at all, Dad. If YHWH wants to make me king, that’s fine with me. But if He chooses someone else, that’s even better. Being the king is a tough job!”

The next spring, 1035 BC, Saul and Ahinoam again put on their best and traveled to Egypt. They arrived at a bad time. Amenhotep III had ruled for 27 glorious years, truly the golden years of Egypt. But he was of poor health. It was time to transfer the power of Egypt to the next generation. But the crown prince Thutmose had tragically died, only months before he was supposed to take over! Amenhotep had another son, Amenhotep IV, but he was untrained. He was childish impetuous and idealistic. Amenhotep III decided to have him marry Nefertiti (a beautiful young daughter of his vizier Ay, who was the brother of the queen mother, Tiy). That ought to settle him down during his preparations to become the next Pharaoh.

Saul and Ahinoam had to wait for the wedding. The royal couple looked so young, reminding Saul of his own youth and naïveté when he first married. But then, the Egyptians idolized youth. While he waited, Saul found the opportunity to talk with an aged Hebrew half-breed he saw at the palace: Osar-seph, a priest of Osiris at Heliopolis and a descendant of Potipherah and Tamie. (His name was in honor of Joseph, who still engendered immense respect after all these years.) Osar-seph had been trying all his life to turn Egypt toward the worship of YHWH, the one true God. So far, he had failed. A lot of Egyptians loved YHWH, of course, but only as another of their many gods.

Osar-seph told Saul of another Hebrew half-breed named Apir-El, the counselor and royal tutor to young Amenhotep IV. Apir-El was also a believer in YHWH. He claimed that he had taught young Amenhotep the futility of worshiping all the many Egyptian gods, and had trained him in monotheism. “We shall see if he can make some changes. He’ll still have to convince his dad, of course, but consider the possibilities, especially after old Amenhotep dies,” Osar-seph said. “We could turn the entire country over to the worship of YHWH! It will be tough, though. The ancient priesthood centered at Karnak will fight us every inch of the way. They’re too powerful, and need to be taken down a peg or two!”

Several weeks later King Saul was finally granted a brief audience with old Amenhotep III. His son was seated next to him, eager to learn how to be a great ruler like his father. Saul could see the old Pharaoh was not ready to entrust Egypt to his son. As Saul appealed to the father, he stressed YHWH’s power, hoping to influence the son toward YHWH, the one true God. Imagine how that could impact the world! Saul bowed respectfully. “O mighty Pharaoh! Remember when I proposed an alliance with Israel? You asked me to eliminate the Amalekites first. By the help of YHWH our God, we’ve done that. They are all destroyed. We ask you to honor your promise to create an alliance with us, instead of the wicked Philistines, who oppress us sorely. We ask your permission to destroy them. With the help of YHWH, we can easily do that. Then we will again be your policemen along the Via Maris, to protect your traders and collect your tolls, just as we did for Egypt during the rule of Samuel.”

Old Amenhotep frowned. “I gave you no such promise! I have a stable working alliance with the Philistines, and I have no intention of breaking it. You asked how you could benefit me, so I told you. I admit that I am surprised you were successful. I will make this alliance with you. You can serve as my policemen on my eastern borders. Keep the Edomites subdued, and the unruly tribes in the Negev and Arabia. Then I will leave you alone and allow you free trade with Egypt and others on the Via Maris.”

“But sir? What about the Philistines?”

“Your complaint over their taxes is not my concern. As I told you, if you can’t protect your own borders, you’re of no help to me. But I’ll make you a deal. If their army invades your land, you may destroy it. I will not interfere. But I will not give you the land of Philistia.”

So again Saul returned home without the alliance he wanted. But he was determined to prove himself to the new Pharaoh. He immediately set about to subdue the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. Within the next year he was successful. Then he turned his army north to attack the kings of Zobah who were harassing Israel. Saul chastened them and drove them back into Syria. He then had peace on all his borders... except Philistia!

CHAPTER 7 – DAVID ANOINTED KING

By late spring, 1034 BC, the land was at peace. Saul sent his army home for their spring harvest. His new palace at 'Gibeah of Saul' was finally finished. It looked pretty nice.

Logos came to Samuel. "My beloved! Peace and joy to you! Why do you still fret and grieve over Saul, seeing as how I have rejected him? He still seeks the approval of men. All his recent efforts have focused on impressing the Pharaoh and trying to gain an alliance with Egypt. If he would seek Me, I would give him all the alliances he needs. But as for you, forget him. Go to Ephrathah to visit your old friends Jesse and Jeanie. Take your horn of oil. I have selected for Myself a king from their sons."

"Lord? Saul has grown strong. And he's still angry with me for killing Agag. If he hears that I've anointed another king in his place, he's liable to kill me!"

"So take a heifer with you at the time of Shavuot, and announce only that you will offer a sacrifice to Me. Invite Jesse's entire family to your sacrifice. I'll show you which one to anoint." So Samuel and Sarah walked to Ephrathah with their heifer. Seeing them, the elders of Ephrathah were afraid. They had been at Gilgal! They knew that Saul and Samuel were not on speaking terms. They were afraid that Samuel may be planning an insurrection against Saul. "Do you come in peace?"

"Yes, in peace. I've come to offer a sacrifice to YHWH for Shavuot. So consecrate yourselves, all you men of Ephrathah. Tomorrow meet me at the old altar up on Mount Moriah. And Jesse, please bring your family."

Samuel and Sarah trudged five miles north (just past Jebus-Salem) and hiked up the hill with their heifer. The altar was deserted and overgrown from lack of use. The Jebusites never came here; their holy place was on nearby Mount Zion. Samuel was thankful for that. They spent the afternoon clearing and preparing for the sacrifice.

The next morning the men of Ephrathah arrived. As old friends, Jesse and Jeanie were given places of honor next to Samuel and Sarah. Jesse was excited. He knew it was time for the ancient prophecies to be fulfilled, and for his eldest son to be anointed king over Israel. What better time than Shavuot (Pentecost)? But the other elders feared Saul.

Samuel invoked YHWH's blessing and completed the sacrifice. Then he announced (as they had expected and feared), "Before anyone may taste of the feast, let the sons of Jesse pass before me. YHWH has commissioned me to anoint the next king of Israel from among them."

The eldest, Eliab ('God our Father'), came first. He was tall, strong, and handsome, looking every inch a king. Not a man there doubted that Samuel would anoint him and they could proceed with the meal. But Logos told Samuel, "Do not look at his outward appearance. I've rejected him. God does not see as man sees. I look at the heart."

Next came Abinadab, and then Shimea, Nathan'el, Raddai, Ozem, and Elihu, all fine upstanding young men. With each, Logos said, "Neither have I chosen this one." Seven had passed. There were no more.

Samuel looked at Jesse and Jennie. "YHWH has not chosen any of these. Are these all your sons?"

Jesse was bewildered. He was so sure that Eliab would be the new king and father of the Redeemer. "Well, no. We have one more. But he is just a young lad. He's out tending the sheep. I didn't think you would..."

"Send for him. We shall not sit down to the feast until he arrives." Two of his brothers ran to get him. It took a long time. They got tired of waiting, but Samuel still wouldn't let them taste of the feast. The roast heifer was getting cold. Poor Jeanie was trying hard not to fret.

Then they heard the boys huffing and puffing back up the steep hill, and soon a ruddy, bright-faced youth came running up with his brothers. It was Tadua. He was still breathing hard – they had run all the way back from the fields. But his eyes were radiant as if he had somehow guessed why he had been summoned. As soon as he appeared, Logos instantly said to Samuel, "Arise. Anoint him, for this is the one I have chosen."

So Samuel anointed him and prophesied over him. "After Saul, YHWH has chosen you to be king over His people Israel. He will be with you, lead you, bless you, and prosper you in all your ways. He will build for you an enduring house. Your name will be famous in all the world and your descendants mighty in Israel, just as the ancient prophecy foretold. By you YHWH shall redeem Israel, for from your descendants will come the promised Messiah. Remember to love and serve only YHWH all your days. Thus He will establish your kingdom forever."

"Yes, O Lord!" Tadua knew where the prophecy had come from, and he accepted it gratefully. He bowed to worship, and the Spirit of YHWH filled him. For thirty minutes he loudly prophesied there before the altar.

Jeanie was upset. Her 'baby' was wasting the time of everyone present with his babblings. The food was now stone cold, everyone's tummy was grumbling, yet Tadua went on and on. She tried to figure out how to shush him up. But suddenly Jeanie realized what Tadua was saying, proclaiming the greatness and goodness of YHWH in new ways that she had never heard from anyone before. *When had her 'baby' grown up?* She was awed.

When he finally ceased and they began the feast, the roast heifer was hot! YHWH's miracle confirmation of Tadua's anointing! Jeanie was ashamed she had fretted.

But one anointing does not a king make. Saul was still Israel's king, though from the time of Tadua's anointing, the Spirit of YHWH left King Saul, to never again hear his prayers or answer his cries.

Logos called Satan into His presence. “I have a job for you, My worthy adversary.”

“So, now it’s no longer ‘beloved adversary’. Now it’s just ‘worthy adversary’. You claim to be a God of Love – that Your love is infinite and eternal – but it looks to me like a load of hype. And I’m not going to do Your job!”

“Satan, I hate what you have become. I told you, true love must hate that which is destroying the beloved, and what you have become is certainly destroying what I created you to be. But you will enjoy the task I have for you. It is what you like best – to torment My Bride.”

Satan was immediately interested. “Okay... who?”

“Labaya [Saul] My chosen one. I have removed My Spirit and My protection. You may torment his soul as you wish, only spare his body and his possessions.”

Satan left in exquisite delight. He had finally learned what Logos had told him from the beginning, that he could not even touch the Bride without permission.

Saul’s servants were mystified. He had always been a bit moody, but now he’d gone over the top. His alliance with Egypt and all his recent victories over the Amalekites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites – they should have cheered him up. But he had become downright grumpy ever since the Feast of Shavuot – even angry and violent at times. They had an idea. “O King, an evil spirit sent from YHWH is terrorizing you. Let us bring a skillful musician. His music will calm you whenever the evil spirit comes.”

“Good idea. Do you have someone in mind?”

“I know a skillful musician. He is Jesse’s youngest son. He has skill with the harp and flute, and he can sing, too. He’s always cheerful, as well as handsome, strong, and fearless, for YHWH is with him. I think you’ll like him.”

“Send for this son of Jesse immediately. I want him on my staff, permanently.” Saul felt relief already.

So Saul’s servants went to visit Jesse in Ephrathah. “King Saul sends his greetings. He has requested your youngest son, the musician, to attend him permanently.”

“Why, I cannot allow that! He is but a lad! I need him to tend my sheep. This is the busiest time...”

“Jesse! Remember what Samuel told us about having a king? The king can take whomever he wants. You do not have the freedom to refuse him. Saul is your king.”

Jesse was sorely tempted to tell them about Tadia’s anointing by Samuel, but he wisely held his tongue. He knew that would get them in big trouble with King Saul. He agreed and sent for Tadia. Within the hour, he was packed, with his harp, his flute, and a gift of food and wine on his donkey. He traveled back to Saul’s new palace at Gibeah with the king’s servants. They told him all about Saul’s torments along the way.

Saul had fallen into a foul mood when he arrived. Tadia knew just what to do. He unpacked his harp immediately and began to play and sing worship songs to YHWH. Of course Satan could not stand that! He went screaming to Logos. “You told me You had removed his covering! You said I could torment him as I wished! Now You send your water boy with worship songs to You. That’s just cruel! How can I do my job? You can’t expect me to work under such abusive, humiliating conditions!”

“Satan, are you really so weak? I do My job under worse conditions than that all the time. I care for those who hate Me. I feed them, shelter and protect them, clothe them, and heal their bodies. I offer rest for their souls and hope for their future even while they curse My holy name and walk wholeheartedly in your ways.”

Satan fled in shame. To imply that he was weak was an affront to his pride. He determined to ignore Tadia and focus solely on Saul. He really tried. In the end, though, he simply couldn’t stand those worship songs sung from Tadia’s heart. He left in disgust.

Saul was immediately better. His soul was once again at peace. The normal joy in living returned. He thanked Tadia profusely, and told his steward to assign him a room at his palace. “I want you always near. You have worked a miracle for me today. I am like a new man!”

But King Saul’s steward had bad news. “Your Royal Highness, there are no more empty rooms. If you insist on attaching to your staff every talented young man you see, we will have to build you a larger palace. Whom do you wish to send home, to give up his room to Tadia?”

While Saul considered that, Tadia spoke up. “If it please Your Majesty, I live down in Ephrathah – but ten miles distant. Before you send off any of your valuable staff, please consider this. I will rarely be needed – how seldom does this evil spirit come upon you? When I am needed, I can be here in under two hours. Please, let your regular staff keep their rooms. I would prefer to live at home and return to you only as needed.”

Tadia was convincing and winsome in his speech. Saul agreed, so Tadia returned home. From then on, whenever that evil spirit came upon Saul, the message was quickly telegraphed to Jesse’s house and Tadia came running, with his precious harp on his back. Within minutes Saul would be refreshed and well, for Satan could not stand being in the same house as Tadia. So for two years Tadia commuted back and forth between his father’s home and Saul’s palace at Gibeah.

In October of 1032 BC, in the time when kings go to battle, the five kings of the Philistines decided that it was payback time for their ignoble rout six years before at Michmash, when their god Baal (Mars) had turned against them. Their priests made all the sacrifices and assured them: *this time Baal would fight for them!*

The Philistines gathered their armies at Socoh of Judah (just north of the Valley of Elah – not Socoh of Othniel, which was further south). When King Saul heard the news he cried out to YHWH for wisdom, but got no answer. He called for the priests, but got no answer from them, either. He commanded the men of Israel (20 years old and older) to muster just south of the valley, blocking the Philistine's advance. But he was afraid to attack them, for he knew he did not have the blessing of YHWH. His men knew it too, and were disheartened. So the battle became a stalemate.

The kings of the Philistines developed a plan to end the stalemate: they chose a champion to represent them. He went to the overlook above the Valley of Elah and shouted to the Israelites, "We don't need an entire army to settle this. Why risk the death of all your finest men? Send out your mightiest warrior to fight me. If he is able to kill me, we will become your servants forever. But if I kill him, then you will become our servants forever." The problem was, he was a giant, descending from the Anakim. His name was Goliath of Gath. He was nine feet tall. His armor weighed 200 pounds. His bronze javelin was two inches thick, with a 25 pound iron spearpoint. Each morning and evening he would come out and shout, "I defy the armies of Israel! If you have any fighting men left among you, send a warrior to fight me!" This went on for forty days.

The Israelites were all terrified of him, Saul included. The older sons of Jesse were out there on the battle lines. But Tadia was not, as he was only 19 and still too young for military service. He remained in the fields, tending his father's sheep. After a while, Tadia began to wonder why it had been so long since Saul had called for him to play his harp. Jesse told him about the battle with the Philistines. Jesse was very old at this time (he had just turned 90), so he sent eager young Tadia to the battle lines to get the news and take food to his brothers.

While Tadia was searching through the ranks for his brothers, the two armies lined up against each other, and Goliath came out again to shout his challenge, along with some stinging insults. Tadia heard, and it intrigued him. "Surely a champion will rise up to defend Israel's honor! Hasn't Saul offered to reward the hero who defeats him?"

"He sure has! As a matter of fact, the king will enrich him, give him Princess Merab in marriage, and make his father's house free from taxes and public service."

"Good. Then this shameful nonsense will end today. No one can defy YHWH like that!" Tadia looked around.

"Where have you been? He's been defying us like this for forty days! No one dares to fight him. Ha, ha! I suppose you want to do it for us?" They laughed at him.

But Eliab, Tadia's oldest brother, overheard them. "Hey, baby brother, go home. You're too young to fight. Who is taking care of those miserable sheep of yours? Your curious insolence just reveals a wicked heart!"

"Hey! What have I done to offend you? I came to bring you food, and to bring back your news to our aging father. Is it a sin to ask a question?" He gave Eliab the food for his brothers, and humbly headed back to Ephrathah to give the news to Jesse and Jeanie.

But others had overheard the conversation as well. They went to tell Saul. He immediately summoned this 'fearless young man' to come before him.

"What did you tell the men on the battle lines?"

"I said, 'Surely a champion will defend YHWH's honor and accept this Philistine's dare.' When they told me it had been forty days, Your Majesty, I was surprised, that is all. Why's everyone so afraid of him, anyway? He's a pagan! Your servant will fight him if nobody else will."

King Saul shook his head. "No, no Tadia. You're just a musician, and a rather youthful one at that. But he has been a mighty warrior from his youth!"

Tadia stood tall. "Your Majesty, as I tend my father's sheep, lions or bears sometimes attack the flock. But I always rescue the lambs, even from their jaws. Twice a lion or bear turned on me, but I struck it and killed it. This uncircumcised Philistine will be no different from the lion or the bear, since he has taunted the armies of the living God! YHWH, who delivers me from the lions and bears, will deliver me from the Philistine as well."

Saul reluctantly agreed, hoping for the best. He then tried to get Tadia to take his own armor and his own sword. But Saul was a very big man. His armor didn't fit, and his sword was just too heavy. So Tadia took only his shepherd's staff, his sling, and a shepherd's bag. The next morning at the time of Goliath's challenge, he walked calmly down to the dry stream bed and picked out five smooth stones, putting them in his bag.

Goliath's challenge began ringing across the valley. Tadia ran across the valley and up the knoll toward the giant. Goliath couldn't believe his eyes. "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks and stones? Are there no men remaining in Israel? Must you send a child against me?" The air turned blue with curses to the Philistine gods.

Tadia just kept coming. Goliath laughed scornfully. "Okay. Come ahead, you foolish little lad. I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field!"

"You come to me with sword and javelin, but I come to you in the name of YHWH of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day He will deliver you into my hands. I will sever your head from your lifeless body. Then I will give the dead bodies of you and your entire army to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. For YHWH does not deliver by sword or spear, but by His own almighty hand. This battle is not yours or mine. It belongs to YHWH!"

Goliath was enraged at this impudence. He grabbed his heavy shield from his armor bearer and roughly shoved him aside. Then with a battle cry that sounded like a lion's roar, he raised his javelin high and charged. Tadia coolly selected a smooth stone, put it in his sling, and whirled it around his head, standing still before the approaching giant. *I must time it as the javelin is thrown*, Tadia thought. *Then Goliath will lower his shield.*

Tadia's thinking shifted into high gear. *The giant is easily within range. Why doesn't he throw? His helmet, shield, and armor cover everything but his eyes. He is almost too close for a second shot if my first should miss. Okay, change of tactics. Goliath is afraid of my sling and won't lower his shield at all. He just plans to stab at me with his javelin. So I must aim for that tiny space between the eyeballs, above his shield and below his helmet.* Tadia quickly re-aimed and let the stone whirl around one last time. There would be no time for a second shot. "YHWH, let my aim be true!" he shouted as he let it fly.

Michael was there. His sword was drawn. He had 5 of his finest angels at Tadia's side to help protect him and guide the stone. They weren't needed. The stone flew true, sinking deeply into Goliath's forehead, right between his eyes. He fell facedown on his shield at Tadia's feet, javelin still in his hand.

Tadia didn't hesitate. *He may only be stunned.* Tadia jumped over his head, pulled his big sword from its sheath with both hands, and chopped off his head. The heavy bronze helmet rolled off. Tadia hoisted up the huge head by the hair, and held it high for all to see.

The Israelite army gave a resounding cry of victory and surged down the hill. The Philistine army cried in dismay and turned to flee in panic. So much for the promise to "become Israel's servants forever." They fled to Philistia, with Israel's soldiers in hot pursuit. By the end of the day, thousands of slain Philistines lay along the way, clear up to the gates of Gath and Ekron. Then the Israelites returned and plundered the Philistine camp north of Socoh.

Tadia returned to Saul's palace at Gibeah with the head of Goliath in his hand. Saul was awed. "Whose son are you, Tadia? What is your lineage, that you could accomplish such mighty deeds in Israel? I asked my army commander, Abner. He doesn't know anyone great from your family."

"I am the son of Jesse of Ephrathah. He was the son of Obed, son of Boaz, son of Salmon, the army commander at the time of Joshua. Besides, I have seven older brothers. Three of them were in this battle: Eliab, Abinadab, and Shimea. General Abner should know them."

"Oh, he knows them, all right. I said he doesn't know of anyone great from your family. But Obed... now I understand. Everyone knows about the ancient prophecies of Obed and the coming Redeemer. Perhaps you are the Redeemer! Surely you have redeemed Israel this day!"

Tadia bowed humbly. "Thank you Your Majesty. I am at your service." But hearing Saul mention the Redeemer, the surrounding crowd, which was large and still growing, gave a resounding cheer.

Inspired by the crowd, Saul waxed eloquent. "Tadia, you are no longer just my musician who comes when I get sick. By YHWH God of Israel I shall make you my own companion and armor bearer. You shall remain at my side from this day forth. You shall go with me to fight valiantly in all YHWH's battles. Your family shall be free of taxes in Israel. I shall make you very wealthy. And I shall give you my daughter Merab in marriage."

"Sir?" Saul's steward spoke up. "We still don't have any spare rooms. Where would you like him to stay?"

The crowd 'booed'. This time Saul met the challenge.

"Tadia shall be as my own son. Jonathan has a big room, with two beds. Tadia shall stay with him until he marries. Er... if you don't mind, Jonathan?"

"Of course not Dad. I'd love it. Ishael is never around the palace any more. Tadia can be my brother in his place. He and I will get along just fine. I am honored." To indicate his approval to the crowd, Jonathan took off his own royal robe and flung it over Tadia's shoulders, to more cheers.

"Tadia means 'youngest sibling'. That name just will not do anymore. From now on all Israel shall call you **David**, meaning 'beloved', for so you are by this entire grateful nation!" Another cheer arose. The people were loving this. "Now David – about my daughter Merab..."

"Please sir, who am I? And who is my father's house, that I should be the king's son-in-law? I am just a youth. Please allow me some time to grow up before I marry."

"I will allow you all the time you wish, but by my soul you are not just a youth! I hereby proclaim you to be first counsel to my men of war! Even my commander Abner shall listen to your counsel!" At that, the crowd, which had grown huge, went wild. For a time, nothing else could be heard above the din. Saul smiled proudly. Jonathan ran to his room, brought back his own armor and weapons, and put them on David. Again, it was just a symbolic gesture, but the crowd was eating it up.

Even more people were coming. The joyous uproar kept growing. To take advantage of the opportunity, Saul signaled his servants, and they put the bloody head of Goliath on a platter and hoisted it up on their shoulders. Then Saul led a procession through the streets of Gibeah, with David and Jonathan behind him and the head behind them. The crowds still grew. People were flocking in from all over Israel. So the procession continued, to Ramah, then to Mizpah, then up to Bethel. All along the way the people were shouting and cheering for David. The news of the new name Saul had given him and his big promotion preceded them. The people loved it!

At first Saul was pleased and proud. But Satan was there, too. People all along the parade were singing and shouting accolades. Even though King Saul was leading the group, he realized that it was David they were really acclaiming. They sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten-thousands!" Saul began to get angry.

David only killed Goliath, he thought. My army slew the rest of the Philistines! And all the Amalekites as well! Yet they attribute ten-thousands to him but only thousands to me? What more can he have but the kingdom?

From that day on, King Saul began to view David with suspicion and envy. Of course his own bad attitudes opened the door wide to the tempter, who so filled him with rage that even David's sweet music could not calm him. Day after day the foul mood continued. Saul took to carrying a spear and threatening everyone with it. David did his best. Jonathan came and sang duets with him. But Saul retained his anger, even to the point of actually throwing his spear at David a few times.

David was far too quick to be caught by Saul's spear. But just the same, he was glad when Saul assigned him to be captain over a thousand and sent him to the front lines. There his courage and joyful nature resulted in his troop becoming the best in the kingdom. The people all loved him dearly (especially the young ladies). He prospered in everything he did. But with each victory over the Philistine raiders, Saul found more reasons to hate and fear David.

Ahinoam was really worried. She finally went to visit Samuel (who was 91). Sarah let her in. "Come in, my dear. Welcome. Samuel isn't here. How can I help you?"

Ahinoam dumped her troubles on Sarah – all about Saul's foul moods, his anger and jealousy at David, and his no longer responding to David's music. Sarah listened, sympathized, and wept with her. "God has clearly left your husband," Sarah said. "The only way to help him is to pray that he will return to YHWH as you both did when you were young."

Just then Samuel came in from the field where he'd been praying. "... and that is impossible, for Saul has become proud. Only the humble can return to YHWH. Pray instead that he will fall to some terrible tragedy that will finally humble him enough to cry out to God!"

Ahinoam gasped. How could she pray tragedy upon her husband? She left, brokenhearted. She continued to pray for Saul, but she could never quite bring herself to release him to God for judgment.

David had left Saul's palace, but his friendship with Jonathan remained true. One other budding friendship became significant. Saul's youngest daughter, Michal, delight of his life, came to him. "Dad, do you love me?"

"Of course I love you, Michal. What do you wish? You shall have it, even to half my kingdom."

"Well, uh... I am of age now, you know."

"Ahh... of course. Have you found a young man worthy of you? Name him. I shall get him for you!"

"Well, you promised Merab to David..."

"David said he was too young. He didn't want Merab. That's why I gave her to Adriel of Meholah."

"No, Dad. You just don't get it, do you? David didn't want Merab... because he wanted me!"

"What? How do you know? He never said..."

"I... I don't know... for sure. But just the way he looked at me when he was staying here, I... Please Dad, I love him! If there is any chance at all, would you..."

"You love him?"

"Yes! He certainly is worthy. There is no worthier man in all Israel! All the maidens in the land have fallen in love with him! But surely you agree that such a brave man should only marry a king's daughter?"

At first Saul had a problem with this. His envy and anger at David were only stirred afresh with Michal's reminder that all the women in Israel were in love with him. But then his thoughts took a different tack. If he played his cards right, he could keep his daughter and get rid of David. So Saul called David into his throne room. "My son, it's been two years since I offered Merab to be your wife. You said you were too young. But now you have proven yourself to be a man among men! I offer you a second chance to be my son-in-law. Merab is given to another, but Michal is now of age. So, what do you think?"

"Thank you, Your Highness. You are most kind. But I am unworthy. I cannot accept your generosity."

Saul nodded and let him go. But kings do have ways. Saul had his servants apply subtle pressure. "Tell him that everyone in the palace loves him, the king delights in him, and he really wants him to marry his daughter."

They passed along the message. Again David refused. "Is it such a light thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man, and not from a royal family?"

The servants returned to Saul. "He says he's just a poor man. His father is surely not poor! But I think he's afraid of having to pay the huge dowry for a king's daughter."

"Aha! Tell him that I'll require no dowry at all, except a hundred foreskins of uncircumcised Philistine soldiers!" Saul rubbed his hands in glee. He hadn't felt this good in years. *Talk about killing two birds with one stone!* "And then, to give him a little incentive, whisper confidentially that Michal loves him!"

But Michal was standing there. She had overheard. She was wearing a frown. *Did she suspect that he was trying to do away with David?*

“Michal, my love! Come.” He sat her on his knee, like he always used to do when she was little. “David is a mighty man of valor. He has YHWH with him. He will have no trouble killing a hundred Philistines to win your hand – if he wants! But I am testing him to see if he really loves you. I’d never give you to a man who doesn’t love you!”

“Yes, Father. Thank you!” Her face brightened up.

Just the same, Michal went straight to her room, knelt by her bed, and began to pray fervently for David. Her young heart was burdened with fear. All afternoon she prayed, through dinner, and on into the evening, crying out for his safety. Finally the burden lifted, and in the silence of a peaceful soul she heard, “I have granted your heart’s desire. Only continue to treasure what I’ve granted. For then I shall be honored in you.”

Michal wiped her eyes and got up. She came into the throne room just as David was bowing before King Saul and laying 200 Philistine foreskins before him. For just a moment it looked like Saul’s face blanched white, as if he were seeing a ghost. But he glanced her way and it was gone. “Oh, Michal! Come stand beside me. This is a joyous occasion! David has asked me for your hand in marriage, and he has proven his love by slaying 200 Philistines!” Saul called everyone to gather for the announcement.

So Saul gave his daughter Michal to David. For a year they lived together in all the joy of newlyweds, unbothered by the demands of war.

The Hittites had become a powerful empire under Tudhaliya II. He had peace on all sides: Kizzuwatna in the south, Arzawa in the west, the Kaska in the north, and the Mitanni in the east. But in his old age he had grown proud, wasting his life energy with indulgent pleasures and demanding his people worship him like a god. The Kaska took advantage of his foolishness in 1030 BC to assassinate him and sack his capital city, Hattusa. After they left, his son Tudhaliya III attempted to take control of the empire. But their military general and chief advisor, Supiluliuma I, knew better. The son was just like the father, if not worse. Within the month, Supiluliuma pulled off a coup d’état and took over. He rebuilt Hattusa and restored the empire.

David’s marriage was like a fairy tale. No happier pair lived in all the land. Michal discovered that her husband was not just a handsome and mighty man of valor, not just a joyful, friendly fellow that everyone loves, not just an optimistic, fun person to be with, David was also a lover – in the truest sense of the word. His love was focused and wholehearted. It was most evident in his worship. He put his entire heart, soul, and body into it.

Michal found herself sucked into David’s worship from their first day together. Never had she experienced such spine-tingling joy and pleasure, such love and peace, as when when she lifted up her heart in praise to YHWH next to her husband. She never wanted to leave!

Then when David reached out to her for intimacy right in the midst of worship, Michal was utterly astounded that the human frame could bear to experience such joy. Like everything he did, David wanted their loving to be in the presence of YHWH. The resulting pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfillment was beyond comprehension.

David had already inflicted so much grief and pain on the Philistine raiders that their commanders feared him. He set up a spy network along the border of Philistia. He arranged his thousand soldiers under a hierarchical ‘first alert’ system, so that no matter where the impending attack, all his men were alerted within the hour. Whenever the Philistines would attempt to mobilize their soldiers out of any of their cities, David and his men would be there before they were even gathered. All David had to do was show up, and the frightened Philistines would flee to their walled cities. So David had a year of peace with his wife.

David’s soldiers of course all loved him. They could spend their time with their wives and families. As long as they kept in shape and relayed the alerts, they protected Israel without actually needing to do any fighting. Saul and Abner were awed, for David showed himself wiser than any commander of the Philistines.

Saul was busy during this year. He decided to clean out the land of all foreigners and idolaters. He hunted down and killed all the witches, wizards, and mediums in the land, without mercy. Then he went to Gezer. He would have slain them all, too, but after all these years, some of them still served YHWH. They met Saul at the gates of the city and reminded him of the covenant they had made with Joshua. “He promised to spare us as long as we remained true to YHWH. And we have. If you violate Joshua’s vow, God will judge between us and you!”

Saul agreed, since he still feared YHWH. But he was suspicious. “We shall see just how faithful you have been. My judges will come in and search each dwelling for idols. If they find more homes with idols than homes without, I will destroy the city. But if they find you faithfully keeping your vow to Joshua, I will leave you in peace.”

That was acceptable to the elders of Gezer. But alas, they had not been as faithful as they wanted to believe. Saul’s judges found idols in half the houses in Gezer. When they did the final tally, only one more home was serving YHWH than those serving the hosts of heaven, Ashtoreth, and all the Baals. Saul was furious! (It is easy to be furious with others while hiding a besetting sin in one’s own life.) “For the sake of one family I will spare your city. But by my life, you will not get off scot-free! You shall be our slaves. You shall cut our wood, draw our water, and pay me a tithe of your increase.” Saul ordered a governor, tax collectors, and policemen to rule them and enforce his command. This became burdensome and odious to the people of Gezer for years to come. They regretted their unfaithfulness to their vow.

Thus Saul was in a bad mood when he moved on to the four cities of the Gibeonites. He knew better than to violate Joshua's covenant with Gibeon, so he passed it by. But he fiercely attacked the newer towns of the Gibeonites: Beeroth, Chepirah, and Kiriath-Jearim. Without mercy he plundered and destroyed the three towns and massacred their citizens. But as he gave the order to exterminate the fleeing remnants, Eleazar son of Abinadab ran down the hill above Kiriath-Jearim and prophesied. "Cease your wrath against the Gibeonites, O King. May YHWH judge between you and them, for they faithfully supported His tabernacle and us Levites here."

Ashamed of losing his temper, Saul returned home. Among the spoils of war was a beautiful young maiden named **Rizpah**, daughter of Aiah the Hivite. Saul took her as a concubine. He never really loved her; he merely took out his frustrations and sexual fantasies on her. Rizpah was a believer. She couldn't understand why YHWH had forsaken her. Yet she clung to her faith and refused to give in to anger or despair at the vile abuse.

Poor Ahinoam was devastated, especially after she learned that Rizpah was pregnant with Saul's child. Again Ahinoam recalled Samuel's exhortation to release Saul to YHWH for judgment, but again she couldn't do it. She still loved him! She sadly remembered her first night with Saul. *How easy it had been to seduce him into bed with her. If only she had known then that other women might seduce him with the same ease.* So Ahinoam blamed herself. She felt old, used, and abandoned. The day Rizpah's son Armoni was born, Ahinoam committed suicide.

Ishael, Saul's oldest son, saw his father's impropriety with Rizpah, and the terrible grief and pain it caused his mother. He too was filled with wrath. At first he took it all out on Rizpah, beating and tormenting her. Rizpah bore it quietly, without anger or malice. After his mother's death, Ishael raped Rizpah repeatedly and swore he would kill her if she ever told anyone. She never did, but the gossip got out anyway. It spread across the land, reinforcing Ishael's nickname – Ishbosheth, 'Man of Shame'.

Satan was beside himself with glee. He found Logos and began to taunt, "You choose 'em... I pervert 'em. You can't win! Love is weak! Lust is powerful..."

"Lust is destructive," Logos interrupted. "Just open your eyes! Does not it trouble you, all the agony and shame you have caused Rizpah? Could you not hear the desperate cries from Ahinoam's broken heart...?"

"Of course I can! That is what makes it so much fun to drink their blood when they kill themselves!"

"Get out of My presence, Satan. Your heart is cold and hard now, but one day, I swear, your own heart shall know every pain, every bitter anguish, and every sorrow you have caused. Then you shall bow to Me and acknowledge that My way is altogether righteous!"

Satan fled. Logos continued interceding, and grieving. The soul of Ahinoam was still in torture, finally seeing the tragedy of what she had done by disobeying Samuel. But now that her body was dead, there was absolutely nothing she could do about it. Her soul flitted back and forth between Saul, Rizpah, and Ishbosheth. She watched the deteriorating relationships and tried to scream warnings, but she was unable to make herself heard. She had thought that suicide would end her torment, but it only multiplied it tenfold. She tried to escape, but found she could not; she was chained to her family by psychic love / hate bonds far too powerful for her.

Months went by. Ahinoam found no relief. Her soul could not bear the fiery hell in which she was bound, but she had no escape, day or night. Finally she gave up trying to help the ones she loved. Gave up trying to hurt the ones she hated. Gave up... "YHWH, You alone are righteous. Take each member of my family and deal with them as You wish, according to Your own wisdom. I repent of trying to protect them from Your judgment. I repent of all I've ever been and done. Take me. Cleanse me. Change me. Do also to me as You desire." She bowed her heart to YHWH.

Finally, those psychic bonds withered and broke. Her soul, now released, began to drift. She saw before her a long, dark tunnel, with a bright spot at the end. She was drawn in. She left the cacophony of earth behind and focused on that light at the end of the tunnel. It was a soothing, healing light – soft, gentle, calling, compelling. The tunnel brightened. She found herself in a quiet park. The grass was rich green, the flowers of the brightest hues, and the sky the bluest blue she had ever seen. Sounds and smells tickled her heightened senses with startling clarity. A lovely crystal clear stream was there. Birds and animals frolicked, nothing threatening. For a time, Ahinoam just played in the park. But one thing seemed a bit unsettling. *That glorious light! Where did it come from?* She saw no sun. Yet the light was vibrant, life-giving, caressing her gently like a lover with purest, holy love. She realized she could not be fully at peace until she gave in to the light.

But Ahinoam felt dirty, utterly filthy of soul and body. She removed her clothes and bathed in the stream, but her clothes had crumbled to dust when she got out. She wept, ashamed at her ugly nakedness. Then to her own surprise, she raised her arms to the deep blue sky and blurted out, "YHWH, clothe me with Your light!"

"I already have," said a quiet voice behind her. She turned to see a shining man, smiling at her.

"YHWH!" She knelt before Him. Bowing, her eyes caught sight of her own body, but it was no longer naked or aged. She had returned to the flower of her youth and was clothed with a modest brightness. It was a spotless white, in matchless beauty and purity. Ahinoam was very pleased. (All women like to look young and lovely. That is not wrong; it is the way they were created.)

Ahinoam knew she was not worthy of such spotless beauty. Her sins flooded her mind; self-centered desires and the wicked actions that had resulted; rebellious and thoughtless deeds; despising YHWH's laws in her pride. She opened her mouth to repent and plead for mercy.

But before she could utter a sound, the shining man interrupted her thoughts. "I understand, dear Ahinoam. That is why the high priest offered the lamb – for your sins. You are covered, forgiven. Look up at Me."

Ahinoam looked up. He was smiling. "I am Logos. From now on I am your High Priest. Come with Me. Learn of Me. You will learn to love My Law. You will learn the joy of self-giving love. And someday, I will offer the sacrifice for you that will cleanse your sin completely, so that you can be all I made you to be."

"You are not YHWH?" Ahinoam was surprised.

"Yes, I am YHWH. I am also El-Shaddai, Elohim, and El Elyon. I am the I AM. I reveal a little more of Myself to each new generation. But from eternity I am Logos, the Word of YHWH My Father who dwells in eternity. In this realm where I dwell, you may call Me Logos."

"This realm... Where am I? Is this heaven? Or is it hell? I thought I would go to hell, for I killed myself. But I could not stand the pain..."

"Yes, My dear. I understand your pain." His words were comforting, soothing, healing, full of forgiveness, with not a hint of condemnation. "This is heaven, or hell, if you wish to make it so. You may relive the past, to suffer again through all your weaknesses, ignorance, and failures – if you wish. You may even view the physical realm you left behind, to torment yourself for all the things you did that you wish you hadn't, or left undone the things you wish you'd done. But you cannot change them, nor can you warn those you left behind to not repeat your own failures. It is past. I urge you to leave the past to take care of itself, and live with Me in the present."

"Oh my Lord! May I live with You? Who could ever want to go back? You are the most wonderful Person I have ever met, or even ever imagined!"

"Some don't think so. Some come here and hate Me, and want to go anywhere but here with Me. I give them their heart's desire here, for each one is free to choose. But for some, their choice becomes a living hell as they seek to perpetuate all that they lusted for on earth."

"I choose You! Nothing on earth compares with You. I didn't know, or I never would have done all those..."

"To choose Me, you must leave the past behind. I am not in the past, My dear. I dwell only in the present."

"Oh. I guess I was. I'm sorry. But... but what about Saul – my husband? Does this mean I can't ever help him, or pray for him? I still love him!"

"Of course you do! Love is eternal. You may pray for him – in the present. That is called intercession. I do it constantly for My precious ones. But you cannot change Labaya's past any more than you can change your own. He also has a free choice. Pray that he chooses wisely! Each choice he makes has consequences. You may also pray for Rizpah, if you wish. Right now she needs your prayers even more than Labaya."

"Rizpah? I don't love her. I..." She was going to say, "hate her," but she bit her tongue instead.

Logos responded to her thought. "I know, My dear, I know. Hate has its place, too. But here in My realm truth is of greatest value. How can you know whom to love or hate if you don't know the truth of who they are and what they've been through? Rizpah did not choose to seduce your husband. She was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. She has already suffered more than you know under the hands of Labaya and Ishael, and others as well. Yet she remains true to Me. She has forgiven all those who have abused her. She cries out to Me in her pain instead of lashing out in anger or bitterness against her abusers. Can you not reserve your hatred for the sin that thrust her between you and Labaya, and find it in your heart to love and pray for Rizpah, as I do?"

"You love her? You pray for her? How...?"

"I do. And I would be most honored if you would join Me in My intercession for her."

Whether it was the truth that opened her eyes, or the grace that was available in abundance, or even just her new and growing adoration for Logos, Ahinoam did not know. But she discovered a brand new love and understanding for Rizpah. "Yes, Sir. I will pray for her as I do for Saul. But why did you call him by his old name, Labaya?"

Logos laughed. This was the kind of laugh that close friends enjoy, and Ahinoam was drawn into it. "Labaya is his name. I celebrate that, for it is what his parents Kish and Kerry called him in faith. He will always be Labaya, 'Great Lion of YHWH', to Me. Samuel only changed it to Saul [meaning 'asked for'] when the sons of Israel asked for a human king instead of trusting Me to lead them. Why would I ever want to celebrate that name?"

"Labaya it is! Now that I think of it, I prefer that name, too. Thank You for loving him and not giving up on him yet." Ahinoam joined in Logos' laughter.

Logos reached out to envelop her in a flaming hug, whispering, "I never give up, My dear, for I am Love."

Thus Ahinoam chose the heaven of the presence of Logos, rather than the hell of living in all the regrets and torments of her sordid past. She joined in the intercession of Logos for His precious ones. But, as we shall soon see, Ahinoam had much yet to learn about this new realm she had chosen, and about her place in it.

CHAPTER 8 – DAVID FLEES FROM SAUL

King Saul was again stuck in a deep blue funk. Queen Ahinoam's suicide had caught him by surprise, just as he was celebrating the birth of Armoni. *How could he have known that Ahinoam would take it so hard? Kings always have concubines! Why couldn't she have understood?*

And then there were the rumors surrounding Ishael. *They were ridiculous, of course. Why would his son want his concubine, especially while she was pregnant?* Just the same, he didn't trust Ishael, so he banished him from the palace. That didn't help his blue funk at all.

Worst of all, there was David, living happily with his daughter Michal at the Judean fortress of Timnah on the border of Philistia. David was almost singlehandedly protecting Israel from the Philistines! And everyone in Israel went goggle-eyed over him! Saul's anger burned. He could not take it anymore. He called his personal guards and other male servants together. Jonathan came, too. "David has offended me. And he has my favorite daughter. Go now. Kill him. Bring Michal back to me unharmed."

"But Dad, what has he done?" Jonathan began.

"Don't 'but Dad' me! I'm the king! Just do it."

Jonathan fled. He had to get to David first. "David my friend!" he called as he drew near. David and Michal came to the door together, hand in hand, as lovers do.

"Hide yourselves! Saul is in one of his famously bad moods. I'm sure it will pass in a day or two, but right now he is trying to kill you! I'll talk to him on your behalf tomorrow. When I find out anything I'll return."

"Thank you, my dear brother!" They ran and hid. Saul's servants' halfhearted attempt to find them failed.

The next day King Saul personally went to Timnah to oversee the assassination. The only way it was going to get done is if he was there. While he was sneaking up on David's house, Jonathan interceded for him. "O my father! Labaya, Great Lion of YHWH! Please do not sin against your servant David. He has never sinned against you. He cares for you, serves you, loves you, and honors you. Everything he has ever done has benefited you. He risked his very life for you and for Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced! Why then will you sin against innocent blood, by putting him to death without just cause?"

As Jonathan was interceding for Labaya, Ahinoam, viewing from the heavenlies, joined in the intercession with Logos. Grace, abundant and strong, poured forth. Satan was stunned by the sudden outpouring, and fled. Saul blinked, and shook his head. "Jonathan, my son! What has come over me? Why am I here? As YHWH lives, David shall not be slain. I swear it. Forgive me. Get David that I may beg his pardon."

So Jonathan called David from his hiding place.

"Your Majesty! What have I done to offend you?"

"No, no, my son. It is I who must beg your forgiveness. I have been in a bad mood ever since Ahinoam died. Please forgive me, David. Come back to the palace to play your music for me again."

Michal jumped out with a shriek. "Mom died? Why? When? How?" She fell to her knees, her face white.

When great grace is flowing, many things change. Saul admitted his failures. "I took a concubine. I have a son by her. I'm afraid it hurt Ahinoam more than she could bear. She... she took her own... I'm so sorry, Michal. Please, my dear, come back to the palace with David. I need you now more than ever before."

So David and Michal came back. For many months, the soothing worship music, now played and sung in glorious duet, had its healing effect, and all was well.

In 1028 BC, at the time when kings go out to war, the Philistines planned a massive attack on Timnah. However, David was not there to hear the alert. He was at the palace. By the time he got the news, the battle was already joined. He ran all the way to Timnah wearing nothing but a loin-cloth. His mighty men were already fighting valiantly, but they were vastly outnumbered and in desperate danger.

David came running up behind. No sword, no armor, no weapon at all. He had been sprinting for 18 miles, and was exhausted. But a little adrenalin kicked in as he rushed up to a Philistine soldier who was about to lop off the head of one of his men. "In the name of YHWH..." he shouted, leaping up in full stride and knocking the poor fellow flat with his feet. David grabbed his sword and in a flash chopped off his head.

A glad shout rang across the battlefield at the news that David was there. The battle turned. Soon the Philistines were in full flight. There was a decisive slaughter that day. Thousands of Philistines fell to David and his thousand; the rest fled back to Ekron.

Another incredible victory for David and his men. The news spread rapidly over the land. Saul heard the people singing David's praise. Satan knew just which buttons to push, and that old jealousy, fear, and hatred returned. David and Michal sensed his foul mood. They played and sang together for him all evening. But this time, Satan refused to flee from the songs of worship. As much as he hated it, this was his opportunity. He wasn't going to let it pass by. He struggled to drown out the sounds of worship with his own bloodthirsty chants and screams.

At midnight the rest of the palace had gone to bed, even Michal. It was only Saul and David with his harp. Saul stood up from his throne and casually hoisted his javelin, pretending that he was also about to retire. But though he was headed toward his bedchambers, he suddenly flung his javelin at David with all his might.

David was very quick, as any man of war is apt to be. Even so, Saul's feint had fooled him. The javelin pierced his cloak and pinned him to the wall. Saul rushed at him, drawing his sword as he came. David could not pull free. In desperation, he pushed his precious harp into Saul's face, then wriggled out of his cloak and fled while Saul was disentangling himself from the strings.

As late as it was, Saul ordered his servants to post a guard outside David's quarters to prevent his escape. He would send down soldiers in the morning and kill David.

Michal awoke when David came in. He told her what had happened. Then he sat down to compose a letter to YHWH (which became **Psalm 59**.) By the time he finished, Michal was getting frantic. "You must go now! If you don't escape tonight, you'll be slain tomorrow!" So he packed his things. Michal lowered him through a window and down the outside wall of the palace.

Families of that day had 'teraphim' – carved statues of family ancestors, usually not to worship but to honor their fathers. They were often held by the eldest son as a pledge of the family inheritance. A few teraphim happened to be in David's apartment. Michal took one, dolled it up with clothes and a goat-hair wig, and arranged it on their bed to look like David. When the soldiers came for him in the morning, she sent them back, saying that David was sick and needed his rest.

Saul was furious. "I told you to bring him here! If he's sick, then bring him to me upon his bed, for I shall slay him this day!" But when the soldiers went to get his bed, they discovered the old teraphim trick. Now Saul was doubly furious. He ran to the apartment with drawn sword. But David was already gone. Michal was cowering in a corner. Saul swore viciously at her, calling her a liar and a traitor. He ordered his servants to install bars over her window and post a guard at her door, to keep her a prisoner. Then he commanded his soldiers to find David and bring him to the palace, dead or alive.

They found him. It wasn't hard. He was at the School of Prophets at Naioth in Ramah, worshiping in the meeting hall with Samuel. But bringing David back was quite another story. Whenever a group of soldiers came for him, they were overcome by the Spirit of God. They could do nothing but fall on their faces in worship, proclaiming the greatness and glory of YHWH. Three entire platoons of battle-hardened soldiers tried. None returned.

Finally Saul himself headed over to Ramah, in fierce anger. He would have a word with Samuel! But Samuel wasn't there. Sarah met Saul and sweetly said, "Samuel is expecting you, O King. He told me to tell you to meet him at the School of Prophets at Naioth. See, up beyond the well, the big building near the top of the hill."

"I know where Naioth is," Saul retorted. "But tell me this. Why does Samuel protect my enemy?"

Sarah answered kindly, "My husband only does what YHWH tells him. If Tadua is your enemy, it is so only because you have become YHWH's enemy. But go up to Naioth. Repent there before YHWH, and..."

Saul swore at her and left. Repenting was the last thing on his mind. He went down to the Valley of Secu. "Have any of you seen David and Samuel?" he asked the women standing fearfully beside the well.

"Yes, sir. They went together up the hill to Naioth."

Saul did not want to go up. Memories of happier times at the School of Prophets flooded back to him. He pushed them out of his mind to nurse his anger. But as he started up the hill, they returned in full force. The Spirit of YHWH fell upon him and could not be denied. He was overcome with the fear of YHWH. He shed his royal robe and began shouting the praises of YHWH in repentance and tears, his hands raised to the heavens. All the way up the hill he worshiped and prophesied, shedding weapons and royal garments along the way.

Samuel met him at the door to the meeting hall. He smiled, seeing the clothes and weapons strewn down the hill. But Saul didn't even see him. He entered the hall with nothing but a loincloth, even his royal ring was discarded. He fell facedown on the floor among the prophets in the center of the great hall. There he lay for a day and a night moaning in deepest agony of soul and spirit.

David didn't know what to think. Samuel told him, "Return to the palace and to your wife. We'll let YHWH deal with Saul here. His repentance may be real, and it may not. He's in God's hands now."

So David returned to his apartment. The guards let him in; their orders were only to not let Michal escape. The next day, Saul came home. He said nothing at all about the incident. But though he left the bars over the window, at least he removed the guards from the door.

The days dragged by. The tension in the palace was so thick you could carve it with a knife. The new moon of Tishri 1 approached. Everyone at the palace would be expected to celebrate the Feast of Trumpets with the king. So David had to know if Saul had repented or not. He finally managed to get alone with Jonathan on the evening before the Feast. "What have I done? Why does your father seek my life? Even Michal is afraid of him! Why? I have to know before I come to the Feast!"

"You have done nothing wrong, I swear! My father tells me everything, for he wants me to be king after him. He would have told me if you had offended him. This whole thing was only another of his bad moods."

"Bad moods? That's the understatement of the year. There is hardly a step between me and death! I must have done something wicked, and he didn't tell you because he knows you care about me."

“What do you want me to do? I’ll do anything.”

“Until I know for sure, I don’t dare go to the Feast with Saul. I’ll hide nearby. You go to the Feast. If Saul misses me, tell him I went back to my father’s house in Ephrathah to celebrate it with my family. If he is cool with that, then I’ll know that he doesn’t harbor a grudge. But if he’s angry, I’ll know he’s still out to kill me.”

“That’s a good plan. I’ll do it.”

“You’ve always been a true friend, Jonathan. Please don’t hide anything from me. If there is iniquity in me, just put me to death yourself, for I would far rather die at your hands than at the hands of your father.”

“I swear! I will tell you if my…” But at that moment, Jonathan noticed a servant of Saul edging closer, trying to overhear them. “Come, let’s go out to the field.” They did. Then, safe from prying ears, he continued. “I swear by YHWH God of Israel, that when I have sounded out how my father feels about you, I will tell you, whether it be for good or for ill. I only ask that when YHWH cuts off all your enemies, as He surely shall, that you will remember my kindness and show mercy to my descendants.”

David gladly promised. So David and Jonathan made a covenant there together, swearing undying friendship with each other. Logos, who loved them both, was pleased.

“But Jonathan, what if Saul assigns a guard to follow you, to capture me when you come to talk to me?”

“Good point. He probably won’t, but he might. Tell you what. By the third day of the Feast I’ll know for sure. You hide beside the great stone Ezel, near your old house at Timnah where you hid from him before. I’ll go a-hunting, and at noon on the third day of the Feast I’ll shoot three arrows, as if I saw a roe. When my aide goes to find the arrows, I’ll shout out to him, so you can hear. If I say, ‘Go farther. The arrows are beyond you,’ then you will know to flee Saul’s wrath. But if I say, ‘Come back. The arrows are on this side of you,’ then you may safely return to the castle for the Feast.”

The first day of the Feast of Trumpets, Saul noticed the empty seat next to Michal, but he held his peace. Jonathan began to hope he had recovered.

But on the second day, Saul asked. So Jonathan told him what David had said about going to celebrate the Feast with his family at Ephrathah. Saul lashed out in anger, “You blockhead! Don’t you know that as long as that son of Jesse lives, your own kingdom is in jeopardy? Bring him to me, that he may die!”

“Why? What has he ever done worthy of death?”

Saul only answered by hurling his javelin at him. So Jonathan fled, without even tasting of the feast that day. He was sorely grieved that his father was so quick to curse and attack him and dishonor his best friend.

The next morning he gathered his hunting gear, took his young aide, and headed toward Timnah. He wasn’t sure if Saul’s guards were following or not, so when he came to the great memorial stone called Ezel, he carried out his plan. After he had called to the lad, ‘Go farther, the arrows are beyond you,’ he could bear it no more. He bowed down and wept. His aide returned with the arrows. “Go back to the palace, my son. Here, take my bow as well. I will hunt no more today. Run along. My soul is in great grief, and I wish to be alone.”

He was there a long time. No guards showed up. David came out from behind the rock, to weep with Jonathan for a while. He had heard. He knew. Thus it was time for them to part, possibly for the last time. “Go in safety, my friend. Remember the vows we made in YHWH’s name. He will guard between you and me, and between our descendants forever.” They hugged and said their good-byes.

David first went to Samuel in Ramah. Samuel was still grieving for Saul. “I am sorry, my son. He did not repent. I am still praying, but it seems hopeless. Flee. He’s sure to look for you here.”

Not wanting to endanger his 95-year-old friend, David fled to Kiriath-Jearim, which King Saul had destroyed. The remnants of the Gibeonites were still struggling to rebuild. Exhausted, David trudged up the hill to Nob.

When Saul had attacked the Gibeonites, Logos had protected the hill above the town of Kiriath-Jearim. There on top of the hill, the family farm of Abinadab remained in peace and safety, with the blessing of YHWH on all they had. The Ark of the Covenant was still there, guarded by a cadre of Levites who had built a small town on the hill. They called it Nob, meaning ‘protection, covering’, for so they had been protected from the wrath of Saul, and so the Ark was covered.

The faithful priests at Nob were desperately poor. For years Saul had left them without any support, and now the devastated Gibeonites were no longer able to help. They welcomed David, but had nothing to offer him except the Bread of the Presence from the tabernacle. The current high priest, **Ahimelech** (Ahijah’s brother), was glad to give the holy bread to David. He also gave him Goliath’s huge sword, which he had hidden behind the ephod.

David left. He never told them that he was fleeing from Saul. But Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of Saul’s shepherds, was there, too. He saw the whole thing. He knew Saul wanted to capture David, so he went to Gibeah to tell Saul what the priests had done (exaggerated, of course).

Saul was furious. He summoned all the priests from Nob and accused them of treason. Ahimelech answered, “Who among your servants is as faithful as David, the king’s son-in-law, a captain in your army, and honored by all as a mighty hero in Israel? Far be it from me to refuse him. I swear I know of nothing he has done against you.”

Saul would not hear it. He ordered his guards to kill all the priests. But they feared God and refused. So then he ordered Doeg the Edomite to kill them. He borrowed Saul's sword and attacked them fiercely, slaughtering 85 priests that day. He then went back to Nob and slew all their wives and children. Finally, he killed their animals and burned their entire town to the ground.

One young son of Ahimelech was spared. **Abiathar** was inside the tabernacle worshipping. As Doeg burned Nob, Abiathar smelled smoke and alerted Abinadab's family. They all hid in the tabernacle and prayed for YHWH's protection over the family farm. Logos sent a band of angels, who covered the farm so that Doeg never saw it. Thus the Ark and the tabernacle were spared.

Ahinoam and Logos wept together over the awful slaughter. "Labaya chose wrongly," Logos said. "Now pray for Rizpah, that she choose rightly in her terrible distress." Ahinoam's vision shifted, and she saw Saul taking out his frustrations on Rizpah, his concubine. As always, she bore the pain and abuse, saying nothing, only crying out in her soul to YHWH. Satan was there, urging her to lash out against Saul. But she would not.

Then Saul picked up their infant son, Armoni, and threatened to throw him out the window. Poor Rizpah faced the ultimate test. "My lord!" She still would not say a word against him. "You hold our only son in your hands. Do unto him as seems best to you, only do not allow your displeasure at me cause you to do something you may later regret." In all this, Rizpah did not sin, either in her mouth or in her soul.

Saul heard. Her soft words turned away his wrath. He put Armoni back down beside her and stalked off. The angelic host cheered the great victory that Rizpah had won that day. Ahinoam looked up at Logos. "Now I see why You asked me to pray for Rizpah. She is a real jewel! When Labaya is at his worst, she is at her best."

"Yes. Rizpah is a special treasure. The most faithful of all who keep the covenant that Gibeon made with Joshua. I will go now and comfort her."

Saul went back to Michal, still in her apartment after the Feast. "I have sad news for you," he lied. "I'm sorry. Doeg the Edomite slew all the priests of YHWH and their families at Nob. David was there, and he too was slain. You are a widow." He reached out as if to comfort her, but she fled to her bedroom, where she barricaded the door and sobbed bitterly in mourning night and day for her beloved.

Saul let her mourn for a week. Then he tried to win her back as his favorite daughter once again. But she would never smile or even look at her father. Finally, concerned that Michal suspected something and might attempt to discover the truth about David, Saul arranged for her to marry Palti-El ('God delivers'), a son of Laish from Gallim. Maybe that would make her happy again.

On the run, David foolishly decided to hide out in the Philistine city of Gath. No one would expect him there. He disguised himself by wearing shabby peasant's clothing and rubbing dirt on his face and in his hair and beard. He pretended to be just a poor fellow looking for work.

As famous as he was, of course he was recognized immediately and brought before King Achish. "Is this not David, king of Israel, of whom they sang, 'Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten-thousands'?"

David was terrified! Surely the men here reporting to Achish had lost sons because of him! He would be slain without mercy at their hands! He hung his head, looked toward the ground, and half-closed one eye. Then as they were discussing what to do with him, he wandered slowly off, dribbling saliva all over his dirty beard. When he reached a window, he stopped to scribble childish pictures in the dust with his finger.

That did it. King Achish had been watching David. "Why do you bring him to me?" Achish asked scornfully. "Do I lack madmen, that you should escort this fool into my presence? Get him out of here!"

So David escaped Gath, a wiser man. He washed and combed his hair, and hiked east up the Valley of Elah. He found a large cave near the town of Adullam which he made his home. But even there, he could not escape his notoriety. Friends visited him, bringing food and supplies. They all realized the injustice of Saul's grievance. Some who had fought beside him at Timnah, and others who admired David and were disgruntled with the oppressive rule of Saul, also came, begging to join his bodyguard. In time, there were 400 men, more than the cave could hold.

Among them came three brothers, Abishai, Joab, and Asahel (sons of David's oldest sister Zeruiah). They had been in Saul's army, but were disgusted with their king and his vendetta against David. They warned David that Saul had commanded all the people in the land to act as his spies, and to notify him if they saw David. Saul's army had standing orders to kill him on sight.

David's time in the cave, though sad and lonely, was also a time of encouragement from his friends as well as growing closer to YHWH. While he was there he wrote **Psalm 142**, then **Psalm 57**. "Be gracious to me, O God, for my soul takes refuge in You. In the shadow of Your wings I hide until destruction passes by. My heart is steadfast to sing praises, O YHWH. Be exalted above the heavens, O God. Let Your glory be over all the earth."

As David reflected on his deliverance from Gath, he also wrote **Psalm 34**: "I sought YHWH, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears... This poor fellow cried, and YHWH heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. Oh, taste and see that YHWH is good! How blessed is everyone who takes refuge in Him! He will never be put to shame."

And **Psalm 56**: “When I am tempted by fear, I will put my trust in YHWH. Then I shall not be afraid, for what can man do unto me? You, O God, have taken account of my wanderings. Put my tears in Your bottle; preserve them forever in Your book. My enemies will turn back in the day I call on You, for this I know: God is with me.”

David realized that if so many could find him there, so could Saul. He needed to leave the cave and seek another hiding place. So he led his family and friends across the Jordan into Moab. He talked the Moabite king into letting him and his warriors stay there in exchange for protection. He sent for his elderly parents, who were ailing and near death, and the king of Moab let them stay there with him.

They were there for six months, while David tried to figure out a way to get Michal back from Saul. But Logos did not give him peace about anything he considered. He was lonely. He pined for his old homestead at Ephrathah. Then he heard the sad news that even Ephrathah had been conquered by a garrison of Philistines! David developed a craving, “Oh, for a drink of cool water from the well at Ephrathah’s gate!”

Three of the men who had joined up with David at the cave in Adullam, Adina, Eleazar, and Shammah, decided to make a try for it. They broke through the Philistine garrison and drew water from the well, barely escaping with their lives. But when they brought it to David, he was appalled! “That was wishful thinking! I didn’t mean for you to actually do it! This is holy water, for you have risked your lives for it! I cannot drink it.” So he poured it out as a drink offering before YHWH. Those three men, and thirty others besides, became known as David’s mighty men. Many other times they would do awesome exploits and risk their lives for him.

David sank into deep despair at that fortress in Moab. He didn’t think things could get any worse. His parents died there (Jesse was 95). His own father-in-law had taken his wife, and was trying to take his life. He cried out to God in agony of soul. “Oh that I had wings like a dove, to fly away and be at rest! For it is not an enemy who reproaches me – then I could bear it. But it is Saul, a man just like me, my companion and good friend. We went side by side to the house of God and had sweet fellowship together. But then Saul violated his covenant. His speech was as smooth as butter, but in his heart was war. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.” (**Psalm 55**)

Finally **Gad** (a young man from the School of the Prophets) spoke to him about it. “David, YHWH has shown me that your wife Michal has been given to another. She was told that you are already dead. Also, YHWH warned me that Saul has discovered where you are. He’s coming to kill you. You must flee to the forests of Judah.” David fled, crying inside all the way. To lose his beloved Michal was the bitterest pill of all. He had thought he was at the bottom before. But now...

He reached the forest west of Hebron in the Judean highlands. He hid in the thickets there and poured out his heart to YHWH in songs of despair and worship, such as in **Psalm 6**: “Return, O YHWH, how long? Rescue my soul! Save me because of Your lovingkindness. I am weary with sighing; every night I make my bed swim; I dissolve my couch with tears. My eye is wasted away with grief...” and **Psalm 63**: “O YHWH, You are my God! I earnestly seek You. My soul thirsts for You in a dry and thirsty land. I remember You on my bed. I meditate on You in the night watches. For You have been my help in trouble. In the shadow of Your wings I can sing for joy.”

Just then his scouts rushed in and told him that the town of Keilah (only five miles away) was under attack by the Philistines. In spite of his precarious position, David had the strongest urge to go help them. He prayed about it, and Logos encouraged him to go. “But YHWH, we’re afraid for our lives here in the forests of Judah; how much more shall we be in danger if we go out?”

“Arise. Go to Keilah. I have given the Philistines into your hands. Many shall hear of it and be glad!” It was YHWH! His voice was unmistakable. David readied his men, which by now numbered about six hundred, and led them to Keilah. There they surprised the Philistines and routed them with a huge slaughter, delivering the town from certain destruction. So that night, the town threw a lavish party in honor of David and his mighty men.

A few in the town were not so grateful. They went to Saul that very night, to report the location of David. Saul was delighted. “David is a fool! God is on my side, for He has delivered David into my hands by putting him in a walled city with barred gates.” He mustered his personal guard and started down the hill toward Keilah within the hour, leaving orders for the rest of his army to be there by morning. They would surround the city and destroy it if its elders refused to surrender David.

Someone else heard the good news of David’s victory at Keilah: Abiathar son of Ahimelech. He had been searching for him all this time, desiring to join his band. Abiathar met David after the battle, with news that his father and all the other Levites at Nob had been slain by Doeg at Saul’s command. David was horrified! It was all his fault. He urged Abiathar to join his growing band, promising to protect him as if he were his own son. David gave him the seat of honor beside him at the feast that night. Abiathar had brought the priestly ephod with him. He became David’s priest from then on, even though he was young.

After the dinner, they prepared to retire for the night. But David’s battle instincts raised a red flag in his mind. Abiathar had heard the news of his victory here – so would Saul! Somebody would surely rat on him, he just knew it. So David asked Abiathar to get his ephod and inquire of YHWH. “Will Saul come to Keilah? Will the men of Keilah surrender me into Saul’s hand?”

YHWH's response to Abiathar was in the affirmative. So at midnight David awoke his men and fled. They retreated past Hebron to the wilderness near the town of Ziph. There they hid in the caves of the hills until Saul gave up the pursuit to return to Gibeah. David was furious about Saul's massacre of all the Levites at Nob. It seemed like just when he thought he had reached the bottom, he was hit with another blow. While hiding near Ziph David wrote **Psalm 52**: "Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? God will break you down forever, and uproot you out from the land of the living. The righteous will see it and fear! They will laugh at him, saying, 'Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches.' I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever."

Someone else heard about David's victory at Keilah, who was to become very important later on. Her name was Ahinoam, but please keep in mind this is NOT the same Ahinoam as Saul's wife who had committed suicide. As with every woman of Israel, Ahinoam had fallen madly in love with David from the time he had slain Goliath. She lived with her family in the Jezreel Valley, working on her father's farm while nursing daydreams of being David's lover. But she was just a plain girl, already in her early 20s. What chance had she? Well, she had something many other girls in Israel did not – she had a bold determination to pursue her daydreams. Ahinoam had something else, too. Her family knew the Laish family. They had been invited to Michal's grand wedding with Palti-El. Ahinoam had been one of the bride's maids, and had agonized with Michal over the death of David.

With most people, hearing of the death of their secret lover would crush their daydreams, but not Ahinoam. She refused to believe that David had died. *How could her hero ever die?* She nursed a hope that somehow he had escaped. With Michal married to another, maybe she had a chance.

When she heard the news of David's victory at Keilah, her daydreams snapped into focus. Ahinoam begged her father's permission to go to Keilah to find David. He of course refused. It just wasn't proper for an unmarried woman to go chasing after a man, any man, but especially the mighty David!

But Ahinoam of Jezreel had unusual determination. Directly disobeying her father's command, she packed her things that night, covered her dress with a plain brown cloak, penned a good-bye letter to her family, and snuck away. *Nothing could rob her of this opportunity.* Logos wept at her foolish choice and the consequences to follow.

It took her two days to reach Keilah. David's men were long gone. Saul's army had also come and gone, chasing after them. It is pretty easy to follow an army as big as Saul's. Ahinoam had no trouble picking up their trail. But to her chagrin, when she caught up with the army they were already back at Saul's palace at Gibeah. Saul had given up the chase.

Once again Ahinoam's determination wouldn't let her go. She joined the 'camp-followers', determined to lay low with Saul's army and wait it out. Ahinoam was a virgin; determined to remain so for David. It disgusted her to be with the whores and pimps, but her plain looks were an advantage. She tied up her long hair, kept herself well-covered with that coarse brown cloak, put on a sad face, and ran from all the soldier's advances.

David's wife Michal, now married to Palti-El, cried out in despair to YHWH. *He had promised to grant her heart's desire, and now this? Why had YHWH forsaken her? Why had He taken away her beloved, the only delight of her heart?* Her faith was sorely tested. Then she, too, heard of David's victory at Keilah. *David is alive! Her father had lied to her.* Michal was greatly encouraged, and her faith increased. *She would pretend happiness with Palti-El, but in her heart she would never be the wife of anyone but David. At her first opportunity, she would escape and return to him.*

Michael came to Logos. "Michal has passed her test and kept her faith. But David has gotten so discouraged that I'm concerned. May I encourage him a bit?"

"And there are more difficulties yet to come. Yes, dear Michael. Send his friend Jonathan. That will be the best encouragement of all."

So Michael spoke to Jonathan in his dreams, telling him where to find David. The next morning, it was but a dream. But it was so vivid, Jonathan couldn't get it out of his mind. Finally he gave in to it. He set off toward Hebron, following the dream to David's hideout near Ziph. He was surprised and delighted when the dream came true, and he was once again talking with David. "Jonathan my friend! Welcome! How in the world did you find me? Am I again discovered by your father?"

"Not at all. God led me here by a miracle dream. YHWH wants to encourage you, I guess. I know now for sure that you don't need to fear my father. You are truly in God's hands, and Saul can never find you there! You shall be king over Israel. I shall bow down to you. All Israel will rejoice to crown you king! And my father knows that, too." Thus they renewed their covenant and encouraged each other. Then Jonathan went home.

The Ziphites got suspicious of the big warriors coming into town and buying groceries. Several of them followed David's men, and discovered their hideout under Mount Hachilah. They went right to Saul, hoping for a reward.

Saul didn't trust the Ziphites. He told them to go back and scout around, then report back all of David's hiding places in the area. They did, even giving Saul a map of their findings. So once again Saul mustered his army. With that map, he would surely catch him this time! He came down to Ziph and sent out his army to surround David and his men. By the time David's scouts saw the army it was too late. They were surrounded.

They tried to flee around the mountain, but Saul's men were on the other side, too. It looked hopeless. David cried out to YHWH, "O Lord! Jonathan prophesied that I am in Your hands and Saul can never find me. I am to be king of Israel. I choose to believe Your Word rather than Saul's armies. Show me now what to do."

"Cease striving. Bow before Me and worship."

David called a halt to his men. There were soldiers in front of him, soldiers behind him – he had no place to go anyway. "Okay everyone. We are in YHWH's hands. Bow and worship!" he commanded, doing the same.

They worshiped there, hiding behind an immense rock. When they finally peeked out, Saul's armies were gone. So David renamed that rock Sela-Hammalekoth ('the Rock of Escape'). It was only later he discovered that just when he had prayed, a runner had reached Saul and had reported a major raid by the Philistines. Saul had recalled his army and hastened to repel them.

But one person had remained behind – a tall, thin, sorry-looking camp-follower in a coarse brown cloak. She was brought to David and thrown at his feet. "Sir, we found this whore after the army left. Shall we stone her?"

David looked, then looked again more closely. Whores wear scarlet. He had never seen one in a plain brown cloak. She looked up at him fearlessly, even with trust in her eyes and a faint smile on her face. Certainly he saw no guilt or shame there. She waited respectfully for her turn to speak. "Stand up," David ordered.

Ahinoam got to her feet, threw off her disguise, and shook out her long hair. This was her moment, and she was determined not to miss it. Now she was dressed in a beautiful powder-blue gown, modest, subtly hinting at her youthful figure within. She bowed to David with a graceful curtsy, and then stood tall. He was the king. And in her heart she was already his queen. She had rehearsed this moment in her daydreams too many times to miss it now. For five years David had lived in her heart. She knew him! He would never condemn her without first hearing her out. So she just smiled fearlessly at him, waiting patiently. "Who are you? Why are you here?" David asked.

"Ahinoam of Jezreel, daughter of Adam of Issachar. Your wife Michal has married another. Therefore I have been sent by YHWH to comfort you in your time of grief." She knew just the right words to pique his interest.

"YHWH sent you? What did He say to you?"

"That He has rejected Saul from being king, and you shall be king of Israel in his place." Ahinoam was guessing, but that much seemed pretty obvious.

"And how is it that you are to comfort me?"

"I am to be your queen." She stopped. *Not one extra word. Let the full impact sink in.*

With a regal smile Ahinoam ran a brush through her long honey hair as she watched the expressions flutter past David's face: first the shock, amazement, and disbelief, followed by careful deliberation, and then real interest; she read it all as if she could read his thoughts. Finally David shooed out his soldiers and relaxed. "What else did YHWH say to you? How often does He speak to you? How long have you known Him?" – the exact questions that Ahinoam was anticipating of him.

This part was crucial, for YHWH surely spoke to David, and if she continued to lie, she would be found out and condemned. But Ahinoam had it all planned. "My lord, YHWH doesn't actually speak to me in words. But I have always worshiped Him. Ever since I was a little girl I have sensed His Spirit teaching my spirit what He created me to be and do. He made me for you. He kept me a virgin for you. He put in me the desire to leave my father's house and search for you until I found you. This is my destiny. As YHWH lives, I have vowed to give myself to you now and forever. If you will not have me, my lord, then you must slay me, for I swear that I shall never leave your side."

It was a good speech, delivered with sincerity and the ring of truth that only years of practice can bring.

As she looked into his eyes, David was startled to see rare powder blue eyes to match her dress. Ahinoam saw it, and laughed sweetly. "Blue is your favorite color, isn't it!" Her eyes danced for him. Again she had guessed right.

"As I said, YHWH made me for you. He knew that blue is your favorite color. He showed me your heart, full of worship. As you worship, you raise your arms to the blue sky to meet with YHWH. So I give you my blue eyes to reflect your worship. I also give you my honey hair in honor of the sweetness of your fellowship with YHWH, and my joyful smile to celebrate it with you."

There it was. In two small, well-rehearsed speeches she had won his heart. Ahinoam had no clue that it was the adversary who had inspired her. David didn't even need to ask YHWH if this was right. He already knew it was right. Ahinoam had just told him. So when David left the area of the Ziphites, Ahinoam remained close beside him. They went to the wilderness of Engedi west of the Salt Sea. He found a good spring there, and lots of caves – it was ideal for a hideout. He began preparing for the inevitable attack.

But David was tired of running, and angry with the Ziphites and their betrayal. It was at Engedi he wrote **Psalm 54**: "Save me, O God, by Your name! Vindicate me by Your power. Hear my prayer, O God! Heed my words! For strangers [the Ziphites] have risen against me. Violent men have sought my life. They have not set God before them. Destroy them in Your faithfulness."

After shooing off the Philistine raiders, Saul returned to Ziph. They pointed the direction David's men had taken. Following their tracks, Saul came to the caves.

But there were footprints in and out of all the caves. After several days of searching, Saul was pretty fed up with the whole thing. He left his army to continue searching, while he entered a tiny cave to take a nap.

Well, that ‘tiny’ cave was actually deep and very large inside. It had been a sheepfold, and David and his band were resting in the sheep pens in back. They saw Saul come in and lie down near the small entry. Soon they heard the measured breathing of deep sleep.

Abishai and Asahel urged David to just kill him, but David refused. He walked silently up to the sleeping king, cut off a piece of his royal robe, and returned. His men still wanted to kill Saul, but David would not permit it.

When Saul awoke and left the cave, David followed. He allowed him to get about a hundred yards away, and then called, “My lord the king!” bowing in respect.

Saul looked back, but did not recognize him. David continued, “Do you really believe that David seeks to harm you? My father, behold...” He held up the piece of Saul’s royal robe. “This is the edge of your robe I hold in my hand. I could have killed you, but instead, I said, ‘I will not stretch out my hand against YHWH’s anointed.’ So you see, there is no rebellion or evil in my heart. I have not sinned against you, even though you try to take my life. May YHWH judge between you and me, for He shall avenge me, but my hand shall never be against you.”

“Is that your voice, David my son?” Saul wept. “You are more righteous than I. You have dealt kindly with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. May YHWH reward you with good for your compassion on me this day. Now I know that you shall be king and your kingdom shall be established. I beg of you, swear to me by YHWH that when you are king you will not cut off my descendants or blot out my name from my father’s household.”

So David swore to him. Saul responded by ordering his army to retreat back to Gibeah. When David turned away to go back into their hideout, there was Ahinoam. She had heard the whole exchange. She stepped quickly in front of him and took both his hands in hers. “I knew it!” she said excitedly. “YHWH just confirmed His Word through King Saul. You shall become king of Israel, just as I told you!” She beamed up at him, leaving unspoken the obvious, “... and I am to be your queen!”

Again not seeking the counsel of YHWH, David agreed. So that very day, in a ceremony performed by Abiathar the priest, David took Ahinoam as his wife. She did indeed become a great comfort to him, for she loved David truly and served him faithfully. She even learned to worship YHWH with him during their times of intimacy, though never like Michal had loved to do. But Logos grieved that David had fallen into such deception, knowing that tragic consequences always follow the breaking of one’s vows and the acceptance of a lie.

Saul had turned to witness that intimate little exchange outside the cave, though at a distance he imagined it to be more than it was. After he got back to the palace, he arranged for a visit with Palti-El. Sure enough, Michal already knew about David’s victory at Keilah, and she was nearly ready to strangle him for lying to her.

“My dear Michal, I would never, ever lie to you,” he lied. “I really thought he was killed at Nob. I’ve no idea how he managed to escape. He is incredibly cunning and wise! However, there is no sense crying over spilled milk. I saw David down at Engedi, and talked at length with him. He is already married to another – a tall thin woman with a powder blue dress and long golden hair that flows like honey. I saw them embrace in front of the cave as I was leaving.” Saul wove a convincing story.

But Michal no longer trusted him and wouldn’t buy it. “Okay, if you and David are on such friendly terms now, invite him and his new wife up to the palace, so I can talk to them. Because I don’t believe you!”

“Oh, he was headed farther south. I don’t think he will be up this way anytime soon.”

“Yeah, right... I’m sure he won’t. And I know why!” Michal stalked off in a snit.

But in six months a national tragedy changed the whole picture. In the spring of 1025 BC, at the age of 97, Samuel died peacefully in his sleep at his home in Ramah. All Israel mourned his death. For a month everyone put aside their differences and gathered at Ramah to mourn his passing and the passing of Israel’s Golden Age – the prosperity and peace which had been Samuel’s legacy. Even King Saul put aside his royal robes to join the mourners. Saul had not seen him since that day at Gilgal when he had slain Agag.

David too, with Ahinoam his wife and all his band of mighty men, came to pay his respects to Samuel. King Saul saw him first, and nudged Michal. “There he is, with his new wife. Look! She’s wearing that same blue dress I told you about. Go. Talk to them. Give David a hug. You’ll see.”

Michal saw. Her father had not lied to her, after all. *David had left her, scorned her, and turned to another. Her David! She had imagined that their love would last forever! How could he?* With a sob, Michal threw her hands across her chest – it hurt, just as if David had stabbed a knife deep into her breast. She returned to Palti-El’s house, grieving far more for David than for Samuel.

This was the first of many consequences David was to have because of Ahinoam of Jezreel. Michal failed her greatest test. Her heart grew cold toward David. At first she mourned her loss, but finally, to ease her pain, she just reckoned him dead and gave herself to Palti-El.

He received her gift gratefully, treating her well. For the first time, he had a wife who truly returned his love. But Ahinoam nursed a bitterness in her heart against David.

Saul's wife Ahinoam continued to intercede with Logos for Saul, and Rizpah. It was having an effect. Ever since Saul had seen the edge of his robe in David's hands, he had been filled with repentance and remorse over what he had done to his family. He tried to overcome his jealousy and hatred against David. He worked to control his foul temper and to restore the confidence of his favorite daughter Michal. But more importantly, he went to Rizpah and humbly asked forgiveness for his abuse.

Rizpah sweetly forgave him and gave herself to him wholeheartedly. Logos was rather pleased. He gave them another son. They named him Mephibosheth, meaning 'destroyer of shame', in the hope that with him the shame over Saul's house would be destroyed. So Saul and Rizpah enjoyed a year of peace.

For several years David and his 600 men had been patrolling the southern borders of Israel. His victory at Keilah was one of many victories, against raiders from Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Negev. Even though chased by Saul, it was still in David's heart to protect Israel. His band of mighty men loved him dearly, and would go anywhere with him. But after Samuel died, David decided that it was time the people he protected repay the favor. The Feast of Passover was coming up. David sent ten of his men to Carmel (near Ziph), to remind Nabal of David's service over the years, and to ask for an offering of food and drink so they could celebrate the Feast.

Nabal was one of the wealthiest men in Judah, and he certainly could afford it. But he was in a hurry to finish shearing his 3000 sheep so he could celebrate the Feast himself. He sent the men away empty-handed, along with a few vulgar and ill-mannered remarks about David's 'disloyalty' to King Saul.

David was furious. Not wishing to give him food was one thing, but criticizing his loyalty – after all he had done for Saul and for Israel! That went way over the top. David totally lost his temper. He ordered 400 of his men to strap on their swords. *Wealthy Nabal must die for this offense.*

But Nabal's shepherds had overheard the exchange. One of them ran to find Nabal's wife, Abigail, and told her what had happened. Abigail, who was as intelligent as she was beautiful, realized the possible consequence of her husband's rebuff. She quickly gathered a lavish gift of food and wine (without telling Nabal), loaded it up on three donkeys, and hurried to meet David.

The donkeys with the food and wine reached him first. With each was a servant, bowing and saying, "All this is for you, my lord, from your servant Nabal." David was impressed. His anger waned.

Lastly came Abigail herself. Dismounting from her donkey she fell to the ground on her face before David. She repented profusely for her husband's churlishness, and begged for the privilege of making amends.

"Please do not let my lord pay attention to Nabal. He is a worthless man. His name means 'folly' and that is how he lives. But because YHWH has restrained you this day from shedding blood and from taking vengeance against him, so may all your enemies be as foolish as Nabal. May YHWH deal with them all according to their folly! So please accept this gift from your maidservant. Forgive my transgression in which my husband offended you. YHWH will build for you an enduring house, for you are fighting His battles on our behalf. I know for sure that all YHWH has promised you shall come to pass, and He shall appoint you the ruler over Israel. When I see it I shall be glad."

David was very impressed. Here was a reverent and faithful woman, humble, generous, and very perceptive. She not only recognized God's call over his life, she also understood that taking vengeance into his own hands would certainly grieve YHWH, and may even cost him the promises over his life. He reached out his hand to gently raise Abigail up from the ground. "Blessed be YHWH God of Israel, who sent you to me this day! And blessed be you, for your wise discernment in keeping me this day from bloodshed and from taking vengeance into my own hands. For if you had not come, I assure you that there would not have been a male left alive in Nabal's house by morning. I accept your gift and grant your request. Go in peace." He smiled kindly at her.

Ahinoam of Jezreel saw it. She was no dummy. She saw the admiration in David's eyes for lovely Abigail, and the gallantry he showed in lifting her up. She heard the kind words, and understood David's body language.

As they feasted that night, Ahinoam was jealous. She could not enjoy herself. She couldn't wait to get away from this place, away from the threat of another woman who certainly was much lovelier than herself. She put on her most seductive attire and did her best to please David, to woo him back to herself. But jealousy does strange things; she could not enjoy herself, and he was a bit too drunk to even remember enjoying her.

Michael came to Logos with a suggestion. "For many years we have protected Nabal and all he had, for the sake of godly Abigail, his wife. But You heard Abigail's own words. She removed the covering! She granted permission for You to deal with David's enemies, fools such as Nabal, according to their folly. Surely it is time! May I?"

"Michael! That is Satan's job. Love holds no grudges, no matter what Nabal has been or done. Reaping the fruit of his own evil choices will be punishment enough, I'm sure. You may remove your protection over him, but no more. Notify Satan that Nabal's covering is gone."

"Yes, Lord. With gladness. Nabal has been a difficult burden for Abigail... for us all to bear."

"Yet we never rejoice in another's calamity, do we?" Michael hung his head. He had been tempted.

Satan was delighted at Nabal's release. He and his demons made short work of it. This was too easy! Nabal was wonderfully responsive to all their temptations. First he overate at the feast that night, then he drank until he was drunker than a skunk. All night demons tormented him with nightmares of attacks from all who hated him, who were numerous. He awoke late the next morning, still living in the terror of his dreams. Then his wife came to him at his bedside and told him about David's 400 men.

Abigail never meant it for harm. She really thought he would be sober by then, ready to hear a little wisdom in case it happened again. She did not know the horrors he had suffered all night. So Nabal's angry response shocked her. He screamed at her, his face red with rage. His flabby body couldn't take the stress. A blood vessel burst in his brain. His entire left side became paralyzed.

Logos gave Nabal time to repent. For ten days Satan tormented him with accusations of all the wicked things he'd ever done, which were many. A normal man going through such hell would have repented a hundred times over, and would have spent the ten days crying out to God for mercy. But not Nabal. Nabal was a committed fool – committed to his own folly. He spent his time lashing out in anger against his wife and servants, ever more furious because they couldn't comprehend his slurred speech and he couldn't get up to strike them.

Finally Logos could bear it no more. He withdrew Nabal's soul and turned his dead body over to Satan, who celebrated his victory by drinking Nabal's blood.

Ahinoam (the wife of Saul) saw, and was appalled. She whispered into Logo's ear, "How can any man be filled with such venom?"

"He does not yet see his heart, just as you at first did not see your own heart, nor the evils that were in it." Logos helped her to remember.

"Then will You draw him into the light, as You did with me, so that he can finally see and repent?"

"I will try, but I cannot force him. He has a freewill choice, too. Intercede with Me that he choose rightly."

Samuel was also watching, along with many others in the heavenlies. "Samuel!" Logos called to him with a big grin. "Today is your wife's birth day!"

"Well, Lord, actually Sarah's birthday was on..."

"Physical birth is not celebrated in My realm," Logos interrupted, laughing. "But birth into Sheol certainly is. See the heavenly host gathered there?" Indeed they were. Myriads of angels circled around one particular spot, the Welcoming Park, the most beautiful place in Sheol. They were singing and dancing in anticipation.

"Come, Samuel. Of all people, I want you with us." Logos filled the park with His light.

Logos moved to the center of the circle of angels, with Ahinoam and Samuel close beside. There, at the spot where earth meets heaven, was a dimmed room, with mourners packed in beside a bed. Samuel recognized them immediately – they were his own friends and family. And there, on the bed, was his own beloved wife, Sarah. She looked asleep, or dead. Her eyes were closed and her lips drawn tight. Suddenly, to the surprise of everyone on earth, she sat bolt upright in bed and opened her eyes wide. "What a beautiful place! And so many angels!" she said. Then her old, withered body dropped back into the bed, while her lovely young soul flew swiftly up from it to stand before Logos.

Instantly Sarah recognized Him. "YHWH, my Lord and my King!" she squealed. She flung out her arms and ran into His embrace. Their joyous hug needed no words. The celebrating angels sang an enchanting melody, called the Welcoming Song, as they danced all around them. Samuel crowded closer, wanting to be recognized. Logos just reached out His other arm to include him in the embrace. The couple in Logos' arms dissolved into one new person.

The welcoming party for Sarah-Samuel lasted a very long time. Heavenly joy is a wondrous and beautiful thing. Ahinoam was not displeased, nor at all jealous, but she did have some questions. "Logos, I'm not complaining, but why did I have to go through that long dark tunnel, while Sarah was instantly in Your presence? And why is there such a grand celebration for her, but none for me?"

"Good questions!" Logos beamed at her, with not the slightest condemnation in His voice. "That tunnel was simply your perception of your soul's transition from an earthly focus to a heavenly one. Nabal's tunnel is far longer and more tortuous than yours, as he fights against My light all the way! But Sarah had no tunnel to go through. Her soul was already focused on My realm. She had prepared herself to see Me even before her body died. My greatest joy is to respond to that kind of faith. She had said all her last good-byes, to both people and things; she had given to Me all she held dear; she had no psychic (soulish) bonds to tie her back to earth. As for your welcoming celebration... I welcomed you. Was that not enough?"

"Yes, Lord. You did it so gently and kindly. And it was perfect for me. I just wondered why the difference?"

"Sarah and Samuel are overcomers. Theirs was not just a welcome. It was an acknowledgment of their victory in overcoming earthly trials and temptations by faith. It was a celebration of many deeds done in, through, and for Me, and the rich treasures they have amassed in My realm as a result. All are not equal in My realm, My dear, though all are equally loved. This one," He put out His hand to again rest on Sarah-Samuel, "has proven herself faithful in small things. She humbled herself, to serve Me all her life. But in My realm, the servant becomes the king! Samuel-Sarah shall rule with Me in power and glory over great things!"

It took Nabal's soul years of torment to break his psychic bonds with earth and follow his torturous tunnel to the light. He resisted Logos' gentle pull all the way. When he finally entered the beautiful heavenly garden called Sheol, the abode of the dead, Ahinoam watched to see his welcome, but alas, Nabal refused to wash in the stream, or even lift his eyes up to the light.

"Surely now that he sees the beauty of Your light he will repent!" Samuel-Sarah breathed.

"Why has it taken so long?" Ahinoam wondered.

"Nabal hates wisdom and loves folly," Logos answered sadly. "Good choices are hard for him."

Nabal felt the pull of the light, but would not face it. He kicked at the lovely flowers as if they were weeds. He dug stones to throw at passing animals, as if he saw them as detestable beasts. Again and again Logos came to him, but Nabal would turn and run, hiding his eyes as if the light hurt him. Logos was sorely grieved for him.

Years went by. Finally Logos dimmed His light as much as possible, and appeared to Nabal as he was sitting on a rock, his face in his hands, yearning for something. "Nabal. I am Logos, your Creator. I can heal your pain, fill your longing. I love you! Will you come to Me?"

"You made me? Then I hate You most of all, for You did it all wrong. You gave me riches, but did not give me time to enjoy them. You gave me a beautiful, kind wife, but did not force her to love me the way I was, for she criticized me. You gave me servants and friends, but all they wanted was my riches. You gave me the finest foods and wines, and then let me get fat. You made my body too weak to endure all the many things You gave. Now all my wealth is gone!" He paused to think a moment, an angry frown on his face. "You gave me everything I ever wanted since I was young, *except peace in my soul!* How could I ever accept a mean, spiteful God like You? I hate You!"

"I have always wanted to give you peace in your soul. I have offered it many times, but you rejected it. Now I offer it once again. Open up your heart. Abandon all you treasured there. I made your heart only for Me. Receive Me there as your Lord, your King, your Friend. The love, joy, and peace you seek is only found in Me."

"No. Leave me alone. Better yet, show me a place I can go where I'll never have to see You again. And get rid of that damnable light that's always pulling at me. It follows me everywhere I go, like a persistent adversary."

"I still hope that someday you will be able to see things differently, but I do grant you your freewill choice. Look down. If you wish you may follow that road away from My presence. But remember this, Nabal. One day you will come before Me again, on that great day when I judge the living and the dead according to their deeds. I suggest you prepare for that day."

There had been no road before, but now, right at Nabal's feet was a broad, well-traveled road, leading downward, out of the park. Nabal rejoiced to find it. He followed it, running away from the light of Logos and blocking his ears from hearing His final words.

Ahinoam was curious, so Logos allowed her to see Nabal's journey. He ran farther, to the very depths of Sheol. He reached a stone wall. Beyond it was a great chasm, with flames licking up from far below. A normal man would certainly have feared and turned back. But not Nabal. He searched until he found a pair of ancient gates and a drawbridge to the far side. The bridge was let down by a huge red dragon, who quickly opened the gates and beckoned Nabal to enter. Again Ahinoam was sure Nabal would flee, but no. He squared his shoulders and strode happily through the gates and across the bridge, shouting boldly, "This is where I belong! Thank you, good friend," he nodded to the dragon, "for opening the way for me. For I believe we shall be best of friends hereafter!"

"I believe we shall!" the dragon chortled, entering with him and slamming the gate behind them. Arm in arm they strolled across the bridge and into a murky, sunless realm. There Ahinoam saw to her horror thousands of people, suspended in flames over a bottomless pit. They were isolated, each tormented in his or her own private hell.

"I've prepared a place for you," the dragon confided. "It is custom-made to your own temperament, filled with reminders of your life, your friends, and all your deeds. Here you will be able to finally see the reality of everything you have ever been and done, and obtain the full rewards of it all. Here you'll finally be appreciated for the great man you are and all your noble deeds!"

"Thank you, my fair friend!" Nabal strutted even taller, if that were possible. "I feel at home already! It's been a long road, but I've reached heaven at last. I knew when I got here I would be appreciated for who I am!"

"It is only my pleasure and delight. I love to torment those who choose me!" the dragon hissed. As he said the word 'torment' he shoved hard, dropping Nabal into his own personal cell above the flames. Nabal felt like he was falling, falling, falling into the fiery darkness. He screamed in terror as the flames licked his soul. Every deed he had ever done, every pain he had ever caused, every wicked thought or self-centered, prideful endeavor, hit him in full force as his eyes were finally opened to his shame.

"Logos!" Ahinoam shrieked, drawing her vision back to the garden. "Why did he not see where he was headed? Why did he not fear, and return?"

"He did see, but he chose not to see. Instead, he saw what he wanted to see. The deep, ugly pits were gardens to him. The flames appeared as beautiful flowers. The fiery darkness glistened like gold. The red dragon appeared to him as an alluring mistress, wooing him into her arms."

Ahinoam wanted to see no more. She turned to look in the opposite direction. There, afar off, she could see a river, deep and wide, from which the stream in which she had bathed was but a tiny tributary. Her soul soon covered the distance to the edge of the river, but could advance no further. On the far bank was a large table; on it was a book. Just beyond the table was a high green hedge. The single door in it was closed and locked.

Ahinoam was curious. “Logos, why can we go this far but no further? May I not cross and go in that door?”

Logos smiled at her, and at others who had joined them here. Yes, My beloved. You may cross, and you may enter that door, for it is the door to the highest heaven at My Father’s throne. But not yet, for the way is not yet open. For now, dwell with Me here in Sheol. Learn of Me; love Me; enjoy Me – all you who have been covered by the blood of the lambs. You may cross when the last lamb is slain, the Lamb of God, and sin and death are finally defeated. Then I shall bring you in victory to My Father.”

After Abigail was gone, Ahinoam of Jezreel settled down. She was still David’s wife and had everything she wanted. Nabal’s wife was no longer around. She was a little ashamed of herself. She briefly wondered why she had gotten so insanely jealous – from whence it had come – but she dismissed it. She understood neither the ways of YHWH nor the ways of the adversary.

Then a shepherd boy appeared on the outskirts of the camp. He was one of Nabal’s. Before anyone else in camp had a chance to react, Ahinoam jumped up from David’s side and ran to meet him.

He was shy – just as glad to talk to Ahinoam as face the legendary David. “Nabal my master is dead. Please tell David. My mistress Abigail wanted him to know.”

“Oh! I’m so sorry for you! Thank you for telling us, my faithful shepherd. I certainly will let David know. And we’re about to leave here, so thank your mistress for us. May YHWH protect her and provide for her.”

Ahinoam sent the shepherd away and returned to camp. “What was that all about?” David asked.

“Oh, nothing. One of Nabal’s shepherds. Nabal heard that you spared his life, and just wanted to express his appreciation,” Ahinoam lied.

Something didn’t ring true to David’s warrior mind. “Appreciation? Really? Ha! I didn’t think Nabal knew the meaning of the word. Is that all?”

“Oh, he’s had a change of heart. Your kindness must have affected him greatly. The shepherd was pleased.” One lie always seems to beget another.

“Good! We’ll pay him a visit. I’ve got to see this ‘change of heart’ for myself. Anyone care to go with me? We must thank Nabal for the feast his wife provided.”

Ahinoam thought fast. This was not going as she expected. She had underestimated David’s kindness and openness, a mistake that could cost her. “Uh, my lord?”

“Yes, my love?”

“I don’t think you should visit them now. Nabal’s change of heart has also changed his relationship to his wife. I believe Nabal is finally working on restoring his marriage. We shouldn’t interrupt them.”

“The shepherd told you all that? So quickly?”

“No, my lord. But I do have a woman’s intuition, you know. I can read between the lines.”

“Oh. Okay. Settle back down, guys. We’ll wait a bit.” David was still under Ahinoam’s spell. He hadn’t yet learned to distrust her. But over the next month, he began to get suspicions. Every time he suggested going to visit Nabal, Ahinoam had some new reason to wait, stay away, leave that place and go anywhere but there.

“What is it with you, woman? Surely Nabal has had time to recover, or restore his marriage, or whatever it was you said he needed to do. I’m going to visit him!”

“O my lord. I’m feeling faint. Please don’t leave me!”

“Okay. Sorry, my love. We’ll invite them here. Joab. Take your brothers and run down to Nabal’s place. Ask him and his wife if they’d like to join us for dinner.”

They returned with the news that Nabal had died and Abigail had been in mourning for a month. Now it all became clear to David. He looked at Ahinoam. “You knew. That’s what the shepherd told you. You’ve been lying to me all this time!” He had been too trusting of her, and was furious at being deceived. He wondered how many other things she had lied about. *Had she lied about hearing YHWH’s voice? About knowing that she was made for him? What about all those endearing speeches when she had first met him? Were they all lies?*

So as often happens, Ahinoam’s lies backfired on her. David’s big, warm heart turned cold and closed toward her. He sent Joab back with a proposal for Abigail to leave her husband’s home and join his happy band.

Now as it turned out, Abigail was in a bind. She had borne Nabal no children, so according to the law, Nabal’s next of kin was supposed to take her, and raise up an heir for Nabal’s vast estate. But Nabal had three brothers, each claiming to be the next of kin and wanting Nabal’s estate – and his beautiful wife. Ever since Nabal’s death, they’d been bickering with each other over who would get her. Now that the period of mourning was past, their fights had become increasingly bitter, as often happens when much wealth is concerned. Abigail had never liked any of Nabal’s brothers. By now she had learned to detest and fear them all. She had made a bad mistake with Nabal, and suffered for it. She would not make that mistake again.

David's proposal came at just the right time. Abigail's decision was easy. She said nothing to her brothers-in-law. She and her maid-servants packed food and all her things on her three donkeys and followed Joab.

When Abigail reached the thicket where David's men were hiding, she dismounted and fell on her face before him. "Behold, your maidservant is but a maid to wash the feet of my lord's servants..." she began.

But David quickly stooped down and lifted her back up. "I haven't invited you here to become my maidservant," he told her. "I asked you to come to be my wife. You're the loveliest, most intelligent, kind, and thoughtful woman in Israel. Nabal was not worthy of you. With the help of YHWH my God, I vow to do my best to be more worthy of you. I will care for you as my own soul."

"Does not my lord already have a wife?"

"I do. But she has deceived and dishonored me, and has proved herself not worthy of me. I shall never go in to her again," David promised. He assured Abigail that it was okay to have two wives. Had not their father Jacob (Israel) had two wives and two concubines?

On that assurance, Abigail readily agreed to David's proposal. After all, like all the women in Israel, she also had secret dreams of loving him. They were married by Abiathar the priest that very day. Thus began another in a long series of tragic consequences which had begun with Ahinoam. Once again, Logos was grieved that He had not even been consulted. David had failed the test.

The next day Nabal's three brothers came searching for Abigail. But she had already told David the whole story, so he was ready for them. "Abigail is under my protection. Now, settle your differences before me or I'll settle them for you. I'll give you one hour."

They began to argue. David strapped on his sword without another word. Their eyes grew big. "What will you do with us if we cannot settle things in an hour?"

"What do you think? I'll slay you all and give Nabal's estate to someone more worthy than any of you."

"Okay. We will split it three ways, even-even."

"I don't believe you are capable of living next to each other on that land, no matter how big it is. You will spend the rest of your days squabbling."

"We swear! We will be friends! We will always love and help each other." They quickly gave each other brotherly hugs and kisses all around.

"Okay. I accept your plan. See that you do! I'll return to check up on you every year or two. If I find you squabbling I will slay you and take Nabal's estate."

Abigail was pleased and proud of David, that he had settled an impossible situation so easily.

David and his men left Carmel and returned to their hideout under Mount Hachilah near the town of Ziph on the edge of the desert. He posted scouts, knowing that Saul would find out he was there. This time he planned an escape route, so they could not be trapped.

As he figured, the Ziphites again reported him to Saul. This time, David was pre-warned and ready. When Saul's army camped at the base of Mount Hachilah, David and Abishai were watching them. They waited until the army was sound asleep, then snuck up to their camp.

Saul had 3000 soldiers, against David's 600. He was so overconfident he didn't even set a night-watchman. David was amazed. There was Saul, sleeping next to General Abner in the middle of the camp, his captains circled around them. David waited until the campfires dimmed, then slowly made his way through the mass of sleeping soldiers, praying that YHWH would grant them deep sleep. Abishai followed behind, sword in hand.

Abishai wanted to just take Saul's spear (which was stuck in the ground near his head) and run him through. David would not hear of it. He quietly took the spear and Saul's water bottle. Then they tiptoed back out the way they had come. No one stirred. Even Abner's two big dogs recognized them and merely wagged their tails.

They crossed a gully and climbed a nearby hill. Then in the stillness of the night, David called out to General Abner. His call echoed off the hills, and in minutes the camp was astir. "Yo! General Abner! Answer me!"

Now Abner's two dogs barked. He finally awoke enough to answer. "Who is it that calls to the king?"

"Abner! What a great military hero you have proven to be today! How well you have guarded your king! Look beside you, for his spear and his water bottle. Oh. They aren't there? It's because I have them in my hand. I could just as easily have slain your king as you slept. All of you, for shame! As YHWH lives, you ought to be put to death, for you have failed to guard your king."

King Saul awoke and recognized David's voice. He answered. "Is that you, David my son?"

"Yes, O my king. Why is my lord still pursuing his servant? What have I done? What evil is in my hand? Has YHWH told you to kill me? Or is it someone I have offended, who wants to take my inheritance in Israel?"

Logos and Ahinoam (Saul's wife) were overhead, still interceding fervently. One more time, the intercession was sufficient and the grace flowed forth. The evil spirit of the adversary fled. King Saul's heart melted with repentance. "I have sinned! Return, O my son David! I have played the fool, and committed a serious evil against you. I swear I will never try to harm you again, because my life was precious in your sight this day." Ahinoam rejoiced. Maybe there was hope for Saul after all.

David held up the spear. “Send your servant to get your spear and water bottle. YHWH will repay each man for his own righteousness and his faithfulness, for He delivered you into my hand these two times, but I refused to lift my hand against YHWH’s anointed. So just as I valued your life today, may YHWH value my life, and may He deliver me from all my distresses.”

Saul sent his servant for the spear. “Blessed are you, my son David. You will accomplish much, and you will surely prevail.” So King Saul returned to Gibeah in peace.

David remained there for a few months, and enjoyed his new wife Abigail. He ordered Ahinoam out of his sight, due to the intense rivalry between his two wives. Then one evening she came to him in violation of his orders. “I must talk to you, my lord, about a matter important to us both. When can we talk? You banned me from seeing you.”

“Don’t blame me. You are the one who lied to me and broke the bond of faith and trust we had.”

“I repent of that in tears every day, and I long for your forgiveness. But we still need to talk.”

“Okay. So... talk already. I did forgive you. But putting our love back together is a different story entirely.”

“My lord, I bear your child. He is nearly four months along. He is beginning to kick sometimes. Here, feel my womb, right there.” Her anguished face was pleading.

“Oh, no! You’re not going to drag me back into that! I’m happy with Abigail, thank you. That is your child. You bear him, raise him, do whatever you want with him. I will have nothing to do with him!” David stalked off in anger, his face burning, ashamed to be unwilling to acknowledge his own child, but too proud to admit it.

Thus began another of the many dire consequences David would suffer in relation to Ahinoam. Logos was grieved. David’s worship times suffered. Whenever he tried to worship, his last sight of the contorted, tear-stained, agonized face of Ahinoam would distract him. Months went by. David grew desperate. “YHWH, why do You no longer visit me? Why is my soul so troubled within me?” *Was it Ahinoam’s deception? Or was it the constant battles with the surrounding nomads raiding Israel? Was it Saul and his promises of peace while still trying to kill him?* David had no answer. He sat down and wrote a letter to YHWH, which became **Psalm 120**.

Finally Logos responded to David’s cries. In a flash of insight, He opened up David’s spiritual eyes to see himself as God sees him. The result was **Psalm 139**, in which David poured out his heart to God. “O YHWH, You have searched me, known me, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Even the night is not dark to You! You formed all my inward parts. You wove me together from my mother’s womb. I am fearfully and wonderfully made!

“In Your book all my days were ordained before I saw even one of them. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me. Know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any evil way in me. Lead me in the everlasting way.”

In the stillness of a soul finally at peace, Logos spoke to David. “Thank you for returning to Me. I have missed you. But I delight that no matter how far you stray, your heart of love still draws you back. I love that in you, David! You are a man after My own heart! Yet I grieve for you. You trouble your own house by your iniquity. You did not ask Me for Ahinoam. Nor for Abigail.”

“Lord, I’m sorry! I repent! What do you want me to do now, divorce them both? I’ll do it...”

“No, David. A greater evil does not make the first one right. I cannot change the past any more than you. You have two wives now. Just love them as I have loved you. Care and provide for them, *and for your children*.”

“But I swore I would never go in to Ahinoam again!”

“A foolish oath, which you shall regret. But you must still love her and keep your vow to take care of her, even if you never have sex with her again. Her time of delivery draws near, and you have no midwife.”

Logos left. In the stillness of the night, David received grace in his heart to do what He had asked. So the next morning he called his two wives together. “I have wronged you both. I am deeply sorry. YHWH showed me last night that I was treating you like toys, like my own playthings, according to my own likes or dislikes. But each of you is a person, infinitely precious in His sight, for He made you. From now on, I am determined to love you, each of you, as He loves me, no strings attached. I ask you, please, will you do the same for me and for each other?”

Not sure where this might be leading, they reluctantly agreed. There was still a lot of bad blood between them. David continued. “Abigail, you are my lover. I will stay true to you and the promises I made you. I only ask that you treat Ahinoam as a sister instead of a rival. Jealousy can destroy a marriage, even ours. Will you do that?”

She hesitantly nodded. So David turned to Ahinoam. “I’m sorry, Ahinoam, for the broken vows. Though you were wrong in deceiving me, YHWH showed me that I was every bit as wrong in trying to correct evil with evil. Will you forgive me for wronging you?”

Ahinoam also nodded, now smiling. “Yes, my lord.”

“I was wrong to prohibit you from coming to me. Please forgive me. I cancel the order. You may talk with me any time, except you may not share my bed. That is Abigail’s place, as I swore to her. But I will care for you as my beloved sister. Only you must promise me you will no longer be jealous of Abigail or bitter against her.”

Repentant, relieved, and grateful, Ahinoam agreed.

CHAPTER 9 – THE DEATH OF SAUL

Heeding YHWH's warning, David moved his band back to Engedi. Then he selected a few men to go with him, and took Ahinoam up to Hebron to find a midwife. She said they were still quite a bit too early, so David moved the rest of his band nearby and waited.

To David's credit, Ahinoam began to feel cherished again during this period. Her wounds began to heal. By the time her baby was born, she and David were on good terms. They named their baby Amnon, meaning 'faithful', making a vow that from this day forth they would treat each other faithfully. Even Abigail quickly warmed up to the cute little shaver. Before long, David found that he had a happy family once again.

But Hebron was a dangerous place. It was too close to Saul's royal residence in Gibeah. David knew it was only a matter of time before Saul's evil spirit returned. He decided to leave Israel and hide out in Philistia. Saul would never attack him there! David asked YHWH to give him wisdom. Pleased at David's obedience with his two wives, Logos responded, "Yes, My beloved. Go to Gath. Talk to King Achish. I will protect you through him."

"You've got to be kidding! Achish? He still thinks I'm a madman! I barely escaped Gath with my life!"

David heard some laughter and a faint, "I do not kid, David. My name is Truth." So, in fearless obedience, he led his men to Gath, praying for wisdom all the way.

An army of 600 swordsmen is no small threat, even for a royal city like Gath. The gates were shut and barred when David approached. But he left his men, and took his two wives and new baby right up to the guardhouse. He laid down his sword, and called, "I am David, a prince of Israel. I wish audience with King Achish." He stood tall and regal.

They were admitted to the throne room of King Achish. As they went through the introductions and formalities, Achish seemed not to remember the madman he had seen three years ago, and David did not remind him. This time he was well-dressed, well-mannered, and respectful, with his lovely family beside him. "Your Majesty, your servant wishes to make a treaty of peace and mutual benefit. I am from Israel, where King Saul seeks my life. I am tired of fighting him, and tired of fleeing from his larger army. I ask only a small place for me and my men to stay in Philistia. In return, I will live in peace with you, and I will help to guard your borders from raiders – either raiders from Israel or from any of the uncivilized tribes of the Negev."

Achish was hesitant. The royal city of Gath was large, but not large enough to add over 600 possibly contentious soldiers next to his own army.

David saw his hesitancy. "If I have found favor in your sight, give me a place in the country, along your border, for why should your servant live with you in the royal city?"

To that, Achish was willing to agree. He gave them the distant town of Ziklag, on the borders of Simeon. It was empty, as it had never been resettled since Joshua had conquered the area. It proved an ideal place. David and his men flourished there for several years. Many of his mighty men married and began raising families. They supported themselves by raids on the uncivilized tribes of the Negev, Edom, or Arabia. David reported each raid back to Achish, accounting how well his borders were being protected. Frankly, he stretched it a bit – he invented a few stories of raids into Simeon and Judah, as if they also threatened his borders! He wanted Achish to believe that he was taking the Philistines' side against Israel.

Achish bought it. Ever since David had come, Achish had had peace on all his borders. In a short time, he trusted him completely. So much so that he asked David to serve as his bodyguard, and invited him to fight side by side with the Philistines in their next major raid on Israel in two weeks. He gave David a week to make his decision.

Now David was in a bind. His job had always been Israel's protection. So to fight against Israel would be impossible. Yet he had worked hard to gain the trust of Achish. Now he regretted those fictitious 'raids' on the towns of Simeon and Judah. He had tried to give Achish the impression that he was hated by all of Israel, and had succeeded all too well. He talked to Abiathar the priest. YHWH's answer through him was, "Yes, go up with them. I will give the Philistines into your hands."

David didn't like that answer. He was trying to prove himself trustworthy to Achish and YHWH wanted him to double-cross the Philistines? They weren't stupid! The first thing they would do would be to attack Ziklag and take their wives and children! Where then could he go for protection from Saul? So he asked Gad, from the School of Prophets. But his answer was even worse. "Go with King Achish. I will go to King Saul to tell him where you are. This will be Saul's last chance to repent. If he repents, YHWH will give the Philistines into your hands."

David didn't like that answer, either. "No, Gad, no! You can't go to Saul. If I go with Achish, that will leave Ziklag unprotected! Saul – or Achish – could come and massacre our wives and little ones! I won't let you go."

Gad was just a young prophet, who both feared and admired David. But this time he did the right thing. "Slay me if you must, but I will obey God rather than you. I'm going to tell Saul where you are, right now."

David tried to stop him, but Gad was determined and David couldn't just kill him, so he got away.

He went straight to Saul. "YHWH God of Israel sent me with this message. 'David is in Ziklag. Immediately go to him. Give him your royal crown, scepter, ring, and robe. Invite him to reign in this palace. Command your servants to welcome him as king and serve him.'"

“And if I refuse?”

“Within two weeks you and your sons will be slain, and Israel’s armies will be defeated and scattered.”

Sadly, Saul was too proud of being king to do it. He had Gad thrown in the dungeon. That night Rizpah had a dream. In it, Saul’s three sons by Ahinoam (Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua) were all killed, while Saul was mortally wounded. Rizpah awoke when Saul called for someone to slay him! It was awful! Rizpah sobbed as she told it to Saul. Sadly, he refused to hear her, either.

“What more can we do?” Michael asked Logos.

“We can return someone from the dead...” Everyone gasped at Logos’ words. Sending someone back from Sheol was unprecedented. Could it even be done?

Samuel-Sarah stepped forward. “I am willing to go, Lord. I have been grieving for Saul ever since he turned away from serving You. Perhaps I can bring him to true repentance, if I show him the tragic alternative.”

“You may go. I will show you when. We must all be in constant intercession for Saul at this crucial time.”

The battle would be in a week. The Philistines began gathering their armies at Aphek LaSharon (on the Plain of Sharon). Saul heard the news and began to muster his armies as well. He wondered if this would just be a raid, or a major battle. He prayed, but got no answer.

After Gad left the camp, David became frantic. He had to have an answer! His week was up, and he had to go tell Achish his decision. Of course he couldn’t fight with the Philistine army, but how could he say so to King Achish while still keeping his trust? He was trapped! He fasted and cried out to YHWH in agony of soul all day and all night. Finally, in the very early morning hours, he had submitted his soul and quieted his heart enough to hear an answer, beginning with a few soft chuckles. It was Logos. “YHWH, are You laughing at me?”

“With you, My beloved, with you. You were so upset that Ahinoam deceived you, yet here you are, stuck in a trap of your own making, because you deceived Achish. Truth works much better, even to one’s enemies. I told you that I would protect you through him.”

“Yes, Lord. I’m sorry. I repent. Please forgive me and help me out of my trap. I’m desperate!”

“I forgive you, My beloved. However, sin does have its consequences. You have sworn allegiance with Achish, so go with him as he leads. *You must keep your vows – even to your own harm.* I can easily protect My people Israel from you. But pray that further consequences fall not upon you and your faithful band, for the adversary seeks occasion against you. Your sin has opened a hole in the covering that you provide over your own. If Satan discovers that hole, it could be disastrous.”

“Yes, my Lord and my God.” David worshiped. So he and his 600 went to the battle with King Achish. Then just before the battle, the four other Philistine kings became suspicious of his loyalties and sent him home. David never knew it, but this, too, was of YHWH. He desired to show mercy on Israel. *If Saul had repented, Logos would have allowed David and his mighty men to help Saul defeat the Philistines. But Saul did not repent, so David was sent home.*

When David and his men returned to Ziklag, they saw to their horror that their city was burning, and over ten thousand Amalekite warriors were heading south with the plunder. They had only been gone three days! All their wives and little ones had been taken, Abigail, Ahinoam, and baby Amnon included. This was a tragedy beyond comprehension. The battle-hardened warriors wept like children until they had no tears left to weep. Then they began to talk of stoning David. (It’s always the leader who takes the rap for a calamity, isn’t it.)

David poured out his heart to YHWH, and again, Logos answered him. He showed him that when Saul had cleared the Amalekites out of the Negev, he had not gone far enough. There had still been a large band of Amalekites in Arabia, beyond Midian. They had come through into the Negev, hoping to re-capture their city of Barnea. Finding it empty and un-defended, they had simply moved in. They had recently begun making raids on surrounding towns and nomadic groups in the Negev for their provisions, just as David had been doing.

Well, the Negev had been pretty well cleaned out by David and his band – all those provisions were in Ziklag. So while David was marching up to Aphek with Achish, the Amalekites had taken Ziklag. Logos did not seem to think it was a problem. “Yes, Satan found you. He intended it for evil, but you in Me shall defeat him utterly and turn it into a great blessing, for you and for all Israel. I want the Amalekites eliminated from the face of the earth. This is your opportunity to enforce My eternal curse against them. So go, My beloved. I am with you.”

David was worried. Logos sounded so casual about it, but this was a big army! So David double-checked with Abiathar the priest. Again, YHWH’s Word came, “Yes, go. Pursue them. You shall surely overtake them, and shall rescue all.” Okay. David still had trouble imagining how he would defeat an army of ten thousand with only 600 men. But he was obedient. They headed south.

However, Logos thought that 600 was way too many. As they crossed the wadi of the brook Besor (five miles south of Gerar), a third of his men suffered heat stroke and were too exhausted to go on. David really agonized about that, crying out to YHWH. “Lord, You told me to go. You confirmed it through Abiathar. Why then are so many of my men sick?” He was discouraged and despondent, and in the depths of grief over the loss of his wives and child. *And now his mighty men are getting sick?!*

Logos did not answer him. This was a test of faith, and obedience. For David, it was the hardest test he had ever been through. His men were sick and ready to revolt, everything he owned had been taken, and now even YHWH seemed distant. Finally he bowed his head, "YHWH, You said to attack Amalek. So I will obey, even if I have to go alone. You are not limited to save by many or by few. I belong to You. I entrust myself into Your hand."

David stood up and called to the remaining 400 men. "YHWH told me to attack Amalek. I'm going to go do it. YHWH will win the victory. If any of you wants to come and share in the victory, I'll be glad to have you. If anyone would rather stay here to care for these sick men, you are welcome to do that, too. Even if you all stay here and I go alone, YHWH will still win the victory." He turned and headed south. His 400 followed him.

The heavenly host gave a mighty cheer, echoing through the heavens. *David had passed the test. He had truly become a man of faith, "a man after God's own heart."*

David wasn't the only one being tested. After sending David home, the Philistine armies at Aphek LaSharon marched north to Megiddo, then crossed the Valley of Jezreel to Shunem, which is between the hills of Moreh and Gilboa. They camped opposite Saul's army, which was gathering at the Springs of Harod at the base of Mt. Gilboa.

It was pretty obvious that they were preparing to attack, and soon. Seeing their vast hordes, Saul was terrified. This was not just a minor raid. They covered the valley! Why, there must be fifty thousand! Where was David now that he needed him? Saul began to regret throwing Gad in the dungeon. He sent runners to Gibeah with orders to set Gad free, and asking for prayer. Then he sent a letter to Ziklag expressing deep regret over his antagonism against David, and begging him to come with his mighty men to Israel's aid. Saul offered David half the kingdom! *Maybe that would be enough to satisfy Gad.* But his messengers returned with the news that Ziklag was burned and empty.

Saul fasted and prayed. He called for prophets. He asked for priests to consult YHWH with the Urim and Thumim, but after his slaughter of the priests at Nob the surviving Levites didn't know how to use them. *Why O why hadn't he shown mercy to Ahimelech?!*

Saul began to panic. He sent a frantic plea to Egypt. Surely Egypt had a responsibility here! *What should he do? Should he surrender? Or fight the Philistines? Could he win? Or would he be killed and his army routed? What about Rizpah's dream? And Gad's prophecy? Should he just flee? Would Israel survive? If only he could talk to Samuel!*

Now Saul wished he had not slain all the witches and mediums. Maybe one could call Samuel back from the dead for a quick consultation. Saul's servants knew of one medium still alive: an old witch called Zansham, who had been hiding in Endor from the wrath of Saul.

What luck! Endor was just the other side of the hills of Moreh, less than 5 miles away. Saul laid aside his royal apparel and put on rough peasant's garb. He took two bodyguards, also dressed like peasants. Though it was evening, they set off immediately, in a circle to the east of Mount Moreh to avoid detection by the Philistine army. They arrived at midnight and beat on old Zansham's door. It took a long time. The poor woman was terrified to have men banging on her door at that ungodly hour. But Saul was insistent. "I beg you! I desperately need you to conjure someone up from the dead!"

"Oh, no! I don't do that anymore. Not since Saul slew all the mediums and spiritists in the land. Do you want to get me in trouble? Saul would kill me!"

"I swear to you in the name of YHWH, you shall come to no harm for this. But I must talk to the prophet Samuel! It shouldn't be hard. He's only been dead four years."

The old witch still didn't want to do it. Saul offered her a year's wages in gold, in advance! That did it. After hiding the gold, she settled in to practice the tricks of her trade. She knew how to make flickering lights seem like hovering spirits. She could project and deepen her voice as if a spirit were answering her from the mystical beyond. She knew Samuel well, and was sure she could impersonate his voice. She expected no trouble.

Logos gave Samuel-Sarah another brief hug and pointed. "There is the place. Now is the time. We will all be interceding. But Saul will not be able to see us, only you. May he finally make the right choices, or else his life will be forfeit tomorrow, and My people Israel will suffer."

The witch pronounced her incantations and called for Samuel. She manipulated the lighting with her foot, adjusted her voice to sound like a man, and prepared to growl, "Why have you awakened me?" But instead, a shrill scream erupted from her throat, for her eyes were opened to the intersection between Earth and Sheol. There stood Samuel, *the real one!* Zansham was utterly terrified! This had never happened before! She looked back at Saul and his men, except now she saw them from Sheol and knew they were King Saul and his bodyguards. "Why have you deceived me? You are King Saul!"

Saul attempted to reassure her. "Never mind, my dear. Never mind. Do not fear. Just tell me what you see."

Zansham began to describe a young Samuel standing in a glorious realm surrounded by angels. Saul knew it was really he, and knelt. Suddenly he too could see into the realm of Sheol, though he only saw Samuel. Ahinoam his wife was there too, but he couldn't see or hear her.

"Why have you summoned me?" Samuel asked kindly.

"I am greatly distressed! The Philistines are upon me and YHWH has left me. He doesn't answer me by prophet, priest, or dream. Tell me what to do!"

“Why ask me? If YHWH has left you it is because you’ve become His adversary. There is nothing I can do. Repent before Him. Plead His forgiveness and mercy. Then obey what He says to do. Is that really so hard? YHWH does not answer because you have not come to Him with the right attitudes of repentance, humility, and willingness to obey. Just as in your disobedience after killing the Amalekites, it is still all about your own pride and honor as king.”

“But Samuel, I thought I obeyed. And I’m trying to obey now. I want to obey! I’m doing everything I can...”

“Right. Like your recent ‘obedience’ when YHWH sent the prophet Gad. You threw him in prison!”

“That was YHWH? Gad is so young! I didn’t know it was YHWH speaking through him. But after that I freed him and I did what he asked. I sent a letter to David offering him my kingdom. Uh... half of it, anyway.”

Samuel laid it out straight. “Half obedience. That’s all you’ve ever done. I swear, if you had obeyed and given David the kingdom, the Philistines would all be on the run by now. Within the week, you would be happily living in the palace with David your son-in-law. David would have forgiven you, restored your honor, and given you a place in his kingdom, for he loves you and honors you as YHWH’s anointed. But because of your disobedience, pride, and unrepentant heart, YHWH has violently torn the kingdom from you and given it to David anyway. Tomorrow the Philistines will vanquish Israel and you and your sons will be on your way to Sheol with me.”

Samuel-Sarah stood there – a commanding presence in his shining robe, arms crossed, eyes blazing, hair and beard stark black in the light of Sheol. He had done all he could do, just as sternly as possible without being cruel. *He loved Saul deeply, but O God! Would he ever repent?*

Saul was overcome with fear, and remorse at all his failures. He lay moaning, full-length on the ground, until nearly sunup. Zansham saw his weakness and tried to get him to eat some breakfast, but he refused. His bodyguards also tried to get him up, but he was too weak to even stand. Zansham feared for her life. King Saul had sworn to grant her immunity, but if he died now, she would be blamed! She insisted he must eat, and the bodyguards agreed. She prepared a lavish meal, fit for a king. Then they rolled him over, lifted his head, and fed it to him like a baby.

Saul returned to his camp just in time for the battle. Sadly, though sorry for having to face the consequences, he never really repented, so all that Samuel had prophesied came to pass. His own discouragement was reflected in his soldiers, who fled before the vastly superior Philistine army. His three sons were slain, and he was mortally wounded, exactly as in Rizpah’s dream. He cried out for his bodyguard to slay him, but he was unwilling to strike YHWH’s anointed and refused. So Saul fell on his sword and died. Seeing him dead, his bodyguard did the same.

Unaware of the battle at Mount Gilboa, David and his 400 men were still chasing Amalekites. They found an Egyptian servant who’d been abandoned after taking sick. They revived him and agreed to not return him to his evil Amalekite master. He led them into the Negev where the vast army of the Amalekites were spread out all over the ground, feasting and carousing to celebrate the immense amount of loot they had taken from Ziklag.

It was twilight. David prayed, “O YHWH, this is Your battle. Do You want us to wait until they all go to sleep? Or wait until dawn? Or attack now?”

Logos responded instantly. “Do you really want them sleeping with your wives? I don’t. They are drunk. Attack immediately. I give them into your hands.”

David obeyed. His fearless little band of 400 moved in upon the camp, slaughtering every man who rose against them. All night, and most of the next day, the battle raged. Of course the wives and even the children of David’s men also rose up to attack their captors. As many Amalekites were slain by them as by David’s mighty men. Logos filled them all with a holy zeal against His enemies, and assigned His heavenly host to protect them as they fought. By the next evening, every Amalekite soldier was dead, except for 400 of their leaders who had managed to escape on swift Arabian camels and flee to Barnea.

David took inventory. Of all the captured wives and children, none were missing or harmed. It was the same with their livestock. God had granted them a miracle! He hugged Abigail and Ahinoam, and baby Amnon. He had feared he’d never see them again. God is so good! They ate their own spoils, and camped there the night. Early the next morning a thought struck him – *the Amalekite wives and children! YHWH had said to exterminate them.* He ordered his men to arise and prepare for battle. There was some complaining but David would not listen. “I’m going to Barnea to obey YHWH. All who wish may join me. The rest, stay here and take care of your wives and families.”

Again David’s army split up. Only 200 followed him to Barnea. The Amalekites on their camels had gotten there first, and were busy fortifying and preparing for the attack. Their fortress was nearly impregnable, well-stocked, and built right over a well. As soon as they saw David coming, they herded everyone inside, prepared for a long siege.

David did not have time for a long siege. He fearlessly roared, “In the name of YHWH my God who has given you into my hands, come out of that fortress right now, or my God shall drive you out!”

“Yeah, right. As if there is any god on earth who can drive us out!” the Amalekites sneered.

“YHWH, hear the taunts with which they taunt You. Drive them out, now, by Your great power!”

David ignored the laughs and taunts. He lined up his men to slay them as they exited the tower. By the time he had them all lined up, the taunts had turned to screams of pain. Within minutes, the heavy gates were flung open and the Amalekites streamed out, frantically fleeing from a swarm of black hornets. They could put up no resistance. By evening, they were all slain.

David's men plundered Barnea. They loaded up 3000 donkeys and 1000 camels with the spoil. They returned to the camp the next day, driving vast herds and flocks before him. Soon everyone was headed back to Ziklag, with such prodigious amounts of plunder as can hardly be imagined. Truly, God had fulfilled his promise to turn the tragedy into a blessing!

David determined to pass along the blessing. When they got back to Ziklag, he divided up a large portion of the spoils to distribute throughout the cities and towns of Judah and Simeon. He wrote notes to all his friends in the area – those who had supported him and his men when he was being chased by Saul. “Behold! This is a gift for you from the spoils of the enemies of YHWH.” He didn't even add his name. It really was all from YHWH.

On the third day after returning, a messenger from Saul's army came dragging into camp. David ran to his aid, and begged him for information on the battle. The man bowed low before David and began his story. “I barely escaped from the camp of the army of Israel. The people have fled from the battle. Many have fallen and died. King Saul, and Jonathan his son, have fallen, and his other two sons as well. They are dead, my lord.”

“Saul! How do you know that Saul is dead?”

“I was running up Mount Gilboa. The Philistines were chasing us from Jezreel, and they were hot on our heels. Then I beheld King Saul leaning on his spear, mortally wounded by a Philistine arrow. He called out to me, so I turned and ran to him. He asked me who I was. I answered, ‘I am an alien, an Amalekite. But still, I am a faithful servant of the king.’ King Saul begged me to kill him before the Philistines got there, so nobody could say he was slain by an uncircumcised Philistine. So I killed him as he asked. Here are Saul's crown, his ring, and his wrist bracelet.”

David and his men tore their clothes at that news. They spent the whole day in mourning, weeping and fasting for Saul. The young Amalekite soldier was not expecting that. He was expecting a celebration, for he knew Saul had been trying to kill David. He also was hoping for a big reward for killing Saul and bringing David the royal crown and ring, for he knew that David would then become king.

But in truth he had not killed Saul. That part of his story he had twisted to make him look like the hero. In reality, he had seen Saul and his bodyguard fall on their swords, and had come to plunder the bodies. But David believed his lie and had him executed for killing YHWH's anointed.

“And now you see the difference between Saul and David My beloved,” Logos said to Ahinoam (who had watched her husband and three sons die). “Ever since his jealousy at David for killing Goliath, Saul has not ceased to pursue his own honor first, even at the cost of disobeying Me. But David My beloved never ceases to put My honor first. David worships Me constantly, loves and honors My anointed ones even when they turn against him, obeys Me wholeheartedly, and hates all that I also hate.”

They listened to David's dirge for Saul and Jonathan. “Your beauty, O Israel, is slain! Oh, how the mighty have fallen! Don't let the Philistines know, lest they rejoice and celebrate their death. Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in life, not parted even in death, weep over them, O daughters of Israel!” It was sad, but Logos was pleased.

Much later, Logos asked Ahinoam. “Would you like to come with Me to greet your husband?” Of course she did, so together they traveled down to the deeper, darker regions of Sheol. Saul had reached Sheol about the same time as the Amalekites whom David had killed. They hated the light and were all fleeing from it, so, not knowing any better, Saul had followed them. They were even now going through the ancient gates and crossing the chasm as the red dragon welcomed them in, chortling in glee.

Saul paused thoughtfully at the edge of the chasm. After the last of the Amalekites crossed, the dragon called and waved to him, urging him to cross. Ahinoam cried out! She had seen what had happened to Nabal. Ahinoam tried to run to him, but Logos drew her back.

Saul hadn't heard her cry. He was studying the chasm and the red dragon. Something didn't seem right. As Logos came near, Saul turned back to look at Him. Saul paused, considering, then followed as Logos led him back up to the Welcoming Park. “He can't see Me yet, but he is drawn by My light.” Logos confided to Ahinoam. Seeing Saul wash in the crystal stream as she had done, Ahinoam rejoiced. But the thought crossed her mind, *How had Sarah made it through the veil right into Logos' arms without washing?*

Logos remained silent for a long time. Saul was now crying out in repentance, and pleading for forgiveness for a lifetime of half-obedience, as well as his bad attitudes and sour moods that had hurt so many. Ahinoam realized that Logos was replaying a recording of his entire life before his eyes, although she couldn't see it. Finally, Logos spoke, tenderly – in love, not condemnation. “Look at Me.”

Saul looked. Suddenly he could see Logos, smiling, holding out His arms in welcome. “O Lord YHWH, how can you love me after all the wicked things I've done?”

“I am love,” Logos answered simply. “Your sins are all forgiven, covered by the blood of the lamb, as you have believed. Welcome to My realm, Labaya. I am delighted that you chose Me, instead of My adversary. Come with Me. Get to know Me as I am. And come meet My friends.”

Now Saul spotted Ahinoam standing beside Logos. His eyes opened wide with delight. Logos laughed, a childlike, sparkly laugh that rang bells in Saul's heart. "Yes, Labaya, here is Ahinoam your wife. You are with Me now, in part because of her faithful intercession and love. Now you will never have to leave her again."

"Thank You, YHWH! I am overwhelmed by love!"

Logos reached down to lift Saul, and put His other arm around Ahinoam. "Come get your welcoming hug, from us both." After they had enjoyed the hugs, they started up a narrow path together. "In this My realm, My name is Logos, the Word of the eternal Father..." He began, patiently starting to teach Saul about Himself.

A bit later, Ahinoam's curiosity focused on a question. "Logos, why did You not unite Saul and me like You did Samuel and Sarah? He is my husband!"

"Yes, he is, My dear. At the right time I will unite you. But would a farmer yoke a pair of wild horses together to plow his field? No. First he would train them to pull together. In My realm, I would no more join together an un-equally yoked pair than the farmer would on earth."

"Yes, Logos, I understand. I certainly do remember how un-equally yoked we were when we first married. We fought about everything! But Logos, we learned to pull together. I learned to support my husband. At least, well, ... until he took Rizpah as his concubine."

"Learned. That is the key. Just as you learned to pull together in the physical realm, so you must learn to pull together in the things of spirit. You have much to learn about Me and My realm. I am the light that draws you and the waters in which you wash. Samuel and Sarah learned to know Me on earth. They didn't need to wash here in the stream, for they lived their entire lives baptized into Me. In time I will join you and Labaya. Be not anxious."

But that brought up a question in Saul's mind. "Sir, Samuel and Sarah certainly deserve to be here with You, but I don't. I fought against You much of my later life. And at the end of my life I had lost You completely, so much that I hired a witch to try to find Your will. Why am I not now suffering in hell, condemned for my sins?"

"There is no condemnation in My realm. I understand the weakness of human flesh and the foolishness and ignorance of the human soul. I am quick to forgive. Your sins are covered by the lamb sacrifice, according to your own faith. One day, when that last pure Lamb of God is sacrificed, they will be taken away completely, so I can bring you to My Father's realm where no sin can exist.

"But suffering – that is a different matter. Under My Law, suffering is always the natural consequence of sin. The Amalekites are now suffering for their own sins, by their own choice. I do not condemn them. Not at all! Their own choices, their own words condemn them.

"When you first arrived here, you saw the Amalekites fleeing from the light. They saw Me. I came to them. They had every opportunity to love and accept Me. But instead, they chose to reject Me and My light and love. Their own choices condemn them to the pit you saw. That is the only suffering in My realm – for those who hate Me so much they cannot humble themselves to accept My sacrifice. In their pride they choose to suffer for their own sins. You followed them only in ignorance. But you've never hated Me, Labaya. You chose Me. I take your suffering for you."

"Thank you, Lord. I am grateful. But... it doesn't seem fair that I should get the same reward here as Samuel!"

"Labaya, my son! How I longed for you to have the same reward as Samuel, or greater! But that entire concept of 'fairness' has no place in My realm. All are not equal here! True justice cares not about trying to make it fair. Rewards here are based on a lifetime of choices and deeds. Your reward seems great, to you. But Samuel's reward is many times greater. He shall rule with Me as king."

"If I had obeyed You fully, wholeheartedly, every time, would my reward have been as great as Samuel's?"

"Labaya, in My realm we don't usually play the 'if only' game. We live in the present, the 'what is', rather than the 'what was' or the 'what might have been'. I will only say that when I lovingly formed you, when I wove you together and gifted you, when I put My Spirit and My nature within you, you had the potential to become far more than you actually achieved. *I made you also a king!* Instead you chose to become a slave – a slave to your own passions and desires – a slave to your honor before men. So now you are but a servant in My Kingdom, for you are what you choose to be. Yet I do not condemn your choices, for you have chosen Me. No choice can bring greater reward."

When their period of mourning was past, David washed his face and turned to his men. "Our reason for hiding out in Philistia is past. We must ask YHWH what He would have us do now." So they all sought YHWH. He told them to go up to Hebron. They gladly obeyed, bringing their families and all they had from Ziklag in 1021 BC. The elders of Hebron welcomed them, making space for them in the city and the surrounding towns.

That fall everyone got together and crowned David king over the southern tribes of Judah and Simeon. He was thirty years old when he first put on Saul's crown.

They sent word across the land and threw a big party. Thousands from each tribe came to Hebron, including many mighty men of valor, for God had inspired them to pledge their loyalty to turn over the kingdom of Saul to David. The patriarch of the house of Aaron, Jehoiada of Kabzeel, also swore allegiance to David. So did many other priests, including young Zadok son of Ahitub. They were working to restore the priesthood of the line of Eleazar, which had gone apostate during the times of the judges.

We must pause here in our narrative to catch up on events in Egypt, for they are to have a powerful impact on our story from here on. Remember naïve, idealistic young Amenhotep IV and his marriage to Nefertiti in 1035 BC? He had been only an immature seventeen at the time. But old Amenhotep III had already begun training him to be the next Pharaoh, since the crown prince had just died and he feared his own end was near.

Old Amenhotep didn't die. He recovered. In fact, in his 36th regnal year he renewed his alliance with the Mitanni by marrying King Tushratta's daughter, Tadukhipa (the niece of his second wife Gilukhipa, whom had married 26 years earlier to cement his alliance with prior Mitanni king Shuttarna II). Elderly Pharaoh Amenhotep III and Egypt's New Kingdom were at the peak of their power and glory.

Amenhotep IV grew up. He turned out to be bright and capable. Nefertiti had given him a son, Smenkhkare, and two daughters. He began insisting that his father grant him at least a co-regency over Egypt. But there remained one unresolved dispute between them. No amount of coaching or cajoling by the wise father could budge the childish idealism of his son. Amenhotep IV insisted that the gods of Egypt were all fake, and that only one true God existed – the God of Joseph. The Hebrews called this God YHWH. Of course Amenhotep III, who didn't really believe in any god at all, knew that would never work in Egypt. For over 2000 years Egyptians had been ruled by the priesthoods of Egypt's many gods: Aten, Amun, Ra, Horus, Osiris, Isis, Thoth, Hathor, Sekhmet, Seth, Ptah, Hapi, and so on.

They had argued about this many times. Neither side would budge. But as he neared 60, wise old Amenhotep III realized he needed a compromise. He startled his son one day by saying, "Do you realize that many of our gods are sun gods? Even gods like Thoth (the moon), Seth (Mars), and Isis (Venus) are reflections of the sun. If you must insist on your 'one true God', all you have to do is call Him Amun, Ra, Aten, or just 'Sol' and people might buy it."

At first his son reacted against that. So his father upped the ante. "I'll let you be co-regent, but I'll do more than that. Each of Egypt's gods has its own city and temple where its priests maintain their power. So I'll build you a city and a temple where you can try out your new religion! But only if you choose an Egyptian name for your god and not that silly, unpronounceable Hebrew name YHWH."

Now, that wasn't what Amenhotep IV wanted, but he saw the possibilities. He could start there. After his old father died, he could enforce the rule of 'one true God' and exclude the others. A Pharaoh could surely do that! So he compromised. He agreed to call his god Aten, Egyptian for the solar disk. (He wanted to use Ra, 'sunlight', but it was taken.) In 1025 BC his father granted him the co-regency and began building his city and temple. It was on the Nile in middle Egypt, halfway between Herakleopolis and Abydos. He called it Akhet-Aten. We know it as Amarna.

Old Amenhotep III got sick and died two years later. Amenhotep IV took the throne in Thebes. His new city for Aten was not ready yet, so he didn't push it. But he did start building a temple to Aten at Karnak just across the Nile.

His father had told him to keep a low profile with his new 'Aten cult' (as he called it) until it was established. "Support the priests of Amun and Ra. Keep your capital here at Thebes. Leave the promotion of your Aten cult to your priests at Akhet-Aten," he had said. Amenhotep IV disagreed! He began denigrating those 'false priests' of Amun and Ra. In their defense, they banded together to become what Amenhotep IV called the 'Amun-Ra cult'.

In his fourth year he moved his capital to Akhet-Aten. He built a large library to house the nation's historical and administrative records and his dad's correspondence with other nations (which we know as the Amarna letters). In his fifth regnal year, Amenhotep IV was ready. He changed his name to Akhenaten and Nefertiti to Neferneferu-Aten, and declared Akhet-Aten as his capital city. He moved his family and court officials there. He dedicated his new 'Temple to the Great Aten' with a hymn of praise to the Aten. He elevated his late great father to god-status as the human embodiment of Aten. Ignoring his father's advice to keep a low profile and maintain the status quo with the other priesthoods, he began to persecute the worshipers of Amun-Ra and their powerful priests at Karnak. He began wasting most of his time and energy trying to marginalize and obliterate all forms of worship in Egypt but his own.

Apir-El warned him that YHWH would not accept his compromise with Egypt's gods, and tried to point him back to YHWH, but Akhenaten needed a physical focus. He never fully understood the concept of worshiping an invisible Spirit. This sun-worship thing threw Egypt into chaos, even civil war, just as his wise father knew it would.

As a result of this religious upheaval, the Levant was mostly left alone during Akhenaten's foolish flirt with monotheism. Egypt was wealthy, but militarily weak. The Hittites grew strong, again threatening his Mitanni allies. But, preoccupied with his Aten cult, Akhenaten's alliances and threats were verbal only, as we read today in the Amarna letters. He neither helped the Mitanni, nor sent aid when the Hittites harassed his vassals in Syria, nor disciplined Israel when they attacked Philistia. Egypt's garrisons in the Levant were powerless. Egypt had become a toothless lion. First Saul, and now David, learned that as long as they politely responded to Akhenaten's many letters, they could get away with anything they wanted.

David's first interest as king was to verify that Saul and his sons were given a decent burial. The Philistines had cut off Saul's head and sent it throughout Philistia to spread the news of his death. But they had not buried his body. They had taken it with the bodies of his sons to Beth-Shan, in the Harod River Valley below Jezreel, and hung them up on the wall, so all Israel would see them and be afraid.

But the men of Jabesh-Gilead had remembered the time Saul had delivered them from the Ammonite king Nahash after he had sworn to gouge out their right eyes and enslave them. They walked all night, reverently took the bodies of Saul and his sons, cremated them, gave their bones an honorable burial and memorial at Jabesh-Gilead, and fasted and mourned for them seven days.

David's first official act as king was to send a letter of commendation to Jabesh-Gilead, blessing them for their kindness to Saul and his sons. He also politely notified them that he'd recently been crowned king in Hebron.

But the men of Gilead were not so quick to accept David as their king. They were still loyal to the house of Saul. Instead, they invited Abner, honored commander of Saul's army, to regather his troops there. He came, bringing Ishael (Ishbosheth) with him. Now, everyone knew that Ishael was an incompetent fool. But he was the last of the royal sons of Saul. So, with considerable reservations, they anointed him king of Israel at Mahanaim of Gilead.

As expected, having a forty-year-old fool as king was humiliating. But Abner didn't have time to deal with it. The Philistines had taken over many of the cities of Israel surrounding the Jezreel Valley, for the Israelites had fled from them and left them undefended. One by one, Abner and his army took them back, until most of Issachar, West Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin were back in Israel's hands. It took him two years. All that time, foolish Ishael (Ishbosheth) was strutting about playing king, with not the foggiest idea of what he was doing.

The elders of Gilead put up with him for Saul's sake. But when Abner returned after driving the Philistines back to their own land, they'd had enough. Abner was Saul's cousin, since his father Ner was brother to Saul's father Kish, so he was nearly royalty. Without telling Ishael, they made Abner their real king. Ishael then became merely a figurehead. He was simple-minded enough to be quite happy with that arrangement. Abner made a good king. He ruled fairly and wisely for over five years, an honorable man as well as a valiant warrior. Israel was at peace.

Strange, how Israel wound up with a fool for a king at the same time that Akhenaten was playing the fool down in Egypt with his new solar religion. In all the fighting back and forth in the Levant, Egypt had not intervened even once. Akhenaten had made no attempt to aid his allies the Philistines, nor had he responded to Saul's frantic pleas for help when the Philistine armies were massing to attack at Mount Gilboa. It wasn't only the Levant that Akhenaten ignored. Hittite king Supiluliuma saw his weakness, too! He invaded Syria in 1022 BC and forced an alliance with Mitanni king Artatama II. (He died in 1000 BC. His son Shuttarna III tried to break the alliance by going to Assyria for help. Supiluliuma killed him and installed vassal king Shattiwaza, who swore allegiance to the Hittites.) They would soon become a powerful threat to Egypt, and Israel!

Though officially at peace, a cold war smoldered between the supporters of King David and those who backed the descendants of Saul. This was particularly illustrated in the contest at the pool of Gibeon. It began as a friendly sport between twelve men selected from the army of Abner, and twelve selected from the army of David. But the twenty-four men fought so violently, that they all died! The fight spread. Abner's men began to get the worst of it. So he wisely called a retreat and ran toward Gilead. But Asahel, Joab's brother, took off after him. He was as fleet as a gazelle! He was catching up, sword in hand, as if he intended to kill him! Abner pled with Asahel to turn aside. He insisted there be no more bloodshed between fellow Israelites. He certainly didn't want to offend Joab by killing his brother! But Asahel would not back off.

Finally, purely in self-defense, Abner thrust the butt of his spear back and caught Asahel in his stomach. Sadly, he died on the spot. Abner was grieved.

Now Joab and Abishai needed to avenge their brother. They chased Abner the rest of the day. But he was not the commander of Saul's army for nothing. He maneuvered around to the top of a nearby hill where a big group of his men had gathered. There he stood in front of them and shouted out to Joab, "Shall the sword devour forever? Don't you know – feuding always turns bitter in the end? How long will it be before you wise up and tell your men to stop fighting with their brothers?"

So Joab blew the trumpet to call retreat, and brought the servants of David back to Gibeon. Abner took the remains of his men with him back to Mahanaim in Gilead.

When Joab counted the dead, it came to 19 of his own men besides Asahel his brother, but 360 of Abner's men had died. What a waste. Aren't you glad today's men just play football instead? Joab buried his brother Asahel in his father's tomb in Ephrathah, and returned to Hebron. He nursed his anger, and never fully forgave Abner.

David had not been there. He was tired of fighting. He discovered it was a lot more fun to make love than to make war. Many of the young ladies of Hebron went all agaga over him, so he spent those seven years at Hebron taking wives and making babies. It is very sad, but once the sacred vow of fidelity is broken, it is that much easier to break it again. Abigail was pregnant with Chileab (also known as Daniel) when he was crowned king. David had vowed to not sleep with Ahinoam, but as fat as Abigail then was, she wasn't much fun. Thus David felt justified in taking another wife. Just one. Ha. In 1020 BC he married Haggith. The next year, King Talmi of Geshur (southern Syria, on Israel's northeastern border) sent his daughter Maacah down to David to cement an alliance with Syria. Of course David could not refuse her – that would be a huge political blunder. So he had four wives (not counting Michal). The following year, Maacah bore him a son whom they named Absalom, and Haggith became pregnant with Adonijah.

So David took a fifth wife: Abital. She soon became pregnant with Shephatiah. That led to a sixth wife, Eglah. She bore him Ithream the next year. Yes, David was a very busy boy during those seven and a half years at Hebron. Logos was grieved. These tragedies were all consequences of David's unfaithfulness to his vows to Michal, his first (and only true) wife, in his affair with Ahinoam.

More consequences were to come. David was a man of war; he knew nothing about being a good husband and father to his many wives and children. Besides, he was now king. He didn't have time to train his children in the ways of YHWH. That was just 'a woman's job'. His negligence would cost him dearly.

King Abner saw the handwriting on the wall. David's influence had grown in Israel, while foolish Ishbosheth was making Abner look like a fool, too. Abner needed to distance himself from Ishbosheth and consolidate the kingdom under himself. So he left Ishbosheth in Gilead at Mahanaim, quietly changed his capital city back to Gibeah, and took over Saul's old palace there. This was a direct provocation to King David, but David was so busy 'making love not war' that he didn't seem to notice.

When Abner moved into Saul's palace, he took one more step to solidify his claim over the throne of Saul. He took Saul's concubine, Rizpah, to be his wife, his queen. It didn't work, though. The people's hearts were all still turned toward David. Nothing Abner did seemed to carry any weight. He was ignored. Rizpah didn't mind. She had no desire for power or glory. She missed Saul. She was just glad to again have someone who cared for her and her two sons. King Abner comforted her. He was good to her. For five years they were happy together.

Though Abner was an honorable man, he did not know YHWH. He was a rough, gruff man of war, used to taking what he wanted, when he wanted it. He had no truck with this priest and sacrifice stuff, so when Passover came around, he celebrated the same way he always had – by overeating and getting drunk. He had learned to really love Rizpah – it's pretty easy to love someone who is always kind, respectful, and grateful – but this night Abner was a bit crass and brutal as drunks often are. Rizpah had been through a lot of abuse with King Saul, especially with his bad moods and drinking, and she didn't want to go through it again. She decided to say something to Abner after he sobered up.

Queen Rizpah had never been one for confronting. But Abner didn't know that. When Rizpah asked to talk, he steeled himself for a proper tongue-lashing about his boorish conduct the night before. He was not ready for what Rizpah had to say, so it disarmed him completely. "My lord and master. Thank you for being so kind and good to me, and for caring for me and comforting me these years since Saul's death. I love you! I don't want to lose you, as I lost Saul."

Abner was taken aback. He didn't know what to say. "Thank you, Rizpah. I love you as well. You're a sweet and beautiful woman – easy to love. But why would you lose me?" Again, he expected criticism.

"I lost Saul because of one thing. He disobeyed YHWH to serve his own honor and desire. So YHWH took him. My lord, I'm worried that you also might be disobeying YHWH, perhaps without even knowing it."

"I'm not a prophet or a priest. YHWH doesn't speak to me. How would I know if I'm disobeying Him?"

Rizpah prayed for the right words. "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, please hear me out. You have been working to rebuild the house of Saul. But Samuel the Prophet said that YHWH would tear the kingdom of Israel away from Saul because of his disobedience, and give it to David. As you stand against David, I'm afraid you may be fighting against YHWH."

"What?! Samuel said that? Saul never told me!"

"Saul never accepted it, even to the end. That is why YHWH finally took him."

"All this time I thought I was doing the right thing, the honorable thing, in my loyalty to the house of Saul."

"You are a good man, a kind and honorable man, Abner. YHWH will not judge you for not knowing."

"Thank you, Rizpah. Pray for me, that YHWH will give me wisdom to do the right thing here."

Rizpah prayed. YHWH answered her prayer that very month, in a rather strange way.

Ishbosheth finally found out that Abner had taken Rizpah for his own wife. He recognized the significance, and realized that he was not the real king anymore. (Yes, he was a bit slow – it had taken him five years to figure it out!) He expressed indignation that Abner had his father's concubine. He tried to assert his own authority. *He wanted Rizpah. And Saul's palace, too. Right now. Why had he been left way out in Gilead anyway? He was the king!*

Abner was furious with him. "I showed kindness to the family of Saul. I made you king. I took care of your father's house. I didn't deliver you into David's hands. And now you accuse me of sin with respect to Saul's concubine? What gall! Your ungratefulness has made me realize my mistake. YHWH has indeed torn the kingdom away from the house of Saul and given it to David, to establish his throne over Israel, even from Dan to Beersheba. And may He do so and even more to me also, if I do not accomplish this for Him!"

Ishbosheth was horrified. He realized he had nothing without Abner's support. He answered not a word.

Abner immediately composed a letter to King David, requesting a meeting to discuss terms of peace.

David wanted peace in the kingdom, but he wanted peace in his own house even more. His many wives (and children) had become a burden. He remembered back to that joyous, glorious first year with Michal, and longed to recover the depth of intimacy and love he had experienced with her – and with YHWH. So he responded to Abner (with a carbon copy to Ishbosheth), “Good. I’ll be happy to make a covenant of peace with you – on one condition. You shall not see my face until you restore to me Saul’s daughter, my wife Michal.”

Ishbosheth rushed up to Gibeah with his copy of the letter. “What is this, Abner? What have you done?”

“Exactly what I said I’d do. I am giving the kingdom to David, and we will serve him. You will, too, or you will be slain by YHWH, or by me! Now, go get Michal away from Palti-El. We will bring her to David as he asked. Don’t just stand there. Move!” Ishbosheth didn’t like being ordered around. *He was the king!* But what choice did he have? For a minute he stood there looking like the fool he was, then he scurried off to obey.

Palti-El was not expecting this. He loved Michal and had enjoyed twelve wonderful years with her. But what could he do against the soldiers that Abner had sent with Ishbosheth? He followed, weeping, to Gibeah, where Abner blocked his way and ordered him back home.

They continued directly down to Hebron to meet with David. Abner brought with him twenty elders of Israel. All along the way, he reminded them of their history: how they had suffered under the hand of Saul; how they had rejoiced every time David won another victory over the Philistines; and how they had longed for David to be king over them instead of Saul. “So now let’s just do it. For YHWH has spoken of David, saying ‘By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel from all their enemies.’” Thus Abner got all the elders to agree.

David was delighted to see Michal again, though she was not happy to see him. Her heart was cold toward him, and she was really upset at being torn away from the man she had learned to love. In order to devote his attention to Abner and their peace agreement, David locked her away in his still-growing harem, sure she would soften in time. That was a big mistake!

Abner was unbelievably generous. He swore Gilead’s allegiance to David as king. He pledged to serve David just as he had served Saul. He vowed to gather all the northern tribes into his covenant with David, and to wholeheartedly support David as the king over all the tribes of Israel. No strings attached. Logos was very pleased. David was also pleased. He accepted, and sent Abner off in peace. Abner left to gather support from the other tribes as promised.

But Joab, now a captain in David’s army, was not so pleased. “You sent Abner off in peace? He’s your enemy! He came to spy out your kingdom!”

David ignored him (another mistake) and went to talk with Michal. So Joab sent a runner after Abner, inviting him back to Hebron’s city gates for a talk.

Michal did not want to talk to David. Now that she had seen his harem she knew for sure this was not the man she had loved. She called him a lustful, fickle cad and turned her back, refusing to answer him another word.

Abner returned to Hebron. Joab was at the city gate, alone and unarmed. He begged a private word with him in the gatehouse. Now, Abner was a man of war, and he should have been suspicious. But in his euphoria over his new peace alliance with David, Abner was so sure he was doing YHWH’s will that he let his guard down. Joab’s brother Abishai was hiding in the guardhouse with a knife. Joab held Abner while Abishai drove the knife deep into his belly, so he died.

David was horrified at what his friends had done. At first, he was angry with Joab and Abishai. He swore a curse on them, saying, “I and my kingdom are innocent of this honorable man’s blood. May it fall on the heads of Joab, Abishai, and their father’s house. May their descendants never lack one who is sick or in poverty because of this!” But then Joab told him that they were only following the law of vengeance. Abner had killed their brother Asahel. So David relented, forgave them, and took back the curse.

Rizpah was horrified, too. Abner’s death was all her fault! Abner had just done what she’d told him that YHWH wanted. She felt utterly crushed and despairing. But alas, her times of testing were not yet over.

David mourned for Abner, honoring him publicly for the great man that he was. He personally helped to carry his bier through town, wearing only sackcloth and ashes, weeping, and chanting laments for him.

Saul and Ahinoam were also horrified. “Logos? Why did You allow Abner to be slain just as he was learning to obey You? He was finally really helping David, after all those years of chasing him. What happened?”

“Don’t be anxious for Abner. I love him! Though he does not know Me, yet his heart was turned toward Me by the faithful testimony of Rizpah. He shall not fail to receive his reward. However, intercede now for Rizpah, that she not lose her faith in this time of extreme testing.”

Ishael was horrified, too. He had many enemies, as fools often do, and Abner had been his only protector. Two ambitious brothers cut off his head and took it to David, crowing, “Behold, the head of Ishbosheth, son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. Thus YHWH gives you vengeance upon your enemies this day!”

David rewarded them, but not as they expected. He had them slain for daring to harm the son of YHWH’s anointed. David honored Ishael, by burying his head in the same grave alongside General Abner.

The souls of Abner and Ishael roamed the hills of Israel for many years. Their psychic bonds with earth were strong, and their few connections to the heavenly realms were very weak. They suffered – oh! They suffered! – finally seeing, and understanding, and feeling the full consequences of all their foolishness and the anger, pain, and bloodshed they each had caused. Each in the hell of his own making, but unable to change a thing, they agonized over each wrong choice and all the hurts that had resulted. Their souls, which had been self-centered for so long, could finally identify with what many others had suffered because of them. Slowly, over years, they were brought to a measure of repentance and release.

Their separate tunnels to Sheol were long and dark. They arrived at the Welcoming Park at about the same time. But there was no welcome for them, only the gentle pull of the light. Ishael hated the light and fled from it – it revealed too much of the wickedness hidden within his soul. However, Abner was drawn to the light. He loved the park. It took a while, but he finally bathed in the stream and called for the light to cleanse and clothe his soul.

Logos appeared to him, beaming and holding out His arms in welcome. “Hello Abner, My beloved servant! Long you have served Me and cared for Me. Now you behold My face. Your service is My joy and delight! Enter now into your reward, My faithful servant!”

“YHWH!” Abner bowed low, now ashamed that he hadn’t paid more heed at the Feasts. “But Your Majesty... When did I ever serve You? When did I even care about You? I wasted my life in violence and selfish pleasures.”

“It was I you served when you served Saul and his sons and when you protected Israel. It was I you helped when you cared for Saul’s house. It was I you loved when you loved Rizpah and comforted her. It was I you obeyed when you went to David. You blessed My heart deeply when you submitted to him. All the rest, I forgive, for you did it in ignorance. You will not lose your reward!”

Abner fell at Logos’ feet in worship as Logos replayed in his mind all the things he had done, showing him for the first time the ways that his ‘servant warrior’ attitude had ministered the heart of God everywhere he went.

They spent many days walking and talking together, as Abner began learning about the God he had always loved but never known. But one day, Abner heard a familiar scream of frustration, as an angry Ishael again failed to find a way of escape from the park. “Logos, Ishael is here too, the only other one I’ve seen in this place. I assume You let me see him because You want me to help him, but he only fled from me. Will You go to Ishael, to draw him into Your light and love as You have me? He doesn’t know You yet.”

Logos’ face saddened. “I’ve tried, but he resists the light. He hasn’t asked to know Me. He scorns My forgiveness and love. I am interceding that he may change his decision.”

“How can anyone resist Your great beauty, Your love and grace? It is impossible! May I talk to him again?”

Logos nodded, so Abner ran to the edge of the park. “Ishael! Come meet a Man who knows everything I’ve ever been and done, and yet forgives and loves me still! He’s the one we’ve been searching for all our lives!” He grabbed his hand and pulled him back to Logos, explaining. “His name is Logos, though on earth we knew Him as YHWH, and Elohim, and El-Shaddai. He is the one who delivered us from Egypt. He took us through the Red Sea, and led us in the desert, and fed us with manna, and brought us into the Promised Land. He is love! He forgives our weakness and ignorance. He’s been our protection and provision...” Abner went on and on, until they reached Logos.

Logos spoke softly to him. “Ishael! I am Logos, your Creator and the lover of your soul...”

“You are too bright! I can’t stand the light! I hate Your light! It exposes all that is in my soul and makes me feel wicked and worthless – and foolish!”

“Ishael, I made your worth to be in Me. Don’t you want the wickedness and foolishness to be exposed so it can be cleansed and eliminated from your soul? I will replace it with truth, and wisdom, and righteousness. Only then can your worthiness shine forth.”

“No! I am a king, the son of a king! What right have You to meddle with what is inside of me? What right have You to make me feel wicked and foolish? That’s judgmental and hateful, You intolerant bigot! I don’t want Your truth, or Your wisdom or righteousness. I’ve got my own. Mine is just as good as Yours! Show me a way out of here. I can’t endure being in Your presence!”

Logos sadly pointed at Ishbosheth’s feet. A broad, well-packed road was there, which Abner was quite sure had not been there before. Ishael saw it and ran, without another word, following it out of the park.

The elders of Israel were not sad at the deaths of Abner and Ishbosheth. They pretended to mourn, but they were secretly glad. That completely resolved a rather sticky problem of theirs. Now that the king and that foolish play king Ishbosheth were both dead, they wholeheartedly submitted to David’s rule. So David was crowned king over Israel as well as Judah, in 1014 BC at the age of 37. The rejoicing spread across the land.

After being crowned king, David went to Gibeah to clean out Saul’s palace. Rizpah was there, with her two sons, in deepest mourning over the loss of her husband Abner and what she had done. He was the second king who had been taken from her. Her grief was doubled.

David had compassion on her. He brought her into his own family and treated her like a beloved sister. For Saul and Abner’s sake, he lovingly took care of her and her sons. But sadly, her testing was not over yet.

CHAPTER 11 – DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL

David now had two palaces, one at Hebron and one at Gibeah. That would not do. David wanted to show that the country was united. As it turned out, a city lay halfway between Gibeah and Hebron. It was Jebus, on the border between Israel and Judah. It was a grand old city on a hill, with a massive wall surrounding it and an impregnable fortress within its walls. The only problem was, it was still held by the Jebusites, a warrior class who had never been defeated. Joshua and Salmon had tried and failed. Caleb had tried and failed. The tribe of Benjamin had tried and failed. Even the Philistines had tried a few times. Everyone had given up. The Jebusites were unassailable.

David kindly sent notice to Jebus-Salem that their time in Israel was up. He gave them two weeks to pack up and get out, or they would all be slain. They sent back the taunt, “We are mighty. You can’t overcome us. Even our blind or our lame will turn you away.”

At that David got angry. *It was YHWH they taunted!* After the two weeks were up, he uncovered their water tunnel and led his men through it to take the city. He then sent them against the Jebusite fortress, saying, “He who strikes down the first Jebusite warrior shall become my commander in chief!” Joab took the lead. He captured the invincible stronghold with hardly an Israelite lost. So Joab became David’s army general from that day on.

That’s how ancient Jebus-Salem became David’s city. He made it his new capital and renamed it Jerusalem, ‘YHWH’s Peace’. Thus David’s fame spread across the land. How they loved him! But foreign nations feared him.

Sadly, David still had a weakness for women. Instead of exterminating all the idolatrous Jebusites as YHWH wanted, David spared three princesses for himself. For their sakes, he allowed their families to remain living in the city. (They were assimilated into the Israeli culture.) He justified it by complaining that Michal his wife had recently snubbed him again, and he needed comforting.

It was a lot of comforting, as those three new wives bore David ten more children, in addition to the ones he already didn’t have time to train up in YHWH’s ways.

The Philistines were horrified to hear of David’s easy victory at Jebus-Salem where they had failed. They had never won a battle against David! The five kings of the Philistines decided they needed to take him out ‘before he got too powerful’. Ha ha. They gathered at Rephaim (the Valley of the Giants, SW of Jerusalem) in late October of 1014 BC, the time when kings go to war. Mars was close, and getting closer. Every Philistine soldier was ordered to carry a little Baal or Ashtoreth talisman and fervently pray to it. Then, their priests assured them, Mars would hear their prayers and grant them victory against this growing threat. (This was on the six-year cycle with Jupiter lined up, but not the 30 year cycle of great catastrophes.)

David didn’t even wait until Mars was closest. He got a Word from YHWH, gave it to his beloved army, and they went down and took ’em out. The poor Philistines were stunned. Less than five minutes after the battle began, they were fleeing in terror before David’s men, dropping their idols behind. It was a little like breaking through a glass window – at first it seems solid, but with a little pressure it totally shatters. David renamed the valley Baal-Perazim, meaning ‘the lord of breaking through’.

David didn’t let his men chase the fleeing Philistines. Instead, he had them gather up the wooden Baal talismans and Asherim. They carried them to the top of a hill, in full view of the Philistines, and built a big bonfire with them. The message to the Philistines was clear: “Your gods are powerless against YHWH, the God of Israel.”

The Philistines got the message. The next year, they mustered again, same time, same valley. This time they were not depending on Baal or the hosts of heaven. Their priests had introduced them to a new religion imported from Nubia. It was a type of Shamanism using big bass drums. They’d beat the drums in a marching rhythm until the soldiers fell into a trance. They could then be ordered to do anything, and they’d fearlessly obey, even if they were hurt. No more fleeing in terror before Israel! Ha ha.

It had worked flawlessly in several trials. It was time to use it to finally defeat their warrior-king neighbor. The Philistines settled down to begin the ritual.

David again got a Word from YHWH. He told him, “Circle around behind and below them. Hide yourselves in the weeping willow trees. Wait until you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the trees, and then attack them quickly, for I will fight for you.”

David obeyed. Just obeyed. Logos sure liked that about him. Give Saul a few simple instructions and he always seemed to have trouble with them. But give David a set of complex or unusual commands, and he would just obey, whether he understood or not.

David’s men waited in the weeping willows. The breeze whispered through them. David wondered, but no. It didn’t sound like marching. He waited. The wind ruffled the branches, sounding like people walking. But not marching. David waited. His army got restless. He told them, “Fret not. This is YHWH’s battle. He said He would fight for us, but only if we waited until we heard the sound of marching in the tops of the trees. So we wait.”

Logos smiled. David had passed the obedience test. Would to God that Saul had been so faithful! Standing next to Logos, Saul and Ahinoam clapped with joy at the victory! The boom of the marching drums wafted down the valley across the tops of the trees. David’s sharp ears picked up the unusual but unmistakable beat and signaled the attack. They vanquished the entranced soldiers and chased them clear back to Gaza.

David led his army back along the eastern borders of Philistia, past Gerar, Ziklag, and Eglon, all the way north to Gath and Ekron, the twin royal cities. There he stopped. Could he end this thing once and for all? He was tired of having to fight Philistines again, every year. He fired off a message for the five Philistine kings to meet him in Gath.

Their armies were devastated. David could just as easily raze and plunder their cities from Ekron to Gaza. The five kings came to meet David, hat in hand. David was blunt. “YHWH God of Israel has defeated you. Again. How many times does He have to prove Himself to you? Your Baals, Ashtoreth, and all the host of heaven are powerless against Him. That stupid Nubian god you drug up from the pit is powerless against Him. All the gods of Egypt, including that new god Aten that seems to have Pharaoh Akhenaten so enthralled, have proven utterly impotent.”

The five defeated kings bowed and nodded. What else could they do? King David continued, “So from today on, I command you to worship YHWH, and serve Him alone. I will station one of my commanders right here in Gath, permanently, to ensure that you do. He will report back to me every month; if he fails to report, I’ll be here with my army to find the reason why. The tribute you give him for me will be in proportion to your obedience to my order. If every family in Philistia worships only YHWH, I will take no tribute. If they all turn away from YHWH to foreign gods, my tribute will be all your income for the entire year. I don’t think you can afford the latter, and I don’t think it is even possible to achieve the former, so your actual tribute will fall somewhere between, depending on how zealous you and your people are for YHWH. My commander will determine how much you owe.”

The five kings continued bowing and nodding. David was not sure he had gotten through to them. “There is an alternative,” he added. “Continue to serve your old gods, and I will simply come in, kill you all, plunder your cities, burn your gods, ravish your wives, and take your lands for Israel. Your ally Egypt, can’t stop me, and you know it. Akhenaten is not the slightest bit interested in sending his army up here. When I take over the Via Maris, Akhenaten will be happy as a clam to let me govern it for Egypt.”

That, they understood! He was serious! David left with a signed peace treaty with Philistia, which they actually kept, for a long time. Some accepted YHWH; some didn’t, and they paid tribute based on how many didn’t. I know it sounds crude, but Logos was rather pleased with the arrangement, and He blessed David for it. (*King Ittai of Gath was one of the five. We shall hear from him again.*)

David returned to Jerusalem, also known now as the ‘City of David’. Again he tried to get close to Michal, but she was colder than an ice cube and would not even give him the time of day. For weeks David tried – he really was quite a charmer with the ladies. This was the first time he had failed. Finally he gave up and went crying to YHWH.

Logos responded at once. “David, My beloved. Thank you for coming to Me. And thank you for what you did for the Philistines. Once again, you proved yourself to be a man after My own heart, as I too prefer mercy to judgment. I only hope that they continue to obey your command, and learn to know Me and worship Me truly. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if I could adopt them into My family Israel!

“Now, as to this matter with Michal. You are deeply at fault, My beloved. It is hard for you to see, because each time, you have found excuses for your sin. But know that from Michal’s perspective every new wife or concubine, every child by them, every time your eyes have strayed, have been like a knife in her breast – yes, ever since she saw Ahinoam with you at Ramah when you came to pay your respects after Samuel’s death. Her wounds are very deep. I’m not sure they can ever heal here with you. I suggest you return her to Palti-El. He loves her, too. Perhaps he can give her the exclusive, focused love she needs to heal.”

David hung his head. The rebuke, though gentle, stung sharply, as he knew that Logos was right.

“People need a place to worship.” Logos continued. “Ever since Samuel shut down the tabernacle at Shiloh, My people have yearned for a place to worship. I too, yearn with their yearnings, for I long to dwell among them. You may build your house, your city, and your fortress. But could you also re-establish My priesthood and bring the Ark of My Covenant back from Kiriath-Jearim?”

David was appalled! Why hadn’t he thought of that? “Of course, Lord! I’ll do that first! Do You want it back at Shiloh? or... or may I bring it here to Jerusalem?”

Logos laughed. It was so good to re-discover that enthusiastic puppy-love that He so appreciated in David! “Here is fine, My beloved. I love being here with you.”

David got to work. This would be a big thing to him. He began preparing a place for the tabernacle in Jerusalem. Saul had abolished the priesthood after Doeg had slain the priests at Nob, so David anointed **Abiathar** as the new high priest at Jerusalem and had him train priests from other cities to help him. When all was ready, David gathered the elders and leading men to Kiriath-Jearim. He got a new ox cart. He got musicians, dancers, and singers. The priests sacrificed countless bulls and calves. Everyone joined in the celebration and feasting on the hill at Abinadab’s farm. He and Eleazar had passed on, but his sons Uzzah and Ahio were still protecting the Ark. They loaded it on the new cart. Then they danced in joyous procession down the road toward Jerusalem.

They were nearly to the City of David. But it is built on a hill, and they had not tied the Ark to the cart. As they started up, it started to slide back. Uzzah quickly put out his hand to steady it. To everyone’s shock and dismay, fire came out from the Ark and poor, faithful Uzzah lay, twitching and smoking, dead on the ground.

David was rightfully afraid, and angry! Suddenly he began having second thoughts about having the Ark of God in his city. He looked around. They were near a threshing and grain preparation area, with a farmhouse nearby. When David inquired, he found it was the home of Obed-edom. He was a Levite from the Levitical city of Gath-rimmon of the tribe of Dan (thus called a Gittite). David begged Obed-edom to take the Ark into his house and care for it. He even offered to pay him for the service. Obed-edom was glad to do it, so the priests brought the Ark into his house. There it remained for three months.

But David was unhappy. He knew what God wanted, and he had failed. The Ark was not in the new tabernacle he had built for it. Israel still had no place open for public worship. He sent his servants to check up on Obed-edom.

They returned with news that the entire family of Obed-edom had prospered abundantly these last three months. That did it for David. He still feared YHWH, but he would be more careful this time. He called the people, the dancers and musicians, and the priests back to the home of Obed-edom. Along the way, he had a long chat with Ahio (the brother of Uzzah and the sole surviving son of Abinadab). “David,” he confided. “I’m trying not to be bitter against YHWH for my brother’s death. I think I now understand. YHWH’s Ark is holy. We knew that. Just look what happened at Beth-shemesh! We should never have placed it on an ox cart at all. We priests should have carried it by poles on our shoulders, just as YHWH commanded, the entire way to Jerusalem. I assure you, we will never make that mistake again. It gives me a much greater respect for the holiness of YHWH!”

So this time the priests carried the Ark on poles the way it was made to be carried. Again they sacrificed, danced, and sang all along the way, with the musicians playing at top volume and everyone celebrating with all his heart. This time they made it safely to the new tabernacle, which was built by David after the pattern of the old tabernacle still at Nob above Kiriath-Jearim. The priests had cleansed and prepared it for the arrival of the Ark. All was purified according to the law. They installed the Ark in the most holy place, the Holy of Holies.

The grand celebration went on into the evening, until the sacrifices and feasting, not to mention all the dancing, singing, and shouting, had everyone tuckered out. David closed by pleading YHWH’s blessing on Israel, on all the people there, and on his tabernacle. The fire of the divine Presence fell down over the most holy place, where the Ark was now safely hidden away. At that, the people gave a thunderous shout, heard all the way to Ekron. Finally, exhausted, David sent the people away with gifts of bread, dates, and raisins to take home with them.

David returned home very late that night. Most were asleep, but he made his rounds anyway, blessing each member of his family as he had learned to do.

Michal was still awake. She came to her doorway as David prayed. She confronted him, her face cold and hard. “I saw you from my window as you came into Jerusalem with the Ark. I couldn’t help but notice how kingly, noble, and distinguished you looked—as you shamelessly danced yourself silly and exposed yourself before all the eager, lusty young maids of the land.”

David was shocked at her lewd implications. “It was before YHWH I danced. He chose me above all your father’s house, to appoint me as ruler of His people. That is why I celebrate before Him with all my heart. I do humbly, even shamelessly expose myself before Him, and He will distinguish me before the maids of whom you speak.” He stopped. He was trying to defend himself to her, but he realized he was getting nowhere. He looked into her eyes, fiery with hate. For the first time he realized that he had lost her. She despised him!

Remembering what YHWH had said, he lowered his head. “I’m sorry, Michal. You are my true wife, my first and only true love. All those other wives were weaknesses—failures on my part. I’ve hurt you deeply because of them. I won’t even try to justify myself. I was wrong. Very, very wrong. I hope that you can forgive me someday. Until then I release you from your vows to me. Go to bed. Tomorrow morning first thing, I’ll take you back to Palti-El.”

So early the next morning, David put aside his royal robes to wear shepherd’s clothing, and snuck out of the palace with Michal. He walked slowly, close to her, talking of happier times. He wanted their walk to last forever. But Michal wore a frown. She wouldn’t respond or look at him, still not believing that he’d really give her away. Palti-El was home. He answered the door, at first not recognizing his king and his wife. Then when he did, he stumbled over his words as he invited them in and yelled for his servants to prepare refreshments.

“Wait,” David said. “I have not come as your king. I’ve just come as a friend, asking a big favor from you.”

Palti-El bowed deeply. “Yes. Anything, Your Majesty. Just say the word. I am your loyal servant.”

“This is my beloved wife, the joy and delight of my eyes forever.” He took her hand, and placed it into Palti-El’s trembling hands. “I ask that you take her, care for her, love her as your own wife, until all the hurts which I caused her have healed, even until she herself decides to return to me. I will pay you your wages...” He handed him a small bag of gold coins, “... each year when I come to see how she is doing, and if she wants to come home with me.”

David turned and fled, unwilling to see their embrace and their great joy in having their marriage restored. For many years they prospered, aided by David’s generosity. They were very happy together. Michal had no desire whatsoever to return to David. Each year when he came, Michal would turn up her nose and look away. It hurt.

David worked hard to secure Israel's borders. Over the next three years, he went to each of the surrounding nations in turn, to see if they accepted his authority as king over Israel. If so, he allied with them. But all those who hated him he subdued by force.

He had already subdued Philistia and cleaned out the Negev. Midian was next. They accepted him gladly, so he made an alliance of free trade and mutual protection with them. They promised to guard his southern border against further intrusions of any Amalekites remaining in Arabia. David promised to help defend them if needed.

After Midian came Edom. Sadly, they wouldn't listen to reason. As a last resort, David told Gad to go and prophesy to King Hadad. Gad humbly poured out his heart. "O King, I am distressed for you and your people. YHWH, God of Israel, is offended by your degrading worship of Molech, Chemosh, and the host of heaven. He says that if you don't repent, your army will be destroyed, your young men slain, and your people enslaved. But King David wants to show you mercy, if you will only give up your false gods, who cannot help you."

Hadad laughed at him. He sent Gad back to Israel with the greatest possible insult: he had half his beard shaved off. Then Hadad gathered his army, 18,000 warriors, and fought against Israel in the Salt Sea Valley. It took David six months to finally conquer them, at great loss of life on both sides. **Psalms 60** and **108** record David's lament over Edom. Joab (David's commanding general ever since he had conquered Jebus-Salem) was furious at them. When the battles were finally over, Joab collected Israel's dead to give them a proper burial. Then he went through the land of Edom and slew every male of military age and tore down the walls of every fortified city. Finally, he established military garrisons in Edom to keep them under control.

Hadad was appalled at the slaughter. It was even worse than Gad had prophesied. He fled to Midian with his royal family. But the Midianites tried to turn them over to David. So they fled to Egypt seeking asylum. Pharaoh Akhenaten was generous to them. He gave them a place to live. Hadad's son (Hadad II) grew up at the Pharaoh's court. Much later, young Hadad II married a younger sister of Queen Mutnodjmet, the 'chief wife' (Tahpenes) of the new Pharaoh Horemheb. Hadad's son, Genubath, grew up in Pharaoh's court. But Hadad II never forgot what Israel had done to Edom. He would later take his family and return to Edom, to become a bitter enemy of Israel, fighting against King Solomon and his successors.

At first Gad was crushed by the insult of losing half his beard. In that culture, a young man's beard was his badge of manhood. But as they made the rounds to other nations, Gad began to see it as a mark of honor. When prophesying to other kings, he added, "This was the insult I got from King Hadad in Edom. We totally destroyed Hadad's army and enslaved the Edomites."

From Edom, David moved north to Moab. They had seen what had happened in Edom, and they saw Gad's half-beard and heard his prophecy, but they still didn't think it could happen to them. They also rejected David as king of Israel. Trusting in their detestable god Chemosh, they mustered their army against him. Their defeat was swift and complete. Joab executed two-thirds of their army, and sent the rest home after making them swear they'd never fight again. The Moabites thus became Israel's servants, bringing tribute each year at harvest time.

Not surprisingly, Ammon (just north of Moab) was a different story. King Nahash had ruled Rabbath-Ammon for a long time, and he had learned a little wisdom. After seeing what had happened to Moab and Edom, Nahash ordered that their huge statue of Molech be covered up and all the images of Ashtoreth and the Baals be hidden or burned. Then, after a frantic cleansing of the idols in his palace, he opened up his city and his home to David and his men. He fed their army, and brought David and Joab into his palace to feast at his table. He gave them gifts, and sent them on their way with a treaty of peace and mutual support. David never forgot his kindness and generosity. It provided a much needed respite from the rigors of war his men had endured for so long.

David then led his refreshed army up to the northern borders of Israel. Hadadezer was the king of Zobah in western Syria. To his north, the Hittites had grown strong. After that forced alliance with Artatama II, they were busy installing vassal governors in all the Mitanni cities from the Euphrates to the Western Sea. Akhenaten, still playing with his new religion, was too preoccupied to help them. The weakened Mitanni had thus lost their grip on lower Syria, including Zobah and Hamath. Taking advantage of this power struggle, Hadadezer was in the process of throwing off the yoke of his Mitanni overlords and retaking all the lands the Mitanni had stolen. Right in the middle of all this, Israel's army reached their borders!

In the euphoria of his recent conquests, Hadadezer had gotten proud and cocky. He didn't realize that his easy victories were only because most of the Mitanni warriors had gone north and west due to the aggressive Hittites. So he rejected Gad's prophecy and defied David and his army.

Hadadezer was an unbelievably cruel and ruthless man, having killed his own father to gain the throne. But he was not stupid. When he saw the battle going against him, he sent for reinforcements from the Syrians at Damascus. But when they, too, fled from the Israelite army, he recognized his defeat and quickly surrendered.

David called a halt to the fighting. Hadadezer and his two generals rode over to David under a white flag of surrender. Hadadezer bowed low before David, humbling himself and pleading for mercy for his army. He swore that the Aramaeans (Syrians) would forever be his servants, pay him tribute, and submit to whatever he asked of them.

David bought it. He always preferred to show mercy. Already, too many had died: 1700 cavalry and 20,000 swordsmen from Hadadezer's army, plus another 22,000 swordsmen from Damascus. David took a lot of Syrian gold and bronze as tribute. He also captured 1000 chariots, and hamstringed their war-horses so they could never be used for war again. Then he constructed military garrisons to keep the Syrians under control.

His timing was unbelievably good – providential, in fact. Hadadezer had just conquered the Mitanni on his northern borders and had begun to attack the kingdom of Hamath (northern Syria). His intent was to take all of Syria, then continue down to Kadesh on the Orontes, and farther into Phoenicia, to Byblos, Tyre, and Sidon. Then he would control Egypt's wealthy trade routes, for he knew that Akhenaten's will was weak. The kings of Hamath and Phoenicia were also weak and didn't have a chance against him. After that, his plan was to forge an alliance with the Hittites to gain control over all the trade routes to Babylon. Nothing could stop them! Then conquering the Amorites and the Philistines would be easy, as they were already subdued by those pesky Hebrews. Finally, with the help of the Hittites, he would wipe out the Hebrews too, to control the entire Levant!

But the coming of David's army had forced Hadadezer to withdraw his troops from Hamath before he could gain the victory. Toi, king of Hamath, was eternally grateful. His small army and his land were spared. When Toi heard that Hadadezer had surrendered to Israel, he sent his son Joram to David with gifts of gold, silver, and bronze. Joram negotiated a treaty of mutual protection against Syria and the growing threat of the Hittites.

Likewise the kings of Phoenicia were grateful, also swearing peace and fealty to David. Hiram, king of Tyre, was so grateful that he sent massive quantities of cedar lumber along with carpenters and stonemasons to build a new palace for David in Jerusalem. King Hiram's men did a magnificent job on David's new palace. At that time, they were the finest builders and masons in the world. Hiram became a treasured friend of David for the rest of his life. Later in his lengthy and prosperous fifty year rule, Hiram honored David's son Solomon by furnishing materials and highly-skilled craftsmen for Solomon's temple.

David looked around. It was a miracle! In the space of only three years, he had peace on all his borders. He had peace treaties with every nation who had accepted his rule in Israel, and army garrisons controlling and collecting tribute from every nation who had resisted. He brought his army home, victorious.

When he was settled into his new palace in Jerusalem, David remembered that he still had a promise to keep. He had pledged to show kindness to Saul's descendants, for his son Jonathan's sake. So he asked all the leading men of Israel if any direct descendants of Saul were still alive.

He found Mephibosheth (Destroyer of Shame), the son of Jonathan. When he was five his nurse had heard of the slaughter on Mount Gilboa and had dropped him as she fled; thus he was lame. David brought him into his house, to eat at his own table. He gave him Saul's estate and told Saul's servant Ziba to care for it and give him the harvest. Logos was happy that David kept his vows.

David began working on his city. He enlarged the Millo at the south end of Mount Moriah's ridge. (This is an area inside the wall which was filled in to level the land.) He strengthened the walls around Jerusalem. He repaired and fortified the covering over the water tunnel.

David took no more wives during this period. He had learned his lesson; one wife with YHWH's blessing was worth more than a dozen with His displeasure. Besides, his sons and daughters were growing up (Amnon, his oldest, was now 16), and you know what it's like in a house full of teenagers! David realized he didn't like kids. He was a man of war. *Kids are a nuisance. He had a kingdom to run, here. They get in the way.* He shooed them off for his many wives to raise and educate. He would live to regret that!

Then he heard that the old Ammonite king Nahash had died. Remembering the kindness that Nahash had shown him, David sent ambassadors with gifts and condolences to the sons of Nahash, Hanun and Shobi. Though young, they remembered David's visit and the treaty their father had signed. They were grateful and eager to renew the friendship. But the elders of Ammon, after crowning Hanun the new king, told him, "Your father had to cover up our idol to Molech, and hide or burn our Ashtoreth and Baal idols. David shamed us and our gods when he came. Your father was too weak. He didn't really believe in our ancient gods. Certainly you realize these 'ambassadors' are spies. David wants to know if we still worship the ancient gods that your father put away. Already these spies have seen them; they are all over the palace, all over the city. But you are young and strong! You are wiser than your father! You don't want to cower in fear like your father did, hiding our gods! So send these spies back to Israel in shame, and challenge them to battle. Israel's one God YHWH cannot defeat all our many gods!"

Young Hanun bought the lie. He had the beards of the ambassadors half-shaved in insult, and prepared for war. He mustered his army, and secretly hired 33,000 Syrian mercenaries as well. Then he enticed Joab to meet him in battle at Medeba (an ancient fortified city south of his capital). Hanun sent his army out the city gates to face Israel. But he had hidden the Syrian mercenaries in the hills. They crept out onto the battlefield behind Joab.

Joab arrayed his forces to battle the Ammonites, and then the Syrians sprang up behind him! Joab, being a wise commander, immediately turned his best forces to face the Syrians, and assigned Abishai his brother to hold off the Ammonites until he got back.

As Joab figured, the hired mercenaries soon fled. As hirelings; they didn't have homes or families to protect. Then Joab turned to help Abishai with the Ammonite army. It didn't take long before they also fled back into the city, tails between their legs. Joab decided not to pursue them, nor even to harm their city. They had, after all, been good to Israel the last time they were here. Now they had been duly humiliated. He let them go.

But when Joab returned to Jerusalem, he learned that the Syrians had been fuming and plotting their revenge. Hadadezer had never really submitted to Israel – he had simply done what was expedient at the time, to save his army. But he did not have the integrity to keep his vows of submission, even with the military garrisons staring him in the face. He re-grouped all the mercenaries, then he gathered another 320,000 swordsmen, 40,000 cavalry, and 7000 charioteers besides – a virtually undefeatable army. They came from all over Syria, including from across the Euphrates River, and began assembling at Helam, a beautiful valley just south of the river.

Joab's garrisons had seen what was going on and alerted Jerusalem. Joab knew that his army was much too small. He called for reinforcements from all the tribes. But only 25,000 came in addition to his 25,000 battle-hardened troops. It had been two years since the battle at Medeba. They crossed the Jordan and marched rapidly north through Syria, hoping to catch the Syrians unprepared.

Shobach, the commander of Hadadezer's army, was no dummy. With his huge army, he had control of the battle's location. *Let the enemy exhaust themselves hiking across the desert!* Shobach kept his forces at Helam. They were laid out battalion after battalion along the river, resting.

When Joab reached Helam his heart sank. The Syrian armies were stretched out as far as the eye could see, both up and down the river. He had only 50,000 men. He was outnumbered at least ten to one. He turned to David. "Sir, I'm sorry. I miscalculated. We defeated Hadadezer only two years ago. I had no idea he could gather this many troops so soon! Our garrisons said they were gathering a lot more troops than they had before, but this is insane! We should retreat until we can gather a larger army."

David laughed. "Ha! Who are you? What did you do with my good friend Joab? My fearless commander who has stood by my side through battles worse than this?"

He slapped him on the back. "Has YHWH grown old and weak? It is He who fights our battles for us! Let's ask Him what to do." So they knelt right there, praying and worshipping for a long time. Finally David stood. "We will retreat, back to that pass we crossed just between those hills. Send runners to the two closest garrisons, asking them to signal Jerusalem for reinforcements."

"But sir, we have no reinforcements. At least, none that are prepared for battle."

"I know that, but the Syrians don't! We had more when we attacked them two years ago."

So they went back to the pass and settled in to wait. It was good. The men needed time to refresh themselves after their 300 mile hike from Jerusalem. Shobach was miffed. He had hoped they would just attack, so he could wipe them out. They would be a lot harder to defeat in that narrow pass. But he had seen the runners. He must not allow them time to gather reinforcements. He must attack while they were still weak and terrified. So he reorganized his forces and prepared his battle plan.

King David also was working on a battle plan. He stretched out a line of troops shoulder to shoulder clear across the pass, with the rest behind them to exchange with them as soon as any got wounded or tired. They must not allow their enemy to break through that line, at all costs. David stationed himself on a small level hillock below and about thirty yards directly in front of the pass. Thirty-seven volunteers from his mighty men joined him.

Joab objected. "Your Majesty! You must stay in back, directing the army. You can't be up front like that. Why, if you were struck, everyone would see you go down and be disheartened. The whole battle would be lost. Surely you know that every enemy soldier will target you."

"Aha, my friend. I see it just the opposite. If I am in front, my army will be continually inspired. I cannot be struck down, for YHWH is with me. Just think of all the promises He has given me! How can they be fulfilled if I'm struck down? God keeps His promises. He is not limited to save by many or by few. Just pray for me, Joab."

"Then I shall join you on the knoll!" Joab suddenly realized that this pass was a 'last stand'. Once the battle was joined, the men wouldn't need a commander in back to redirect them. If the line failed to hold, all was lost. There could be no fallback position, no regrouping elsewhere, and no retreat. The men needed the inspiration up front. David nodded. They understood each other.

The Syrians worked their way up to the pass and the battle began. Shobach knew he was at a disadvantage, as the pass was too narrow for him to commit more than one battalion at a time, but he figured he could just overwhelm them with his vast superiority of numbers. He realized that his cavalry would be ineffective on the slope of the hill, so he sent them back down to the valley to look for some way around to the rear of the battle line. He sent his archers first, trying to draw the Israelites down to the plain where his chariots could wipe them out, but the Israelites would not leave their defensive line. They simply waited, holding their shields up close together. They were packed so tight that not a single arrow could get through. The cowards!

He changed tactics. "Target their king!" he ordered. "The stupid fool is right out front. Throw everything you have at him. When he is down, his army will flee!"

Never was a battle fought like this one. All day the little group of mighty men were assailed. All day arrows and spears would bounce off their armor, shields, or helmets, just missing the vulnerable face, hand, or shin. A dozen times David's helmet was knocked off, but his men would casually toss it back to him and he would put it back on in mid-swing. The mighty men fought together as a perfect team, guarding one another's backs. They laughed and joked with each other as they fought, without a thought for personal safety. It truly was inspiring! The rest of David's army was encouraged by their bravery, and their single thin battle line held firm.

But David had not considered the cavalry. They had a long way around, much too far for footmen, but they rode hard to get behind them. David and Joab were up front. There was no one in back to organize a line at the rear. David could not leave the knoll. He prayed, YHWH, this is Your battle. You deal with their cavalry."

In time, the cavalry managed to circle the hills. They thundered up the valley toward the pass from the rear. 40,000 horses make quite a racket. It shook the earth. It also shook the surrounding cliffs, which were made of brittle shale. The shale shattered above them on both sides, exploding into the valley in a zillion sharp shards. The Syrian cavalry was decimated. Of the horses that survived, most fell or broke their legs slipping and sliding on loose shale. Not one reached the rear of David's army.

Shobach was beginning to get anxious. His warriors were dropping like flies! Where was his cavalry? They should have been there by now! He finally realized that he would never entice David's army down into the valley where his charioteers were waiting, so he sent them around to aid his horsemen. Maybe David had more forces back behind the pass than he knew.

The charioteers reached the horsemen. They too began slipping and sliding on the shale. Michael and his host were assisting, of course, and many horses fell that day simply by a push from an angel. The commanders of the cavalry and charioteers finally realized that their horses were useless. But they still had a formidable force of well-armed men. So they regrouped them into some semblance of an infantry and began working their way up to the pass. Michael decided a little hailstorm here might help. Shale hail! He and his host picked up sharp pieces of shale from the valley, and carried them high overhead, to let them drop on the advancing soldiers. Not a man survived to attack the rear of David's battle line.

Now Shobach was angry. This was not going well for him. He was a mighty warrior. He had always been known for his amazing skill with a javelin. He would go up and kill their king himself! Surely that would inspire his men on to victory. Surrounded by his bodyguards, he moved up close to the knoll. He brought five javelins with him. At this close range, he could not miss!

Shobach took careful aim, his eyes fixed only on David. After he took him out, his next javelin would be for Joab. By then the Israelite line would be crumbling and their soldiers fleeing in fear. Shobach reached way back and let it fly. Yes! His aim was true! David was a dead man! But at the last possible second, David stooped slightly and caught the javelin on his shoulder. Stretching far backward with the momentum of it, he rebounded to let it fly in the direction it had come. Shobach was stunned! *How did he do that? No man is that quick!* By the time he overcame his surprise, it was too late. The butt end of the returning javelin caught him in the throat just above his breastplate, nearly ripping his head off. Mighty Shobach was dead before he hit the ground.

When Hadadezer heard that Shobach was dead, he climbed the hill to personally take command. But he was appalled at what he saw! Piles of bloody Syrian bodies were stacking up all around the pass! His charioteers and cavalry were nowhere to be seen. The Israelites looked like they hadn't yet lost a man. Again, he knew when to stop and cut his losses. He signaled his trumpeter to blow retreat, then walked slowly up the hill to David's knoll.

David stood there, resting on his sword, water bottle in his other hand. This was the first break he'd had all day. Hadadezer reached him and bowed to the ground before him. "O mighty king, truly your God YHWH is powerful. You have won. We surrender. We are your servants. Ask whatever you will of us. We will do it."

"Ha! I heard that line before, two years ago. I won't be so trusting this time. You have a lot more men. Tell me, where are they from? How many kings allied with you?"

Hadadezer was filled with dread. He had better be truthful, or he might lose his life over this. He counted off the city-states involved. "Sixteen, sir."

"Okay. Go now. Take care of your dead and wounded. Tomorrow morning I want to see you and all sixteen of your allied kings right here on this knoll. If they are not all here, your life is forfeit."

The Syrian king retreated, and David turned to face his own army. They cheered him lustily. Truly a great victory had been won. David honored YHWH, and Joab, and his thirty-seven mighty men! They had stood with him through thick and thin from the time he had fled from Saul 'til now. David swore to immortalize their names in the history of Israel forever. (This is recorded in 2 Samuel 23.) Each received wealth and lifetime freedom from taxes for their families, as well as honor. *Note that Uriah the Hittite was one of them. His name will come up later.*

The Syrian kings were there the next morning, as ordered. David greeted them in the name of YHWH, asked each their name, where they were from, and how big their army had been, while his scribe recorded the information in a little book.

Then David asked the obviously rhetorical question, “How many of you kings want to live, a long and happy life, in peace and security at home with your wives and families?” He paused. Heads were nodding. “I cannot guarantee that you will – that is up to YHWH our God. But I can guarantee that you will NOT if you ever again ally yourselves with this wicked King Hadadezer. He is a liar and a double-crosser! He swore allegiance with me two years ago after I showed mercy to his army. Now already he broke our treaty and fought against me. That will never happen again. I now know where you live. The next time any of you kings makes a battle alliance with Hadadezer, I will come and level your capital city!”

The sixteen kings all submitted and signed treaties of peace with David. King Hadadezer went home in shame. He never again threatened Israel or offered to help the Ammonites or Moabites against Israel. His general Rezon plotted a mutiny against him, for even his own soldiers despised him. Deserting Hadadezer, most of the army fled to Damascus where they made Rezon their new king.

Again David returned to Jerusalem with a nation at peace, with treaties and alliances on all sides and no one to threaten him. But one thing troubled him. He now lived in a lovely new house of cedar and stone, while the tabernacle of YHWH was only a tent. In the fall of 1008 BC he sent for a man from the School of Prophets, expecting Gad. But a young prophet named **Nathan** came instead. David described the glorious temple he wanted to build for YHWH. Nathan agreed and gave David his blessing. It was almost too wonderful to be true. “Do all that is in your mind, O King, for YHWH is surely with you!”

But that night, Logos came to Nathan in his dreams. He had to return to King David the next morning, hat in hand, embarrassed at his error. He assured David that, “YHWH loves you and promises to establish your throne forever. He sees your heart. He is pleased with your desire to build a house for Him. But you are a man of war and violence. Your hands are stained with the blood of all YHWH’s enemies. He says, ‘You cannot build Me a house of peace. When your days are completed and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your son and establish his kingdom. He shall be a man of peace; meek and obedient, like Moses. He shall build a house worthy of My name. I will be his father, and he will be My son. When he falls into iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, but My lovingkindness will never depart from him, as I took it from Saul when he failed to obey Me. Thus, O King, your kingdom shall endure before Me forever.’”

Though disappointed, David accepted YHWH’s Word through Nathan. He knelt at the tabernacle that evening, pouring his heart out to YHWH in love and worship. He thanked YHWH for His promises, and vowed to trust and serve Him any way he could.

Logos was pleased at his response. Very pleased.

But David, frankly, was a bit discouraged. He moped around for days, not knowing what to do with himself. Peace does that to a man of war like David. All his high energy needed to be focused on something – anything! If he couldn’t build YHWH’s temple, what could he do?

He could work on his marriage and family. He took his annual wage for Palti-El and walked to the familiar house in Gallim of Benjamin, just north of Jerusalem. Just as before, Palti-El gratefully received the money, but Michal refused to face David or even look at him. She again swore that she would never want to return.

Now David was doubly depressed. All through the fall and winter, he nursed an unusually sour mood. Satan had been watching, looking for an open door, any open door he could find, to gain occasion against him. Maybe he had found it. He went crowing to Logos, “Your son David has a Bad Attitude. He seems to have lost his faith. He doesn’t trust You anymore. He didn’t like being told he couldn’t build the temple. *Somebody is going to get hurt!* How about if I discipline him a bit? He really needs it!”

Surprisingly, Logos agreed. “You are correct, Satan. David My beloved does need an attitude adjustment. You may use the Ammonite army to discipline him.”

“Aw... That’s too obvious. David loves war. That will only cheer him up. How about a delightful sex scandal? Certainly that is one weakness that needs testing.”

“I do not change. It’s the Ammonites or nothing.”

So Satan scurried off to incite the Ammonites to war. That wasn’t hard. Two years before, the Israelites had deeply humiliated Hanun son of Nahash. He had watched as Joab’s smaller army had first frightened off his Syrian mercenaries, and then turned about to chase his own army back into the city like yellow cowards. Then he had been doubly humiliated when Joab had just turned and walked off without even attacking his city.

Hanun was proud of Rabbath-Ammon. It was built on a solid rock. It was veritable fortress, with its water supply hidden inside its impregnable walls. Somehow, he had to taunt Israel into attacking Rabbath-Ammon. So the next spring near the time of the close pass of Mars, when kings go out to battle, King Hanun began sending raiding parties across the Jordan to Israeli villages and towns, hoping to draw David and Joab’s wrath.

He succeeded. David couldn’t allow the surrounding nations to think they could ever get away with that! But Satan, that sly old serpent, had a trick up his sleeve. He projected to David’s mind, *You’re over forty now, you know. You’re tired. You’ve battled enough. You deserve a rest. You’re too valuable to risk on the battlefield anymore!* David, in his discouragement, bought it. He sent Joab off to war. He stayed home.

Now, everyone has heard the lurid story of David and Bathsheba. It's been told or made into movies many times. But they tell it wrong, putting all the blame on David and making Bathsheba the victim. The truth is that Bathsheba and Satan were more to blame than David, though God allowed it and turned it around for good.

Satan had a purpose in tempting David to stay home. He didn't want a war, he wanted a sex scandal. Logos had not allowed him to tempt David with one, but that didn't matter to Satan. He knew David had a weakness there. All he had to do was arrange the circumstances. He had plenty of material to work with. All the women in Israel had fallen in love with David. Satan picked a lonely and stunningly lovely woman named Bathsheba, whose husband Uriah the Hittite (one of David's mighty men) was gone battling Ammonites with Joab.

One of the reasons Satan picked Bathsheba was, she lived just across the stream from the king's new palace. Also, she had harbored daydreams about David ever since she was a young girl, after he had killed Goliath. It was pretty easy for Satan to play with her daydreams. She saw David walking on the parapet of his palace. *If he saw her, might he fall in love with her? Wouldn't that be romantic! That would serve Uriah right for always being off to war when she needed him.* She strolled down to the stream in the sunlight, coyly dropped her robe, and began bathing. *She was just bathing. She had done nothing wrong.* Who would know that she had picked that spot because it was in view of the parapet? Who would know she had picked that time because she saw David up there right now, and the sun was in the right place to highlight her curves?

Michael went zipping up to Logos. He was so excited he didn't even wait for Logos to greet him. "Logos! Satan is trying to tempt David into a sex scandal! But You never gave him permission for that. He's violating Your direct command, Your authority!"

Logos sadly shook His head. "No, my dear Michael. Satan is nowhere near David now. His only temptation to David was to entice him to stay home – there is nothing sinful about that. Satan is tempting Bathsheba. She gave him occasion against her by indulging her own fantasies and daydreams, for many years now. Satan is sticking to the letter of the law. I cannot stop him."

"But... but... this is just wrong!"

"If David falls to temptation, it will be by his own lusts, not by Satan. Intercede with Me that David has learned his lesson from all his previous moral failures."

David was strolling up on the high parapet of his new palace in a deep blue funk. Now he regretted not going to war with Joab. *What was he thinking? Anything would be better than this moping around with nothing to do.* It was a beautiful, sunshiny day. Why was he not happy? *He had everything a man could ever want – except Michal his wife.*

Satan came crowing to Logos. "There. I did what You asked. I started a war with the Ammonite army. It seems that David just didn't want to go. Now, we'll just let nature take its course, shall we?" He guffawed.

"We are interceding that David choose correctly. You do not have permission to tempt him in this. Go!"

Satan left, pouting, to watch the scene at the parapet. David was on the rail, gazing idly down on the bathing beauty. She pretended not to notice him. Satan longed to go to David – just a few whispers to inflame his lusts.

This was not working. David had plenty of wives. He didn't need another. Without Satan there to tempt him, all he thought about was how much he missed Michal. The problem was that Bathsheba was naturally a bit shy and didn't have a clue how to flirt with her body. Satan zipped down for some emergency seduction instruction.

Bathsheba finished her bath, rose up slowly out of the water, stretched majestically at just the right side view, and began to slowly dry herself.

Michael again complained, "Logos! Satan is teaching Bathsheba to act like a two-bit whore! Are You going to let him get away with that? She has a husband! It's just not... not natural! Satan is perverting her!"

"I'm sorry, Michael. Bathsheba has invited Satan to tempt her. She herself wants to seduce David. I cannot force her against her own choice. Intercede that David choose more wisely. This is a crucial time!"

"May I go to him to whisper Truth into his ear?"

"Not during his time of testing. That is the purpose of the test, to see if he has internalized faith, wisdom, and truth. He should have learned this lesson long ago."

Bathsheba flung her robe around her, twirling with a graceful pirouette to make the robe flair out. Then, as she started back up the path to her house, she looked up at David with a smile and a wink. That did it. The crowning touch! Suddenly David knew the whole performance was for him. He went back to his servants and ordered them to invite her to the palace. Like leading an ox to the slaughter. Logos and Michael wept.

Lovely Bathsheba was only too willing to come to David's palace, and into his bedroom. I know, it was only a single wild fling, and then he sent her home. But wild flings do have their consequences. After two months she sent word that she was pregnant.

This could get awkward. David called her back to the palace to question her. Yes, she was pretty sure. No, it couldn't have been her husband Uriah – he had been gone three months. David sent her home whispering, "I'll send for your husband. You lie with him and then pretend the baby is his." So David fired off a message for Joab to send Uriah home at once.

Faithful, honorable Uriah! His greatest joy was to serve his king! He came gladly, to report on the welfare of the army, on Joab, on the state of the war, with never a thought that he had been double-crossed. David tried everything he could think of to get him across that stream and back home (including getting him drunk!) but he would not. He slept with the servants night after night, eager to get back to the war and unwilling to go sleep in a comfortable bed at home with his wife while the rest of the army was roughing it out in the field.

Finally David gave up. He sent him back to Joab with a sealed note for Joab to put him on the front of the battle line and withdraw from him, so he would die. I hate this part of the story. I can't believe David would do such a thing to one of his own mighty men, who had served him so faithfully. I can't believe that Joab would obey such an order, either! I weep in grief at the shame and dishonor this has brought on the name of YHWH. Oh, how David would suffer for his evil.

Joab's messenger returned with the news, "A big force rushed out the gate of Rabbath-Ammon at us, to draw us toward the walls. We pressed them back to the gate. But some archers shot at us from above the gate, so some of the king's servants died..."

David was angry, as Joab knew he would be. "Why did Joab allow them to get so close? He knows better than that! That was foolish!"

"... and Uriah your servant is dead also."

Now David's heart – and conscience – smote him. He felt faint. The deed was done. He bowed his head, as if in mourning for his friend. "Tell Joab, 'Don't be sad. The sword devours one as well as another. Redouble your efforts, that his sacrifice not be in vain.'"

Bathsheba heard the consequence of her misdeed as well. Her loyal, loving husband was dead. She mourned for him for a month. Then David sent for her, to take her as his eleventh wife. Logos was displeased. David had failed the test, big time. The consequences of his sin would trouble his household, and all Israel, for generations.

Logos kept hoping that David would come to Him in repentance. Did he really think he had managed to keep the whole affair a secret? From God? Yeah. Right... Finally Logos sent young Nathan back with a story.

"Your Majesty. There were two men in Israel, one very rich, and one poor. The rich man had a great many sheep, but the poor man had only one lamb, a pet, which slept with him in his house. But when a traveler came to visit the rich man, he didn't want to take from his own flock. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and roasted it to serve a feast for his visitor."

David was furious. "As YHWH lives, the man that did this thing shall surely die!"

"You are the man, O King! Therefore, YHWH says, 'I anointed you and delivered you from Saul. I gave you all of his house, including his daughter as your wife. I made you king of My people Israel. I gave you peace on all your borders. If that weren't enough, I would have given you much more. So why have you despised My Word and done this evil in My sight? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the arrows of Ammon, and stole his wife for yourself. Therefore I will raise up evil against you from your own household. I will even take your own wives and give them to your relative. Though you tried to keep your sin a secret, I will do this openly, before all Israel and the surrounding nations. The shame of it will never leave your house.'"

Now David repented! Nathan let him stew for a bit. When he came back, David had written out his prayer for pardon. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, nor remove Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation. Sustain me with a willing spirit." (*Psalm 51*)

"YHWH has accepted your repentance and covered your sin," Nathan said, "You shall not die. But, you've given YHWH's enemies valid occasion to blaspheme. *Your son will bear the consequence. He shall surely die.*"

David checked his sons (he had many by this time). They were fine. (His oldest, Amnon, was now eighteen.) David could not figure out which son Nathan had in mind. Months passed. No deaths. Perhaps God had relented. David relaxed to enjoy his latest wife, now his favorite. She was a huge comfort. Her enthusiastic, wholehearted love reminded him of Michal, easing the pain of his loss.

Joab finally captured Rabbath-Ammon, royal city of the Ammonites. But, faithful servant that he was, he didn't want the credit. He entreated David to come to the battle line, so he could go into the city at the head of his army. This gave David the honor of personally taking the crown off foolish Hanun's head, and putting it on his own. David slew Hanun and installed his younger brother Shobi as king in his place. Then Joab subdued the other Ammonite cities, put their people under hard labor, and imposed an annual tribute.

Next year Bathsheba gave birth to their child, a boy. They named him Ya'salech, ('YHWH Forgives'). He was the cutest baby David had ever seen. For the first time, David began to learn what it means to be a father. All his other children had been born without much involvement on his part (since he had already turned his affections to his latest wife), but Ya'salech was different. David and Bathsheba spent hours each day bonding together and with their new baby. For the first time in many years David was truly happy. He took delight in caring for Ya'salech, changing his diapers, and bathing him. Parenting is such joy! How could he have missed it before?

Pharaoh Akhenaten died in 1006 BC. His co-regent brother Smenkhkare died two months later. Akhenaten's queen Nefertiti, renamed Neferneferu-Aten, disappeared from history as well. But she didn't die. She changed her name again, to Ankhkeperure Smenkhkare. She adopted Akhenaten's nine-year-old son Tutankhaton as co-regent. In a few years she renamed him Pharaoh Tutankhamen (the living image of Amun) and gave him Ankhesenamen as a wife. (She was her and Akhenaten's daughter, and had been [as Ankhesenpa'aton] a child bride of Akhenaten).

The vizier Ay, Nefertiti's father, was the real power behind the throne. They restored Egypt's polytheistic religion and the Amun-Ra priesthood. They abandoned Akhenaten's monotheism and his capital city, Akhet-Aten (Amarna). They moved to the traditional capital, Thebes.

Ay's General Horemheb sought to pacify the Levant. He also fought against the growing power of the Hittites under King Suppiluliuma, and against the Assyrians then controlling north Syria. But the Egyptian armies were so weakened from years of inactivity under Akhenaten that he didn't accomplish much at first.

In 1003 BC, Ya'salech (the four-year-old son of David and Bathsheba and the delight of their eyes) took sick. David called in the best physicians. They sadly reported there was nothing they could do. It was a major heart valve failure. The boy's heart was racing, but not pumping much blood. Barring a miracle, he would surely die.

Suddenly David remembered what Nathan had said. His son would die. *Oh, no! Not this one! Any son but this one!* David fell on his face to the ground, weeping and crying out to YHWH for mercy. For a week he remained on his face, fasting and praying. Never had David wanted anything as much as this. Bathsheba shared his agony as only a loving wife and mother can.

Yet Ya'salech died, according to the Word of YHWH. David's servants were afraid to tell him; afraid he would be so distraught he would commit suicide. But he overheard their whispers and guessed the truth. Seeing Bathsheba's agonized face confirmed it. So got up, washed his face, and asked for supper. This surprised his servants, but David said, "While he was yet alive, I fasted and prayed, hoping that perhaps YHWH would be gracious and relent. But now that he is dead, why should I fast? I shall go to him someday, but he shall not return to me in this realm."

After dinner they bathed and went to bed early. They worshiped YHWH together for a while, as David tenderly caressed and comforted his wife Bathsheba. She conceived that very night. Logos was pleased with David's repentant heart, and He placed His special love and blessings on this new child growing within her womb.

The freed soul of baby Ya'salech, now bewildered and frightened, was met in Sheol by the outstretched arms and smiling eyes of Logos Himself.

Ya'salech recognized Him right away – it had been such a short time since he had been sent from Him to be born of Bathsheba. He ran into His arms, and was immediately comforted. After a long hug, they walked together toward the Nursery. But Ya'salech was just old enough to have a question. "Logos, why am I back with You so soon? Did my parents not want me?"

Logos choked back a sob. This was a question He hated to answer, particularly for someone so young. "Ya'salech, your parents loved you dearly. They wanted you more than anything else in the world. But they did something bad. They didn't know it would hurt you, or they never would have done it. Can you forgive them?"

Ya'salech brightened up. *His parents did love him. And this wasn't his fault.* "Yes, of course I forgive them. May I see them again, so I can tell them?"

Logos laughed through His tears, and hugged the child again. "Yes Ya'salech, you may see them again, but is it all right with you if you stay with Me awhile first? You have a lot of growing up to do before you can begin to understand your parents."

In 1002 BC **Solomon** was born. David was 49. Grand Vizier Ay succeeded in deposing Queen Ankhkeperure (Nefertiti) and taking over as co-regent for the fourteen-year-old boy-king, Pharaoh Tutankhaton/Tutankhamon. Though the wicked Hittites still grew stronger, the world prospered and was at peace for now. The trade routes were flooded with goods. Much of the profits from that trade continued to flow toward Egypt. But 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. The kingdom of Israel grew wealthy, too. So did the surrounding nations in allegiance to David.

David and Bathsheba had moved past their grief at the loss of Ya'salech, and were enjoying their new baby. They still were very much in love, enjoying each other so much that David had nearly forgotten Michal, and Bathsheba had nearly forgotten Uriah. Baby Solomon, if possible, was even more beautiful than Ya'salech was. And alert! How soon he learned to smile and laugh! Now he was beginning to talk! Nathan told them that YHWH had dubbed him Jedidiah, ('Beloved of YHWH')! It delighted them no end.

I would like to claim that no happier couple existed anywhere on the planet, but it wouldn't be true. A shadow still hung over David and his family. Nathan's prophecy included one more punishment: awful evil, public evil, would arise from David's own household.

David tried to prevent it. He made the rounds every night to bless each member of his family. He exhorted his wives to train up their children in the wisdom of YHWH. He even tried to discipline them sometimes, although he was pretty rusty at it and it often didn't work out as he expected. But some problems are unavoidable in a big harem where competition is the norm and the children of different women live together in one palace.

The inevitable happened. David's oldest son, Amnon, developed a crush on Tamar, one of his half-sisters. The mother of Amnon, Ahinoam, and the mother of Tamar, Maacah, were aware of it, and tried to keep them apart. But David was blithely unaware. He thought nothing of it when Amnon pretended to be sick and asked David to send his sister Tamar into his bedroom to care for him.

As soon as they were alone, Amnon tried to seduce Tamar. She knew better, and resisted his advances. But his wicked lusts overwhelmed his good sense. He grabbed her and forceably raped her. Afterwards his lust quickly turned to hate (as lust often does). He threw her out of the apartment as if she were a common whore, and locked the door behind her. Poor Tamar tore her lovely long-sleeve princess robe and ran home wailing.

Tamar was utterly devastated. Though a sweet sixteen and strikingly beautiful, she never overcame her shame. She spent the rest of her life in seclusion in her older brother's house, like a widow. She never married or bore a child. Thus a beautiful young life, full of potential, was completely destroyed by one detestable act of lust.

Their father David was rightly horrified. The gossip of his family's private shame spread widely across the land, just as Nathan had prophesied. At Satan's urging, David blamed himself, and did nothing to discipline Amnon.

Tamar's older brother Absalom was furious! He kept silent, hoping that his father would properly punish Amnon. But months went by and David still did nothing. Absalom nursed his anger and started plotting revenge.

Ahinoam and Maacah agonized over what they might do. They felt like all the gossip was directed against them. They couldn't walk outside the palace without sensing every eye on them and every mouth whispering awful things as they passed. They, too, waited for David to do something. At first they were afraid he might impose the letter of the law and stone both of their children – Amnon for the rape, and Tamar because it happened in the city and she didn't cry out loud enough to be heard.

But after two months dragged by with nothing done, Ahinoam decided she needed to say something to David. She came to him one evening after dinner, with Maacah in tow. "My lord," they bowed before David. "You vowed that I could come to talk with you anytime..." He nodded his agreement. "It's about my son. We're both extremely sorry about what Amnon did to Tamar. It has brought terrible shame to us, to you, and to all Israel. But we don't know what to do about it. Please, my Lord. Tell us what we can do... or tell us what you plan to do about it. We don't want to lose our children, but such a wicked deed must not remain unpunished!"

"Believe me, I have agonized over that every day since then. But it is all my fault, because of my sin with Uriah and Bathsheba. There is nothing I can do."

Maacah spoke up. "My lord. YHWH is punishing you already. You don't have to punish yourself. But Amnon has not yet been punished. And poor Tamar is crushed down with grief and shame. Her burden is too big to bear!"

David looked back and forth between them, tears in his eyes. "Yes, YHWH is punishing them both, just like He is punishing me. I can do no more."

So David did nothing. Tragically, after two years, Tamar's older brother Absalom finally took matters into his own hands. He gathered all of David's sons at a party, got them all drunk, and then had Amnon killed. The rest of the king's sons saw and feared they would be next, so they scattered and fled for the hills. The report that got back to David was that Absalom had killed all of them!

At the thought of losing all his sons in one day, David nearly had heart failure! But it hit Ahinoam the hardest. All her daydreams, her brave determination, everything that she had worked for since she'd first seen David kill Goliath, came crashing down in ruins at her feet. How utterly naïve had been that young Ahinoam in Jezreel who thought she could replace Michal as David's queen! Now her only child, Amnon, was dead, and David would surely blame her for the deaths of his other sons! To the screams of the noonday passersby, Ahinoam threw herself off the highest parapet of the palace, her last tragic act in a lifetime of play-acting.

The good news was that only Amnon was killed, not all of David's sons. Still, Absalom fled to stay with his in-laws, King Talmai in Geshur. His daughter was born there, named Tamar to honor his sister. David didn't dare forgive Absalom or invite him to return home, but he mourned for him even more than for Ahinoam or Amnon!

In agony of soul, David turned again to composing psalms, among them **Psalms 5** and **7**. "Give ear to my words, O YHWH! Consider my groans! Heed the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to You do I pray. You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before You. You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak lies. You abhor the man of bloodshed and deceit. But I enter Your house by Your abundant mercy. I bow in reverence at Your holy temple... O YHWH my God, if there is injustice in my hands; or if I have rewarded evil for good to my friend; or if I have plundered without cause – then let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it; let him trample my life down and lay my glory in the dust. Judge the peoples, O YHWH. Vindicate me according to my righteousness and the integrity within me. Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous. The righteous God tries the hearts and minds. The same God who saves the upright in heart is my protection. YHWH is a righteous judge. His indignation is against the wicked every day." YHWH heard, and calmed his soul through Bathsheba and baby Solomon. But David's trials were not yet over.

By Pharaoh Tutankhamen's eighth year (999 BC), his General Horemheb had succeeded in restoring Egyptian control along the western coast of the Levant, capturing the city of Gezer and slaying all its inhabitants in the process. (They had vowed to serve YHWH, but had been put to forced labor by King Saul when he caught them only half keeping their vow. Now using Egypt, Logos Himself judged them.) Egypt was finally reasserting its military muscle, at last recovering from the self-induced trance of the Amarna Atenist heresy under Pharaoh Akhenaten.

The next year, (the year Absalom murdered Amnon) Pharaoh Tutankhamen died, in front of 10,000 horrified Egyptians. It was so tragic. Gods aren't supposed to die. He was only seventeen. His aged vizier Ay was heartbroken, blaming himself. He had staged a big chariot competition, and of course the proud young Pharaoh was only too eager to participate. Ay had cautioned him – chariot races are dangerous! But King Tut was fearless, as teenagers are apt to be. Then the unthinkable happened: King Tut's chariot wheel fell off as they rounded a curve. He was thrown out and run over by several other chariots.

He was attended by the best doctors, but to no avail. Ay, in duty to his country, made plans to marry Tut's widow, Ankhesenamen, to become the next Pharaoh. She was appalled (Ay was her grandfather!) but was given no say in the matter. Worse, she had to share this gruff and hard old man with his earlier wife, Tiye II, who was a sharp-tongued old battleaxe anyway, and doubly so in view of this new competition for her husband's favors. Sill in mourning, the lovely young widow felt abused and taken advantage of. (I know, it's a sick soap opera. But it happened.)

Queen Ankhesenamen secretly wrote two letters, one explaining her situation to General Horemheb, ordering him to forge a marriage alliance with the Hittites, and the other to King Suppiluliuma in Hattusa, begging him to send one of his many sons for her to marry before her seventy day mourning period ended.

Horemheb had just finished re-establishing Egyptian hegemony over the Levant, and was heading north toward Syria and Hatti. He did not want a peace treaty. He wanted to subdue the Hittites and regain full control of Egypt's trade routes. He read the queen's secret letter in dismay. *Maybe he could pretend he hadn't gotten it.*

On his way north, David met him at Hiram's palace in Tyre. David expressed his grateful support for Egypt's maintaining the peace along the coastal plain, and his appreciation for the alliances Egypt had with Philistia and Phoenicia. But then David explained to Horemheb how he had subdued Syria, in part because the Hittites had so weakened the Mitanni that they had lost control. "Do not underestimate the Hittites, sir! They subdued the Mitanni. They are now allied with them, so they may be impossible to defeat. I am happy that I have peace on all my borders, and I have no desire to stir up trouble in Hatti!"

But General Horemheb was a bit stubborn, and he didn't believe the Hittites could have gotten that strong in such a short time. He took his army up past Byblos to Kadesh on the Orontes. There he was confronted with the sight of the new Hittite and Mitanni alliance. Seeing their armies combined, he was stunned. David was right!

Horemheb was no dummy. He knew when he was defeated, and knew how to turn it around. He could play this game of politics with the best of them. He took a few of his captains to talk to King Suppiluliuma. "Your Imperial Majesty! My sincerest congratulations on your fine efforts in bringing peace to this troubled region." (That is not what he said. It is a summary of what he took over thirty minutes to say.) Then he pulled out the queen's letter (now glad he had it) and got down to business. "As you may know, our benevolent Pharaoh Tutankhamen has tragically died. His widow Queen Ankhesenamen, who at twenty is in the flower of her youthful beauty, needs a young prince to marry before her period of mourning is passed. If she does not, she will be forced to marry her old vizier, who is her own grandfather. She begs..."

"Yes, I know. I got the same letter," King Suppiluliuma interrupted dryly, a little jaded by this wordy blowhard. "I don't believe a word of it. You are looking for occasion against me, so you can entice me down there to fight you on your own turf, since it is pretty obvious to you that you can't defeat me here. Well, I'll be damned if I'll fall for it!"

Chagrined that he had been seen through so easily, Horemheb spent the next hour reassuring Suppiluliuma of his sincerity. It was a good act. He claimed his army was not here to attack Hatti. Oh no! His army was only here to guarantee safe conduct for the young prince that he hoped to bring back to his lovely queen. So the Hittite king sent messengers down to Egypt to check out the unlikely story. They returned to report it was all true!

Horemheb was vindicated! King Suppiluliuma asked his 23-year-old son Prince Zannanza to go with Horemheb's army back to Egypt for the wedding.

Zannanza was excited to go to Egypt and become the Pharaoh! He spent his time on their journey pestering Horemheb with questions about Egypt, what the queen was like, what a Pharaoh did, and what would be expected of him. But his Egyptian was atrocious, his childishness was insufferable, and his ignorance was exceeded only by his arrogance. Imagine taking orders from a Hittite who has seen Egypt only from the perspective of 'the enemy'! So at the border, Horemheb had his guards slay Zannanza and his aides and hide their bodies in the sand. He would not let this young upstart become his Pharaoh! He much preferred Ay, who would likely die in a few years anyway, leaving the throne of Egypt open for himself. Egypt would surely suffer for his rash decision. King Suppiluliuma was enraged at the deception, starting a cold war between Hatti and Egypt that lasted fifty-five years (until Rameses II).

However, Ay rewarded General Horemheb for his dark deed. When Ay married Queen Ankhesenamen to become the next Pharaoh, he promoted Horemheb to be his grand vizier. Horemheb's top captain (whom I shall name Ahab) then moved up in rank to command their army. Knowing he wouldn't live long, Ay began immediate preparation of his tomb and mortuary temple. Lovely Ankhesenamen simply could not endure this political marriage to a sixty-year-old grandfather who just treated her like a sex toy. She committed suicide. Thus ended the last of the Amarna royal blood line, though the 18th dynasty continued.

Ay didn't care about Ankhesenamen. But he did care about the threat from the Hittites! If there ever was a time to recall favors from all his alliances in the Levant, it was now. So he sent Ahab and his army back north, gathering the armies of the Levant as they went. By the time furious King Supiluliuma's army had reached Byblos, Ay's army and all his allies were there to meet him.

This time their armies were better matched. It looked like a huge battle ahead, with much loss of life on both sides. General Ahab had been a captain for a long time. But now, looking at his first battle as 'the general' he was not so sure. He had been there when Horemheb had faced the overwhelming armies of the Hittite / Mitanni alliance! His combined armies were stronger and better prepared than before, but he was still not sure they could win. Maybe it was time to negotiate again. Ahab informed his allies.

King David was there with 400,000 Israelites, too. He didn't particularly want to fight, either; it's just part of the job when you have an alliance. But when the new General Ahab said he wanted to negotiate instead of fight, David got interested. He asked to go with him. King Hiram agreed – all the kings should go, including the five kings of the Philistines. So with their attendants, they formed a procession of kings heading across the valley to meet the powerful and angry Hittite king Supiluliuma.

Scanning the kings, he was openly disdainful. "Where is General Horemheb? He lied to me and killed my son, Prince Zannanza. That is an unforgivable crime; one for which every Egyptian military man must die! I don't know why the rest of you kings want to support Egypt. I have no quarrel with you. If you leave now with your armies, I'll let you go. But Egypt's army is mine!"

Suddenly Ahab realized that if his allies desert him, he's dead! He glanced fearfully around at the kings beside him. David seemed to be the only one not afraid, so Ahab gave him the nod. He stepped up. "I am David, king of Israel, whose God is YHWH. With His help I defeated the armies of Syria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Amalek, and subdued and allied with these, the five kings of the Philistines." They nodded, glad that he was doing all the talking. "I am now allied with every nation in the Levant, and Egypt besides. I swear by YHWH my God, we will stand together, for we keep our alliances. We will not leave!"

"If you stay, you'll suffer the same fate as Egypt. I will destroy your army and slay every last one of you here."

David entreated softly, kindly, "You are assuming, sir, that you will be victorious. Your armies are actually pretty closely matched to all of ours. Not one of us plans to desert our ally Egypt. Even if you do achieve the victory, it will be at a huge cost, and it may weaken your army to the extent that Assyria or Babylon could overwhelm you when you return to Hatti. We don't want that, O King. We need you to stay strong, to protect your country, and to protect the Mitanni. We have no desire to fight you. For if your army is weakened or destroyed here, the Assyrians will certainly see their chance, finish you off, and threaten us as well. Wouldn't you rather make a peace agreement with us?"

"I said, the slaying of my son Prince Zannanza is an unforgivable crime. Egypt must be punished!"

"I'm terribly sorry for you at the loss of your son. I am in mourning also, for the tragic loss of two of my sons. My second wife was so distraught she jumped off the parapet of my palace to commit suicide. I mourn with you, sir. But I cannot let my sorrow dictate my policy. It is dangerous to react in unreasonable anger, for if I am controlled by a fit of temper I am blinded to wisdom. I don't know what went on with General Horemheb; perhaps he should be punished. He's not here to defend himself. But please sir, preserve the balance of powers. Consider carefully the consequences. Do not risk everything for the sake of your anger."

David's soft words, and his understanding attitude of sympathy, had an effect. Supiluliuma relented and made a tentative peace pact with them. Still, for five years, Hittites raided Egyptian outposts all over the Levant, taking their soldiers captive. The cold war between Egypt and Hatti smoldered on and off for fifty-five years.

Ashur-resh-ishi had been the warrior-king of Assyria since 1003 BC. In 998 BC he took over as priest-king as well, but in 993 BC he gave that title to Tiglath-pileser, his son. Assyrian power once more was felt in Mitanni and Syria, distracting the angry Hittites away from Egypt. About then, King Supiluliuma contracted the plague (from the soldiers he had captured from those Egyptian garrisons) and died. His eldest son Arnuwanda II ruled in his place. He was a brilliant and capable king, having been groomed since birth to take over for his dad. Sadly, he also got the plague, and died after one year. His young brother Mursili was unprepared to be king, but took over anyway. Everyone laughed at his youth, but Mursili actually turned out to be a pretty good king, ruling from 991 to 967 BC. He protected the Hittites from the Assyrians to the east, the fierce Kaska in Anatolia, and the Arzawa in southwestern Anatolia, all of which left him little time to pursue his father's feud against the Egyptians. Egypt and the Levant prospered as a result. Under Mursili, the Hittites slowly regained their strength after that devastating plague from Egypt and the death of their powerful king Supiluliuma.

CHAPTER 13 – DAVID AND ABSALOM

King David allowed his son Absalom to return to the palace from Geshur in 995 BC, but he still shunned him. It wasn't until 993 BC, five full years after he had murdered Amnon, that Absalom was again admitted into David's presence. Absalom bowed and apologized, but he had grown bitter during his lengthy banishment. After finally being restored to the king's favor, he began to plot how he would take the kingdom from his father. He got a chariot and fifty runners to go before him, and began working to steal the hearts of the men of Israel. He would stand in a place of honor at the city gate to inquire of passersby their grievances (as if he was a judge). He proclaimed each man's case right and promised that he would surely get justice – *if only Absalom were king*.

David never did discipline Absalom, or even try to stop him in his rebellion. As a man of war David had succeeded brilliantly, but as a family man and as an administrator of justice, he failed miserably. His other sons and daughters, and even his wives and concubines, took note, and lost confidence in him. Others in his family also rebelled. His own sons and daughters openly despised him. Finally David was realizing that he was not capable of properly caring for ten wives, ten concubines, and all their many children. He abandoned them all to care for themselves, except for his favorite wife Bathsheba and her children. They now had five. Their ages in 991 BC were: Solomon, 11; Grace, 9; Shimea, 7; Shobab, 5; and Nathan, 3.

It was Abigail who finally cried out to YHWH on behalf of David's harem. "O YHWH God of Israel, hear our cry! Here we are queens of Israel, and our sons princes of the land. Yet they grow up fatherless, and we are like widows sitting at the table with our husband. O my Lord God! You commanded David to treat us fairly, to love and care for us. But he has forgotten his vows and neglected us. Please, O YHWH God of Israel, judge between David and us! Turn his heart back to You and back to the keeping of his vows." She wept in prayers like that for months.

Logos heard her plea. He permitted Satan to test David again. In early 990 BC David fell to Satan's temptation to fear Mars and the host of heaven. David knew that on October 24, Mars would pass by on its closest orbit in thirty years, probably causing major catastrophes all over the Levant. So David insisted that faithful Joab violate God's Law by taking a census. Joab knew it was wrong, and didn't want to do it. So David made it sound like he just wanted to gather information about the strength of his armies, in case the Hittites should attack. But David really wanted the census so he could figure out just how many died from the Mars flyby. He was afraid.

By the middle of October Joab had the tally: they had about 1,100,000 men and 2,800,000 women and children in Israel, plus 470,000 men and 1,200,000 women and children in Judah, not counting Levi and Benjamin.

David was acting like the heathen kings around him, fearing Mars rather than YHWH! After he had done it, David's tender conscience smote him. "O YHWH," he prayed, "Again I have greatly sinned! Please forgive me. Take away my iniquity, for I have acted very foolishly."

Logos sent Gad, David's faithful seer from the School of Prophets. He had stood by David all these years, and David trusted him with his life. "David, YHWH loves you deeply, but from the time you left Michal your wife in the palace of King Saul, you have failed to keep your marriage vows. Again and again you have made vows, to one more wife after another, and the only vows you now keep are to the wife of your good friend Uriah! All of Israel suffers the consequences of your unfaithfulness. The resulting strife and rebellion in your house has given occasion to the enemies of YHWH to blaspheme His holy name."

"What does YHWH want me to do? Divorce them all and go back to Michal? I cannot! I promised Michal to Palti-El until she wants to return to me. But she doesn't! She still hates my guts!"

"Keep your vows. Don't make vows you cannot keep. YHWH told you before, you cannot change what is past, but you can keep your vows to care for your wives, all of them. And work with them to train up your children. Their cries have risen up to Him, that you have ignored and abandoned them even within your own palace."

David bowed his head. Maybe he was going to get off easy this time. "Yes. By God's grace, I will do it. Every one of my wives will know my love and care before this day is out." He got up to go visit his harem.

"Not so fast, David my friend. We still must discuss your punishment for turning away from the pure fear of YHWH to the fear of Mars. You knew that was wrong! But YHWH hears your heart of repentance, so He grants you a choice. You may choose either three years of famine, three months of your army fleeing before the Hittites, or three days of the Sword of YHWH."

"YHWH is merciful. Let me fall under His hand rather into the hands of my enemies. I choose the last of the three." He hurried out to his harem to fulfill his promise. He was there the rest of the day, listening, apologizing for his failures, showing that he cared, hearing their problems and promising his help, and learning to know his children. It was a big job. Some had grown bitter or angry at him. Some had even left home. He tried to heal their hurts. He asked their forgiveness for ignoring them and for the favoritism he had shown. Well, it was a start.

At dawn (October 24, 990 BC) Mars has already come terrifyingly near! Its closest approach wouldn't be until noon. The sword of YHWH leaped out as a great electric arc from the magneto-head of Mars, striking the earth in the northern hills of Naphtali and rapidly burning across the land toward Jerusalem.

David was standing on the high parapet of his palace, the very spot from which his second wife Ahinoam had jumped to her death. He saw the distant electric arc; it was aiming directly toward Jerusalem, right toward his new tabernacle. He looked at Gad, who pointed to the middle of Mount Moriah's ridge (not the north peak). "Hurry! Build an altar to YHWH there. He may yet relent and spare His holy city Jerusalem. I'll be praying..."

David sprinted to get between his tabernacle and the oncoming 'Sword of YHWH'. He determined to block it or die trying. He ran to the ridge Gad had pointed out. His father-in law, Ornan (the Jebusite king Araunah), had a field there. (When David had conquered Jebus-Salem he had given him the field as dowry for his daughter. Ornan had adopted Israeli customs and had learned to love YHWH.) He had just sold his fall harvest. He was on top of the ridge unhitching his oxen from the empty cart and cleaning up, unaware of the approaching catastrophe. As David frantically ran toward him, he bowed low. "Why has my lord the king come to his servant? Is my daughter..."

"To buy your threshing floor for an altar to YHWH! The disaster approaches! Look! The Sword of YHWH!" That arc from Mars had just reached Mount Moriah's north peak, where it had paused. Maybe they could stop it.

"O my lord! Take whatever is good in your sight. Everything here, I freely return to my king."

"No, I cannot offer YHWH that which cost me nothing. I will pay you the full value. 600 shekels of gold for the land, and 50 shekels of silver for the yoke of oxen and your threshing equipment."

Ornan agreed. He helped David pull together twelve stones for an altar. David threw the wood on top while Ornan slew his oxen. Then they prepared the sacrifice. But they weren't quick enough. The electric arc from Mars came sizzling down the ridge before they could get it lit. They both jumped away and ran down the hill, with David frantically calling on YHWH all the way. He ran directly toward the tabernacle, so the powerful electric arc would have to kill him before it could destroy the tabernacle.

Behind them, the 'Sword of YHWH' reached Ornan's field, vaporizing the wood, the oxen, the altar, and the threshing floor, all the way to the bare rock below. There it paused again. David and Ornan turned to look, and then fell on their knees before the awesome sight. It was like a huge curved angel stretching from earth to heaven over Jerusalem, blazing like the sun.

David resigned himself to death. Trembling in panic, he bowed in fervent supplication. "Let me die, YHWH. I'm the one who ordered Joab to count the people. I'm the one who sinned. Please let Your hand be against me and my father's house, but not against these innocent people or against Your holy city Jerusalem, and certainly not against Your holy tabernacle or the Ark of Your Covenant!"

It was not yet noon. Only a half-day had passed of the three days of the 'Sword of YHWH' that Gad had promised for David's punishment, but already 70,000 Israelites had died! Logos was sorry over the magnitude of the calamity. Satan had gone too far. God cut short the punishment. He withdrew the arc and ordered Satan to cease his attack on Israel. Mars passed overhead without further damage.

David continued shaking for days. He had been fearless in battle, but that 'Sword of YHWH' had utterly terrified him. Talk about putting the fear of God on him! The arc was more powerful than 1000 lightning bolts streaming continuously down from heaven. There was nothing left of the sacrifice, the altar, or the threshing floor – only a smoking black pit in the ground. David was afraid of God; afraid to go to the tabernacle; even afraid to go to the old tabernacle at the hill above Gibeon to use the altar of burnt offering that was still there.

Nobody would go near the steaming pit. In fact, few people would even venture up onto Mount Moriah's ridge where Ornan's threshing floor had been. "That is holy ground!" David confided in Ornan, as he counted out the full price they had agreed on. "*If YHWH will permit it, I'm going to build His temple on that hill!*"

This catastrophe hurt other nations besides Israel. Nations to the north and south also had many dead. In the north, the Syrian army was wiped out and wicked old King Hadadezer was slain as he was trying to regain control of Damascus from his mutinous General Rezon (Hezion). Rezon thus took control of the entire land. He reigned over Syria from 990 to 930 BC. In Egypt, old Pharaoh Ay was injured in the cataclysm. He survived for three more years, but his vizier Horemheb had to handle all his affairs, so he became the de-facto Pharaoh (which he turned out to be very good at). Egypt's army was also devastated, but young Hittite King Mursili was in no shape to take advantage of it. It took Egypt three years to rebuild their army. Horemheb married a sister of Nefertiti, Queen Mutnodjmet Tahpenes (chief wife), to establish his claim to the throne. When Ay died and Horemheb took over in 987 BC, he divided his army between his two top generals, the better to keep them from getting too powerful. He also made priests out of some trustworthy soldiers, and told them to reestablish the ancient Egyptian pantheon led by Amun-Ra.

Absalom never forgave his father David for failing to discipline Amnon, even after murdering him. Now it was payback time. In 989 BC, Absalom snuck off to Hebron. There he gathered all his supporters at David's old palace, and declared himself the new king of Israel.

When David heard the news he feared for his life. He knew Absalom was exceedingly popular with the people. Even many from Jerusalem now sided with him, including David's wisest counselor, Ahithophel. (He had never quite gotten over his anger at what David had done in stealing his granddaughter, Bathsheba.)

Should David fight his own son for the kingdom? He couldn't see it. That would risk all his beloved people in Jerusalem. So instead, he took his family, servants, and faithful followers and fled down toward the Jordan. He sent his loyal priests, **Zadok** (of the line of Eleazar) and **Abiathar** (high priest in the line of Ithamar), back into the city. They planned to keep David up-to-date on news at Jerusalem by sending messages in the hands of their young sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan. David also sent back Hushai, another wise counselor, in a calculated attempt to negate the wisdom of Ahithophel.

So Absalom triumphantly entered Jerusalem and took David's palace without a fight. Following Ahithophel's advice, he publicly violated David's concubines that night, on the roof of the palace, "in full view of all the people." Thus Absalom fulfilled the prophecy of Nathan to David after his sin with Bathsheba.

Ahithophel had told Absalom that his shameful act would strengthen his case before the people of Israel, for they would then see no hope of reconciliation between him and his father. But David was praying that YHWH would turn Ahithophel's counsel to foolishness. That is how it turned out. The Israelites saw Absalom's vile sin, and began to realize that in spite of his kind words and handsome appearance, he was a wicked man and would never make a good king. So for the first time in four years he began to lose followers.

Ahithophel advised Absalom to send their 12,000 troops after David immediately, to kill him before he could gather warriors in his defense. Ahithophel figured that the fewer who died and the quicker it was over, the more in Israel would follow Absalom. This was very wise counsel. It probably would have been successful. However, Hushai managed to talk him out of it by appealing to his pride. He urged Absalom to wait until he had time to assemble all the armies of Israel, so they could totally annihilate David and all his loyal followers. He knew that most of Israel's army wouldn't obey Absalom when ordered to attack David. They loved David! But Absalom, in his colossal arrogance, couldn't see that. He agreed with Hushai's counsel.

Advice spurned, Ahithophel knew his time was up. He was wise enough to see that the hand of God was against Absalom, and that because of this he would fail in his attack against David. Ahithophel realized for the first time that he was supporting the wrong side. In fighting against David he was fighting God Himself! He went home, put his affairs in order, and hanged himself.

Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar about his counsel to Absalom. They gave the message to a maidservant, who passed it along to their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan. They tried to escape the city to take it to David. But Absalom had assigned a young lad to spy on them. Being their same age, he had gained their confidence. As soon as he heard the plan, he told Absalom's guards.

Ahimaaz and Jonathan fled from the guards, miffed that they had been deceived by the lad who had 'befriended' them. But many in the area were still loyal to David. An old woman saw the exhausted boys trying to escape, and hid them in her cistern until the guards had passed. Thus they were able to take the message to David. He was relieved. He now had time to prepare. He and his trusted followers crossed the Jordan and headed north to Mahanaim of Gilead. There he began gathering loyal men while he awaited Absalom's attack.

Following the advice of David's counselor Hushai, Absalom sent out a call to muster Israel's armies at Gilgal. There he waited. And waited. And waited, while soldiers dribbled in. He was furious! They weren't responding to his call, as Hushai knew they wouldn't. Finally Absalom sent to the School of Prophets for Gad, to find out why. Gad answered simply. "Sir, you are fighting God. Israel won't respond to you because YHWH has not called you to be Israel's king. If you continue this foolish rebellion, you will be slain. Instead, fall to your knees right now. Repent humbly to God and to your father. They will forgive you."

But of course in his arrogance, Absalom could not do that. Instead, he had Gad thrown in prison (again – it just seems to come with the job of being a prophet). Absalom finally took the few who had followed him and crossed the Jordan to find David.

Since Joab, the commander of the army of Israel, had remained loyal to David, Absalom needed another good commander whom his army would follow. He decided on Amasa, the son of Jether the Ishmaelite and Abigail (the second oldest of David's five sisters). He had been living in the land of his father, and had never been close to his uncle David, so Absalom thought he would be loyal. That turned out to be a mistake, one of many Absalom would make since he was not following God's wisdom.

The men of Israel actually had assembled in response to Absalom's call. But sadly for Absalom, most of them had assembled at Gilead with David. They brought gifts, food, and assurance of their loyalty. It was amazing, humbling, to David to see how many had come. Shobi, son of Nahash, (king of the Ammonites since his older brother Hanun had been slain by David) came from Rabbath-Ammon in the east. He brought all the annual tribute that David had imposed, and more. He had seen how fairly David had treated his father, and how justly David had treated his rebellious brother. He wanted his tribute to go directly to David, for he saw that God was with him. In addition, he brought tons of food and supplies for David's men. He became David's friend and supporter the rest of his life. Logos rewarded the Ammonites for his faithfulness to His chosen one. Many others came to support David as well.

David prepared his army for battle. It had grown quite large. He divided it up into 3 battalions, commanded by three generals, Joab, Abishai, and Ittai.

Ittai felt honored to be chosen by David as his general. He had come from Gath with 600 soldiers, pledging his support for David. They had all forsaken the gods of the Philistines and bowed to YHWH as a result of that famous treaty David had made with the Philistine kings at Gath. Ittai also became a loyal friend of David the rest of his life.

David charged his three generals to deal gently with Absalom. He still hoped to reconcile with his son. All the people heard, but many couldn't believe that David could be so generous to the traitor who had murdered Amnon, stolen his kingdom, and was trying to kill him, too.

Absalom and his army headed north on the east bank of the Jordan toward Gilead. This turned out to be another mistake, for all along the east bank was a thick forest. (It was known as the forest of Ephraim, since Jephthah and the men of Gilead had defeated 42,000 men of Ephraim there in 1133 BC.) The road through the forest was broad and firm, but it was not wide enough to accommodate a large army. This forced the men to travel in a long, thin column – a military blunder of the highest order. Foolish Amasa realized his mistake when they engaged their enemy, but by then it was too late. What could he do? David's army was far larger than he had been given to expect. They were picking off his soldiers as fast as they came up the road! He ordered his men to retreat and fan out in the forest.

The forest was thick, dark, and often swampy from the nearby Jordan River. You can hide out in a forest, but you cannot attack a large army from a forest. More of his men succeeded in getting lost in the forest than ever succeeded in attacking the loyal followers of David.

Joab, Abishai, and Ittai weren't interested in chasing through the forest after Amasa's men. They only wanted to stop the rebellion against David and his kingdom. They searched the forest, looking only for Absalom. Once again, his prodigious pride was his downfall. Had he hidden in the forest with his men, he might have lived to fight another day. But no, he was dashing through the forest on his mule, trying to appear kingly to inspire his men. He had even taken off his battle helmet, so he could let his long hair fly out behind him like a banner. His beautiful, thick, dark hair was his trademark. The maids in Israel all swooned over it. It had been one of the reasons for his meteoric rise in popularity while he was plotting to take over the kingdom.

So it was fitting that his long, thick hair flew up and caught in the branches of an old oak tree as he rode his mule underneath. The mule continued on, leaving him dangling by his thick hair. Again, if he had simply cut off his hair with his sword, he might have escaped. But no, he stupidly insisted he must save his hair. He was desperately trying to un-tangle it when he was spotted by one of Joab's troops. He reported Absalom to Joab, expecting him to cut Absalom down and take him to David. But Joab was angry. "Why didn't you just kill him?"

"David commanded us to protect the king's son," he replied. "How could I disobey my king's command?"

But Joab understood human nature better than that, better even than David. "I won't waste time playing games. If this rebellion isn't dealt with now, it will only pop up again later!" He thrust three spears through Absalom's heart while he yet hung in the tree. Joab and his men then cut him down and buried him in a pit, covering him with a large heap of stones as a memorial to his arrogant gall and his unbelievable foolishness. Joab sent word to Abishai and Ittai, and they all ordered their men back to Gilead.

When Absalom's General Amasa heard that their king was dead, he at least had the sense to order retreat. Some went home, ashamed at what they had done. But many just snuck past Amasa in the woods to join David's loyal band.

Two runners went to Mahanaim to notify David of the victory. One was Ahimaaz, son of Zadok. He outran the other, a Cushite, and broke the news to David gently, "Blessed be YHWH your God, who has this day defeated all who rebelled against my lord the king."

When David asked about the welfare of Absalom, he wouldn't tell him. But then the Cushite came, and he blabbed everything. By the time Joab returned from the battle, David was wailing, "O my son! Absalom my son! Would to God I had died instead of you, O Absalom my son, my son..." over and over like a broken record.

Joab was miffed. They should have had a celebration that night! Instead, all the people were caught up in David's mourning. They slunk back into Mahanaim as if they had been defeated. Joab couldn't stand it. He went to David and told him, "Today you have covered with shame the faces of your servants, who saved your life and the lives of all your family, by loving those who hate you, and hating those who love you! You act as though you would be pleased if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead! Please, go out now and commend your servants for their victory this day. If you do not, surely not a man in Israel will remain loyal to you by morning!"

David listened to his faithful general. (He did not yet know that it was Joab who had killed Absalom.) So he went out and thanked the people. But he sounded only half-hearted. The people were confused. They weren't sure whether David wanted to return to Jerusalem and recover his throne or forever mope around mourning for Absalom. They were afraid he had lost his nerve!

Faithful Joab sent messengers across the land, saying, "Mighty King David delivered us from the oppression of the Philistines. He saved us from the nations surrounding us. He led us back to YHWH after Saul had turned away. David hasn't lost his nerve. He merely fled from rebellious Absalom because he didn't want to fight his own son. But now that Absalom is dead, it's time to welcome the king back to Jerusalem!" So the people urged him to return.

But the men of Judah, especially Jerusalem, were not sure what would happen if he came back. Would there be a big purge of all those who had supported Absalom? They were many, especially in Jerusalem. It seemed like they all had been under Absalom's spell, at least at first. General Amasa and his army were in dread of what David might do to them. So they kept silent, especially when they heard how furious David was with General Joab after he learned that Joab had killed Absalom.

Finally David sent a message to Zadok, Abiathar, and the elders of Judah at Jerusalem. It said, "Why are you the last ones in Israel to call for my return? You are my own brothers, my own bone and flesh. Why should you be last to back the king? I swear I mean you no harm, from the lowest servant in my house up to General Amasa my nephew, including all those who fought against me. I now forgive them all. To show my forgiveness, I swear this day to appoint General Amasa as chief commander of my army, in place of Joab, who killed my son."

Now, this was more like the kind-hearted David they knew and loved. They agreed together to send word to David, "Return, O King, and all who are with you. We are eager to receive you!" Indeed they were. It seemed like everyone in the land had gathered at Gilgal to greet him as he crossed the Jordan. Now came the celebration that Joab had wanted when Absalom was killed. David was quick to honor all those who had supported him, and just as quick to forgive all who had followed Absalom.

Shimei (a Benjamite, and Saul's cousin) had cursed David as he was fleeing from Absalom. But now he bowed in repentance before David. Abishai wanted to have his head for his previous insolence, but David's forgiveness covered even him.

Mephibosheth, son of Saul's son Jonathan, also came to welcome David. Ziba (Saul's servant, whom David had assigned to manage Saul's estate in Mephibosheth's name) had accused Mephibosheth of rebelling against David by trying to make himself the king in David's absence. (Ziba actually wanted Saul's estate all for himself.) However, Mephibosheth had obviously been in mourning for weeks – his clothes unwashed, hair and beard untrimmed – it turned out that he had been fasting and praying for David's return the entire time he was gone. Again David showed mercy. He forgave Ziba of his lie and granted him equal shares with Mephibosheth over the estate of Saul.

But even with David's kindness and forgiveness, the spirit of rebellion was not so easily quenched in Israel. Furious that his puppet Absalom had been so easily killed by Joab, Satan went looking for another to take his place. He found a distant cousin of Saul: Sheba, son of Bichri. Sheba toured Israel northward, proclaiming himself as the last royal heir to Saul's kingdom, and belittling David as "only the son of Jesse, the shepherd!" Over 5000 Israelites actually bought the bold lie and followed him.

David was rightfully concerned. He ordered his new General Amasa to gather the army of Judah. Sadly, they didn't trust him, as he had so recently been fighting against David, and did not respond in time. So David told Abishai and his troops to do the job. He pursued Sheba, together with David's mighty men. Joab, though he was no longer David's general, also went to support his brother Abishai.

Amasa and the few he had gathered met them at the great memorial stone at Gibeon. Joab pretended delight at seeing him, and ran to greet him. But as he reached out to kiss him, he thrust a sword deep into his belly. "That's for leading the fight against my king at Gilead, you traitor!" He whispered, letting his body slump to the ground in the middle of the highway. Abishai indicated his approval by putting his own general's helmet on Joab's head.

Amasa's armor bearer called out, "Whoever is loyal to King David, follow Joab now." But the soldiers behind him stood rooted to the ground, horrified by the bloody body of their general. So the armor bearer dragged the body off to the side and threw a cape over it. That broke the spell.

They caught up with Sheba at Abel Beth-maacah, where he had brought his followers to develop an army. Joab and Abishai didn't fool around. They surrounded the city, and immediately began building a siege mound and preparing a battering ram to destroy the city walls.

The house of Maacah had long been known for their wisdom. But this time, they seemed paralyzed with fear. They had soldiers within and soldiers without. Sheba had convinced Maacah's king to take his side, and the family of Maacah was torn between their loyalty to David, and their loyalty to their own city-king in his support for Sheba. Surely their king would be slain if they changed sides now.

But a brave servant-girl lived in the house of Maacah who still had her wits about her. We'll call her Magan. She loved her master as much as anyone in the city, but though she was loyal, she adored David. She could not tolerate her king's support for Sheba's rebellion against her beloved King David. She stood on the wall and boldly called to Joab. "Why are you about to destroy Abel; a famous city in Israel; a city which has always been faithful to my lord the king; a city which has become widely known for wisdom and righteousness? We are gentle, like a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of YHWH?"

Joab (still wearing the general's helmet) responded, "Far be it from me to harm you. I have nothing against your king or the house of Maacah. I only want that wicked son of Bichri, Sheba, who rebelled against King David. Deliver him up and we will depart in peace."

Magan returned to the royal court, where Sheba, his generals, the king of Abel Beth-maacah, and many of his guards and servants had gathered. "Listen to me!" she cried out. The kings, princes, generals, and mighty men of the city turned to look at this little servant girl.

Magan was not intimidated by them. She had seen them all paralyzed by fear. It was up to her. “I’ve just been on top of the wall talking to Joab, Israel’s army commander. He doesn’t want to destroy our city. He has nothing against us or our king. He only wants one thing: the head of Sheba!” She pointed at his horrified face. “You rebelled against King David and turned the hearts of your followers against him. They can be forgiven, but you cannot. Is it expedient for the whole city to die because of your sin? No, it is not!” She turned to the guards, “I say it is far better that this one rebel die for his own sin, so that the rest of us may live!” She pointed at Sheba and ordered, “Cut off his head!”

Sheba, who had entered the city with 5000 cheering supporters, did not feel so cocky now. He half stood, “Just who is this peasant woman, that she...”

But her words had already struck home. His soldiers realized it was his life or theirs. One of his own guards, standing next to him, pulled out his sword and sliced off his head before he could finish his sentence. He then took the head by the hair went up to the city wall. “Sheba’s rebellion is dead,” he shouted, throwing the bloody head down to Joab. “This is his head! Long live King David and his faithful generals Joab and Abishai!”

So Joab blew the trumpet of retreat. Thus the city was saved. The king of Maacah was forever grateful to Magan. Though her family was from Ammon, they were given lands and riches in Israel, and adopted as true Israelites into the tribe of Naphtali. For her boldness and wisdom, Magan was promoted from a humble servant to a trusted advisor to the city-king. Also, for his skill in helping to stop the rebellion, Joab was restored as one of David’s generals. Secretly, David was relieved that he had slain Amasa.

David decided what to do about his concubines that Absalom had violated. He called them all together. “I’m sorry I didn’t bring you with me when we fled Jerusalem. I had no idea my son Absalom would be so beastly to you. However, you also bear some blame, as there are ten of you and there was only one of him. You allowed him to violate you, one at a time, on the roof of the palace, in the sight of all Israel. You knew it was wrong, and by resisting together you had the power to stop him, yet you did not. So I will continue to supply your needs but you will see my face no more. You will remain in your quarters like widows the rest of your lives.”

David visited his faithful priests, Zadok and Abiathar. He gave them a letter he had written while fleeing from his son Absalom. (It is now **Psalm 3**.) “O YHWH, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me, saying of my soul, ‘There is no deliverance for him in God!’ But You, O YHWH, are a shield about me. You are my glory, the one who lifts my head. I cried to You and You answered from Your holy mountain. I lay down, slept, and awoke refreshed, for You sustain me. I will not be afraid, though ten thousand people set themselves against me.”

The land was suffering. That exceedingly close pass of Mars in October of 990 BC had opened up old wounds in the Earth’s crust. The huge volcano at Thera in the Aegean Sea north of Crete again erupted, nearly as bad as when it had devastated the earth in 1620 BC.

This time, the abused Minoans in Crete called it quits. They hated paying tribute to the Mycenaeans anyway, and now their island was all covered with ash. So finally they evacuated entirely from Crete and migrated to Phoenicia. The Mycenaeans grew powerful; they took over Crete, and their pirate ships soon controlled the Mediterranean. They became known – and feared – as the ‘Sea Peoples’. *It won’t be long before they’re attacking Egypt itself.*

Thera’s ash went up into the stratosphere, circled the globe, and began stunting crop growth all around the earth. By 986 BC the famine was widespread and severe.

Ay died without an heir, leaving Horemheb as Egypt’s Pharaoh. His land had been devastated by the bubonic plague, the Mars flyby, and now from famine – he had no aggression left. But the Hittites, Syrians, and Assyrians were all suffering through similar plagues, and couldn’t take advantage of it. The bubonic plague hadn’t bothered Israel, because of their strict laws of cleanliness. But this famine was something else, like a phantom army stalking the land. David agonized about it, needing to know why. He understood enough about God’s ways to realize that when His people suffered, there was usually a reason.

So he went to YHWH. For a long time, Logos was silent, but David was persistent. He worshiped day after day at the tabernacle. He had Zadok and Abiathar offer special burnt and sin offerings for him. He repented of every sin he could think of, and the sins of those around him. Nothing. Finally he decided on a fast – until YHWH answered! Frankly, he needed it. He had gotten a bit pudgy and out of shape since that last battle at Gilead when he had refused to fight his own son. After a week of fasting in front of the tabernacle, David was pretty weak, but he still trusted YHWH. He will not let him die. He loves him! So David continued to refuse food, swearing he’d rather die than not hear YHWH’s voice. Thus David drew near to God. Filled with the Spirit, he returned to his poetry. Among others, he wrote **Psalms 10** and **13**. “Why do You stand afar off, O YHWH? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble? Arise, O YHWH! Lift up Your hand! Do not forget the afflicted! In pride the wicked hotly pursues the afflicted; let them be caught in the plots which they have devised! ... How long, O YHWH? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, with sorrow in my heart all day? How long will my enemies be exalted over me? But I have rejoiced in Your lovingkindness. My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to YHWH, because He has dealt generously with me.”

Then, in the wee hours of the morning, after David had grown so weak he could hardly stand, Logos finally came to him. “Thank you for pursuing Me, My beloved. I have missed you. Welcome back into My presence!”

“YHWH! My Lord and King! Why was it so hard to reach You? Why did You hide Yourself from me?”

“It is always hard to reach Me when you have sin in your life. When you repent of your sins, repent also for those within your family which result from your own. However, I was not hiding from you. You were hiding from Me. Ever since My sword struck the top of Mount Moriah, you have feared Me with the wrong kind of fear, and have stayed away from Me.”

“The wrong kind of fear...?”

“It is right to fear Me with a deep awe and reverence at My great holiness and power, for then you keep yourself holy as I am holy. But you were afraid of Me; afraid of My sword; even afraid to enter My tabernacle. That kind of fear exposes doubts about My infinite love, faithfulness, and mercy. It says you don’t trust Me.”

“I do trust You, Lord. I will never again be afraid of You. Please tell me why Israel suffers famine these three years? When Gad gave me that choice of punishments, I chose the three days of Your sword. Is the famine because I cut the three days short when I blocked the sword to protect Your tabernacle? I was being zealous for Your name!”

David heard the familiar chuckles, and was glad to be back in YHWH’s presence. Logos comforted his soul.

“No, My beloved. The famine is not to punish you at all. I was glad when you interposed yourself at the risk of your life, to block Me from destroying My tabernacle and the Ark of My Covenant. I cut the three days short to show My approval! No, the famine is for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites in three cities, in direct violation of the covenant they had made with Joshua.”

“Oh, Lord! I always knew that was wrong. But it was almost 44 years ago! What can we do about it now?”

“That is up to the leaders of Gibeon. They are the ones still carrying the grudge. They have grown bitter and have cursed Israel, giving occasion to the adversary to inflict judgments upon you for Saul’s sin. You’ll have to ask the Gibeonites what will mitigate their bitterness.”

So David went to Gibeon and asked the elders, “What do you want me to do for you? How can I make atonement for Saul’s sin, so you will bless Israel and remove the curse you swore against us?”

“We don’t want money. And we don’t want anyone of Israel to die, except the man who consumed us, Saul, the one who tried to exterminate us. Give us seven of his sons. We will hang them on the wall before YHWH in Gibeah of Saul. Then we will retract the curse.”

David’s heart sank. Saul only had two sons left. All the rest had died with him in his last battle. “What about grandsons? Will that be sufficient?”

“Yes, but only if they are adults.”

David agreed and went to get them. Surprisingly, the two sons of Saul by Rizpah, Armoni and Mephibosheth, went willingly. When they heard that their lives were to be sacrificed to save Israel from the famine, they sadly agreed that it was better that they die, than all Israel perish. Their mother Rizpah had raised them well. She went with them, to be close to them in their final hours.

The five sons of Merab, Saul’s oldest daughter, were a different story. They howled, pled their innocence, and fought to escape. They had to be hauled off by twenty burly soldiers. David tried to explain it, but to no avail.

His ears were red with curses when they left home. He could not blame them, but only feel sorry for them. This was the hardest thing he had ever done; harder even than his battle at Helam in Syria. He brought the seven (plus Rizpah between her sons) to the Gibeonites.

David left with his soldiers. He could not bear to see their fate. The Gibeonites chained up Saul’s sons and grandsons, took them to Saul’s old palace in Gibeah, and hung them on the wall in a big ceremony. Then, as they had agreed, they prayed to YHWH to remove the curse and bless the land of Israel instead. So their bitterness was healed and the bloodguiltiness of the land was cleansed before God and man. The famine subsided.

It was the middle of Nisan (Passover time – our April) at the beginning of the barley harvest when Saul’s sons were slain. Following the barley harvest was the wheat harvest, beginning fifty days later in the month of Sivan (our June). After a long, dry summer, the early rains began to fall in the middle of Tishri (our October) during the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles). Now they knew the famine was truly over, as the rains were not only early, they were abundant. They cleansed the air and washed away the ash.

Everyone celebrated the Feast with joy, for the first time in years. By the eighth day of Sukkot, the drenched people were glad to leave their Sukkim (temporary huts) and celebrate the last great day of the Feast in their homes. David’s palace was joyously full with his family and friends. The food was plentiful and the fellowship sweet.

It was only then David noticed that Rizpah was missing. (Rizpah had been living with David as a sister for 28 years, ever since he had been made king in Israel in 1014 BC, since her husband Abner had been slain by Joab.)

David quickly sent men to find her. To his horror he discovered that she had never left Gibeah after her two sons had been slain! She had stayed near the wall, keeping the birds and wild animals away and sleeping on sackcloth on the rock for seven months!

David couldn't believe it. She was still there, in the pouring rain, though she was 65 years old. David wouldn't even partake of the feast. He took some men and rushed to Gibeah. David covered Rizpah and brought her back to his palace, while his men took down the bodies of her two sons and the five sons of Merab and prepared them for burial. He also sent messengers to retrieve the bones of Saul and his three sons from the men of Jabesh-Gilead. Finally, David held a solemn memorial service in honor of Saul's house, and buried Saul and his descendants in Zelah of Benjamin next to the grave of Kish, Saul's father. The peace of God fell, and they knew the famine was truly over. The men of Jabesh-Gilead returned home rejoicing.

David was shocked that Rizpah had stayed out in the weather for so long. "Why didn't you call me? I would have taken the bodies down months ago!"

"I did not want to trouble my lord. YHWH cares for me. He knows my needs. He always provides."

David was shamed. Here was a woman who had lost everything in tragedy after tragedy all through her life. Yet she trusted YHWH and rejoiced in His presence more than David in the best of times. He swore to her, "You shall be as a queen mother over all Israel. You shall teach the women of the land reverence and faith."

But alas, it was not to be. Rizpah was deathly ill. It wasn't just from staying outdoors in the fall rains. There are diseases which surround dead bodies, and Rizpah had caught something serious. She never recovered, though David brought the best physicians in the land. She grew weaker day by day, and was in terrible pain, yet she never complained. Instead, she worshiped, sang psalms, smiled, and encouraged all who attended her.

Rizpah held on for several months. David pled with God to heal her. Finally He promised He would! David came to her that evening with the good news. "Rizpah, *'Beloved of YHWH!'* That's what YHWH Himself called you! He told me today that He will heal you!"

"Yes, dear David. I know He will. Please, call all my close friends to celebrate with me in my final hours."

"Final hours? What do you mean? God said He will heal you. They'll come celebrate your healing!"

"David, my lord, my friend... please. Let me go. There is no healing for me in this world. I have nothing left here. My healing is with my sons, and my husband Abner, and my God and King YHWH."

She smiled sweetly at David through her pain. For the first time he saw the depths of her longing for that better land – that spirit realm. He nodded. "Yes, Rizpah, Beloved of YHWH. I understand. I'm sorry it took me so long. YHWH will carry you to His holy realm on high and heal and comfort you as I never could. Please, give Him a hug for me!" He sent for all her friends to gather.

By the time the last had come it was very late, for there were many. Rizpah had touched nearly everyone in the palace and for miles around with her kindness, wisdom, and amazing selflessness. They finally moved her bed out to the great hall so everyone could see her.

It was clear that she was dying. But still she had a smile, a kind word, an encouragement for everyone who came. David was awed. He could see YHWH's glory shining from her face even through the pain and tragedies of her life. Late into the night she hung on, until she had managed to say good-bye to everyone who had come. By then she had no strength left, not even to hold up her head.

In the darkest hour of the night a look of fear crossed Rizpah's face for the first time. With labored breathing she cried out, "David, my king! Please... come! Take my hand... The death angel approaches... I am sorely afraid, for I've not been this way before."

David pushed through the crowd and knelt at her side, taking her hand in both of his. "My sister! Beloved of YHWH! You have nothing to fear. You are in His hand..." But Rizpah suddenly sat bolt upright, gazing at a spot high on the wall above everyone's head. Her eyes opened wide with surprise and delight, and her agonized look of fear changed to an expression of joy and anticipation.

"Why, look! It's morning already! The winter is past," she called in the sweet, strong voice of a teen-aged girl. "The rains have ceased, and the sun shines so bright! I've never seen the land of Israel so beautiful..." She took one deep breath, smiling as if all the fragrances of springtime had returned. Then her lifeless body fell back while her released soul leaped forward, directly into the waiting arms of Logos at the Welcoming Park in Sheol.

The entire massed choir of the heavenly host was circled all around her, belting out the Welcoming Song, dancing, and shouting the victory. But Rizpah had eyes only for Logos, shining in glorious splendor before her. "YHWH, my Lord and my God!" She recognized Him instantly and tried to throw herself at His feet.

But He caught her and lifted her into His embrace. "Rizpah, My beloved! Welcome into the joy of your Lord!" Logos hugged her to Himself. "Well done! Oh, well done!" He whispered in her ear. "You have suffered through every temptation, every trial, every grief and pain under the sun, yet your love and faith in Me only grew stronger through the testing. Now it is past. The beauty of your purity shines forth for all the universe to see! As you were faithful in small things, so now you shall rule with Me as queen in My realm over great things. Welcome to your heavenly home, My beloved, My precious one, My treasure, My queen!"

Rizpah was not ready for that. "Oh! But my Lord! Your servant is unworthy. I am just an alien, a Hivite of Gibeon, captured as a slave to Saul, and only adopted into the family of Israel when Abner took Saul's house."

“All My sons and daughters are adopted. And all are as slaves and aliens until they receive My cleansing...”

“But I am the least! Why should You call me a queen? I have never been anything but a servant!”

Logos lifted her face to gaze into His eyes. “That is true. *In this My realm, the servant of all is greatest of all!* All your life you have demonstrated My own nature and character to My people, for I too am servant of all. I too suffer abuse and hatred from those I serve. I too love those who hate Me, and return kindness and blessing for those who curse Me and spitefully use Me. You may be an alien to them, but not to Me. Since the day you heard My name you have not ceased to shine with My glory. That is why you shall be My queen in My realm and dwell with Me forever.”

Rizpah relaxed into His hug. Then she remembered. “King David said to give You a hug from him. I did not understand that, for never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I could hug You, much less that Your hug would be so satisfying, so comforting. Yet David was kind to me. Can You accept a hug from him?”

“Of course!” He clasped her ever more tightly, and a new thrill went through her. “I, too, give you this hug from David, for he loved you truly, with a love that transcends human, physical relationships. I bless both him and you with the joy of divine love, for he, too, is My beloved, and he shall reign forever with Me as king!”

Rizpah was overwhelmed. “But Lord, if David is to reign as king and I as queen, does that mean...”

Logos threw back His shining head and laughed, a great, glorious laugh that echoed joyously through the park to make it seem like the whole universe laughed with Him. “My heavenly realms have many kings and queens. My overcomers! My saints! Let Me introduce you to one.” He showed her Samuel-Sarah, who greeted Rizpah with another happy hug. Now Rizpah was doubly mystified. Of course she recognized Samuel – she had been twenty-six when he had died. And she recognized her heroine Sarah, whom she had always admired as the nicest and loveliest princess in the land. *But both in one person?*

Logos responded to her unasked question. “I made him one. I separated them on earth, so they could find each other and learn to love and support each other. But in My realm, Samuel-Sarah is always one.”

Rizpah remembered how happy she had been when Abner had married her – for the first time in her life she had felt whole. “Logos, is there one here for me? Did You make me one with someone like that? Or did I never find the one...?” She was interrupted by laughter, as if everyone but her was in on a delightful joke.

Logos finally stopped laughing long enough to ask, “Do you not recognize this fine young king standing here beside Me?” His eyes twinkled.

Rizpah looked, then looked again. He was so young, strong, and handsome she hadn’t recognized him, but it was indeed Abner, her husband. He was no longer gruff and grizzled but smiling and kindly. Suddenly she knew what the rest had been laughing at. “O my Lord! Are You saying...? But... Abner is now so young and handsome, while I am but a frail and ugly old woman!”

“Queen Rizpah, no ‘ugly’ or ‘frail’ exists in My realm. All is now, and now is always perfect in every way as I created you. Behold your face!” Logos was transformed into a crystal glass, so they could see their reflections. Rizpah gasped, for staring back at her in the mirror was the most compellingly beautiful face she had ever seen. It was her face, the face of a lovely young princess!

Still facing the mirror, Abner and Rizpah reached out their arms in a side embrace. But the mirror too had arms, reaching around them in a triple hug. “You will always be young and handsome, My beloved king-queen, for you reflect My glory as you rule My universe with Me!” Their triple hug grew closer. They became shrouded by flames, hidden from view. The encircling host bowed their eyes in reverence and waited. Rizpah had not known she could contain such joy. But her capacity was enlarged even as her joy and pleasure increased. Her body was merged as one with Abner, and with Logos. She slowly became aware that she was now experiencing the reality of which the most intimate of human pleasures was but the merest taste. Theirs was a total oneness, not just of body, but of mind, will, soul, and spirit as well. She felt satisfied, complete, yet the hug went on and on. Time no longer had meaning, but only the joy of oneness with her husband and her God.

Many minutes – or eons – flowed by. Finally the flames dimmed. Logos pushed Himself away from Abner-Rizpah. They had been so much one – he wondered how they could possibly be separated, and why he still felt so complete even after they were. Logos answered his thoughts, “We are forever separate, for I am of a different essence from you. I am Spirit, from eternity. You are flesh, of this realm of time and space. Yet from this day on we are always one as well, for I made you a container of Myself in this realm of time and space, and in you My creation is complete. The oneness you sense between you and Me will never cease, for it is My own Spirit dwelling within your soul, binding you together in Me. This is how I created you to be. You will ever get closer, more one with each other, as you draw nearer to Me and learn of Me.”

Now Rizpah had a thought, “Lord, how long did our hug last?” She was suddenly surprised that she could hear her husband’s thoughts in her mind, yet could still think independently as well, even though she sensed they had only one mind and body.

Logos laughed again. “How long? As long as you want. With Me, you are free from your slavery to time. In My realm, hugs never really end. My realm is fueled by hugs!”

Logos then answered her unspoken question. “Yes, Abner-Rizpah, you are now truly one in body, soul, mind, and spirit. This is the way I created you in the beginning. Your ‘independent’ thoughts are no more independent than when you argued with yourself on earth. But now as your male and female aspects fully communicate, your capacity to understand and be in harmony with yourself is enhanced. That will continue to grow as you learn of Me.”

Saul and Ahinoam, stood arm in arm, awaiting their chance to greet the new arrival. Logos beckoned them up to give Abner-Rizpah their welcoming hugs. “On earth Saul was your king, Abner-Rizpah. Here in Sheol, you are his king, and he is your servant. He and Ahinoam are still just learning to be one with Me and each other.”

Rizpah was shocked to see Saul there. For a moment, scenes of his abuse flashed across her mind. “No, Rizpah!” Logos cautioned, “No condemnation can enter My realm. Only in his immaturity did he mistreat you. He repented and we forgave him. He didn’t really know what he was doing to you. At least he learned to love and care for you – after he saw a piece of his robe in David’s hand and repented! He is now learning to love and care for his own wife. Just love him as I do.” And so the party continued on, a grand celebration that lasted for days, or millennia, in that beautiful realm called Sheol, where time seemed to have so little meaning. *Queen Rizpah was finally home.*

King David was deeply saddened by Rizpah’s death, more than he dared to admit. He was finally discovering that true love does not have to start with the physical beauty or the sensual feelings. With Rizpah, it had started when he saw the beauty of her character and the goodness of her soul. *Would to God that all relationships would start that way!* David wept openly when he laid her body beside Abner’s in Saul’s cemetery in Gibeah. All Israel mourned for Rizpah, as much as if she was their queen.

David had been preoccupied for years with the affairs of his family and the strife within his kingdom. Though he had subdued the Philistines, now they sensed a weakness. Some giants, descendants of the Anakim who still lived among them, decided they were strong enough to rebel against the tribute they were paying. The rebellion began in Gezer, with the Philistines led by Ishbi-Benob, who swore he would kill David for slaying his uncle Goliath. David (now 67 years old) rushed down to Gezer with his army to quell the rebellion.

Ishbi-Benob very nearly succeeded that day. He and his personal guards pierced through the Israeli lines, to charge, huge spears raised high, straight for David. David had never seen a giant move so fast. In seconds he had mowed down the soldiers in front of him, and suddenly no one was left between David and the giant. Ishbi-Benob flung his spear. David blocked it with his shield, but the spear was so heavy that it knocked him flat on his back. His shield, sword, and helmet went flying. He lay stunned.

Ishbi-Benob was all ready with his sword. David lay defenseless on the ground. It looked like certain death. But at the last second, Abishai threw himself between them, causing Ishbi-Benob’s sword to miss. A fierce swordfight ensued. Abishai was barely able to parry the heavy sword of the giant. David grabbed his sword to join the fray. Even with the two of them, they barely succeeded in bringing the giant down. Abishai lopped off his head, while David nearly collapsed from exhaustion.

The battle was barely begun, but General Joab called retreat. He tried to make it sound like a victory, since the Philistine champion was slain, but everyone knew it was in concern for David. When they got back to the palace, Joab and Abishai swore, “You shall never again go out to battle, lest you extinguish the lamp of Israel.”

With Ishbi-Benob dead, the Philistines were furious. Three times they gathered their armies at a pit near Gath to attack Israel, each time led by another giant of the Anakim. First was Saph, who was slain by Sibbecai, a captain of David’s army and one of his mighty men. After him came Lahmi, Goliath’s younger brother. He was brought down by Elhanan of Ephrathah, a descendant of Jair. The third was Hexad, a huge dude with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. He plowed through Israel’s battle line and went berserk, killing Abishai and sending Joab flying through the air! Jonathan, son of David’s brother Shimea, rushed in and finally brought Hexad down. So the giants of the Anakim all died. The Philistines were again subdued. General Joab did recover, though he never fought again.

David stayed home during those last three battles. He composed a summary of his life. We know it as **Psalm 18**. “YHWH is my rock and my fortress, my strong deliverer; my God in whom I take refuge. He is my shield, my armor, and my Savior, for He saves me from the violence of the wicked. I call upon YHWH, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from all my enemies. The earth quaked; the very foundations of the heavens were shaken when He was angry with me. Smoke poured from His nostrils and fire streamed from His mouth like a sword, devouring the land and setting Mount Moriah ablaze. But when YHWH was pleased with me He thundered from the heavens and sent lightning like arrows to rout my enemies. The paths of the sea emerged and the foundations of the earth were laid bare at YHWH’s rebuke and in a blast of breath from His nostrils. He sent from on high, lifted me up, and drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my enemies and those who hate me, for they were too strong for me. They knocked me flat in the day of my calamity, but YHWH came and lifted me up. He brought me into a broad and protected place. He rescued me because He delights in me! YHWH has rewarded me according to my righteousness, for I have lived according to His ways.” So David retired from war. He was too old. He decided to spend the rest of his life writing psalms and caring for his family. Bathsheba, his favorite wife, rejoiced to have him home!

Their family had grown. Bathsheba had borne to David four sons and three daughters: Solomon (18), Grace (16), Shimea (14), Shobab (12), Nathan (10), Jessica (9) and Julie (6). David was very proud of them, especially since, unlike the children of his other wives, he had actually had a hand in raising them. Others, too, noticed the contrast between them and the children of David's other wives. It's amazing the difference it makes when two parents work together to raise their children. All were admirable, but Solomon turned out the best. He was a fine young man, responsible, inquisitive, intelligent, respectful, reverent – everyone loved him. Though he had grown handsome, tall, and strong, yet there was a humble earnestness and sincerity about him which showed David that Solomon should be the one to succeed him as king. Surely he would never turn out like his arrogant half-brother, Absalom!

So one day David got Solomon alone for that 'man to man' talk. He responded well. He and his father thought alike. Solomon too longed to build a temple for YHWH! That cinched it for David. So he vowed to Bathsheba that Solomon would be king of Israel after him.

Later, David charged Solomon, "I had intended to build a temple, but YHWH revealed to me, 'You are a man of war and bloodshed. But your son shall be a man of peace, for I will give him rest on all sides. He shall build a house for My name. He shall be My son. I will be his father. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.' Therefore, my son, YHWH will be with you, to make you succeed as He promised. May He grant you wisdom and discretion, and give you charge over Israel as king in my place, so that you may keep the Law of YHWH your God. For then you shall prosper forever, if you are careful to observe all the commandments of YHWH through Moses concerning Israel. Be strong, my son. Never fear or be dismayed."

David ordered the elders of Israel to assist Solomon in this task. "YHWH is with you! He has given you rest on every side and put all the inhabitants of the land into my hand. So set your heart and soul to seek YHWH your God. Arise therefore, to build for YHWH Elohim a permanent temple, that you may bring into it the Ark of the Covenant and all the holy vessels of the tabernacle. I charge Solomon my son to lead in this holy work."

David got busy gathering material so Solomon could start building the temple as soon as he became king. He acknowledged, "Solomon is young and inexperienced. But the temple he builds for YHWH will be exceedingly magnificent. It will be most glorious – famous all around the world. Therefore, I must make preparations for it." So he started drawing up building plans, and he gave orders to begin gathering materials and training workers.

Logos was pleased with his commitment. He blessed their efforts. Over the next ten years (from 984 BC) they collected a billion dollars worth of gold, silver, and bronze, and iron, lumber, and quarried stone beyond measure.

Old Pharaoh Horemheb had five daughters but no male heir. In 983 BC he decided to make use of the assets he had. He sent his eldest daughter (princess Sharelli) to marry King Nickmaddu III of Ugarit on the Levantine coast in northwest Syria. That worked out well. He obtained peace with the Hittites, Syrians, and Mitanni at minimal cost to himself. He didn't even have to send his army. *He should have.* The Hittites and their allies were busy battling the aggressive Mycenaean 'Sea Peoples' at this time, and were too busy to bother with Egypt. Horemheb smugly let them deal with it, content with his treaty, never considering that those same Sea Peoples may threaten Egypt some day!

Egypt had a good alliance with King David, but he was old. So the next year Horemheb sent ambassadors up to Israel, to find out if another daughter might be of use to cement a fresh alliance with whomever David wanted to succeed him. But King David had misgivings. *His political marriage to King Talmi's daughter Maacah to forge that stupid alliance with Syria had not worked so well – look at the trouble Syria had caused since then! And look at all the trouble that Maacah's son Absalom had caused!* "No, I don't recommend it, Solomon. There are other ways to make alliances. When you marry, marry for love, not politics."

Solomon was thinking way ahead of David on this one. "But Dad, your alliances succeeded because of the might of your army. The surrounding nations were all afraid of you. But Egypt has become more powerful than Israel. We can't threaten them with war! As strong as they are now, we would be foolish to turn down their offer. Besides, I don't have to marry just for politics. The Egyptian ambassadors said Pharaoh Horemheb has four remaining unmarried daughters. I can go down there, make friends with him, live in his palace awhile and learn all about Egypt, and then choose whichever daughter I like best. Everyone wins! And I'll also get an education on building from the best builders in the world. Just think how valuable that will be when I start to build YHWH's new temple!"

"You won't be able to talk with her. You'll have to learn Egyptian, or she'll have to learn Hebrew."

"Oh, Dad. Languages have never been difficult for me. I already know a little Egyptian. After a year or two down there, I'll be fluent in it. I already can speak in Aramaic, Acadian, Phoenician, a little Hittite..."

"Okay, Okay, I won't prohibit you. But I still smell a rat. Be sure to ask YHWH about it first." Well, if there was one thing Solomon loved more than learning, it was worship. He loved the tabernacle; loved to kneel with David for hours in prayer and worship; loved to sing the psalms that his father had written. He'd never actually heard from God personally, but he felt closest to God when his father talked with YHWH. He knew that YHWH loved him and was leading him. So he spent the next few days fasting and earnestly seeking YHWH's leading. Finally satisfied, he was quite confident he should go.

David still wasn't so sure. This was the first time that Solomon had tried to step out on his own, on anything. "Don't you think you should confirm it with the priests? Marriage is a rather big step."

"Dad... I'm 20 now. I'm a man. If I am going to be king, I have to learn to hear from YHWH for myself."

"Son, learn from my mistakes. I suffered enough for both of us! I learned to get confirmation on important things like this. It is too easy to hear what you want to hear, rather than what YHWH is really trying to say."

So Solomon, being an obedient child, found Abiathar and asked him to seek YHWH through the Urim and the Thumim. Abiathar refused. "I will not seek YHWH on something I know to be wrong. The Law of Moses says not to marry foreign wives, lest they turn your heart away from following Him. The Egyptians are idolaters."

But Solomon really wanted to go. He defended himself. "I would never marry an idolater! But many of the finest women in Israel were once foreign idolaters. Rahab, Ruth, Ahinoam, Rizpah... most of Dad's wives! Of course I'd make sure she loved YHWH and forsook her idolatry before I married one." Abiathar wouldn't relent. Solomon never quite forgave him for that.

Since Solomon had determined to go to Egypt with the Pharaoh's ambassadors, he introduced himself to them as, "Crown Prince Solomon, appointed to be king after my father King David's death." He asked to stay with them in their quarters, the better to learn Egyptian. They were delighted, seeing in him the fulfillment of their mission. They welcomed him into their group, and conducted intensive language lessons until they felt he was ready to leave. Then in the spring, after the Passover when the latter rains were past, they set out together for Egypt.

Along the way, Solomon practiced his speech. There is nothing quite so honoring to a foreign king as to address him in his own language. Solomon gave the ambassadors some chuckles, for as you know, Egyptian pronunciation is nearly impossible for foreigners.

Finally, with the ambassadors and his own aides and translators behind him, Solomon stood before the throne of Pharaoh Horemheb. He bowed in respect, then stood tall and smiled. "Your Gracious and Benevolent Imperial Majesty!" He had this part down pat. "I am Crown Prince Solomon, son of David king of Israel. I have come at your request, to seal a large bathtub between our two kingdoms. I am wet cow, having never married. Your offer of one of your daughters in marriage is humbly attacked. However, I would like your permission to race with them for a few epochs before I decide. I beg of you to bear me a son in your court. This will give you a chance to understand me as well as time for me to race with your daughters. Egypt is the most powerful and advanced nation in the world. I hope to learn much of your culture and people before I sleep."

Grizzled old Pharaoh Horemheb, having learned a good lesson from his captain Ahab after his and David's successful negotiations with the powerful Hittite king Supiluliuma, really wanted this alliance to work. He tried to maintain a straight face, and of course no one else dared to snicker without the Pharaoh starting it!

But there was no way. Even biting his lip fiercely, he could not bottle up his laughter. It burst forth, and within seconds the entire court had broken up in hearty guffaws. To his credit, Prince Solomon just continued to stand tall, trying to appear regal, his face a bit red but otherwise unfazed. He knew his Egyptian was not that good. He expected a few gaffs. He figured the benefit of trying would outweigh his mistakes.

Horemheb finally recovered his composure. He gently stepped off the dais to stand in front of the young Prince. He put his arm out so that his hand rested on Solomon's shoulder, and very slowly (though in perfect Egyptian) answered, "My dear Prince Solomon. I also hope to seal the large bathtub between our kingdoms. I am very glad that you are a wet cow; my daughters are wet cows as well. You may stay with me and race with them as long as you wish until you decide. I am happy that you appreciate my culture and my people. I encourage you to learn from us. I will indeed treat you like a son in my court. Welcome!"

He spoke so slowly and carefully that Solomon understood his errors in pronunciation and the crazy way it had sounded to them. He too began to laugh, as he bowed to express his thanks. Not surprisingly, everyone in the court loved him for trying. They amused themselves for weeks over his mistakes. Solomon became known throughout the palace as the 'wet cow' and the royal alliance as the 'large bathtub'. But it was not until Horemheb's second daughter came to him later that he realized why they had laughed so heartily. Her name was Muwet, pronounced 'Moo-wet'. She was a vivacious, petite seventeen-year-old, with a mischievous grin, a slender, athletic build, and boundless energy. She loved to flick her long black hair around to express her feelings, and to let it fly in the wind as she ran from place to place. She came to visit Solomon right after he had settled in to his room in the palace.

"Hello, wet cow. I also am wet cow, for my name is Moo-wet." She deliberately overemphasized it so he could hear the connection. "My father, the Pharaoh, told me to show you around, wherever you'd like to go. My maids will accompany us, to help answer all your questions. Dad wants you to learn all about our culture and our people. I am to hide nothing from you. I know some Hebrew, but my father told me not to use it much, until you learn our language a little better! I hope that's okay with you?"

"Of course it is!" Solomon was pleased and delighted. "And will you race with me throughout the land for a few epochs?" He understood his errors and went along with the joke as a good sport.

“Oh, but Prince Solomon! I might win the races! I’m very fast. How do you think it would look for you to be chasing me around the kingdom?”

So from the beginning they hit it off together. Solomon learned that Horemheb’s other daughters were still a bit young. But Muwet was just wonderful. Her intelligence, her wit, her delightful sense of humor, her eagerness to please, not to mention her unaffected beauty and grace, stole Solomon’s heart. As promised, she went with him everywhere, chatting happily about everything to help Solomon pick up the language.

Old Horemheb was also delighted with Solomon. This handsome young prince was everything he had hoped for his daughter, and more! He had feared that Muwet would just be thrown into a harem as a trophy, but Solomon had no harem, and he really seemed to care about her. He treated her with the respect due a princess. Horemheb gladly gave Solomon the run of the kingdom, trusting that nature would take its course.

This was the happiest time of Solomon’s life. He loved wisdom and learning, and Egypt was filled with wondrous things to learn. Within six months he was fluent in verbal and written Egyptian. He explored all the temples, the mortuary complexes, the pyramids, and the sphinxes, with Muwet helping him to understand Egypt’s complex system of gods and goddesses and her rich heritage of ancient legends. He loved the carvings, the paintings on all the walls, the careful historical vignettes chiseled in stone, the monuments, and the celebration steles.

But what fascinated him the most were the huge stone works. Solomon had the mind of an engineer. He always wanted to know how things were done. *How did you move those 20 ton blocks of stone? How did you lift them up into the pyramids? How did you erect those heavy obelisks? Where did the stone come from and how did you quarry it and get it here? And how did you make those tunnels through the stone, those massive trap doors, and those secret inner chambers?* Solomon was full of questions. By Horemheb’s order his artisans showed Solomon all the secrets of Egypt which up ’til now had been carefully guarded from foreign nations. They hid nothing from him, nothing at all.

Two wonderful years flew rapidly by. Then he heard news that his father’s health was failing and he realized he needed to return to Israel. By now, Muwet was such a part of his life, Solomon knew he could not return without her. But he had sworn to Abiathar that he would never marry an idolater. He had to teach her about YHWH and persuade her to renounce Egypt’s idols. That could be a bit tricky – the Egyptians had gods up the kazoo, in a rich tapestry of traditions that covered every aspect of Egyptian life and culture. Though Prince Solomon of course believed in YHWH as the one and only true God, yet as he had learned (non-judgmentally, of course) about the Egyptian gods, he had become a bit entranced.

Solomon decided he just needed to come clean with Muwet. In all their times together, they had never before been alone with each other. But now, Solomon brought Muwet into a sunny side-room in the palace and asked her to tell her maids to leave them in private. She smiled sweetly and complied; it was clear that she trusted him completely. When the maids had gone, they sat down across the table from each other, and Solomon reached out his hands. In the two years he had been here, he’d always treated her with utmost respect. He had never even tried to hold her hand, though at times she had grabbed his hand or his arm to hurry him along. So this was a gesture of love. Muwet immediately recognized it as such. She flashed him her most lovely smile, looked up into his eyes, and slowly, deliberately, extended her hands to grasp tightly with his. She made it abundantly clear that she returned his love.

“Muwet, I have raced with you now for two years. In that time, I have deeply fallen in love with you, and with your people and culture. But my father is ill. It is time for me to return to Israel to take over the kingdom. I must go. But... dear Muwet... I want you to go with me...”

“Of course! I want to go with you! That is what my father wants, too, remember? So we can seal that large bathtub between our kingdoms!” She laughed musically and squeezed his hands, and Solomon saw again the many reasons he had fallen in love with her.

“My dear, sweet Muwet! I want that now more than anything. But we have a problem. You are happy here among your people, your culture. But Israel is different. We don’t have your two thousand years of tradition, or your lovely stone monuments, or your vast panoply of gods and goddesses, or the colorful murals gracing the walls of your mortuary temples. We only have one God in Israel, YHWH. He is often distant, for he is Spirit and does not inhabit idols made with hands. YHWH is a God of Law, and utter holiness. Breakers of His Law are often severely punished. He’s a jealous God! He is kind and loving as long as we are faithful to Him, but if we aren’t, He gets angry. He will not tolerate us worshiping any of Egypt’s gods in Israel. So I’m concerned that you won’t be happy there.”

Muwet’s response was beautiful. She squeezed his hands and looked fiercely up into his eyes. “Do you think I will give you up just because of our difference in gods? I am happy here because I was raised here, but I swear, the gods of this land mean nothing to me, compared to you! I love you, Prince Solomon! You are the light of my eyes every morning. You fill my dreams every night. From this day forth I swear by YHWH your God that I will gladly leave Egypt and all its gods behind, and cling only to you, your people, your land, *and your God!*”

Muwet had clearly been rehearsing this little speech for some time. Solomon should have suspected that careful coaching from her father was involved, too. But he had heard what he wanted to hear. He didn’t notice.

CHAPTER 15 – SOLOMON BECOMES KING

So they were married, in January 980 BC, with the full blessing of her father Horemheb. All Egypt rejoiced, for everyone had come to love this brilliant, handsome young prince. They signed their peace alliance, the best and most generous treaty ever signed between two nations, though they still jokingly referred to it as their 'large bathtub'. Horemheb sent them off with servants and riches, and with the unexpected dowry gift of the city of Gezer, which Horemheb had captured back in 999 BC while he was the general of Tutankhamen's army.

The large caravan traveled leisurely up the coast on the Via Maris. Solomon realized that responsibilities awaited him, and he wanted his honeymoon to last. Never was a young couple so happy together – so much in love – as they enjoyed the sunsets over the sparkling Mediterranean. Even the dour Philistines, seeing the Egyptian horses and chariots, welcomed them peacefully as they passed.

Solomon should have hurried. His father was sicker than he knew, and dire things were happening in Israel. Though David was 71, Solomon could not imagine him sick. All his life David had been the picture of robust health. He was a high energy, rapid metabolism, type 'A' go-getter. He could accomplish more in one day than five normal men. With the amount of exercise he got, he had been well-muscled but never fat, even though he ate huge helpings of rich foods and delicacies at every meal.

But after David stopped going out to war and began planning for the temple, he found himself at a desk all day. Others got all the exercise while he, with just as much rich food, got pudgy. The result was predictable; his thyroid flagged and his arteries began to clog. His unquenchable energy evaporated. During the two years Solomon was in Egypt, David weakened dramatically. He barely had the strength to climb out of bed. The winter was past. The sun shone. But his body remained cold, for the blood no longer circulated to his limbs. His loving servants did everything they could. They massaged him, covered him, and finally found a lovely maid who was willing to sleep at his feet at night to warm them. Since it is improper for a woman to lie with a man not her husband, they wrote her a marriage certificate. So Abishag of Shunem became David's twelfth wife, though he never consummated their marriage. She cared for David as a nurse the rest of his life. She rubbed his limbs and encouraged him to take better care of his health. She insisted he get more exercise and cut back on sweets and rich pastries. That extended his life by eight years.

Chileab, son of Abigail, was the oldest living son in David's royal line. He normally would take over for his sick father. But he had a wife and family; he was caring for Abigail his mother as if she were a widow; and he knew that David had promised Solomon the kingdom. He and his mother loved David and respected his decision. So Chileab had no ambitions for the kingdom.

Haggith's son Adonijah, next in the royal line, had no such scruples. He surely knew what David had promised Bathsheba about Solomon, but with Solomon still in Egypt and David bedridden, Adonijah saw his chance. He began laying the groundwork to steal the kingdom for himself. First, he had to get the support of the military.

As it turned out, that was quite easy. Joab, David's loyal commander for many years, had never known why David had ordered Uriah killed. He was out in the field, and not in on the palace gossip. He had simply assumed that Uriah had been recalled to the palace to investigate his own crimes, and had been sent back to the field to give him an honorable battle death. He knew Uriah was a close friend of David, and it was just like kind-hearted David to have him slain with honor rather than hung in shame.

All Adonijah had to do was tell Joab the truth, in all its sordid details. David's wild fling with Bathsheba even though he already had ten wives and ten concubines. Their illegitimate child. David's attempts to deceive Uriah so he might think it was his own child. Finally, David's alternate plan to get Uriah killed in order to marry his wife. Adonijah knew it all; he had been privy to all the gossip. A palace harem is no place to keep secrets.

Joab was shocked. His loyalty and admiration for David was utterly crushed. David had been his hero! All his life, David could do no wrong! Suddenly, Joab held nothing but disgust for this deeply flawed human being, his stolen wife Bathsheba, and her son. *Solomon be damned! He'd never be king if Joab had anything to do with it.* Adonijah had General Joab's full support.

That night, Joab cried, for the first time in many years. Loyal, faithful, valiant Uriah! He had given his life for his king and country. He had saved the lives of many, Joab included, by his incredible bravery and strength in battle. He had stood with David and Joab all day on the knoll in front of the army in Syria, tirelessly defending his king and his other mighty men. And without asking why, Joab had ordered him slain! Joab was ashamed of himself.

All night he lay, tossing and turning, and by morning he had begun to get bitter. *Someone ought to die for that travesty of justice! David? No, David was all but dead already. Perhaps Solomon? Now wouldn't that be fitting!*

Adonijah knew he also needed the support of the priesthood. That might be harder, as both Abiathar and Zadok were loyal supporters of David, and both knew that David had chosen Solomon to be king after him. Adonijah went first to Abiathar, to feel him out. "How do you feel about Solomon's running off to pagan Egypt for two years, especially now that his father is sick?"

"I told him not to go. He's down there making a peace alliance by marrying one of Horemheb's daughters. He is now soaking up their heathen culture and bowing to their idolatrous gods. I told him YHWH hates that!"

“So... you think it might not be the best thing for Israel if Solomon returns and becomes our king?”

“Not the best thing? It would be the worst thing! Why? Do you have some alternative in mind?”

So now Adonijah had the support he needed. He began to quietly gather around him those he knew would be loyal, and plan for his coup d'état.

But then news arrived that Solomon was returning from Egypt, with a large caravan. What lousy timing! Adonijah was not quite ready, but it was now or never. He sent invitations to everyone in the palace he could count on, but of course not to Zadok, or Bathsheba's sons, or Nathan the seer, or David's loyal mighty men.

This had to be quick. He did not have time to go to Saul's old palace at Gibeah as he had planned. The spring of En-rogel, just south of Jerusalem at the intersection of the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys, would have to do. It was overlooked by a high ledge, called Zohaleth, which could act as a natural platform so all could see and hear him. Adonijah brought his key supporters with him up on the ledge, stationed his loyal 'cheerleaders' in the crowd below, and began the ritual.

Abiathar offered sheep and oxen (enough to feed all the people) to YHWH on the ledge, then in a great show of affection, anointed Adonijah as the new king. Then while his cheerleaders chanted, “Long live King Adonijah!” he served the roast meat and wine to begin the celebration. Nothing like keeping his supporters well-fed and a little drunk to get them to love him.

Nathan was excited to welcome Solomon home, and was oblivious to Adonijah's treachery. Solomon hadn't a clue. He was just delighted to finally be home and eager to show off his new wife, Horemheb's generous gifts, and their royal treaty. But though it was noon, King David was not on his throne, nor in his judgment hall.

“Where is my father?” Solomon could not imagine his mighty father sick. He ran to David's bedchambers, where young Abishag was warming him. Solomon was shocked at how old and flabby he appeared. His face was so pale! “My father! My father! How I've missed you!” He fell on him and wept.

But David was not dead yet. He pushed him back up. “I'm just fine, my son. Tell me of your trip. And who is this athletic dark-haired beauty who is standing behind you? Surely you have more to do than weep at my frailty?”

Solomon smiled and wiped his eyes. It was good to see his father still so sharp. “This is Princess Muwet, daughter of Egypt's Pharaoh Horemheb. We raced together like wet cows throughout the land of Egypt during these last few epochs. But Muwet has forsaken the gods of Egypt and accepted YHWH as her God. She is now my wife. Together we... ahem... sealed the large bathtub.”

Solomon and Muwet grinned broadly, but the rest of the group just stared at the couple in mystified silence. So Solomon explained his inaccurate pronunciation of the Egyptian words and how it had made such a delightful hit throughout the land. He began to wax eloquent about the glories of Egypt that he had seen, how well he had been treated, the incredible education he had received, and the favors and riches Horemheb had piled upon him.

But all this time Logos was nudging Nathan the seer. He was very interested, and did not want to be distracted, but Logos kept insisting. A lifetime of hearing and obeying the voice of God finally prevailed. Nathan left the room.

“Go to Bathsheba!” Logos said sternly. “Adonijah has taken the kingdom, and David does not know it. But he will listen to Bathsheba.”

Nathan obeyed instantly. This was a matter of life or death. He explained it all to Bathsheba. “Go to David. Tell him everything. I'll come in after you to confirm it.”

Bathsheba ran to obey, climbing the stairs to David's bedchambers two at a time. She burst into the room as Solomon was reaching the climax of a fine story from his exploits in Egypt. Everyone was smiling, laughing – *and there was a beautiful and skimpily-dressed young woman right there on David's bed, rubbing David's legs!*

Bathsheba was momentarily speechless. Satan was right there. *That is your new rival! David's twelfth wife! David doesn't care about you anymore. He won't keep his promises to you. He doesn't care if Adonijah becomes king. He doesn't care for anything except his own selfish pleasures. David never did keep his vows, and he won't now. Leave him. It'll serve him right if he's slain by Adonijah.*

Then Abishag saw her staring and beckoned her in. “Don't mind me,” she called sweetly, breaking the spell. “I'm just his nurse. The circulation in his legs has been so poor, I volunteered to help him. Didn't they tell you?”

Bathsheba truly loved David. *Where had that awful thought come from?* She smiled at Abishag in relief, and fell to her knees at David's bed, telling him what Nathan had told her about Adonijah's coup d'état. As planned, she had barely finished when Nathan came in to confirm it.

Solomon, Muwet, and the rest stood around with shocked looks on their faces. But David had not been king for forty years for nothing. He struggled to sit on the side of his bed. “Dress me. Quickly. Take me to my throne. Have Bathsheba and Solomon stand before me. Call for Zadok the priest. Nathan, you too. Call the city elders loyal to me. And send quickly to the guardhouse for Captain Benaiah, son of Jehoiada of Kabzeel. He'll support me, for sure.”

When David was seated on his throne, Bathsheba and Solomon came to stand before him, while the others respectfully gathered around. Grasping his scepter, he shakily stood up before them.

David faced Bathsheba. “As YHWH lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress,” David vowed. “Just as surely as I swore by YHWH God of Israel saying, ‘Your son shall be king after me, and shall sit on this throne in my place,’ thus will I do this very day!” David sat back down, exhausted by the effort. He aimed his scepter at Shammah, a leader of his mighty men. “Put Solomon on my mule and lead him out the water gate to the Gihon Spring. (This is less than a half mile north of the En-rogel Spring.) Let Zadok the priest and Nathan the seer anoint him with oil as king over Israel. Then blow the silver trumpets and have all my loyal servants shout out, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ as he enters the city on my mule. We shall see how many stay with Adonijah down in the Kidron Valley!”

David paused, to glance over at Muwet. She stood alone in the background, looking bewildered and a little afraid. “Muwet, my dear! I’m sorry that you have to see trouble so soon. You and Bathsheba come back up to my bedroom with me, and regale me with stories. There is no need for you to be involved in political chicanery.”

Muwet knew enough Hebrew by now to be able to do that. Bathsheba, who at 62 was nine years younger than David, rejoiced to be invited. She lay beside David to keep him warm, delighting in Muwet’s stories and content in this implication that she was still David’s favorite wife.

Muwet assumed that Bathsheba was David’s only wife. She was happy to be accepted into such a loving family. She gave them her side of the last two delightful years she’d spent ‘racing’ around Egypt with Solomon. Realizing she was not needed for now, Abishag left them in peace.

Benaiah came running up the stairs with Jonathan, his aide, and burst into the room. “My lord! I have just heard! I’m sorry it took me so long to get here.”

“Thank you for coming, good friend.” David filled him in on all he had told Zadok and Nathan. “They’re gathering at the water gate. Tell your soldiers to find them and wait nearby, in case they need to be protected from Adonijah.”

“Yes sir!” Captain Benaiah rose to immediately obey. “As YHWH has been with my lord the king, so may He always be with King Solomon, to make his throne even greater than my lord King David!”

David laughed, “Blessed be YHWH, God of Israel, who has anointed a king of His choosing to sit on my throne today while my eyes can still see it.”

So Benaiah ran to muster his forces. Instead of sending them directly to the water gate, he had them first fan out through the city with the proclamation, “King David has made his son **Solomon** king in his place. He is being anointed at the Gihon Spring! Come celebrate with us!”

That started the city in an uproar. Thousands of people streamed out into the streets shouting and cheering, and bringing special foods, drinks, and musical instruments.

Jonathan, Benaiah’s young aide, had divided loyalties. Though he had recently joined David’s guard, his own father, Abiathar, was a leader in Adonijah’s rebellion! He left Benaiah, his master, and ran to find his dad.

Adonijah and his supporters had just finished the feast. Most of them were lying on the ground in various stages of drunkenness. However, Joab and Abiathar were still alert, concerned by the trumpets they had heard and the loud commotion that was coming from the city. But when they saw Jonathan running up, they relaxed. They knew he was Benaiah’s aide. Surely he would not have left Benaiah’s side if anything significant was happening.

Abiathar reached out to hug his son. “So good to have you join us, Jonathan. What’s the good news?”

“No! Solomon has returned, and our lord King David has just anointed him king at Gihon!” Jonathan panted, and proceeded to spill the whole story – way too loudly.

Adonijah tried to shush him, but it’s hard to hush such excitement. The ledge amplified his voice to the men in the valley below, and many heard. They weren’t too drunk to realize the significance! Terrified at what they had done, the crowd quickly melted away. Most of them headed north to join the celebration for Solomon.

When he saw all his supporters leaving him, Adonijah was rightly afraid. Neither Abiathar nor Joab could help him if their own influence was gone. Adonijah ran to the tabernacle, and grabbed the horns on the altar. No one would dare slay a man on the holy altar of YHWH!

That evening, Solomon kindly summoned Adonijah back to the palace for interrogation. “I swear that I meant no disrespect for you or for King David! I am a loyal son! I only saw David getting too weak to rule, and you were gone to Egypt and no one knew when you would return – somebody had to take charge! I’m the next in line for the throne! I did it for YHWH and His people Israel.”

Solomon didn’t really believe him, but he was just glad that the coup had been squelched so quickly. “Go home. Behave yourself. As long as you remain loyal, I swear that not a hair on your head will perish. But if wickedness or rebellion is found in you, know that you shall surely die.”

Old General Joab likewise came before Solomon, also bowing and swearing allegiance, as did Abiathar after him. Again, Solomon didn’t particularly believe either of them, but he granted mercy. Thus the kingdom was at peace.

Six years went by. Everyone thought David would die, but he didn’t. He recovered. It’s amazing what a good diet and regular exercise can do. Soon he had returned to his throne, now with another throne next to his for Solomon. But Solomon spent most of this time on a ‘secret project’ in the field of Ornan on Mount Moriah. He was “preparing a foundation for the new temple,” he said. So the first six years he was king, he hardly ever sat on his throne.

David had anointed Solomon as king in Jerusalem, but not many people outside Jerusalem seemed to even know he was king. So David decided to anoint him a second time. In 974 BC he sent word all across the land to the elders, leaders, and other important men of all the tribes of Israel, inviting them to his palace for the Passover.

When they were all assembled, David went up to the portico of his palace to address them. He had recovered much of his strength, and the thrill of facing the multitude again energized him, so he was able to stand the whole time. It was a wonderful speech (which I won't repeat as it is all recorded in 1 Chron. 28 and 29). In it, he reminded the people of how he had wanted to build a temple for YHWH, but wasn't permitted to because he had been a man of war and bloodshed. Instead, YHWH had chosen his son Solomon to build it, and promised to establish his kingdom forever if only he obeyed Him.

He then officially charged Solomon: "Know the God of your father, Solomon my son, and serve Him with a whole heart and willing mind. For YHWH searches the hearts and understands every intent of your thoughts. If you seek YHWH, He will let you find Him. But if you forsake Him, He will reject you and give the kingdom to another."

David publicly gave Solomon the plans he had drawn up for the temple, and the accounting for the materials he'd set aside. "Be strong, and courageous! Act boldly! Do not fear or be dismayed, for YHWH Elohim is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. He will guide you until the work on the temple is finished. It will be glorious!"

Then David charged the people to obey Solomon, and support him in this monumental task. Many among them volunteered their support. When Zadok had his aides take up a collection, it turned out to be unbelievably bountiful, for the people gave willingly for the temple.

David led in prayer. He thanked YHWH for the willing hearts and the bountiful offering that had resulted, and committed it all to Him in glorious worship as only David could do. He closed with, "... and give my son Solomon a perfect heart to keep Your commandments and to build Your temple as I have made provision."

So the assembly bowed and worshiped together. That night they ate the Passover with their families. The next day, the First of Unleavened Bread, the priests sacrificed to YHWH thousands of animals, together with plentiful wine as drink offerings in abundance for all Israel. They feasted all that week with great joy.

In the middle of the week, after the priest had offered the Firstfruits, David gathered the multitude in front of his portico again. There, in view of everyone, Zadok the priest anointed **Solomon** a second time, as ruler over all Israel. Then Solomon went in and sat on his father's throne while the leaders of Israel processed past to congratulate him and swear their allegiance.

Thus Solomon's throne was established, for God was with him. The first year of his 'official' reign was like the fabled Camelot, a kingdom of peace and happiness, unmarred by any pain. Even from the beginning, Solomon was more wealthy and powerful than his father had ever been. The riches he had received from his father-in-law Horemheb (which included many horses and chariots), the glad support of all the leaders in Israel, and now the congratulations, gifts, and pledges of allegiance coming from other nations – nobody dared to be on the wrong side of this new king who was so favored by mighty Egypt!

Everyone in Israel fell in love with Solomon's lovely and vivacious Egyptian queen. Muwet was always at his side, gracing his every appearance with her beauty and support. Judah adopted her into their tribe. True to her vow, she faithfully worshiped YHWH beside her husband. After a time, Abiathar had to admit that he'd been wrong. Egypt had not turned Solomon's heart away from YHWH, nor had Muwet seduced him into worshiping the pagan gods of Egypt. Not a soul could deny that she truly loved Solomon, and Israel, and YHWH their God.

David's reign was over; he had officially passed the scepter to Solomon. From that year on, David's health slowly deteriorated. He once again became bedridden. But he did continue to counsel Solomon in all the aspects of running a kingdom, and warned him against the pitfalls that had hurt his own rule so badly. Muwet was saddened to hear of all David's other wives, and the troubles with all his other children. She had hoped that this kingdom under YHWH would be free of things like multiple marriages, incest, and familial strife that had so plagued Egyptian Pharaohs. David apologized to her and Solomon, and to Bathsheba, too. "I grievously sinned by breaking my vows to Michal and taking other wives. I suffered greatly for it. My wives, children, and all Israel have suffered even more. *Beware, Solomon, of taking multiple wives!*"

Solomon and Muwet agreed. However, with three daughters and no sons during the first six years of their marriage, the thought did cross Solomon's mind that he might need another wife just to get a male heir!

The alliances David had made with the surrounding nations and city-states were still in effect. But the next spring, ambassadors came to Jerusalem from Shobi, son of Nahash and king of Ammon. He sent congratulations and lavish gifts, and invited Israel's new king to pay him a visit. King Solomon gladly went to visit his father's old friend, only to discover that King Shobi was offering his daughter Princess Naamah to seal a renewed alliance!

She was young and lovely. Muwet saw the rivalry she could cause. Muwet was trembling as she stood beside her husband. Every fiber in her being wanted to shout out, *No! Don't do it! There are other ways to seal this alliance. You don't need another wife! Am I not enough for you? Don't you remember what your father told you?*

But she just stood there, smiling, unable to say it. For Satan was whispering in her ear, “It’s okay. All the kings do it. Solomon’s father did it. Your father did it. Your own marriage is the result of a marriage alliance! How can you possibly be against them? Solomon loves you – you’ll still be his first queen. Why do you care if he has another?” Muwet was not yet able to distinguish Satan’s voice from her own thoughts. She kept mum.

Solomon also was taken back by this offer. King Shobi had already been very generous. Solomon was happy to sign an alliance with him, without any need for further enticement. He did remember his father’s recent words, and he struggled with them. Satan was whispering things in his ear just like with Muwet, but he rejected them. His kingdom was going to be better, higher, more righteous than David’s. He was an obedient and responsible son, who heeded the voice of his father.

Michael knelt before Logos, tensely watching the scene below them in this critical time of testing. He couldn’t stand the suspense. “Logos? Will he do it?” he panted.

Logos nodded, continuing His intercession. “I think so, my friend, but only My Father in eternity knows for sure. Solomon certainly has had sufficient training to choose correctly. The information we’re about to find out is, is all his moral education in his heart, or only in his head?”

Solomon was trying to figure out some polite way of saying no thanks. He knew he couldn’t take Naamah, but he certainly didn’t want to offend David’s faithful friend. Satan realized that he was about to lose him. He had to do something, fast. He went to Princess Naamah, to whisper, “Solomon is looking strangely at you because your halter strap needs adjusting.” Naamah recognized that voice, which had been her companion all her life. Without a thought she reached up to adjust the strap. Then before Michael could block this incredible violation of testing protocol, Satan forced Naamah’s fingers to fumble on the catch, momentarily revealing much more of her anatomy than she had intended.

It was only the briefest glimpse, but it changed the entire orientation of the battle. Suddenly Solomon found himself by choice side by side with a demon of lust, one which had never troubled him before, even all the time that he had ‘raced’ with Muwet. Solomon had come to Muwet on the basis of utmost respect, and had fallen in love with her wit, her character, her vivacious love of life, without undue focus on the loveliness of her lithe, petite body. But this Ammonite princess was to him nothing but a body – and now a very voluptuous, seducing one at that. Solomon could not get the brief image out of his mind. He focused only on King Shobi, but the image remained. Now Satan’s arguments made a lot more sense. *After all, he could just relegate her to his harem, like his father had done with all his wives before Bathsheba. Naamah need not affect his marriage. And she might give him a male heir!*

He bowed in grateful acceptance of the alliance, and the princess. All the host of heaven, who had been prepared to celebrate with the magnitude of his victory, now groaned at the enormity of Solomon’s defeat.

Satan came up to Logos to boast. But Logos rebuked him first. “Satan, you know that you are not permitted to touch them in their times of testing.”

“Ta, ta! I tricked even You! You should have stopped me, but You just weren’t quick enough! So, what’s my punishment? Ha, ha! Any punishment is worth that one! Your ‘chosen one’ will never recover!”

“Your punishment is as severe as your crime. For twenty years you and all your demons are blocked from coming anywhere near Solomon, wherever he goes.”

“You’ve got to be kidding!” Satan’s red face turned ashen. “Why, in that length of time he could... he could...” Satan stopped, spluttering. He couldn’t even imagine how blessed and how close to Logos Solomon might become in that length of time.

“I do not kid. Without your temptations, Solomon could become the greatest, wisest, richest king that ever lived or ever shall live. Does not that say something about the foolishness of your ways and righteousness of Mine? Now go. Peddle your lies and tricks elsewhere, *or I shall double it to forty years!*” Satan fled.

Michael and Gavriel had big grins on their faces. “Why, Lord! This could change Solomon’s defeat into his greatest victory! You are incredible!” Gavriel bowed in deepest worship. But Michael was ready for action. “Go now, dear Michael. Cover Solomon and his family. Permit Satan and his demons to come no closer than 100 feet to Solomon, day or night, no matter where he goes.”

“What if Solomon visits a stronghold of Satan, where everyone is filled with personal demons?”

“If Solomon comes closer than 100 feet, then all those personal demons must flee, every one, or you have My power and authority to drive them out. Satan will think twice before he violates My Law again.”

All the way back home, Solomon tried to explain to Muwet why this would not affect their relationship. But they both knew it had, tragically and forever. He swore to Muwet that he would just put Naamah into his harem and never go in to her, but pornographic images don’t go away that easily. It was not Satan that tempted him. It was his own youthful lusts that compelled him to sneak into her bedroom some nights after Muwet was fast asleep. A year later his first son **Rehoboam** was born of Naamah the Ammonitess, putting the lie to all his pledges of fidelity. Sweet Muwet was crushed. Solomon repented profusely, and again swore to keep his vows. But the fragile bond of trust was broken. Their once storybook marriage suffered the inevitable consequences.

Muwet was devastated that Solomon's oldest son was born of another woman. She feared that after Solomon passed on, Naamah's son would inherit the kingdom! So Muwet desperately hoped her fourth child would be a son, but alas, she bore another daughter. They now had four girls: Ta'phath, Basemath, Tinah, and Berrie.

Realizing his weakness and really wanting to ease his wife's pain, Solomon stationed a guard at the apartment of Naamah the Ammonitess. He was to prevent any male (himself included) from entering her apartment, day or night. That, and Solomon's heart of repentance, eventually eased the problem. Muwet forgave him.

Over the remainder of his reign Solomon gained many more lovely princesses from all the surrounding nations and city-states, including even far-off nations wanting to establish trade relations. It seemed everyone wanted a marriage alliance with this powerful new king who was so favored of Egypt! But as long as Muwet lived, Solomon kept them isolated in his ever-growing harem, calling them 'my princesses' and treating them like he treated his own four virgin daughters. He had learned his lesson. From then on Solomon faithfully kept his vows to Muwet. Their marriage slowly healed.

In mid 972 BC, the 3rd year of Solomon's reign, King David was dying. He knew it, and called his family (by Bathsheba) into his bedroom. He charged Solomon, "I am dying. Be strong, therefore! Show you're a man by keeping the charge of YHWH your God, to walk in His ways and keep His laws. Then He will grant you good success in all you do. And then YHWH will fulfill His promise to me that if my son is careful to walk before Him in truth with his heart and soul, He will establish my kingdom forever. Thus I'll never lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel."

Solomon swore he would. Muwet agreed. Bathsheba, weeping with joy, gave Solomon a loving mother's hug. "I am so proud of you, my son! God is truly with you!"

David continued with some practical counsel. "Deal wisely with the many powerful men around you. Joab, for example. I don't trust him anymore. His brains may have been scrambled a bit when Hexad knocked him for a loop. Even though he repented for supporting Adonijah, he just seems to love war and bloodshed too much, and he's too quick to take vengeance into his own hands. Don't forget, he assassinated Saul's General Abner just as Abner was helping to establish my kingdom. You'll know what to do. Then Abiathar... I don't know what turned him against you. But be careful. He is a descendant of Eli the high priest and he has powerful friends among the priesthood. I don't know what to say about my son Adonijah. Obviously I don't want you to harm him, yet I don't trust him, either. God give you wisdom. Remember Shimei, the son of Gera [brother of Kish, Saul's father]. He cursed me so viciously while I fled to Mahanaim... Even though I showed him mercy, he still seems bitter. I think he should be punished.

"But my friend Barzillai of Gilead, who supported me so graciously and generously at Mahanaim when I fled from Absalom... show kindness to his sons for me. And Ittai the Gittite proved himself a true Israelite..." David went on and on, reminiscing of friends and foes alike. Solomon was amazed that his father's mind was still so keen and his compassion still so strong. Truly, King David was a man of unusually great heart! Solomon was proud of him, praying that he too could rise to such greatness someday.

When David finally finished, Solomon thanked him and added, "I know that you're ready to die and you long to go to your fathers and to YHWH your God. But please don't die yet. You have many friends; allow them time to say good-bye." David agreed, so Solomon sent messengers all across the land, inviting David's friends to his bedside. There were many indeed. They came streaming in, first from close around Jerusalem and then from all over Israel, from morning 'til night, assuring David of their undying love and offering Solomon their condolences. All week they came, and for three more weeks besides, from as far away as Dan and Beersheba. David surprised himself by hanging on to the end. Saying good-bye to his many beloved friends somehow energized him.

Most of these visits were merely the kind partings of his cherished friends and admirers, but one, on the afternoon of the very first day, turned out to be much more. Palti-El and Michal showed up together. David was surprised, for every year when he brought the wages he had promised, Michal always swore she would never want to return to him. Yet here she was. David had eyes only for her. Though she also was very old, Michal was still beautiful to him. Fond memories raced through his mind.

Palti-El bowed low to express his condolences and his gratefulness for David's kind support over the years. Michal remained standing next to Palti-El, her face clouded. David feared she was still bitter, after all these years, and was only here because of Palti-El. Solomon was watching them closely. He knew their story. *How tragic is an entire life wasted in bitterness*, he thought.

Palti-El finished. There was a brief silence, then he rose and turned to leave. Michal half-turned to follow, then suddenly, before the guards could even react, she flung herself to her knees by David's bed and grasped his hands in hers. "David! My lord the king! My first and only true love! Forgive me!" she blurted out. Palti-El's eyes popped wide and his mouth dropped open, but Michal didn't see. "You've treated me so kindly all these years – I had no right to remain bitter. My bitterness only deprived me of my own joy and the joy of ever bearing children."

David smiled at her and squeezed her hands. "Michal, my beloved! I forgave you long ago! I bless you to leave any bitterness in the past where it belongs. Go in peace, loved, blessed. May the sunshine of your joy be restored. And may Palti-El give you many children."

“My lord, you are my sunshine, my only joy.”

“Huh? I’m on my deathbed! Bathsheba the wife of Uriah lies by my side day and night only trying to keep me warm. I cannot give you any children!”

“Then I will lie at your feet to keep them warm, for I will not leave you. I choose to live with you, and die with you, and may Bathsheba’s children be in place of mine. I now gladly choose to share your joy with her. And I swear to no longer condemn or criticize you or contend with her.”

This was a strange request. David did not really know how to handle it. But Palti-El remembered the agreement. “Your Majesty. You gave her to me only until she chose to return. She has just chosen. I cannot dispute it. I didn’t expect this, or I would have brought her things. I’ll go get them. May she be the blessing to you in your old age that she has been to me these last 56 years.”

The heavenly host cheered at this awesome victory of forgiveness and reconciliation, one of many that was to occur in David’s bedroom over the next four weeks. Michael turned to Logos. “I knew Satan’s punishment would turn into a blessing for Solomon. With him here, the blessing covers David, too. His bedroom measures less than 100 feet, so even long-held demons of jealousy and bitterness like Michal’s can gain no admittance.”

Logos laughed. “And are you thinking of how many more places you would like Solomon to visit, so you can vanquish all the demons across the entire kingdom?”

“Of course. Oh, You needn’t worry. I remember Your Law, ‘Encourage, never force!’ But I will be encouraging Solomon to visit every square inch of the Levant during these twenty years. And wouldn’t it be wonderful if Satan would slip up again, so You could double it to forty years. Why, the entire earth might be purified!”

“Rejoice, dear Michael! But no. Satan will not soon forget this punishment. When the twenty years are up, be doubly on your guard, for he will spend this time plotting devious ways to undo our good.”

After the last visitor finally left, David was exhausted. That night, in the loving arms of Bathsheba his favorite wife, with Michal his true wife asleep at his feet, David died, at the age of 80, in peace in his sleep, as a good man should. The next morning, the entire country went into mourning except Michal. She never even cried. She only stared vacantly at the wall. The light which had so recently returned to her eyes was now forever gone. Michal never smiled again, nor would she even eat or drink. She only repeated, “I belong with David. Please let me go.” She died within a few days of her first husband.

Many weeks later, after their numerous psychic bonds with the affairs and cares of earth were finally broken, David and Michal reached Sheol. Their first sight after entering the Welcoming Park, was each other.

Their relationship was renewed in Sheol. In a love that transcends time, they embraced each other heartily. At first, no words were needed, so they turned together to explore this new and brilliantly lit realm. The Welcoming Park was as breathtaking as ever, in colors, sounds, sights, and smells, and filled with lively but peaceful animals.

But it was mostly the music that struck David, the ‘sweet psalmist of Israel’. I cannot describe this music any better than to liken it to Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata, played with a slow and majestic cadence. But for David, the lead part was replaced with a haunting flute, the piano harmony was played by a wondrous harpist, while in the background he could hear glorious bird and forest songs. Having heard it first-hand when I visited 972 BC to obtain for you this story, I can attest that sweeter music has never been conceived in the mind of man. Beethoven, the finest musician ever born, traversed hell to get it, you know – though depression, tragedy, anger, bitterness, pain, the loss of family, friends, finally even the loss of his outward hearing. Yet it all only served to allow him to hear the sounds of heaven more clearly. Truly Beethoven snatched the glorious melodies of Sheol through his own personal hells, dragging them to the earthly realms to bless the hearts of music lovers ever since.

Hours (or perhaps weeks) later, David and Michal sat beside the crystal stream. They knew they were to bathe and enter the light, but they still felt dirty, unworthy to even dip in the stream. Now they began to talk; two deeply flawed souls who had each received unforgivable wounds from the other. Yet in this realm, with no downward pull of evil, the impossible came easy. Their wounds began to heal. Lengthy excuses, explanations, self-justification, or establishment of blame were simply unnecessary. Then, having bared their hearts in repentance and forgiveness, they finally knew it was time to wash the past away.

“You always were my first and only true love,” they agreed, deciding to enter the stream together as one. They hugged tightly, face to face, and slowly walked into the water together. When they emerged they lifted their faces up to the brightness and called out together, “YHWH. Please come to us. Clothe us with Your light.”

Logos was there, with His face beaming in delight. He joined their hug as the angel chorus sang the Welcoming Song. Instantly the wounds were forgotten, the scars of life erased, the tears wiped away, the trials and struggles... the pain and anguish... the fearful costs they had paid to reach this place... It was all suddenly more than worth it.

In the months that followed, David and Michal had many questions answered. There were also many glad introductions to those who had arrived before. Among them was Jacob-Leah, who helped to resolve one of David’s questions from childhood. He wanted to know, “Where’s Rachel? Why are you one with only Leah in this realm? I thought Rachel was your favorite wife?”

“We have been one since the beginning of time,” Jacob-Leah responded. “Rachel was my human choice, but only because I was rebellious, refusing to heed the voice of the Spirit, but even after we got married we never were one. Rachel chose Satan, and is now suffering for that choice. Logos planned only one true wife for each man.”

Logos laughed and pinpointed the real issue. “David, I’m glad you are finally re-acquainted with your true wife Michal, but you are concerned for Uriah’s wife, since she became your favorite wife. Don’t be anxious. I love her and care for her as I do every soul who comes to Me.”

“Thank You, Logos. But I’m also concerned for our son. I sinned badly in stealing Bathsheba from faithful Uriah. Will Solomon suffer Your wrath because of my sin?”

“Sin always bears painful consequences. Your family has suffered much for your sins, and will suffer more if they themselves fall into the same patterns of iniquity. But I do not love them any less. Indeed, Solomon has a big heart for Me. That is my greatest delight! Intercede that he always will retain that tender, teachable heart toward Me. Then he will be blessed beyond measure!”

“Yes, Lord. But what about his descendants?”

“Look at the tribes of Joseph and Benjamin. Are they despised because Jacob chose wrongly? No. Indeed, Joseph’s right choices elevated him above his brothers. Each is judged on his own deeds, not his parents’ sins.”

“But what about Solomon’s precious Muwet, and that whore Naamah the Ammonitess who seduced him and bore his son – will Rehoboam be his heir?”

“David, My beloved! Your judgment of Naamah has no place in My realm. I love Naamah, and Solomon too. Let Me be the judge of their hearts and motivations. Only My Father in eternity knows their future, as it depends on their choices. But My Plan of the Ages is big enough to accommodate even a wrong choice, such as Solomon’s falling to temptation with Naamah. That has forever altered his destiny with Muwet, his true wife, but I swear to you that good will come of it. My Plan of the Ages grows only more glorious in response.”

“Lord, what if I had rejected the deceptive advances of Ahinoam of Jezreel, and instead had kept faith with Michal until we could be restored? Oh how I wish that I...”

“No, David, we do not play ‘what if’ or ‘if only’ games here. You chose a different plan from Mine. I honored your choice. That is all there is now. Worry not about Ahinoam, or Abigail, or Bathsheba, or any of the others. Rejoice that you are now and forever reconciled with your true wife! And be glad that your children even through your wrong marriages are also loved by Me and woven into My Plan of the Ages. In the end, all will worship Me as they see how even your mistakes and failures have become a glorious part of My Father’s plan.”

Every administration exchange has power struggles. With Solomon, these were minimized, since the kingdom was at peace and everyone dearly loved him and Muwet. His support was nearly universal. But as he and David had prayed, God gave him wisdom regarding the exceptions.

Adonijah, Solomon’s older half-brother, feigned total loyalty and submission. Yet he came secretly to the queen mother Bathsheba to beg a favor. “As the older, you know that the kingdom was mine, and all Israel expected me to become the king. David insisted, however, so the kingdom went to my little brother, for it was of YHWH. I accept that, but I do have just one small request. Please ask Solomon to grant me Abishag the Shunamite for my wife.”

Bathsheba naïvely passed on the request, but Solomon saw through it instantly. Abishag had been David’s most recent wife. According to long tradition, the one who married the previous king’s wife had a strong claim on the kingdom. “By YHWH God of Israel, my older brother hasn’t given up yet, has he? He may as well be asking for the kingdom, for him and Joab and Abiathar the priest as well! Now therefore, as YHWH lives, who has established me on the throne of David my father as He promised, surely Adonijah shall be put to death today!”

So Solomon sent Benaiah to slay Adonijah, which nipped that plot in the bud. Now he knew that Abiathar could no longer be trusted, either. But he couldn’t kill him – he had been a faithful priest to David for many years. So he dismissed him from the priesthood and sent him home to Anathoth, thus fulfilling Samuel’s prophecy that none of Eli’s descendants would grow old in the priesthood. **Zadok** took his place as Israel’s high priest. From then on the high priests followed the line of Eleazar.

When he learned that their plot was discovered, Joab knew his days were numbered. He panicked, and foolishly ran to the tabernacle and grabbed the horns of the altar. The mighty Joab? Hexad really had scrambled his brains! When Solomon heard that news, he knew that old General Joab must have been plotting with Adonijah and Abiathar against him. He ordered Benaiah to kill him, too. Benaiah took Joab’s place as the general over Israel’s army.

David had mentioned one more man of questionable loyalty: Shimei, who had cruelly cursed him years before. David had forgiven him, but Solomon needed to test his loyalty. He gave him a place to build a house in Jerusalem, and warned him never to leave the city. “In the day you go out of the city and cross the Kidron, know for certain that you will die. Your blood will be on your own head.”

Shimei swore to be obedient and loyal, but only kept his vow for three years before he found some excuse to ‘forget’ and leave the city. Solomon was not so forgetful. He kept his vow and had him slain. All Israel saw they had a king who kept his word.

That fall after David's death, Solomon was preparing to implement the plans that David had given him for the construction of the temple. He knew he needed YHWH's blessing on it. What better time than the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles)? He made a bit of a compromise here, which miffed Logos, but He understood and never held it against him (though it would hurt the kingdom later). Solomon decided to split up the Feast into two: the first one in Israel (at Gibeon where the original tabernacle still was on the hill called Nob above Kiriath-Jearim), and the second one for Judah (at David's new tabernacle in Jerusalem.)

In Gibeon at the proper time (Tishri 15), Zadok and his crew of priests offered a thousand animals on the altar, to be sure of having enough food for the people. They built their sukkim, king and peasant alike, for the Feast treats one no different from any other. There they camped and worshiped before YHWH for a week. They spent the time contemplating His majesty compared with their own insignificance, and basking in His love.

It is a humbling experience for a king to lie beside his wife in a frail sukkah, like the common folk all around him. From a distance Satan watched them admiring the stars through the branches of the shelter. He ground his teeth, yearning to be able to pervert this precious moment with a little temptation, but he could not. Indeed he would not soon forget this punishment!

Instead, Logos came, eager to take advantage of this time of holiness and complete freedom from temptation in Solomon's life. As Solomon drifted off into dreamland, one of the bright stars in the sky swooped down to become a man. "Solomon, son of David My beloved! Ask of Me whatever you will. I shall give it to you, out of love for David My son." The man's robe blazed brighter than the brightest stars. The shining face smiled pleasantly at him. Solomon recognized it was YHWH! This was the first time Solomon had personally seen or heard Him.

Nearly overwhelmed, he lifted his arms in worship. "Lord YHWH!" he responded. "You showed such great lovingkindness to David my father. And now You have given me the throne in his place. Yet I am like a child and the kingdom is vast, a mighty people that can hardly be numbered. I don't need more stuff – I have all the money and stuff I need. What I really need is wisdom, Lord – an understanding heart to judge Your people rightly and to discern between the truth and the lie."

The shining face beamed at him. "Because you asked for wisdom, rather than money or stuff or honor or long life, behold, I grant your request. I give you wisdom, understanding, and a discerning heart, *greater than any before or after you*. But I like your attitude, so I am also granting you riches and honor, and long life as well if you continue to walk in My ways and keep My laws. For in truth living life according to My wisdom and My ways does bring riches, honor, and an extended lifespan."

The dream faded, and Solomon awoke. He lay there in his sukkah watching the stars, reveling in his dream. Life is indeed so frail and humble, like his sukkah. But... how awesome to consider that the God of the Universe, who flung those stars into space, cares about him! Like a tiny speck in a vast universe seemed the sukkah of his life, yet the One infinitely bigger than the universe – loves him! The tears trickled down Solomon's cheeks. Muwet's quiet breathing didn't change, but somehow, Solomon knew he could never be the same again.

Two weeks later, Solomon duplicated the Feast for those in Judah, at David's new tabernacle in Jerusalem where he'd put the Ark of the Covenant. After the Feasts concluded, Solomon began to organize his kingdom. He had an 'organizer' type personality and a discerning eye. He found capable, faithful men to install as officers, administrators, scribes, or accountants over the affairs of his kingdom. Soon everything was running like a fine Swiss watch, needing little attention from him.

Solomon also appointed judges in each city (many had also served his father), so he was rarely bothered except on the difficult cases. But on those, Solomon soon became known and feared all over the land for his justice and his unfailing wisdom and discernment! Michael faithfully kept all demons 100 feet away from Solomon. Without their personal demons, those infamous shark lawyers and lying witnesses could never keep their story straight, so Solomon saw right through them.

His administration's justice became legendary. Many would come for hundreds of miles around just to sit and listen at his court. He welcomed them, and took delight in amazing them with tidbits of profound wisdom to chew on. When asked where he got such incredible wisdom, he would always reply, "The reverential fear of YHWH is the beginning of all wisdom; only arrogant fools despise His wisdom and instruction." Thus King Solomon remained humble and gave God the glory. Logos was pleased.

By the beginning of 971 BC, the kingdom was firmly established in the hands of King Solomon. He seemed to have no enemies. Everyone admired and respected him. He was smart, firm, and thoughtful, as well as cheerful and kind. He graciously took charge of David's palace and servants. He added all the women in David's harem to his own, including lovely young Abishag. He vowed to care and provide for them, not as wives, but as sisters or as mothers – his princesses. But he stayed faithful to Muwet. He had learned from his error. Thus, after Rehoboam, he fathered no more children except through Muwet.

Besides, he had decided he didn't really like kids! He began staying up late with administrative work, letting Muwet handle the little girls. He would come to bed after she put them to sleep. But with his powerful brain still chugging along a hundred miles an hour, King Solomon now discovered the meaning of the word 'insomnia'.

At first it was tough lying there for hour after hour just listening to his wife's soft breathing. Solomon was a 'doer'. Doing nothing bothered him, especially knowing how tired he'd be the next day. But then he remembered the Feast, lying in his Sukkah, and that precious dream of YHWH. "O YHWH," he prayed one night at 2:00 AM. "You promised to give me wisdom. I know this is a little thing, but I need wisdom on how to get to sleep."

"Get up. Write," came the unmistakable words.

Solomon got out of bed and went to his desk. "Okay. What shall I write, YHWH?" he asked.

"Unless YHWH builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless YHWH guards the city, the watchmen remain awake in vain. So it is vain for you to arise early, to retire late, and to eat the bread of anxious toil. For YHWH gives to His beloved sleep."

Solomon sighed. "That's it, YHWH. I've gotten anxious about my responsibilities as king. I'm sorry. I give it all to You, YHWH. I give You all my concerns of the day, for You are the King through me. I accept your gift of sleep." He returned to bed, to fall asleep easily.

The very next night he lay awake for another reason. Baby Berrie was fussy, and nothing Muwet did seemed to calm her. Solomon was trying to think of a nice way to say, "Just take the little rug-rat back to the nursery to deal with her there!" but again Logos said, "Get up. Write."

This time he wrote, "Behold, children are a gift of YHWH. The fruit of the womb is a great reward. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is every man whose quiver is full of them! They shall not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate." Solomon was in awe. Those sure weren't his words. They were God's words!

The next day he studied the two pages, realizing God had written through him like He had written the Psalms through his father David. He got out a clean page. "YHWH, if these are Your words, inspire me again."

"Give the king Your judgments, O God," Solomon began. "and Your righteousness to the king's son. May he judge Your oppressed people with righteousness and true justice. Then the mountains will bring peace, and the hills will flow with righteousness. May the king vindicate the afflicted, save the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor. Let them fear You while the sun endures... Let them pray for the king and bless him all day long." These inspired poems, the first of many Solomon would write, were later collected as **Psalms 127 and 72**.

On Iyar 2, 971 BC (our Sunday, April 21), Solomon officially started work on the new temple according to the plan given him by King David. In a big ceremony that day he laid the cornerstone, and began the careful assembly of all the materials David had collected for the project.

Everyone rejoiced to see the long-anticipated project actually begun. The materials were all pre-cut, so it went together rather rapidly at first. The foundation and walls were built with one layer of heavy cedar beams between every three layers of large ashlar stone, to lock it together. This made it surprisingly earthquake-proof; a must in those days when Mars came so close every 30 years. The project was completed in seven and a half years, by the Feast of Tabernacles in 964 BC. I won't bother you with all the details; they are recorded in 1 Kings 6 and 2 Chronicles 3 and 4. But, dear Reader, I have decided to let you in on Solomon's 'secret project', which no one understood back then except Muwet and Zadok the high priest.

While David was still alive, Solomon had spent six years on Mount Moriah 'preparing the foundation' for the temple. In the process, he had dug out an astounding amount of sandstone. He used it to fill the 'Millo', now a level platform on the south peak of Mount Moriah's ridge. And Solomon's 'secret project'? He was secretly digging an underground escape tunnel under the ridge, all the way under the north wall of the city. There he prepared a stone grotto so that if the city were ever attacked, the Ark of the Covenant and the other precious furnishings of the temple could be hidden for safekeeping. He prepared 'booby traps', great stone plugs in the tunnel, with skills he had learned in his study of the pyramids down in Egypt. The tunnel was entered by a secret cedar elevator, driven by sand hydraulics, using sand stored in massive bronze pillars at either side of the temple entrance. Jeremiah the Prophet made use of Solomon's security system in 586 BC. It saved the Ark of the Covenant when the Babylonians burned Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's temple.

These years of building the temple were glorious for Solomon and his family. Their angelic covering, and their complete freedom from any demonic harassment and temptation, made the temple construction project more holy and blessed than any project before or since, ever!

Muwet was outgoing, adventurous, and never the slightest bit shy. She supported her husband, working with him on his building projects. She also loved to go with Solomon on all his negotiations to surrounding nations, and slowly learned to trust him regarding the 'princesses' he often 'married' and brought home. But sometimes, with four little girls, Muwet had to stay behind. In those times, Solomon and Muwet wrote love poems to each other. Yes, even after Solomon had accumulated many other wives and concubines, they were still infatuated with each other. Those love poems were inspired by the love of God given them for each other. They were later collected by the sons of Zadok and integrated into one grand poem, called the **Song of Songs**. In it, Solomon and his dark-haired beauty expressed their longing for each other when they were apart, and their eager fantasies about finding each other again. Solomon nicknamed Muwet his 'Shulamite' ('lady of Solomon'). He knew she was his only true wife.

The one thing Muwet could not seem to do, was to give Solomon a son. Solomon cried out to YHWH about it for years. One day he finally got an answer, which saddened him, but he could not deny it. Logos reminded him of all the trouble his father David had experienced due to his sons fighting over the kingdom. "If you had multiple sons, the more you prospered, the more your sons would be tempted to fight over your kingdom. They might end up killing each other, or you! No. Just raise Rehoboam to be faithful, honest, and kind, and be glad you have an heir." So Solomon and Muwet accepted the word of YHWH.

As Rehoboam grew, Solomon (since he had only one son) was diligent to train him in wisdom. Many of his teachings were recorded, such as these: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Indeed they are as a wreath of victory on your head, and ornaments of authority around your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, just say no... My son, if you receive my sayings and treasure my commandments within you – if you attend your ear to wisdom and incline your heart to understanding – if you cry for discernment and lift your voice for understanding – if you seek her as for silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures – then you will discern the fear of YHWH and discover the knowledge of God. For YHWH gives wisdom. From His mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to all who walk in integrity, a fortress guarding the paths of justice and preserving the ways of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness, justice, equity, and every good way. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will guard you, and understanding will keep watch over you... My son, never forget my teaching, but keep my commandments from your heart, for length of days, years of life, and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you – bind them about your neck and write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and a good reputation in the sight of God and men. Trust in YHWH with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your way clear. Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear God, so that you turn away from evil. That will be healing to your body and restoration to your bones. Honor YHWH from your wealth, the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with wine. My son, do not reject YHWH's discipline or loathe His reproof. For whomever He loves He reproves, even as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights."

As Rehoboam grew up, Solomon had him memorize all these and more. Surely he will make a fine king someday.

They were later collected into a book: **The Proverbs of Solomon**. The other treasures of Solomon's kingdom are now lost (or still hidden under the temple mount), but this finest treasure remains, for those who take time to read it.

Solomon's temple was completed in the fall, 964 BC. To celebrate, he called all of Israel to Jerusalem to dedicate it. This was the greatest feast ever celebrated, even to this day. It was not just the food and drink, though the number of animals sacrificed and eaten were beyond numbering. But the people's joy at finally having a permanent place to worship, their gratefulness to God for the nation's peace and prosperity, and their delight with Solomon and Muwet, made it a feast of joy like no other before or since. Solomon walked humbly among them, thus all demonic activity was driven from the assembly according to the punishment Logos had given Satan. With no temptation or downward pull of evil, the upward beckoning of virtue and righteousness became so strong it could not be denied. Everyone in Israel met with YHWH in one way or another. Not a one was left unchanged in the meeting.

The party began on Tishri 7 with the dedication of the massive altar of burnt offering and big bronze 'sea' (laver). By the day of Atonement on Tishri 10 they were ready, so the people were all cleansed. Between the 10th and the 14th, the new temple and its furnishings were purified by the sprinkling of the blood. So it was finally time to install everything into the new temple. Most of the furnishings were new. They brought in the huge and beautiful new golden lampstand, and the lovely new altar of incense and table of showbread. These were patterned after the old, except much larger and heavier since the Levites no longer needed to carry them across the desert. But there can only be one Ark of the Covenant! With great ceremony, the priests brought it out of David's tabernacle and carried it on poles to stand in the sunshine before the assembly in front of the new temple. "Open it," Logos commanded Zadok the high priest. With fear and trembling, he obeyed. All the great multitude stood and worshiped in profound and reverent silence.

Within the Ark Zadok saw only the two tablets of the covenant which Moses had put there at Mount Sinai. "Take them out. Read them," Logos commanded Zadok. Again, he obeyed. Each word rang clearly out across the multitude, washing and cleansing their hearts like waves of the sea. After he finished reading, there was a holy hush as he reverently put the tablets back in the Ark and replaced the cover and golden mercy seat. Then the people fell on their faces before YHWH in worship, fervently vowing to Him, "All these things we will do!" Logos heard their vows and received their worship. It was good.

Finally, amid loud shouts of joy, the priests carried the Ark on its long poles into the new temple, and installed it into the most holy place behind the heavy veil. Instead of removing the poles (as they had to do in the tabernacle), the temple was just large enough for the poles to remain installed in the loops made for them on the Ark. They touched the wall on one side and the veil on the other. Zadok noted with delight that he could verify the Ark was in there by the two small bumps in the veil.

When Zadok and the other priests came out of the holy place, the majesty of YHWH came down from heaven like a thick, fiery cloud, covering the temple with glory. It was so spectacular that even the priests felt faint with awe, and could not stand to minister! For an hour, not a person was left standing in the entire assembly. Everyone was on his face before YHWH, overwhelmed by glory unspeakable! Each person sensed in his heart, *God actually loves me. YHWH is pleased with me. He wants to bless me.* It felt good, rather like your mother's hug when you were little.

King Solomon, on a five-foot high bronzed speaker's platform, was first to be able to stand. Filled with the Spirit, he faced the people and quoted his little poem.

"YHWH said that He would permanently dwell
in the thick cloud, obscured from men's eyes.
Surely I have built a house of loftiness for You;
a settled place for You to abide forever!"

He then reminded Israel of their history leading up to this point. Finally he knelt, lifted his hands toward heaven, and began to pray. "O YHWH, God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk wholeheartedly before You. You have kept Your promise to Your servant David. Every good word You have spoken rests fulfilled this day. Now therefore, confirm Your word to David that he shall not lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel if only his sons walk in Your Law. But will God indeed dwell with mankind on earth? Behold, the highest heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant that Your eyes may be open toward this house day and night, toward the place of which You said that You would put Your name there, to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. Please hear from Your dwelling place in heaven; hear, and forgive the sin of Your servant and Your people Israel. Indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And render to each one according to all his ways (for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men) that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You have given to our fathers. When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin) and are taken captive, if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, and pray toward their land which You have given to their fathers, and toward the city which You have chosen, and *toward the house which I have built for Your name*, then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, their prayers and supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You. Now I pray, O Lord my God, let Your eyes be open and Your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. Arise, O Lord YHWH, to Your resting place, You and the Ark of Your power! Let Your priests, O Lord YHWH, be clothed with salvation, and let Your godly ones rejoice in what is good and just and right."

Solomon finished his prayer. The glory of God in the fiery cloud swirled and sparkled over the temple behind him, blazing like the sun, so that Solomon stood out in black silhouette before the people. Zadok realized that such awesome glory could not be contained! Whether led by the Spirit or by his own initiative no one knows, but he called for one more sacrificial animal. It was brought; a perfect yearling lamb. He knew it was unnecessary. All the offerings had already been offered, all the sacrifices slain, all the blood sprinkled, all the fat burned up on the altar, and all the animals eaten. But he decided to offer it anyway. When he placed his hands on the head of the lamb, instead of confessing his sins, Zadok shouted out, "O YHWH, this one is just for YOU!"

When he put the slain lamb on the altar, still stained by the blood of thousands of previous offerings, Zadok didn't light it. Instead, he stepped back and looked up toward the light blazing from the swirling clouds above the temple. "YHWH, let the light of Your holiness have free reign here now! Burn away anything within us that is not of You." He knelt, and put his face to the ground.

Logos instantly responded to Zadok. The fiery cloud above the temple rose high into the air and moved to hover directly above the altar, becoming a tall pillar of fire. Now everyone was on his knees, with his hands raised toward the pillar and his eyes fixed upon it. The flames gently, slowly, descended to the altar, completely consuming the lamb as well as burning up all the residue of the previous offerings. After the altar was perfectly clean, the fiery pillar again moved, slowly and deliberately, toward the temple entrance. The flame was intensely hot and bright.

Solomon was still kneeling on the speaker's platform, which was directly between the altar and the door of the temple. The flaming pillar was moving straight toward him. He was terrified! He would be consumed like the lamb! His body wanted to get up, to flee the flames like his father had fled the sword on Mount Moriah. But his spirit responded, *No, My son. Submit your body to the fire.* He chose to heed his spirit. In humble obedience he cried, "My Father. Into Your hands I commit my spirit!" Then he fell on his face before the pillar of fire, resigned to die.

The angels were screaming in the agony and ecstasy of anticipation. *Is Solomon holy enough? Can Logos pull it off?* They watched Logos approach the platform; watched as Solomon bowed his heart and soul and resigned his life into the Father's hands. Logos reached out to touch him. Victory shouts shook the heavens.

The pillar of fire enveloped Solomon. For a long time nothing could be seen on the platform but the blazing fire of YHWH, now unspeakably bright. The watching people held their collective breath. A few cried in fear, sure that Solomon could not survive the intense flames. Others were just as sure that YHWH was pleased with Solomon and would somehow resurrect him from the ashes.

Finally the fiery cloud progressed past the platform, slowly, deliberately moving toward the temple and into the open door. No longer above the temple, the glory now filled the temple. It blazed out the door like the brilliance of the sun. The now empty platform cast a long dark shadow across the people.

Indignant that God would slay Solomon so soon after he had built His temple, a few jumped up from their knees to cry out. But when they stood, they saw Solomon's body lying flat on the top of the platform. They called out to YHWH. Soon more and more were standing to pray, "O YHWH, God of Israel! Solomon loved You! He served You! Save him now we pray!"

Still the body lay there. Now everyone was standing up and crying out. Then the figure moved, and Solomon began to struggle to his feet. A deathly silence swept over the crowd. Finally Solomon stood before them, a bit wobbly, his whole body glowing brightly. He opened his mouth, but no words came out. He slowly turned around, to face the open door of the temple. There he knelt and bowed his head. After a long time, he stood and turned again to face the people. "What was it like? What did He say to you? Were you dead?" They all wanted to know.

Solomon raised his hands for silence. "He didn't say anything. He just..." Solomon shook his head, as if he couldn't quite believe it. "He just... He just gave me a hug. All He wanted... was a hug."

The people again fell on their faces in worship, praising YHWH with glad shouts, saying, "Thanks be to YHWH! Truly He is good! Truly His lovingkindness is everlasting! Truly His mercy endures forever!"

The evening had come. The sun hung low over the mountains. The people still needed to finish their sukkim for the Feast of Sukkot, which would begin at sundown. Solomon blessed the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, "Blessed be YHWH, who has given rest to His people Israel as He promised. For not one word of all He promised through Moses has failed. May YHWH our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. And may He never leave us or forsake us, so that He may incline our hearts toward Himself, to walk in His ways and keep His commandments. And may these words of mine, as I have made supplication before Him, remain near to YHWH our God day and night forever, that He might maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel every day. Then all the peoples of the earth will know that YHWH is God, and there is none else besides Him. So I bless you all. I bless your heart to be wholly devoted to YHWH, to keep His commandments and walk in His statutes just as it is this day. For then you shall indeed be blessed." So he sent them off to their sukkim. He and Muwet found a tiny space among them for their own. The flaming sunset filled the sky as they placed the last few thin branches overhead and lay down together. All was at peace.

Satan howled at the 'unfairness' of it all, but Michael and his host wouldn't even respond. They were busy enforcing Logos' 100 foot rule and encouraging Solomon to continue day by day walking throughout the assembly. Never in history was any large assembly bathed in such perfect holiness. Each night as the people lay down in their sukkim, Logos walked among them, comforting, healing, restoring, blessing, encouraging, receiving their worship, and fulfilling their joy. It was a tiny slice of heaven!

Logos confided to his angels, "This is how I made them to live! Oh, that they would always choose to live together in such holiness, that I might dwell among them and be their God, that they would be My people, and prosper, and become all that I created them to be."

Sukkot reached its climax on the eighth 'Great Day' of the Feast. The day after that (Tishri 23) Solomon sent the people home. They had feasted together for sixteen days total. Never before or since has any nation been so joyful, so glad of heart, and so satisfied with food and fellowship. Thus Logos transformed Solomon's greatest moral failure into his greatest victory. The holiness of this time brought blessings to the land for many years to come.

Zadok the high priest was curious about the poem King Solomon had quoted at the beginning of his prayer. It had been recorded by the scribes, so he studied it, but it didn't seem to make sense. Finally he asked Solomon about it.

"You are perceptive, my friend. It was not supposed to make sense. It is a riddle. Only you can understand, and each succeeding high priest after you. You know about that secret hiding place I made deep underneath Mount Moriah. The temple is the 'permanent dwelling', the 'house of loftiness', while that underground grotto is the 'settled place, obscured from men's eyes'. You are to teach the high priest who comes after you this poem, and what it means, and how to operate the elevator by means of the two pillars Yahkeen and Boaz. Don't let them confuse those pillars! That is why I named them. Yahkeen, the fixed vertical force, raises the elevator. Boaz, the fulcrum at the base, drops it again. Also, tell them how to release the stone plugs in the tunnel, so no one can follow them. There must be no possibility of an attacking nation ever capturing the Ark of God's Covenant."

Solomon and Muwet tried to sleep in their own bed in David's palace that night. But they couldn't seem to fall asleep. That entire feast had been so satisfying, so joyful, so utterly blessed, they were overflowing with praises to YHWH. Finally, about midnight, they got up and went outside. The night air was still warm, the twinkling stars shone brightly; it was obvious that they needed to spend one more night in a sukkah. It wasn't hard to find a nice one, still leaning up against the palace walls. They climbed in, threw their blanket on the ground, and lay together staring at the stars through the branches. Sure enough, in no time at all they were fast asleep in each other's arms.

Once again, as at Gibeon eight years before, a bright star floated down to become an angel within Solomon's dreams. The angel reached down, took Solomon's hand, and lifted him into His embrace, all without a word. King Solomon knew from this hug that the angel was YHWH, who had hugged him at the dedication of the temple.

Logos responded to his thoughts. "Yes, it is I, My son. And yes, I dearly delight to hug My precious ones! Heaven is fueled by hugs! But it is rare that I can hug someone still bound to earth, because their sin usually gets between us. Thank you for keeping yourself holy. Now, regarding your prayers and supplications during the Feast – I am pleased. I consecrated this temple you have built by putting My name there forever. My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually throughout all time. As for you, if you will walk before Me like your father David, in righteousness and integrity of heart, obeying My commandments and keeping My statutes and laws, then I will establish your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised your father.

"But, if you or your descendants then turn away from following Me, forsaking My commandments and turning aside from My laws, to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them. Then the temple which I just consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. It will become a heap of ruins. Everyone who passes by will be astonished, and hiss, and say, 'Why has YHWH permitted such a tragedy to this land and this temple?' And they will answer, 'Because they forsook YHWH their God who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods, to worship them and serve them; therefore YHWH their God has brought all this calamity upon them.' So Israel will become a byword and a proverb among men."

"I love you, YHWH. I love everything about You: Your wisdom and ways, Your Law, Your Feasts, Your people. You are my God! You have blessed me beyond measure. You have shown Yourself to me in ways I can never forget. How then could I ever turn aside to worship other gods?"

"And I love your attitude, My son. If you can keep it, you will never turn away from Me! I delight in you more than you can possibly understand. I rejoice that I have one on the earth whose heart is wholly turned toward Me. *Truly in you, Solomon, the world shall see the surpassing blessings upon those whose God is YHWH!*"

Indeed the world saw! All the nations of the earth from the Congo to the Black Sea, from the Caspian Sea to the deserts of Arabia, from Libya in the Far West to Mongolia, China, and India in the Far East – the Lydians, Urartu, Medes, Nubians, Assyrians, Kaska, Arzawa, Anatolians, Kassites, Hittites, Mitanni, Persians, Parthians, Elamites, Babylonians, Cimmerians, Hyrcanians, and many others, sent ambassadors, *and princesses*, to Solomon. All were duly impressed with his amazing wisdom, his wealth, and his magnificent temple. God gave him favor with them all.

Solomon's harem of foreign princesses kept growing. Every king on earth seemed to want Solomon to have his daughter. Solomon collected princesses like some people collect baseball cards. By the time he finished the temple, Solomon already had forty wives and their maids. But David's palace had really only been built for a harem of twenty at the most. It was a beautiful palace, but it would no longer do for Solomon. He insisted on only the best treatment for his beloved princesses.

So as soon as the builders finished Solomon's temple, he put them to work on a bigger palace – a much bigger palace! It would be the largest palace in the world, more than twice as large as the Pharaoh's palace in Egypt. It was begun in 964 BC and not completed until 951 BC.

Long before he finished it, Solomon had a war. I must tell that story, for few have heard it. Logos had assured David that his son would be a man of peace, and he was. Israel remained at peace most of Solomon's reign. But it was not so for the rest of the world! The Mycenaean Sea Peoples grew stronger, attacking nations throughout the northern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. The Assyrians and Babylonians battled each other to an uneasy truce, both badly weakened in the war. The alliance between the Hittites and the Mitanni had strengthened them both; now they were fighting Anatolians, Cimmerians, and Urartu to the north to expand their combined empire. Egypt faced conflicts with Libyans in the east and Nubians in the south. In 966 BC the Hittite king Muwatalli II had given his daughter to become one of Solomon's 'princesses' and had begun quietly taking over northern Syria, a direct threat to Egyptian hegemony in the Levant. Solomon was intent on finishing his temple, and didn't care about Syria. He had three Hittite princesses in his harem – surely they would be satisfied with Syria and stop at Israel's border!

Pharaoh Horemheb was old, and smart. He did not share Solomon's naïve optimism about the intentions of the Hittites. They were conquering nation after nation, and he knew it was but a matter of time before they took over his trade routes. Horemheb made Seti I (son of his vizier Rameses I) commander of the Egyptian army. Seti I was young and strong, from a long line of military officers, trained from birth for war. He began a massive military buildup to address the Hittite threat.

Horemheb notified Solomon of his planned offensive against the Hittites, and requested his support. Solomon had no desire to fight, but a peace alliance in those days demanded military aid when needed. He was torn; he had an alliance with the Hittites as well as the Egyptians. But he had to admit that old King Muwatalli had violated the terms of their agreement by taking control of towns in the northern Levant, thus abusing his own allies as well as threatening Egypt's interests. Besides, Solomon's favorite wife was Horemheb's daughter!

So in 964 BC Solomon also began a military buildup. All fighting men of Israel were drafted, to begin rigorous battle training. Solomon bought 4000 more war horses from Arabia, thus doubling his cavalry and chariot forces. Yes, Solomon was a man of peace, for he had peace in his heart. But in his great wisdom he understood that real peace can be achieved only through strength.

Sadly, only months before the planned offensive, old Horemheb took sick. He died the very day his army had planned to leave. This was a terrible blow to Egypt. They all loved Horemheb; for all his gruff sternness, he was a true patriot! All of Egypt had prospered under his wise and firm rule. Everything else was put on hold. They buried him with honor and mourned his death for 70 days. His tomb in the Valley of Kings (unfinished, as his death was unexpected) was lavishly decorated with carvings of his military exploits, and filled with riches as befits one of Egypt's greatest Pharaohs. He left no male heir.

With a heavy heart, his old vizier Rameses I took over as Pharaoh (beginning the 19th Dynasty). It was too late to battle the Hittites this year (mid 962 BC). Maybe next year. Solomon came down to Egypt to mourn with them over the loss of his father-in-law. He stayed for six months. Muwet renewed acquaintances and assured everyone of King Solomon's loyalty and undying support. Everyone in the palace still remembered the 'large bathtub'! Rameses and Queen Sitre renewed their alliance with Israel. Their son Seti I and his wife Tuya swore an eternal friendship with Solomon and Muwet. Seti assured them how much he looked forward to joining with Israel in the campaign against the Hittites. Solomon returned to Israel in peace.

But alas, taking over a kingdom is not as easy as it sounds, especially for an old man like Rameses I. He, like his entire country, had been badly shaken by Horemheb's untimely death. They simply were not ready the next year for an offensive against the Hittites. Rameses decided to postpone it for one more year.

As he was preparing for battle in the spring, 960 BC, Solomon heard that Egypt's Pharaoh had died again. Rameses had never fully recovered from the loss of his old friend Horemheb, and in the exertions of preparing for war, he had suffered a heart attack and keeled over, right in front of Seti I and his army. Seti had rushed to his father's aid, yelling for physicians, but it was too late. Rameses died within the hour, surrounded by his son and other commanders (who all loved him dearly).

His dying words were to his son. "Seti, Take over Egypt. She needs you. Rule her with firmness, but with kindness. Love her, as I have loved her – as Horemheb loved her before me. And keep our alliance with King Solomon; he is a true friend. Only with his help will you be able to meet the Hittite threat. For his God YHWH is strong indeed! Oh, how I wish He were our God as well!" With that, dear old Rameses breathed his last.

In the course of time, Rameses passed through that long dark tunnel into the Welcoming Park. His faithful friend Horemheb was there. He'd been there quite a while, so after the greetings, he shared his thoughts with his vizier. "I've searched everywhere. This is not at all like the priests instructed us. I saw them bury me, with highest honors, riches, food... everything we thought we needed for the afterlife. They prayed to the gods and performed the rituals for me – I was there, hovering above my body, so I could see everything. I tried to tell them I was there, but no one could hear me. I stuck around for a long time trying to get someone to notice me, but I finally had to let it all go. Then I passed through a long dark tunnel to this light."

Horemheb frowned. "But if this is the afterlife, there is nothing here that I expected – none of the gods they said I'd meet; none of the riches or foods they buried with me... We don't even seem to need to eat or drink here."

Rameses was nodding. He'd experienced pretty much the same things. But he was still bewildered. "Well, let's explore further. Maybe we haven't gotten there yet."

"True, this land seems to be much larger than what we see. But there are boundaries. I've been all around and I can go no further. Come, let's walk it together." So they did, calling out to all their gods as they went: Ra, god of the sun; Nut, god of the sky; Thoth, god of the moon; Geb, god of earth; Sekhmet (Mercury), the goddess of sickness and healing; Isis (Venus), the love goddess; Ptah, god of fire; Horus, god of Jupiter; Osiris, god of Saturn; Hapi, river goddess... They even cried out to Seth (Mars), god of war and chaos, on the off-chance that they'd wound up in the underworld. But they got no answers from any of them, for what seemed like days, or years.

Finally Rameses ventured his opinion. "I think we've been lied to, sir. All our lives... all our history, our culture, all of Egypt's gods... we were lied to. They are all false. Why don't we try calling out to Israel's God..."

Horemheb was not ready for that, yet. "Yes, maybe we were lied to," he interrupted. "Or, maybe our faith is being tested. Or maybe..." he held up his hand. "Maybe old Akhenaten was right. Don't you just feel the pull of the light all around us? It's so bright, so powerful, yet where is the sun? Ra is not here. Maybe the light here is the 'Aten' that old Akhenaten talked about. He always told us to 'embrace the all-encompassing light'. He kept insisting that there was no other god. I'll bet that's it. This is his realm. After all the effort I put into wiping out all traces of his religion! I feel like a fool! I thought I was doing Egypt a big service restoring the ancient religion of Amun." He fell to his knees. "O great Aten, forgive my foolishness. I didn't know. In the integrity of my heart I fought against you. I beg you, mighty Aten, forgive me now, wash me, cleanse me with your light." He lifted his hands. "I embrace the light! Glorious light! O majestic Aten, purify me now..." He went on like that for quite a while.

Rameses just stood there shaking his head. Finally he spoke up. “Uh, Sir? Aten is no more of a god here than Ra. I helped you to eliminate his worship from Egypt. If he were a real god, then why were we so successful? We found no gods in this realm because the real God, the true God, is Spirit. Don’t you remember what Solomon told us about the God of Israel? He is Spirit. He has no images at all – not planets or stars or animals or people. Solomon said that He is the Creator of all those things. We can’t see Him. But if we pray to Him, He’ll hear us. Solomon told us so.”

So Rameses knelt beside his friend and put one arm across his shoulders. He raised the other hand high and cried out, “O YHWH, God of Israel, hear our prayer, and show us what to do. We’re stuck here. We’ll do anything You ask...” He paused a moment, then added, “O YHWH, please forgive us for not believing in You earlier. We didn’t know. I thought Solomon’s God was too good to be true, but...” He stopped and looked at Horemheb. “Sir, I feel dirty. Yucky, like I’ve been eating mud-pies when I could have been feasting on luscious roast lamb. I need to wash off before I can even pray to YHWH...” He jumped up and hurried back to the crystal stream.

Horemheb remained there kneeling on the turf with his conflicting thoughts. Looking down, he noticed he had knelt right on top of a lovely flower, but it was not crushed. His body seemed heavy and firmly on the ground, yet when he felt below him, he discovered a small space between him and the grass and flowers. Maybe he also was spirit. Then if YHWH was Spirit, he should be able to see Him. Well, he had prayed to all the other gods and gotten no response. It wouldn’t hurt to pray to this one. He also began calling out to YHWH. Soon he had joined Rameses washing in the stream.

They washed for a long time. At first, they felt no cleaner than before, but the light continued to draw them. Soon they were confessing and repenting of their sins as they washed. They had both thought themselves pretty good people on earth, but here in Sheol, they saw things more clearly. In this realm their pride, cruelty, and self-centeredness was like mud, needing to be washed off. Now they found themselves getting both cleaner and younger. It encouraged them. The stream remained crystal clear.

“Sir?” Rameses turned to his friend. “This land is too big. It can’t be only for us. I think others are here too, many others. Perhaps some are even here washing in the stream with us. But they’re just spirits, like us. We can’t see them, like we can’t see YHWH.” He raised his arms and cried out, “O Lord YHWH. Please allow us to see others here.”

Horemheb was skeptical – until he heard Rameses greeting someone he couldn’t see! Then he too prayed for YHWH to open his eyes. In moments, he saw two beautiful young ladies before them, also washing in the stream. Horemheb had never seen ladies so beautiful; yet they were strangely familiar.

“I am Horemheb, Pharaoh of Egypt,” he began, but it sounded too formal here. “Well, I was a Pharaoh...”

The more lovely of the two reached out her arms to him. “O mighty and beloved Pharaoh! I am your wife, Queen Mutnodjmet, sister of Nefertiti.” The other held out her arms to Rameses, “And I am Sitre your wife, and mother of our son Seti.” She laughed. “You both look so young and handsome I hardly recognized you.”

After they all got re-acquainted, Horemheb observed, “This is YHWH’s realm. I’m sure of it now, for every time we pray to Him, things happen. We did not feel dirty until we prayed to Him, and we did not begin to feel clean until we repented to Him. Then we got younger! Now, though you were right next to us, we didn’t see you until we asked Him to open our eyes.”

Rameses nodded. “I agree. If we’re going to live here, we had better get to know YHWH better. What do you remember Solomon saying about Him?”

“Not much. I’m afraid I wasn’t much interested in his God back then. Besides, he spent most of his time with Muwet.” They pooled their knowledge. Between them, it still wasn’t much. The days, or eons, passed. It was difficult to reckon time in this realm where there was no night, no sun moving across the sky, and no need to eat or sleep. Finally Horemheb concluded, “Look. We don’t know enough about YHWH and we have no hope of knowing more unless He reveals it. Let’s ask Him directly.”

So they knelt beside the stream. Horemheb led. “Lord YHWH, God of Solomon. We realize now that You are the only true God of the afterlife. We repent of trusting in all those other gods, but we didn’t know. We were ignorant. We’ve all been lied to. Please, Sir, reveal Yourself to us. Tell us about Yourself, so we may worship You, and only You. We pledge ourselves to do whatever You ask of us.”

Nothing happened. Horemheb was disappointed. But Rameses said, “Sir, I think He wants us to wash again. This time, throw off our clothes. They are filthy to Him. Then we must ask Him to clothe us with His light.”

The ladies looked at each other. This was asking a bit much. Horemheb answered, “Well, we just said we’d do whatever He asked. That is a small thing. I’m going to do it. I’ll walk downstream a bit. You ladies don’t have to look.” He took a step away, and disappeared!

Rameses did likewise, and likewise disappeared. So the ladies separated and found the privacy they needed as well. Soon they were standing before Logos, clothed in modest brightness. He welcomed them all with a big smile. “Yes, you sure were lied to,” He laughingly agreed. “But I do not condemn. I accept your repentance. Now, you have asked to learn of Me. Your choice delights Me. Not all choose so well. Come with Me to My Nursery.”

“Nursery, Lord?” Horemheb was mystified.

Logos laughed. It was a happy, inclusive laugh. “Yes. Though on earth you had grown old, yet in this My realm you regain your youth, and until you learn of Me, you are as newborn babies. I will teach you.”

“But Lord YHWH,” Horemheb responded. “How can You be so kind when we served other gods all our lives? We are unworthy to stand in Your presence.”

“Your worth is not based on what you did, but on who you are. You are My children. I made you. That makes you of infinite worth.” He paused to let that sink in, then added. “You served other gods in ignorance. You couldn’t respond to My Spirit within Solomon because your hearts were hard and your spiritual eyes blind. But ignorance, hardness of heart, and spiritual blindness is the natural state of those not yet made alive by My Spirit. All shall be forgiven for those who are willing to learn of Me. All are permitted a choice. Only those who reject Me in full knowledge of who I am and what I’ve done for them cannot be forgiven.”

“How can any who learn of You still reject You?”

“But many do. I am Wisdom. I am Peace. I am Justice, Truth, and Righteousness. I am Law. I am self-giving Love. When they discover Me, those who love only self and selfish pleasures discover that they hate Me, for they hate what I am. You never hated any of these things, so you choose to learn of Me. I rejoice in that, and in you!”

Sitre spoke up. “Lord YHWH, I beg of You, allow me to return to Seti. He still worships false gods, but he is a good boy. He will believe me if I tell him about You. He will love You, I know. I don’t want my son to waste his entire life serving false gods as we have wasted ours!”

“Your soul cannot be seen or heard by him. Your body is rather locked up, sealed in cloth and stone. Wouldn’t that cause a monumental fuss, if I broke open the stone sarcophagus, burial chamber, and mortuary temple and empowered your mummy to come bumbling forth! No, My dear. I think not. Seti still has Solomon. Intercede with Me that he will hear him. Seti already loves Solomon and his wisdom, you know. And I count that as love for Me.”

So you and I, dear Reader, will now leave them at the Nursery and go back to Egypt. Solomon and Muwet returned as soon as they got the news of Rameses’ death. They mourned with Seti, and supported him during his transition of power to become Egypt’s next Pharaoh. Seti was grateful for their support, and renewed the alliance that Horemheb had made 20 years before. Seti was a few years younger than Solomon. He had married shortly after Solomon had taken Naamah the Ammonitess. His first child had died in infancy. His second was a girl, Tia. His third was his heir and the delight of his life. Seti named him Rameses after his beloved grandfather. When Seti became Pharaoh, Rameses II was eight. Already he was being trained to follow in his father’s footsteps.

Seti I was a career military man. He had not desired to be Pharaoh; his heart had always been set to protect Egypt from the Hittite threat. So this was a major and unexpected step for him. His wife Tuya was a big encouragement; in truth she was more of a queen than Seti was a king. Thus it took Seti I a year to complete the transition of power, before he was ready to begin the long awaited military campaign planned by Horemheb.

Seti brought his fine army north in the spring of 959 BC. He had 1200 chariots and 18,000 infantry. They were well-trained and equipped, for Seti was a brilliant commander. They traveled light and moved rapidly up the coast. Their supply ships sailed along side, stopping at each port to replenish their food.

A large clan of Bedouin Shasu had set up shop along the Via Maris in the Sinai, trying to extort a profit from passing traders. Seti sent them packing, with a promise of their annihilation if they returned. Seti then renewed alliances and restored Egyptian hegemony in Philistia. They knew better than to resist him.

After that Seti traveled up the Valley of Jezreel where he joined Solomon at Megiddo. Solomon had 1400 chariots, 12,000 cavalry, and 16,000 infantry. Together they made a formidable, though not invincible, force.

They met some resistance around the Sea of Galilee and Jordan Valley. Three towns (Hamath, Pella, and Yanom) had rebelled against Egypt and allied themselves with the Hittites to the north. Now they were harassing nearby Beth-Shan and Rehob in an effort to get them to join the rebellion. Seti subdued them, and stationed a garrison in Beth-Shan to warn him of any future rebellion.

Seti and Solomon continued up the coast together, re-establishing alliances in Phoenicia and Zobah in southern Syria. They moved north through Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos, then went inland to Kadesh on the Orontes. There they met their first real resistance. The combined forces of the Hittite / Mitanni alliance were massed at Kadesh, prepared to conquer Zobah, Damascus, Bashan, and who knows? Perhaps Israel itself!

Seti wanted to just wipe out their army then and there. But Solomon begged him to wait. (Remember he had three Hittite wives and a solid treaty with King Muwatalli II!) “My friend, we have both the force of might and the force of right. Let us show mercy and give Muwatalli a chance to honor his treaty with me. But if he refuses to withdraw, then we shall destroy his armies.”

So Seti and Solomon took their personal guard under a flag of truce and met with King Muwatalli II. He was quite cordial, having seen the size of their forces. He received them graciously, and politely asked Solomon about the welfare of his daughters. “Your daughters are my joy and delight! I treat them like my own daughters. They are among the loveliest princesses in the land.

“But you have not kept your agreement with me. Why are your armies in Kadesh? You swore to me that your empire would come no farther south than Ugarit, Ebla, Aleppo, and Carchemish. Why are you in Syria – to threaten my northern allies? I’ve grown rich and powerful by cultivating faithful alliances with every king in the Levant. Shall you not likewise prosper?”

King Muwatalli bowed down, backpedaling furiously. “I had no intentions of attacking you!” he lied. “I only brought my forces into Syria at their request, to help strengthen them against threats from Assyria. Then when I heard you were coming, I feared you were planning to attack me. I will go if you wish, and keep our alliance.”

So he withdrew. Seti and Solomon returned south through Zobah. Along the way, they chatted together. “Y’know, that was all a big pile of horse pucky,” Seti said. “I’m glad to give old Muwatalli a chance, but I’ll bet we’ll be back here next year to take him out.”

“Yes,” Solomon agreed. “I don’t trust him either. But under YHWH’s Law, every man gets a chance to choose. He may now choose to do what is right. Surely YHWH would bless him for it. But... if he continues to be the aggressor, he may not receive a second chance. YHWH will not be mocked. Mercy spurned leads to judgment.”

“Tell me about YHWH’s Law,” Seti urged. Solomon did, for the rest of the trip. Seti eagerly plied him with questions and soaked up every word. The watching host of heaven (which now included Rameses and Sitre, and Horemheb and Mutnodjmet) cheered his victory.

“You see,” Logos assured Sitre. “Your son loves Me, even though he doesn’t yet know Me. He loves Solomon My son, and all that he represents. He loves My Law and My wisdom through Solomon. I count that as love for Me! I shall bless him, his son, and his future descendants for generations to come, for his choices this day.”

The next year (958 BC) Muwatalli had gathered even more military forces at Kadesh. It was clear he’d chosen to defy Solomon and Seti. Indeed, he wanted them to attack him at Kadesh, where he was now prepared to defeat them. They would be weak from the long march, while his own armies were getting stronger every day. It was now at 2000 chariots, more than 50,000 swordsmen, and 5000 archers. With the armies of Israel and Egypt out of the way, he planned to march through the Levant taking everything in his path all the way into Egypt.

In the spring, Seti again met Solomon and his army at the Valley of Jezreel. Together they traveled north through Zobah toward Kadesh. All along the way Seti again plied Solomon with questions, far more interested in YHWH’s wisdom than in the upcoming battle. Finally Solomon asked, “Are you not concerned? I’m sure Muwatalli would not defy us without first improving his army. We could be walking into a trap.”

“Solomon, my friend, I do love your great wisdom, and I appreciate your teaching me about YHWH’s Law. But I have been trained as a military commander from my youth, while you’ve never yet tasted battle. I assure you, I’m well prepared. Stay close by my side. You shall see.”

But when he saw the Hittite and Mitanni forces camped along the Orontes River from Kadesh nearly to Riblah, Seti was afraid. “Solomon, they have doubled their forces. And look how they’ve dug in along the river. They’re expecting us to attack them. They’ve made earthen berms to protect them against our archers and make our chariots worthless. They’re not going to come out and attack us in open battle; they plan to camp there and wait for us to attack them. That would be suicide. Their fortifications along the river are too strong. I planned a surprise for them, but if we have to attack them, my surprise won’t work.”

“What, my friend, was your surprise?”

“Muwatalli knows the strength of our two armies. He has spies along our route. What he doesn’t know is that my supply ships contain another army hidden below decks, with 5,000 more swordsmen and archers. Their ships are docked at Simyra and my men are now headed east, through the forests of Lebanon and over the hills to the Homs-Tripoli gap. They’ll be here in a few days. My plan was to engage the Hittites, then pretend to be frightened and flee before them south along the Orontes. My second army would then come through the gap into this valley at their rear, at which time you and I would turn to face them. This forces them to fight on two fronts, a classic military strategy from which they would have no escape. But now it won’t work. They’re not going to come out to chase us.”

“Let’s pray. Maybe YHWH has a solution.”

“You mean... He actually talks to you?”

“Only if I am holy. I will have my priest offer a lamb for my sins, and yours, if you are willing.”

“Yes, please! I would love to hear from YHWH!”

The priest brought him a sacrificial ram. Solomon put his hands on the ram’s head, and confessed his sins. Then he told Seti, “The ram will be sacrificed. His blood will cover the sins I just put on his head. If I am holy, YHWH might speak to me or give me wisdom in answer to my prayer. Do you want to confess your sins, too?”

Seti did. Solomon had set a good example. At first, Seti confessed the same things that Solomon had. But Logos was pleased with his confession, and his attitude. He reminded Seti of other things. It is amazing what progress can be made, *with no demons allowed for 100 feet around Solomon*. These confessions continued on for a full hour, as Seti discovered more heart issues that were not right. He even wept and confessed his arrogance in thinking himself to be a better military man than Solomon. (Though that was certainly true, yet his pride was wrong.)

It was dinner time before the ram was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled. Then Solomon bowed in a brief prayer. "YHWH, I am Your servant. Show me what You want me to do." In just moments he looked up. "He wants me to go to Muwatalli once more, alone."

"Just like that? He actually talked to you? Why that's... that's just incredible! I didn't hear anything."

"Keep listening. After all that repentance I'm sure He will speak to you. But YHWH's voice is soft and kind – never pushy. You must be quiet in your soul to hear Him. You wait here, while I go to obey YHWH. That is one thing about hearing His voice – you have to be willing to obey, or you will never even hear Him."

"I'm willing! I swear it! I will wait here until He speaks to me, if it takes all week!" Seti vowed.

A cheer arose in the heavenlies as Solomon prepared to visit Muwatalli. He took only his chariot and one aide. They rode past the forces along the river until they reached the fortress at Kadesh. There Solomon got down, left his chariot with his aide, and entered the fortress alone. He was ushered right into the throne room. King Muwatalli II awaited him. "My son! Welcome! We were about to have dinner. Will you dine with me?"

"No I will not. Do not call me your son, for you have not kept your word. I came only to give you one last warning before your armies are destroyed."

Muwatalli's face hardened. "You fool! Did you really think I'd keep my word? I merely wanted to stall you, until I was strong enough to defeat you! I shall bind you in chains until you see the defeat of your army. Then I'll kill you and sacrifice your blood to my gods. Guards! Seize him! Send word to Seti that Solomon is my captive. He will be slain after seeing my victory."

The guards were unusually gentle with Solomon. Without their personal demons, all they could feel for him was respect and compassion. Yet they obeyed their master and brought Solomon in chains to the tower window overlooking the battleground. There they removed the chains and left, locking the heavy door behind them.

Surprisingly, Solomon still did not fear. He knew that YHWH had told him to come, and he had obeyed. YHWH would care for him. He spent his time in prayer for his army, and for Israel (which would be defenseless if his army were lost). Then he prayed for Seti and his army, and Egypt as well. Mostly he prayed for Seti to hear the voice and see the glory of the God of Israel.

Seti had no dinner that evening. He continued by the altar, listening intently, determined to hear that quiet voice Solomon talked about. The sun set. Darkness fell. Still he remained kneeling by the altar with his face to the ground. He refused to go to sleep, though his knees ached and his tear-stained face was gritty with dirt.

The sun rose. Seti realized he'd fallen asleep after all. He was hungry, and disappointed that he had not heard YHWH's voice. But he'd sure had a strange dream! In his dream he had stood by the fortress at Kadesh, looking at Solomon in a high tower window. All the while, his men were filing past him, carrying rocks... *that was it!* Seti went to breakfast, a plan solidifying in his mind.

The hills above that area were very rocky. 50,000 men can move a lot of rocks. Seti told his archers to stand guard. He ordered his charioteers to shuttle rocks down to the river north of Kadesh. Half his footsoldiers would be up in the hills loading chariots with rocks. The other half would throw them into the river to make a dam. Looking up, Seti saw Solomon in the tower, smiling and waving to him, just like in his dream. YHWH had spoken to him after all!

His dam was a success. After two days the Orontes River began flooding its banks, turning the massive earthworks of the Hittite army into a muddy swamp. They finally came out and prepared to do battle on the plain, just about the time that Seti's secret army came down the valley looking for him. Their combined forces had the Hittite army trapped. They began to drive them into the river. Muwatalli, watching from his fortress, realized that he had been beaten. He sent for Solomon. "My son! You have been most patient with me! I repent for troubling you. You have the victory! I surrender. Just name your terms. I will immediately withdraw and never bother your lands again. But please don't destroy my army. We still need protection from Assyria, and from the Mycenaean Sea Peoples, and from the uncivilized marauding barbarians in the north." He bowed low before Solomon.

"Okay." Solomon responded kindly, but firmly. "Here are my terms. Take your army and all the men you left to rule the cities you conquered. We will follow you, all the way past Hamath on the Orontes to Tiphseh on the Euphrates. Any Hittites or Mitanni which you leave in Syria will be slain. If you ever again attempt to control the King's Highway which passes through Tiphseh, Hamath, and Kadesh, we will show no further mercy. You must swear to keep your forces north of that road."

"It's a deal. I swear it! Oh, thank you, kind sir! Please let me sound the retreat for my men before they are all slain." So he did. They fled, with Solomon and Seti following them as they gathered up their forces from the conquered cities and towns of Syria. It was a great victory. The Hittites were cleared out of Syria. Wicked King Muwatalli II was stopped, or at least slowed down for a while. (Though he began plotting his revenge even as he fled.)

Thus ended Solomon's 'wars' for the first twenty years of his reign. He never really had to fight. He was known the world over as a man of peace; peace through strength. His army grew so strong that no nation on earth dared break their alliance with Israel. Every nation in the Levant and far beyond, prospered as a result of this peace.

CHAPTER 18 – MUWET’S EGYPTIAN PALACE

Solomon’s fabulous new palace was thirteen years under construction. It would certainly become one of the wonders of the world, even more breathtaking than his spectacular temple. It would be finished in late 951 BC. But he really needed it long before that. As I said, Solomon collected princesses like youngsters collect baseball cards. So by 953 BC, two and a half years before its completion, his harem had doubled to eighty princesses. About half had attendant maids (whom Solomon called concubines). All of them were virgins, and remained so (except Naamah the Ammonitess). He had certainly learned that lesson! So at least King David’s old palace was no longer troubled by a herd of bickering, screaming, snot-nosed kids.

But Muwet had begun to respectfully object. She was wondering where this would all lead and why she had to share her palace with 120 beautiful young women. “My love,” Solomon responded to Muwet with warm affection. “I love you more than a thousand other women. You are my only true love. All these princesses are nothing to me. They are symbolic only, trophies to the conquest of YHWH over the surrounding nations. Every princess in my harem represents a nation who has sworn allegiance and peaceful trade with us and who remains submitted to the God of Israel. They are no competition to you! I swear, ever since my affair with Naamah, I have been absolutely faithful to you, my beloved. To show how much I love you, ask me anything you want – *anything*. I’ll do it for you.”

A generous offer indeed. Muwet thought about it. She thought back to the splendor she had left behind in Egypt; the murals on the walls, the lovely monuments, carvings, life-sized statues and images traced on the walls. She knew what she wanted. “Okay. Build me a bedroom, a special, large room, big enough for lovely murals, tapestries, and carvings on the walls, graceful columns with lotus flower capitals, and grand statues from all my rich heritage of Egypt. I love to decorate, and in all of Israel I’ve not found a single person who knows how to really decorate. Your walls are so plain! And there is not a statue or carving in all the land! Just give me a place to decorate as I like.”

Solomon’s heart sank. “Muwet, remember? I told you our God is a jealous God. He will not tolerate any other gods here in Israel. All those things, the statues, carvings, even the lotus flower – they are all gods of Egypt. You swore to me when we left Egypt that you would worship YHWH only, and leave all the gods of Egypt behind.”

“And I’ve kept my promise, too. I don’t want to worship them, my lord! I love YHWH your God. I love to worship Him with you! Of course I won’t put up Horace [a falcon], or Anubis [a jackal], or Hathor [a cow], or Thoth [an ibis], or Sobek [a crocodile], or Naunet [a frog], or Nefertem [a lotus flower], or any of Egypt’s gods. Only decorations. Nothing more. Besides, you promised anything I asked. Now, do you still love me? or do you not?”

“Jerusalem is a holy city. The temple of YHWH and the Ark of His Covenant is here. I cannot do what you ask, not here in the Holy City.” He sighed. Solomon had known that Muwet was strong-willed and independent; those were qualities he admired in her. Her vivacious and high-spirited love of life was his delight every day. How could he refuse her? “I know what to do. I will build you a separate palace, with all the bedrooms you want and as large as you want. I’ll use Egyptian architecture, with tall columns and high ceilings, and you can decorate it any way you wish. But I will have to build it beyond the city walls, for YHWH will not allow it in the Holy City.”

“Outside the walls? Is it safe? And I love being here with you. How could I ever live in a separate palace?”

“I’ll put it on the north wall, overlooking the Jericho Road and Mount Moriah – just an easy stroll from here. I’ll connect it to my palace with a lovely private walkway, lined with high rock walls, trees, and hanging flowers. I’ll construct a romantic garden between us where we can meet and make love. I promise you’ll be safe and happy there. And you will never again have to face my harem.”

Solomon immediately began Muwet’s palace. He had spent two years in Egypt; he knew exactly what she wanted. By the time his own grand palace was finished in 951 BC, Muwet’s palace was also nearing completion.

She loved it, its walkway, and its garden, as he had known she would. Of course it was small, really designed only for Muwet and her four daughters. But in its own way, it was quite remarkable, too, with soaring ceilings, an imposing lofty entryway, a lavish master bedroom, an Egyptian bath, and a ginormous display room for all the artworks that Muwet had in mind. She immediately went to work decorating the walls and installing the murals and statues she had ordered from Egypt.

About this time Solomon received word that Zadok, the old high priest from David’s era, was dying. He was nearly 100 years old. Solomon visited him and congratulated him on a life well-lived, faithful to the last. He thanked Zadok for his service, blessed him, and assured him that they would meet again, in YHWH’s realm.

Old Zadok shook his head, his steely gray eyes piercing even to Solomon’s soul. “No, my son, we will not meet again, unless you change the direction you are heading. For YHWH showed me that you have become His enemy. You have forsaken His commandments, and turned away to serve other gods.”

Solomon was shocked, stunned! He protested, “My friend! I have not turned away. I keep my vows to love and serve YHWH – every Sabbath, every new moon, and every festival exactly as He commanded Moses. And I support YHWH’s priests wholeheartedly, as you yourself know. YHWH meets with me, and blesses me! My heart is faithful to Him and to His Law, and to my wife and family.”

Zadok's eyes softened. "I know you have, my son. You have kept yourself more holy, and obeyed YHWH more faithfully, and served Him more wholeheartedly, than any other king before you. YHWH has responded by making you the wisest, the wealthiest, and the most powerful king in the history of mankind. So why now, knowing all this, have you turned aside to other gods?"

"I have not! I swear! Who told you this? Who is it that utters such vile libel against me?"

"It is YHWH Himself, my son. He met with me..."

"Tell me. I must know everything He said. Do not hide from me a single word of all He spoke to you."

Zadok sighed, squeezing his eyes tight in the memory. "I knew I was dying, my friend. But I feared death. Though I have lived my life as faithfully as I knew how, yet my sins and failures are ever before me. I cried out to YHWH for assurance that He had a place for me, to receive me unto Himself. He gave me peace and quieted my soul. I'm ready to return to my fathers in His realm."

"But that assurance was so strong upon me, that sense of His presence was so compelling, that I was emboldened. If He would so graciously answer a general prayer, why not a specific one? So I asked, 'O Lord YHWH, when I opened the Ark of the Covenant at Your command, why did I only see the two tablets of stone? Where is the dish of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded?' YHWH said that during the apostasy after Joshua's death, He had removed the manna and Aaron's rod and had taken them up to His heavenly realm for safekeeping. They are now in the real Ark, His throne in heaven, where they will remain until Israel wholeheartedly returns to Him."

"But why? And why has He not returned them, since the apostasy in Israel is now over?"

"The manna represents life within, for it becomes our life when we eat it. Aaron's rod represents the fruitfulness of life, for true life within cannot be contained; it always brings forth buds, and flowers, and then fruit. We lost the life within when we turned away to idols which have no life within. All that remains is the two tablets of the law, like sign posts pointing us toward life if we will keep it, but also pointing toward death if we fail to keep it. YHWH has not yet returned the manna or the rod of Aaron because the apostasy is not over."

"But that is not true! I and my father before me have wholeheartedly served only YHWH. We have obeyed His law, and experienced His presence with us. He has met with me personally, several times! How can you say that the apostasy is not yet over?" Zadok just lay there, his eyes closed. Solomon feared he had fallen asleep. He shook him gently. "Please tell me! What did He say?"

Zadok opened one eye. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you." He closed it, shaking his head.

"I believe you, old man. (In those days, 'old man' was a tribute, as old age was respected.) You couldn't tell a lie to save your mother's soul! Tell me everything."

Zadok was pleased at this compliment. He nodded. "YHWH told me that twenty-two years ago, His adversary violated your rights as a child of God. He was permitted to tempt you with Princess Naamah, but Satan went beyond his permit. He pushed Naamah into exposing herself before you. He had no right to do that, as you had never given his demons of lust any occasion against you. Since you weren't prepared for such a temptation, you fell for it – an unjust defeat for you. YHWH said that He righted the wrong by prohibiting Satan and his demons from coming near you for twenty years, to give you time to recover and restore your righteous habits free of temptation. But you were on probation. That twenty year period passed two and a half years ago. So what happened then?"

"That was when I started Muwet's palace."

"Exactly. YHWH said that was Satan tempting you again. Except this time he did it within the Law, subtly twisting the truth just enough so you would fall for it. Now you have welcomed idols within the land."

"They're not idols! They're... they're just... Egyptian decorations. Muwet doesn't worship them, nor do I."

"Don't argue with me; argue with YHWH. I'm just reporting what He said. Muwet is worshiping them. You've had it easy for twenty years. It was about time for a little testing of your moral strength and character. You failed the test. Now that Muwet is your wife it's too late, but you should never have married her. You should have married one of my daughters."

Horried, Solomon bowed his head and put his hand over his mouth. For a long time he was silent. He knew what Zadok said was true. But he wasn't willing to destroy Muwet's new palace. "I'm sorry. I repent. Thank you, Zadok, for telling me. I will cleanse Muwet's palace and never again allow anything resembling an idol!"

"Cleanse it? How can you cleanse it?"

"We'll get rid of the Egyptian statues that were made to be idols. And all the other decorations we will... uh... we'll cleanse by sprinkling the blood of the lamb, just like we cleansed the furnishings of the temple."

That sounded okay to Zadok. He blessed Solomon. "YHWH loves you, my son. You have a tender heart; easily entreated; quick to repent; eager to make it right. Go now, tell YHWH what you told me; perhaps He will forgive you. And I believe I will see you again someday in His realm." Old Zadok died peacefully in 951 BC. Ahimaaz his son was disfigured from a sports injury, which disqualified him from the priesthood. (Solomon gave him a job as supply officer in Naphtali.) Therefore, Zadok's grandson Azariah succeeded him as high priest.

CHAPTER 19 – KING SOLOMON’S DECLINE

We must back up two and a half years to 953 BC, when the twenty-year punishment Logos had given Satan was ended. It had turned into a victory for Solomon, for he had become the wisest, richest, most revered, most powerful, and most feared monarch the world has ever known, before or since. But now, as Logos had warned, Satan was released with diabolical cunning, determined to make up for the lost time. Michael watched closely, secretly hoping Satan would go too far again, so his punishment could be doubled to total forty years, but no. Satan stuck closely to the letter of the law. His scheme limited his temptations to those areas in which Solomon or his family gave him legal occasion, taking care that every temptation precisely fit the ‘crime’. But you can be assured that Satan missed no opportunities!

One opportunity resulted from Muwet’s longing for the gods of Egypt, as we just discussed. Satan made the most of that, as we shall see! But another opportunity began at the same time, which is why we now return to 953 BC for the parallel story. Young Rehoboam had been the ideal son. He had listened to his father’s instruction. He admired his father, and loved his wisdom. He was often with Solomon, now that he was nineteen, learning from him everything he needed to know to be king after him.

He lived in a tiny apartment in Solomon’s harem with his mother Naamah. But living conditions were not the best, for as I said, David’s palace was only built for a harem of twenty or so. Solomon’s harem had grown to 120 lovely young women, and his new palace was not quite finished. That meant that even Naamah’s apartment was shared with other women. You know this was not right, and King Solomon knew it too. But his son had been so good, so pure, so utterly free of lust, and so absolutely attentive to Solomon’s instruction to guard himself from seductive women, that Solomon missed the warning signs. “Just one more year and my palace will be complete. Then we’ll have plenty of room for all my precious princesses to have their own quarters. We can put up with anything for one year, can’t we?” Thus he pushed away the Spirit’s nudges.

Now, a young man of 19 has hormones, even without Satan’s temptation. In those close quarters with all those young lovelies, he had seen things which Satan (now released from his punishment) replayed in his mind. So without even being aware of it, he developed a lustful eye. Satan’s finest demons slyly began their work.

Naamah was a pretty good mother, though she was a bit miffed at having to share her apartment with four other princesses. She insisted that they remain modestly clothed around Rehoboam, and tried to protect him from their scandalous gossip. But Satan had an ace up his sleeve: a young dark-haired Arabian beauty from the Bedouin Shasu tribe. They had been driven out of the Sinai by Seti and really needed an alliance with Solomon.

As I said, Solomon collected princesses like teenagers collect baseball cards, and even though he knew his harem was overflowing, he couldn’t resist the offer. “Just for one year,” he told Naamah, as he brought the Arabian princess, Suzy, to her apartment door.

“No! Please! Rehoboam is growing up. I’ve noticed his eye is no longer pure. He should not be living with lovely young ladies who are not his wife. If you want him to be king after you, help me guard him from such temptations.”

“Hmm... perhaps you’re right. He could live with me. But Muwet might not like that. Well, what if he married her? I haven’t married her yet. No. He’s too young. Forget that. I guess I shouldn’t have taken her until my new palace was done. Oh, I know. She doesn’t know the language yet. I’ll have her live downstairs with my translators until the new palace is complete. Then by the time I officially marry her, she’ll know the language.” So he brought Suzy down and introduced her to his translators. They were all quite a bit older (having worked for David) and glad to have a princess for a ‘daughter’ until she could get better quarters.

Suzy was quite happy there. She was even happier when she discovered what life would have been like locked up in Solomon’s crowded harem. But the busy translators had the run of the palace. Suzy loved to go with them, learning all the languages and meeting everyone. Rehoboam was delighted to meet her; she was nearly his age, and for once, not locked up in the harem! Rehoboam developed an intense desire to learn another language, specifically, Suzy’s dialect of Arabian. Suzy didn’t mind that a bit. This young prince held far more interest to her than an old king with 120 ‘wives’. Within a very short time they were finding ways to be alone together.

One day Naamah went searching for her son, and found him in a translator’s bedroom alone with a half-undressed Suzy in his arms. That did it! She hauled Rehoboam off to King Solomon. “I was afraid of this. Please discipline your son, or you will have a big scandal on your hands. And keep your harem locked up. I feel sick about it... yucky, like a spirit of seduction has flooded into the palace!”

Truer words were never spoken, but Solomon was so used to having no temptation that he couldn’t see it. He didn’t discipline his son. Rehoboam had always been a good son! Solomon couldn’t believe he had fallen to lust. So instead, he had a ‘man-to-man’ talk with him.

“But Dad, I love her! She’s my age, too young for you. Besides, you already have a lot of wives. I don’t have any. Please let me marry her.”

Solomon shook his head sadly. “You don’t love her. You don’t know her. You can’t even speak her language. Love is more than being attracted to a pretty smile and a cute body, a lot more. And she’s an idolater! You’re young. You have plenty of time. You’d better seriously consider the consequences of marrying a foreigner.”

“Look who’s talking! Last time I checked, you had 121 wives, *every single one a foreigner!*”

“Only 81. The others are just concubines.”

“So? I don’t see much difference. You don’t love any of them. Except perhaps Muwet. You sure don’t love my mom!” Rehoboam sounded a little bitter.

“I do love all my princesses, but in a different way. It’s not romantic, sexual love. I love them as I love my own daughters. I love each of them as an individual, as a person. I love her nation, her people, her culture. It is a political love. It reminds me of my pledge to her father the king, so that I will keep my pledge, my alliance with her nation. And you’re right, I don’t love the concubines – but they came to me as maids to my princesses, just like Hagar was Sarah’s handmaid...” Solomon shut up abruptly, realizing he was just trying to justify himself and had lost the entire focus of their talk.

“Right...” Rehoboam sneered. “And from Hagar came Ishmael. You know how well that turned out.”

“My son, my son! I’m sorry I mentioned her. I want better for you. You will be king someday. Let me find a princess, a Sarah, for you. A true Israelite who loves YHWH; who will bless you all your life.”

“Oh Dad, you just don’t get it. You claim to be so wise, but you don’t understand me at all. I really do love Suzy, and I know her better than you think. I see her every day, teaching her Hebrew and learning her language. I’ll bet that I know her better than you know any of your eighty wives not counting Muwet. She is the only one you’ve ever spent time getting to know. You haven’t even talked to most of your wives since you married them.”

Solomon was stuck. Caught by his own indiscretion. What could he do? “Okay, my son. But I want to confirm that you really love her. If you promise to wait for two years, *and not touch her at all the whole time*, I will talk to her and to her father about arranging your marriage.”

“Two years!?” To him, that was like, *forever!*

“I waited that long for Muwet. Without touching her! We learned each other’s language. We learned to know each other and communicate, heart to heart. In that time my initial attraction for her grew to real love, love that has remained true all these years despite my other princesses.”

Rehoboam could not deny that. He grudgingly agreed, and went off to tell Suzy. Solomon breathed a sigh of relief. *Wisdom wins out, after all.* He was sure that his new palace would be finished in one year, and he could give Suzy her own separate quarters in his harem. Once she was there, Rehoboam would surely forget about her. King Solomon planned to have a good Israelite princess for him by then.

Let’s see, there must be one among the many descendants of David’s ten wives. Solomon secretly began the search.

But even for the wisest man on the planet things don’t always go according to plan. Surprise! Rehoboam kept his promise! He treated Suzy with more respect. She not only agreed to the ‘no touching’ rule, she was relieved and quite happy with it. They spent the time getting to really know and love each other, learning to communicate from heart to heart as Solomon had said.

Solomon soon found an Israelite princess for his son: Mahalath, the second daughter of Jerimoth (son of David) and Abihail (daughter of Eliab son of Jesse). She was everything Solomon wanted for his son. Her parents were faithful and loyal to him and to YHWH. She was bright, refined, cheerful, spirited, a talented singer and dancer, witty, and absolutely gorgeous! A stunning knockout!

But alas, his new palace was not finished in one year as he had planned. Too many of his workers had transferred over to the building of Muwet’s new palace, which was going faster than he had expected. That was good news for Muwet – she was really excited about it. But it meant he wasn’t able to separate Rehoboam and Suzy as he had hoped. Now they were closer than ever!

Solomon decided to take a chance here. Life is filled with risks. The victory goes to the one willing to face them head on. He arranged with Jerimoth and Abihail (they were delighted with the idea) for Mahalath to stay at the palace. He brought her and Naamah into his council chamber. “Mahalath, my dear,” Solomon began. “We’d love to have you as our daughter-in-law, but we have a problem.” Suddenly Solomon stopped. He was going to ask her to slyly seduce Rehoboam away from Suzy, but he knew better. Such nefarious palace plots usually backfire. He was not known as the wisest man on the planet for nothing. He decided to come clean.

“Our only son, Prince Rehoboam, has fallen in love with a foreigner, Suzy of Arabia. I told him I didn’t want him to marry her, but I promised him he could if he waited and didn’t touch her for two years. So far, he has obeyed. He seems determined to make it work. But I’d much rather he marry a lovely Israelite princess like yourself. Would you be willing to at least get to know him? Muwet will let you stay with our two girls; they’re about your age. You’ll have the run of the palace. At least you’d help him see that this foreigner isn’t the only girl in town. I hope Rehoboam will fall in love with you instead of Suzy. We have one year. Are you willing to try? I promise never to push you to do anything that you yourself don’t feel comfortable with.”

Mahalath readily agreed. Being second-born, she loved competition, and the stakes were high. She was ambitious, and the thought of being the queen of Israel excited her. She was old enough to be street-smart, but young enough to dare anything. She bowed regally with a ‘princess curtsy’ and kissed Solomon and Naamah’s hands. “Introduce me to them. I will start by just being their friend, both of them, and see where it leads.”

Again, Solomon decided that honesty would be the best policy here. He called them in together. “Rehoboam, Suzy, thank you for coming. I want to introduce you to Princess Mahalath, daughter of Jerimoth and Abihail. She is an Israelite of Judah, who loves YHWH and is loyal to me and my rule. I’ve invited her to stay here in the palace for a year. She’ll sleep in Ta’phath and Basemath’s bedroom. I want you to accept her as your friend, and get to know her. Now Rehoboam, before you get upset, hear me out. We made a deal. If you keep your promise to me, I will keep mine to you. If you still love Suzy, on the day you turn twenty-one, you will have my permission to marry her. So far, you’ve been faithful about not touching her, and I am pleased. Nevertheless, I ask you to consider this Israelite princess. I want you to be happy. I believe you’d be happier marrying her than marrying a foreigner. But this is your life; your choice. I just want to make sure you have a choice.”

Rehoboam was floored. Suzy was hurt. Neither could think of anything polite to say. But Mahalath was not shy. She saw her chance and grabbed it. “Thank you, Solomon, for being absolutely honest with us all, so we know right where we stand. Rehoboam and Suzy, I can see right away that you really love each other, and I swear I will make no attempt to come between you. Suzy, you are a living doll, and you’d make a beautiful queen! And Rehoboam, I see you are handsome, strong, and wise. I’m sure you will make a fine king! As your dad said, all I ask of you both is the chance to become your friend. And while I might hope that you would choose me instead of Suzy, yet I promise to honor your choice and love you both just the same, for a true friend always wants what is best for her friends.”

Now, that cute little speech didn’t exactly calm the waters, but it was a good start. Over the following year Mahalath did become friends with Rehoboam and Suzy. She behaved herself and never tried to come between them, insisting that she wanted only the best for them.

In fact, she behaved so honorably, and so lovingly, that Rehoboam found he had fallen in love with her, just as Solomon was hoping. But even the best laid plans of mice and men sometimes founder over an unforeseen flaw.

Rehoboam’s twenty-first birthday came in spring, 951 BC, a few months before Solomon’s new palace was finally finished. Rehoboam had kept the ‘no touching’ rule; that Solomon couldn’t deny. So he threw a big palace birthday party for him, promising that he could announce his choice between Mahalath and Suzy before the entire palace. He swore to honor it, whatever that choice might be. King Solomon had seen the deepening friendship between Mahalath and his son. He still had hopes that all his training would pay off and Rehoboam would pick her. But he really didn’t know. *And his son wasn’t saying!*

The dining hall was crammed with friends and well-wishers. The party was a smashing success. The feasting was fabulous. The guests were full. Rehoboam stood up.

“Thank you all for coming, for honoring me on my birthday. I feel so blessed to have such faithful friends. And a special thanks to my beloved father. His wisdom, his careful training, and his fine example of godliness mean more to me than anyone else can know. I hope to mold my life around his example. Truly, the world is a better place because of my father! I hope and pray that someday people will say the same about me.”

Rehoboam had been sitting between Mahalath and Suzy during the feast. Everyone knew why they were there. The suspense had built up to unbearable levels. Rehoboam smiled broadly, playing it for all it was worth. He called them both to stand beside him and placed an arm around each. “As you may know, today is the day I am to announce my engagement. To my right is Suzy, my first childhood sweetheart. She is wild and free, exciting to be with, with a great love for learning and adventure. Yet she has always been submissive, eager to please, thoughtful, careful, obedient, with only the truest and purest love. My life is enriched by knowing her and learning about her and her culture. I’ll never forget her! I count not a moment wasted that I’ve spent with her.”

He turned his head toward Mahalath on his left, and gasps could be heard through the crowd. Suzy stiffened under his right arm, and he heard a stifled sob. But he plunged on. “On my left is Princess Mahalath, of the line of David. I have only recently learned to love her, since she befriended me a year ago. Never has any man had a truer or more faithful friend and confidante! She never tried to break up my love for Suzy. Indeed, she encouraged it. All she really wanted was my happiness. She is cultured, refined, a true princess in the very best meaning of the word. She loves me with a holy love, wanting my best, even as she loves YHWH God of Israel and even Israel herself. Her faithfulness, her loyalty, her purity, her beauty would make her the finest queen any king, and any nation, could ever hope to have...”

Solomon glanced over at Naamah and breathed a sigh of relief. *Rehoboam had chosen correctly – God bless him! It was a tough choice, but he did it.* Solomon squeezed Muwet’s hand. pleased to know that his son would be a wise king, like himself.

But Rehoboam wasn’t through. “I therefore make my choice, based on all the wisdom that my beloved father has given me, based on all the love that YHWH my God has put in my heart. In accord with the vow my father made to me that this choice was mine and mine alone to make, I now choose...” The dramatic pause. Rehoboam would make a great king. He surely knew how to play the crowd. You could smell the suspense as everyone held his breath and strained to hear over the pounding of his own heartbeat.

“... Suzy...” looks of blank disbelief washed across the crowd. “... and Mahalath! I shall marry both! For I could never give up either of my precious treasures!”

The crowd went wild with shrieks, cries, gasps, and shouts of indignation. Never had it been done that a man should marry two women at one time. Who would become the 'first' queen? or who the favorite? Solomon half stood, shaking his head. He knew that YHWH's best was for only one true wife. Everyone knew the trouble their father Jacob had suffered because of his marriage to both Rachael and Leah, and the competition between them. Even David with his eleven wives and ten concubines had only had one at a time. Solomon knew firsthand that his life only really went well after he had become totally faithful to Muwet.

Rehoboam waved them all to silence, and, with a big smile, called for his father to come forward. "Dad? I ask your blessing on our marriage. I have kept my promise to you; now I ask you to keep your promise to me."

What could Solomon do? Once again, he was stuck in a trap of his own making. Satan laughed so hard he couldn't even stand up. He'd played it straight by the book. These weak and foolish humans, in all their supposed 'wisdom', had fallen for every temptation along the way.

Michael zipped up to plead with Logos. "What can I do? Satan followed Your Law. He didn't do anything I can fault. Yet he won over both Solomon and his son!"

"You can do nothing, my beloved Michael. Every response to the temptations of Satan was by their own choices. We do not violate freewill choices, do we." Yet Michael noticed He had tears in His eyes as He looked back at His precious ones to resume His work of intercession.

Solomon was still trying to figure out a way to back out. "Suzy, do you accept this arrangement? Will you be happy to share your husband with Mahalath?"

"Oh, yes sir! Mahalath is wonderful. I love her as my own sister. I... I am only grateful to be chosen as well. For a moment, I thought... I thought I had lost his love. I swear I would have died!"

"And you, Mahalath? Are you happy with this? Might there not be competition between you two?"

"I also feel honored to be chosen to share with Suzy. You know, at first I was competitive. But when I saw the love they shared, I knew I could never break it up. Suzy and I will never have any problems getting along. She's so different from me – she's everything I'm not. Yet I too have learned to love her as my own sister."

So Solomon gave in. "Then I will not stand in your way. But I urge you to remember your promises when you begin bearing his sons and one of them is chosen as his heir to the throne. For the throne of Israel will not share two kings as easily as a man might share two wives! Rehoboam, I keep my promises. I give my blessing on your double marriage, as you have chosen. We'll plan the wedding to coincide with the dedication of my palace. You shall have the big apartment on the top floor. I'll get it furnished by then."

As Michael had feared and Satan had hoped, this year, 951 BC, marked the beginning of the decline of Solomon's kingdom. It was only a subtle shift, but as Naamah had seen, it was as if a door had been opened to the demons of lust and moral perversion. It had started within the palace harem, but from that double wedding it spread across the land. The wedding guests sensed something unsettling, even improper, about having two women saying 'I do' to one man. Solomon assigned them the finest of the upper apartments in his nearly completed palace. They were the first official occupants – the only occupants on their first night together. Their private loving was tame compared to the wild imaginations of others across the land, thinking of how two lovely ladies might share their intimate wedding night with one man! Solomon was sad, wondering where he had gone wrong and not knowing how to fix it.

Muwet didn't seem to care. She was just excited that her new palace was nearly done. She was busy preparing her decorations. She had ordered special statues, carvings, and tapestries from Egypt in time for the dedication, set for the end of Av (July), the same as Solomon's palace.

Ultimately it was Naamah who bore the main burden of organizing the move of Solomon's harem to the new digs during the month of Elul (August). Their new apartments were very spacious; Solomon's princesses finally had room to spare. Shortly after everyone had moved in and settled, Muwet's Egyptian palace was also finished and she, too, left David's palace. Only her two youngest daughters were still living with her (Tinah, 23, and Berrie, 21). Her oldest daughters were already married with families of their own. (Ta'phath, 28, was married to Ben-Abinadab, Solomon's supply deputy at Napoth-dor. Basemath, 27, had married Ahimaaz, his supply officer in Naphtali.)

Muwet's statues were installed. Her tapestries were hung. Her murals and carvings lined the walls. It was truly beautiful – the full flower of her Egyptian heritage. Duly impressed, Solomon was quick to congratulate her on her fine taste. He did not know that back when Muwet had asked for Egyptian decorations, she had a secret motive. She wanted to bear Solomon a royal son, and was getting more desperate with each passing year. She was then 46 (in 953 BC), and had borne no children since Berrie, nineteen years earlier. YHWH had not responded to her prayers, except to tell her she should be content with Rehoboam son of Naamah. She had tried to be content, but she could not. So she had secretly ordered a statue of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of love and fertility. No one need ever know if she prayed each night to Isis for a son!

So... now our two parallel stories come back together.

Muwet's first night in her new palace, she made sure her daughters were in their bedrooms. She retired to hers, locked the door, closed the windows, and shut the blinds. Then she poured out her heart to Isis for a solid hour. Finally satisfied, she re-opened her windows and slept.

The next morning, Muwet was excited. Maybe today was the day. She wrote out a love poem, thanking Solomon for the beautiful palace and asking him to meet her at their secret garden between the rock walls (SS 2:14). Then she began preparing to meet her lover. After thirty years of marriage, she was still infatuated with his love. This time she knew that her fervent prayers to Isis had been heard and she would conceive for him a son!

Solomon met and embraced Muwet, but without his customary cheerful smiles. He looked old (though he was only 51), as if the weight of the world were laid upon his shoulders. Muwet began expressing her gratefulness for her spectacular new palace, but Solomon cut her short. "Muwet, my dear, dear Muwet. I'm so sorry. I have failed you. I should never have allowed this. YHWH is furious with us for allowing the idols in the land. I thought they were just decorations, but YHWH told Zadok that you are worshiping them in your heart. We've got to get rid of them and cleanse your new palace, before they destroy us. I promised old Zadok that I would do it right away."

"But... But... that's impossible! How did old Zadok know? I only worshiped Isis once, last night. One time! And I had the doors and windows locked and the blinds pulled tight. Nobody could possibly have seen me."

"Muwet, I've told you, YHWH knows. He is Spirit. He sees the heart. He can even read your thoughts..."

"Oh, I know, Solomon, but He was not there. He was up at your temple where we go to worship. I know! I've seen the glory of His Spirit there many times! But He has never been anywhere near my palace."

Solomon shut his eyes. *Lord, have mercy upon our ignorance and open our eyes to Your truth*, he prayed. "Muwet, YHWH does dwell at the temple. But He is much bigger than that. Egypt's gods are all limited gods; god of the sky, god of the river, god of the desert, god of Mars, god of Venus. But YHWH is the God of everything, everyone, everywhere, and all the time. He is unlimited. Of course He sees you in your bedroom. There is no place you could go where He would not see you."

"Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't understand. I didn't want to offend YHWH. I love Him. But... but He has not given me a son for you, and I thought Isis might..."

"YHWH understands, my love. He will forgive us. But we must go to Him and repent. I told you before that He is a jealous God. He tolerates no idols, none, not even for a single prayer. We'll get rid of Isis and any other idols you have. Then I'll have a priest come to cleanse your palace by the sprinkling of the blood, and YHWH will forgive us."

"Why do you keep saying 'us'? I'm the one who got Isis from Egypt and prayed to her. You didn't even know."

"We're married. In God's eyes we are one. I'm at fault as much as you, because I didn't stop you."

Muwet bowed her head. "I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt you. I wanted to bless you with a son. I worship YHWH with you at the temple, so I was sure He'd never know about a few secret prayers to Isis at my bedside."

Solomon forgave her. They destroyed the idols and cleansed Muwet's palace as Solomon had promised Zadok. Nevertheless the doors had been opened to the demons of moral perversion (due to Rehoboam's two wives) and idolatry (due to Muwet's Egyptian idols). Solomon never succeeded in fully closing them, nor did Israel. They had given Satan occasion against them, within the law. He didn't miss his opportunities!

Solomon should have destroyed the Egyptian palace and brought Muwet back to live with him. But they both loved her new palace, so they only destroyed the bare minimum – the things they knew were idols. But the other statues, carvings, tapestries, and murals on the walls also portrayed scenes which included many Egyptian gods and goddesses. Most of those remained.

And Solomon should have prohibited the double marriage. He should have made Rehoboam choose. But he had promised he would honor Rehoboam's choice and he did not want to go back on his word in front of everyone in the palace. Besides, he knew if he did, he'd have another argument about his own many wives!

So instead of being rightfully firm with his son, he indulged him. He even took to heart some of the things Rehoboam had criticized him about. Oh, he still loved Muwet! He still met with her on warm evenings in their secret garden and enjoyed her love. But she no longer lived at the palace. His ever-growing harem now had spacious quarters, with private rooms for each of his 'princesses'. Rehoboam had pointed out the fact that of all his wives, Muwet was the only one he really knew. Well, now he'd change that. On those evenings he was not with Muwet, he began meeting with each of his other wives, personally getting to know them, learning about their culture, their families, their likes and dislikes, *and their many faiths*.

Solomon still had a huge work force. His economy depended on keeping them employed. After finishing the temple, Solomon's palace, and Muwet's Egyptian palace, he sent them off in many directions. Now they began building treasure cities, storage cities, military garrisons, even a huge stable complex for the many war horses he had purchased from Arabia. As he had learned from Egypt, he established trade routes, protected by trade cities at their junctions. One such city was Ezion-Geber at the north tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. Solomon built it up into a powerful city, with an iron smelting facility, extensive shipyards, and a major seaport for ships from the Red and Arabian Seas. His trading ships brought treasures from all around the world. It all came flooding into Israel, gold, silver, ivory, spices, exotic foods, silks, embroideries, carvings, monkeys – *and more princesses with their foreign gods*.

Logos was not happy with Solomon's compromises. Up until this point, no one had been able to stand against him. Logos had been with him everywhere he went, giving him incredible wisdom and understanding. He was admired and feared the world over. But he had become self-assured, and even a little proud. With his compromises, he lost some of his angelic covering, and Logos allowed several enemies to begin harassing him.

Do you remember General Rezon? In 1008 BC he had fled from Hadadezer after the army was decimated. He and his men had taken Damascus, where he had pretended to submit to David. He even sent a token princess to Solomon to keep him off their backs. Well, old Hadadezer was long dead. Rezon was now the king. He had become strong, and had basically taken over all of Syria, which he ruled from about 990 to 930 BC. Though he still hated Israel for what David had done during Hadadezer's reign, Rezon feigned submission until about 950 BC. Solomon had Rezon's oldest daughter in his harem, and thought all was well.

With the weakening of Solomon's angelic covering, Logos allowed Rezon to begin harassment raids on Israel from the north. At first they were small. But they became a thorn in Solomon's side.

Now, do you remember King Hadad? When David had subdued Edom, Hadad had fled to Egypt, where his son (also named Hadad) had grown up in Akhenaten's court. He had married a younger sister of Pharaoh Horemheb's queen Mutnodjmet. But he never forgot the massacre inflicted upon Edom by Joab in 1011 BC. Even though Egypt had treated him well, young Hadad took his family and returned to Edom, rebuilding his father's army there to harass Israel. He was the only king in the area who did NOT add a daughter to Solomon's harem! He became another thorn in Solomon's side. Logos left these two thorns as a discipline, to show Solomon that he needed to repent. But Solomon missed it.

Solomon sent ambassadors to both Edom and Syria, threatening military discipline if they didn't stop their raids on Israel. The ambassadors came back with word that both Edom and Syria had allied with the Hittites. Muwatalli had deceived him again! When Solomon had allowed him to flee north with his army, Muwatalli had sworn to stay out of Syria, but it was a lie. Now, with Hittite support, Edom and Syria thumbed their noses at Israel and dared Solomon to attack. He realized that without Egypt's help, he was too weak.

But when Solomon notified Seti about it, requesting Egypt's help, he learned that Seti and his army were far off to their west fighting Libyans. For the first time in his thirty year reign, Solomon was stumped. He cried out to YHWH, but got no answers. He went to Azariah, his new high priest, but he didn't yet know YHWH's voice and couldn't help him. So those two thorns in Solomon's side just continued to fester, untreated, for years.

In 950 BC, Mahalath bore Rehoboam his first son, Jeush. Suddenly his father's warning to his two wives took on meaning. They had been so young, so naïve, when they had sworn they would never compete, and would always love each other as sisters. Mahalath, who always was a bit competitive, took on the smug 'I win!' attitude. Poor Suzy was crushed. Her firstborn later that year was a daughter. She became desperate for a son.

Rehoboam didn't like the competitive attitude. Plus, they weren't nearly as much fun pregnant or nursing babies. He left them in his quarters and went out in search of other ways to have fun. Maacah (a daughter of Uriel of Gibeah and Tamar, Absalom's only daughter) found him and seduced him. (I'm sorry to put it so bluntly, but there is no nice way to tell this part of the story.) When she said she was pregnant with Rehoboam's child, he took her as his third wife. She bore him **Abijah**.

Now with three wives in his bedroom, Rehoboam was satisfied for a few years. One was usually available if the others weren't. Mahalath bore another son, Shemariah. Suzy bore a second daughter. Then Maacah bore a second son, Attai. And so it went. His bedroom soon became a war zone in his wives' competition for his love. At first that had been exciting to him, but as demons of lust gained control of his mind, his love for them turned to disgust, and he sought other lovers. Over the 20 years since marrying Mahalath and Suzy, Rehoboam took a total of 18 wives and 60 concubines. And they weren't 'political princesses' either. His life became consumed with moral perversions and sexual fantasies. In all, he fathered 28 sons and 60 daughters! It was draining his life energy and dissipating all his earlier high goals and kingly aspirations.

Solomon saw the downward spiral of his life and tried to help him. He again reminded him of all the fine teaching to which he had responded so well when he was younger. But Rehoboam's heart had become hard. He couldn't hear. Moral depravity does that, I'm afraid.

Besides, Solomon was facing temptations of his own. I hate stories with sad endings, but I cannot change what happened. How could the wisest man on the planet fall to such disgrace? He had been so careful; so pure; so holy! Other than his affair with Naamah the Ammonitess, he had been faithful and true to Muwet, and had loved her with a passion and purity that had set the gold standard for marriage throughout all Israel.

But idolatry does strange things in one's heart. Though he never admitted it, even to himself, Solomon had been deeply hurt by Muwet's worship of Isis. Their marriage had been so close, he had even forgotten that she was a foreigner. Now that obvious fact hit him flat in the face. Without any conscious decision, he began to doubt her – doubt her faith, her loyalty, and even her love. Oh, their marriage continued on. But Solomon seemed just a bit cold and aloof. Muwet couldn't help but notice.

She tried and tried to reignite the flame. But then she discovered how much time Solomon was spending getting to know his 'princesses'. Now, for the second time in her life, Muwet felt competition for her husband's love. With Naamah, she had been young and resilient, able to forgive and bounce back. But at 51, she was devastated. Now the doubts went both ways. *Was he still being faithful? Were his evening talks with his 'princesses' all so innocent while she was tucked away in her separate palace?*

It seemed only yesterday when Muwet had moved out to her new palace with her two youngest daughters. Now they, too, were married and gone, and Muwet was alone. Suddenly she felt very lonely – and very vulnerable. She wandered through her lovely rooms staring at her wall carvings, tapestries, and murals. They had once been so beautiful, but now it all seemed so hollow and vain. All she had ever really wanted was Solomon, and he was away in another palace with – what was the latest count? Muwet didn't even know. Over 160 wives plus their maids!

Muwet glanced in a mirror, suddenly realizing that she was looking old. How could she compete with those lovely young ladies in Solomon's harem? She fell into one of her deep plush carpets, sobbing. She felt like a used dishrag, now thrown into a corner and forgotten. That evening she skipped dinner and went straight to bed, determined to hold an extended pity party.

Some time later, Solomon noticed that Muwet had not been showing up for dinner. He sent an aide, who came back saying she was sick. Solomon walked to her palace to see her. She lay in bed, looking very weak.

He called for his own personal physician, who checked her out. He pulled Solomon aside to give his prognosis. "She's dying. She hasn't eaten for a long time – over a week is my guess. Worse, she hasn't drunk anything, either. She is extremely dehydrated. But worst of all, she seems to have lost the will to live. She won't eat or drink. She won't talk to me. She listens with a dull, uninterested expression on her face. I think she has a broken heart. Medicines can't help that. There is nothing more I can do. But you are her husband. If you spend more time with her, talk with her, feed her and bring her water yourself, she may recover."

So Solomon got Muwet some fruit juice. He tenderly held her head up and wet her lips with it, then kissed her. She tried to turn her head away, but he kept at it, gently, lovingly, until he finally got her to drink the juice. "I love you, Muwet. I'm so sorry I was not here when you got sick. How can I make it up to you?"

"You don't care about me! You've got 160 other women prettier than I! You didn't even miss me!"

"I do miss you! I swear, I am absolutely faithful to you! I only spend time with my princesses to get to know them, so I can be sensitive to their needs. They are like daughters to me. It is only you I truly love!"

"Then why did it take a week for you to even notice that I was not at your dinner table?"

"A week?" Solomon thought back frantically. How had he gotten so busy? "I am terribly sorry, my love. You're so adventurous and independent I thought you wanted to be away. That's why I gave you your own palace! But you know I'll meet you at our secret garden – anytime!"

So they kissed and made up. Solomon began slowly nursing Muwet back to health as his doctor had said. But Satan had his foot in the door, and he wasn't giving up that easily. It was the beginning of the winter rainy season. He sent storm after storm, with record-breaking cold. Muwet had a weakened immune system. She developed a cough. That developed into bronchitis, which got into her lungs and turned into pneumonia. She passed away on the night of our December 20th, 948 BC, her 52nd birthday.

Solomon was utterly devastated, inconsolable. All Israel mourned with him as they buried Muwet. He cried out to YHWH, but the heavens were like brass. The priests held no answer, no word from God for him. His counselors were afraid to talk to him. Suddenly everything he had accomplished all his life seemed meaningless. It was all vanity. Futility. All his incredible wealth, his wisdom, his power, his honor among the nations! He would have given it all away in a heartbeat to have Muwet back.

Solomon went to his longtime secret counselor, his cook. She wisely suggested he write out all his woes in a letter to YHWH. So he began to write. "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity, says the preacher. I have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. I set my mind to explore by wisdom all that mankind has done. I increased in wisdom, and magnified myself in knowledge and understanding over all who were before me, but I found only madness and folly. Finally I realized that all this was like a simpleton chasing the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and in great knowledge is great pain. So I determined to test myself with pleasure. I ate the world's tastiest delicacies and drank the finest wines. I planted vineyards, parks, gardens, and fruit trees. I built lavish palaces and treasure cities. I owned vast flocks of sheep, goats, horses, and camels, plus countless slaves to tend them. I amassed great wealth in silver and gold and all the exotic riches of the Far East. I gathered dancers, poets, singers, jesters, and lovely women all around me. But after all that, I said of laughter, 'It is but madness,' and of pleasure, 'So what did that accomplish?' The wise man and the fool both die and are soon forgotten. Thus I hated life, for all that I had achieved just grieved me. It was all pure vanity, like a simpleton chasing the wind."

Logos finally met him in his deepest despair. He wrote. "There is nothing better than to eat and drink and enjoy the labor set before you, for it is all from the hand of God. To the good person, it is God who gives wisdom, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering up for the one who is good in His sight – and such futility that is, too!"

Months went by. Solomon's dark poems poured out of his heart of hopelessness. In the process, the healing began. Solomon's scribes began collecting his poems, to try to put them in some kind of order. This became the book of *Ecclesiastes*. At first, they thought Solomon was going crazy, and feared he would kill himself in despair.

But when they got some less pessimistic poems, they realized it was all part of his grieving, and healing, process. So they mixed the lighter poems in with the dark ones. *"There is a proper time for everything... and everything is appropriate in its time. But only what God does will remain forever. So put eternity in your heart, for one hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and chasing the wind! There is one fate for the righteous and the wicked, for the clean and the unclean, for the good man, and the sinner. For every man has the same thing hidden in his heart: it is full of evil and insanity throughout their lives. Then they go to the grave, where their memory is forgotten and they no longer have any share in all that is done under the sun. What vanity and futility! So, young man, eat your bread in happiness; drink your wine with a cheerful heart. God likes that. Enjoy your life with the woman you love, all the days of this fleeting life God has given you. This is God's reward for the toil He sets before you. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your heart. For life is so short. All your activity and wisdom will abruptly cease when you go to the grave. For the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the clever, nor wealth to the wise, nor favor to the worthy. Time and chance shall overtake us all. In a moment it is all caught by the wind and blown away."*

Toward the end, the scribes gathered Solomon's later poems and proverbs to reach some kind of conclusion. "Light is pleasant. It is good for the eyes to see the sun. If a man should live for many years, let him rejoice in them all. But remember too that days of darkness will come, when all will seem like futility and foolishly chasing the wind. So rejoice, young man, in your childhood. Let your heart be happy during the days of young manhood. Follow the impulses of your heart and the desire of your eyes. Love life! Yet remember that God will bring you into judgment for everything you do. So don't let yourself get all bent out of shape by the vexation or pain of your body. Childhood strength, the prime of life, is so fleeting. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, before your body fails you and you stare death in the face. Remember Him before your body returns to the dust of the earth and your spirit returns to the God who gave it. Will YHWH then also look back at your life to inquire with me, 'Is it not all vanity of vanities?' Therefore the preacher concludes, 'All is vanity and chasing after the wind.'"

But the scribes were never happy with that. It sounded too hopeless. Years later, they added their own ending. "When all has been heard, the conclusion is this: Fear God and keep His commandments. For God will bring every act, secret or not, to judgment, whether good or evil."

Satan worked hard to destroy Solomon during this dark period. He nearly succeeded. But Solomon was not the wisest person on the planet for nothing. He rejected the madness that comes with total despair, knowing it would lead to suicide. He rejected the temptation to call out to false gods when YHWH didn't answer him. He rejected the urge to lash out in anger – that terrible temptation to take out his torment on others.

Seeing the fall of his son into immorality, he knew what would happen if he ever opened his own door to impurity with his many princesses. He refused that, too! Satan could not believe it. 160 lovely ladies and Solomon would not use even one to quell his loneliness. He was beginning to really know them. They were people, individuals, each infinitely precious in God's sight – not objects to use for his own needs or pleasures. Satan was disgusted. How could one man be so... so damnably holy?

It was time to take the gloves off. The word of Muwet's death got out to the surrounding nations and city-states. Satan kicked all his demons into mandatory overtime, convincing every king for five hundred miles around to send Solomon another princess or two along with their condolences. Suddenly hundreds of young ladies, each lovelier than the last, came flooding to the palace. Each had high hopes to replace Muwet as Solomon's chief queen. They wore the most alluring of garments, the most beguiling of smiles, the finest of perfumes, and the most exotic of hairstyles and jewelry. Satan ground his teeth in diabolical anger, vowing that Solomon would fall or he would turn in his adversary badge and take up knitting!

Solomon did not fall. He grew stronger. Though he politely accepted the gifts, renewed the alliances, and kindly installed the princesses into his growing harem, yet he did not sin by indulging in immorality or idolatry with them. Satan was utterly astounded. The air was blue all around from his cursing. "By heaven, I shall find a way..." he stopped. "Of course. These are just young princesses – mere babes – dumb blonds, air-head brunettes, spaced-out red-heads, sensuous bodies with fluff for brains. They'll never tempt Solomon. I need a mature woman, worldly-wise, experienced in life, full of wisdom and knowledge like himself. Not just a princess – a queen, wealthy, regal, smart, one who can appreciate Solomon's achievements." He ordered his demons to search out the wisest queen on the planet, to tempt the wisest king on the planet.

They found her. She was Nikulis, queen of Sheba. (The kingdom of the Sabeans on the southwestern tip of Arabia had been founded by Sheba, son of Joktan, grandson of Eber.) She was perfect: smart, mature, beautiful, rich, regal, with a vast wealth of experiences and deep love of learning. Now, how to get her to go. She was responsible and faithful in her kingdom, and needed a bit of push. Satan determined to pull out all the stops.

Solomon's trading ships went through Sabean ports. Queen Nikulis, of course, maintained a watchful eye on all traders. It was pretty easy for Satan to get Nikulis to strike up conversations with the Hebrew traders, and to inspire them to boast about Solomon. After hearing a few times about Solomon's great wisdom and riches, she began to get interested, and started to interrogate all Hebrew traders. When a certain Captain Jon came on a wealth-laden ship headed toward Ezion-Geber, she invited him to her court for a few days to tell her more.

On Solomon's side, it was tougher. But he had lost some of his spiritual covering due to his compromises. So with a lot of careful work, Satan was able to enter his dreams. Night after night, he painted vivid pictures in Solomon's mind of Queen Nikulis, her court, and her throne room. Solomon was beginning to recover from his depression, so Satan inflamed his lonely heart with desire for a queen to replace Muwet; an exotic queen; one that would be his equal in wisdom.

Satan worked so slyly, Solomon fell for it, thinking those were his own thoughts and dreams. He searched his harem for such a woman but alas; all he found there were powder puffs and space cadets. So he began asking his trading captains if, in all their travels, they had ever seen a queen to match his visions.

Satan had Captain Jon back by then. Jon had talked at length with Queen Nikulis. He raved about her – her wisdom, her exotic court, her marvelous throne – just like in Solomon's dreams! So Solomon composed a letter of introduction / invitation, and sent it with Captain Jon.

Then he began preparations. He carefully sketched out the throne he had seen in his dreams (as confirmed by Captain Jon). He told his finest craftsmen to make it, with ivory, gold, and precious jewels. He modified his own court to match hers, with tropical plants, colorful parrots and birds of paradise, monkeys, slender columns with graceful hangings, murals of natural splendors on his walls, rich tapestries, and exotic rugs. He filled the air with a subtle fragrance of tropical incense. He placed the new throne up on the dais, the same level as his own, as fitting only for a chief queen. Frankly, Solomon really got into it. Logos was disgusted. Had he forgotten so soon his tragedy with Muwet's palace statues and idols?

Satan made sure Queen Nikulis got the message, and that her passions were inflamed with desire to see this great and wise king she was hearing so much about. She immediately set about to answer his invitation. Though her husband was dead, her son was now old enough to rule in her absence for a time. Her kingdom was rather wealthy due to her wise and caring leadership, so she prepared a gift with generous samples of this wealth, including gold, silver, precious jewels, and spices. She brought servants, her private guard, and her personal maids. They all set out on a large camel caravan headed for Jerusalem.

Solomon heard news of the caravan. He was ready. So was Queen Nikulis. She had prepared a list of questions to test Solomon's world-famous wisdom. Solomon sent his cavalry (12,000 horsemen!) to escort her past the land of Edom, where Hadad was still looking for ways to insult him. But Solomon did not come himself. He wanted to meet her in his re-designed throne room.

Solomon was excited! This was what he needed to take his mind off the tragedy of Muwet's death. All the land rejoiced that his mourning was past and his depression finally cured. The closer Queen Nikulis got to Jerusalem, the greater the crowds of joyful people out to greet her. They expressed their love for Solomon, and their delight that Queen Nikulis had come to visit him. And not a few told her interpreters of Queen Muwet's tragic death and King Solomon's desperate loneliness, and hinted shyly at Solomon's immediate need for a chief queen to replace her. The hints were not lost on Queen Nikulis.

She was overwhelmed. Never had she seen a land so loyal to their king, so kind and loving to each other, so happy, so prosperous, and so welcoming to an alien queen. Ezion-Geber was amazing. But Jerusalem was astounding. Its wealth and splendor were almost unsurpassed (except possibly in Egypt). She was ushered past Muwet's palace, David's palace, Solomon's spectacular temple, right up to the great stone steps at the door of Solomon's new palace.

Solomon's cavalry lined up on either side, holding back the cheering crowds. Queen Nikulis dismounted from her camel. Thirty colorful pages announced her presence with a dazzling trumpet fanfare. She nodded to her maids and bodyguards, who fell in behind her as she climbed the stairs. She half expected to see King Solomon in the open doorway, but no. She entered alone. Again she expected to see him in the massive columned foyer, but again, no. Hundreds of impeccably-dressed courtiers bowed low and motioned her on toward the great hall. The heavy doors were closed, with four huge armed guards at each door. They too bowed to her and beckoned her forward, opening the big twin doors only as she approached.

Queen Nikulis gasped, both hands over her mouth. For there in front of her were all the sights, sounds, and smells of her own throne room, except five times larger and more spectacular, complete with her own throne on the dais at the front! And there, finally, was King Solomon himself, dressed in royal splendor. He stood on the dais beside her throne, bowing slightly, his arm outstretched in invitation for her to come up and take her throne.

Queen Nikulis staggered back in astonishment. *Was Solomon a magician? How in the world... How did he do all this?* She slowly walked in, eyes wide with wonder. All her questions now seemed so trivial. She was sure he had never seen her court. How had Solomon duplicated it so perfectly? Yet not perfectly, for everything here was even bigger, richer, and more splendid than hers.

She reached the front. There she stopped, overawed. There were six steps up to the dais. A great stone lion sat on either side of each step; twelve life-sized stone lions, with ivory teeth and rubies for eyes. Solomon kindly stepped down and took her arm, to gently guide her to her throne. Only then did he sit in his own throne beside her. Her throne was ivory, inlaid with jewels and gold filigree. But his was pure gold, with a gold lion forming each armrest. As he sat, he gave her a welcoming smile and introduced himself. "I am Solomon, son of David and king of Israel, by the rich grace of YHWH our God. Welcome to my court! Welcome to your royal courtiers as well!" He waved to her retinue, still filling the great hall.

"Now, you have a list of questions. Ask whatever is on your mind, and I will answer it, for it is YHWH my God who gives me wisdom. In the reverential fear of YHWH is found all knowledge and understanding."

Queen Nikulis got out her list and scanned it. Then she stopped. "How did you know I had a list of questions? How did you know what my throne looked like? How did you know what my court was like? You've never been there. How did you *do* all this?" She half stood, waving an arm around the room. Her voice squeaked on the word 'do'.

Solomon smiled broadly, his great beard spreading a little at the base to look even larger. "I already answered that one. It is YHWH my God who gives me wisdom. He showed me in my dreams all I needed to know to prepare for you. But dear queen, that question was not on your list. I insist you ask the questions on your list, for you might not sleep in peace tonight unless you do."

It was surreal. A tame monkey jumped on her lap and threw his arms around her chest as if he had been her very own pet. A brightly hued parrot flew overhead, landed in a potted tree nearby, and chatted cheerily in Hebrew. Queen Nikulis began to read the first question on her list, except halfway through, she stopped, as the incongruity hit her like a ton of bricks. Of course the parrot was speaking Hebrew; that was the language of the land. How then was she here talking, and being answered so freely, in her own language? She looked around for a hidden translator, then at Solomon beside her.

"You wonder that I speak your language?" Solomon answered her unasked question. "It is only fitting that a great queen such as yourself be addressed in her own language. Shall the king of Israel honor you with any less? But if you wish, I can address you in any language that you choose. For I know Aramaic, Egyptian, Libyan, Nubian, Phoenician, Assyrian, Chaldean, Median, Persian, Hittite, Arzawian, or whatever you wish." He was gambling a little that she would stick to Arabic, for though he was fluent in six languages, and pretty good on six more, he was a bit weak on the others. But his spoken Arabic was excellent, especially after two years talking with Suzy while helping Rehoboam teach her Hebrew.

Nikulis was shaking her head in wonder. "Egyptian? That's a tough language. I wrestled with it for years, and even now have not really mastered the pronunciation."

Solomon shifted instantly into flawless Egyptian. "If you would like, we can only speak Egyptian. I would love to help you with your pronunciation. Indeed, it is one of my favorite languages. Though I must admit that in my first few months I had trouble with the pronunciation as well. It was early in my reign, when I was making alliances with all the surrounding nations. When I reached Egypt, I mispronounced 'royal alliance' to make it sound like 'large bathtub', right there in the Pharaoh's court. That got a lot of laughs, believe me!"

"Oh my god! You do speak Egyptian!" Queen Nikulis exclaimed, still in Arabic. "No, no. I'm sorry. I thought you were boasting. Please, let's stick to Arabic."

So they went through her list of questions in Arabic. They really were quite good questions, like how to best calculate the length of the year, how to build structures to withstand the periodic earthquakes, how to detect if a stranger is lying to you, how to guard one's nation against the plague, how to defeat traitors or assassins, and how to discern between true love and selfish lust.

Solomon answered all her questions with ease, as if they were but trivial to him. Each one led to questions behind the question. He would gently point them out and answer them, too. They enjoyed themselves so much that they even forgot about dinner time, until an enterprising servant tempted them with two bowls of fragrant soup as an appetizer. Then they retired to the great dining hall, where a thousand happy people feasted together.

Rehoboam with his many wives had already left the new palace and taken over David's old palace. Solomon had planned to host Queen Nikulis up in Rehoboam's apartment, which was spacious and beautiful. But she had too many attendants, so he changed his tactics. Muwet's palace had been cleaned out and restored; he decided to put them up there. So right after dinner he led her to his apartment, and showed her his life-size painting of Muwet, made years ago while she had first moved to her own palace. "This is my beloved Egyptian Queen Muwet, my first and only true queen these last 32 years. Alas, she recently passed on to YHWH's realm, but the palace I made for her is clean and prepared for your use, if you would like. Your retinue will all fit comfortably there. If you wish to stay here with me instead, you may, but I'll have to split you up into several groups."

"She's so beautiful! I would just love to stay in Muwet's palace. We saw it coming here, but I have not yet seen inside. It must be spectacular! But how did..."

Solomon put a finger to his lips and shook his head. "Shhh! I must swear you to secrecy before I can answer your question."

“What? I haven’t asked my question yet. How can you possibly know what I’m thinking?”

“Swear to me by YHWH you will tell no one.”

“Okay. I swear by YHWH. Now, what is my question?”

“You wondered in your heart how a great king and queen, who loved each other more than life itself, could bear to live in separate palaces.”

“Oh my god! You did it again! You read my heart like it was an open book!”

“No, dear Queen Nikulis. Not your god. I told you at the beginning, it is YHWH my God who gives wisdom. He knows the secrets of men’s hearts. He tells me what I need to know about you. Please, out of deference to me, don’t say, ‘Oh my god!’ anymore. If you must swear, swear by YHWH, God of Israel. If you would like, I will teach you about Him, so He can be your God as well.”

“Mmm... YHWH must be powerful, to see into hearts. I would like very much to learn about Him. But why did you want me to swear?”

“Because my answer is secret. Even my builders didn’t know, for I finished it myself. I’ll show you...” He told his attendants to escort the rest of her retinue to the palace, then he led Queen Nikulis into his bedroom and locked the door. “Fear not!” he said in answer to the doubts rising in her mind. “I swear by YHWH that I will treat your royal person with the utmost respect. But you have the question, and I have determined since before you came to answer every question you have and hold nothing back. Come with me.” He led her to the far side of his huge bed, and pulled on a hidden latch. It opened before them a secret passage, with stairs down to a rear entry. Once outside, they found themselves in a narrow passageway between two high rock walls, with flowers hanging down the walls. After a pleasant stroll, it widened out and became a flower garden. A gazebo stood beside a pool, fed by a waterfall from the wall. A peaceful stream ran through the garden. Flowers were strewn everywhere in wild profusion, shaded by fig trees and date palms. Their fragrance filled the air. Large carp swam in the pool. Colorful birds flitted among the trees and flower bushes. A love couch was half-hidden along the back of the gazebo. *No words were spoken. Queen Nikulis could not have missed its significance.*

They continued their stroll. After a few more minutes Solomon unlocked the secret entry to Muwet’s palace and they slipped in to her huge, lavishly decorated bedroom. Solomon closed up the paneling and looked at Nikulis. “Did I answer your question?” He smiled.

She nodded, speechless, her heart beating wildly and a flush rising to her face. Solomon pretended not to notice. “We must go out to the art room before the others arrive. No one else must know of this entry. Even my two trusted servants who tend the garden don’t know of this entry.”

He led her out. They were innocently discussing the lovely wall hangings as the others began coming in. The sunset colored the murals and tapestries in flaming reds and golds. They got their guests comfortably situated, made sure their needs were met, and left them for the night. Only the queen slept in Muwet’s lavish bedroom. Her attendants slept in the girl’s bedrooms and the foyer.

Queen Nikulis had only planned to stay a month, so she kept Solomon busy, plying him with questions which he patiently, lovingly answered. He took her everywhere, both throughout the palace and throughout Jerusalem, hiding nothing that she wanted to see. He always behaved like the perfect gentleman that he was. But they didn’t use, and avoided even talking about, the secret passage. They both had felt the powerful pull of that love couch in the garden gazebo.

That Sabbath, Solomon took her to the temple. They watched while Azariah and the priests performed the morning sacrifice and sprinkled the blood to purify the people. When it was all over, they walked together up the great stone staircase, to stand between the bronze pillars and gaze into the open door. Queen Nikulis was once again overwhelmed! The glory of YHWH still blazed from the open door in those days. With legs too weak to stand, Nikulis fell to her knees before YHWH and bowed her face to the ground. She was there a long time before she even noticed Solomon kneeling there beside her, worshiping.

Satan was at the door to the throne room, screaming for admittance. Logos came to the door. “You are no longer permitted here. You’ve proven that you despise wisdom, so I have nothing more to say to you. Begone.”

“Wait! Wait! Hear me out! It’s not fair! You’re not being just! You’re violating your own Law! If You don’t hear me out, the universe will cease to exist!”

“Okay, Satan. You have thirty seconds to tell how I am violating My own Law. Go.”

“There is a foreigner in Your temple. She’s mine. An idolater. I prepared her to tempt Solomon according to Your Law. He hasn’t yet fallen to her temptations, but he will. I’m sure of it. Except now she’s in the temple, bowing before Your glory! As everyone knows, that’s not lawful! She should be slain by the holy fire of Your presence! The sprinkling of the blood doesn’t apply to her. It is only for the sins of Your people Israel. I know the law. Foreigners are not permitted in the temple!”

“And you care that I’ve not slain her? That doesn’t sound like you, Satan. How could you use her to tempt Solomon if I slew her?”

“I’ve finally got Solomon just where I want him. But if Nikulis repents and turns to You, then all is lost!”

“And you’re worried that she might turn to Me and repent if she beholds My glory in My temple?”

“Yes. Exactly.”

“And that is why I have not slain her. I see her heart. She loves wisdom and understanding; she longs for true love and peace. Her heritage may be idolater but her heart is Israelite. Could you not see that when you chose her to do your dirty work?” Satan fled, raging. He had to get them back to that secret garden before she repented and gave her heart to YHWH. Over the next few months, he tried every trick in the book to get them back there. Queen Nikulis was certainly willing, even eager. But she was too much of a lady to initiate the subject. King Solomon stood firm. He would not violate this precious woman who had come to him for wisdom. Oh, he felt the temptation! It came so strongly upon him at times that he cried out in his soul to God for strength to withstand it! Logos was very pleased. He answered Solomon’s prayer, pouring out His grace.

For many hours each day they sat together on their thrones, talking. Solomon indeed hid nothing from her, even telling her about his princesses and how he treated them. Of course she wanted to meet them, so Solomon introduced them – all of them. Including their maids, there were almost a thousand. It took a week. He knew each of their names, who their maids were, who their royal father was, and how they had come to him. He told Nikulis about each one; their likes and dislikes, their favorite foods, their native culture, and their gods. Here Solomon’s phenomenal memory stood him in good stead, for he never once failed to keep them straight. He sometimes would chat happily with them in their own language, then interpret for Queen Nikulis. After each interview he would ask them, “Please tell the queen, have I ever treated you poorly, or taken advantage of you, or abused you, or forced you, or hurt or molested you, or done anything to you that I would not do to my own beloved daughters?” And in each case they would answer him, “Oh, no, sir. Never. Our own fathers would not have treated us so well. I feel so grateful to be one of your precious princesses.”

A bit later, Nikulis posed an unexpected question. “Solomon, why do they all still worship their own gods? I would think they would all be worshipping YHWH!”

“True. I’ve not taught them about YHWH. I wanted to get to know them first as they are, learn about their own culture and heritage, before I try to convert them to mine. These princesses are my ‘political lovers’. They are each here due to an alliance with a foreign power. I not only want to keep them happy, I also want to keep their father happy and his nation happy. I’m not sure how I could do that if I converted them all to YHWH. Can you imagine what might happen to my alliance if one reported back to her father that I was trying to force her to change gods?”

It was a lame answer, and Queen Nikulis saw right through it. For the first time, Solomon had answered the outward question *while avoiding the question behind the question*. Nikulis pounced on it.

“Yet you are teaching me about YHWH. Do you not love them enough to do the same? You don’t have to force them – you didn’t have to force me! Just show them, like you showed me! Of all that I have learned since I came here (and that’s a lot), learning about YHWH is the best.” She shook her head, thinking about all that she’d experienced since she had come. “Solomon, O Solomon! The fantastic reports I heard in my own land about your power, your wealth, your wisdom... your majesty! I could not believe them until my own eyes had seen. Yet now that I’ve seen, I realize that not even the half was told me! You far exceed in wisdom and prosperity the reports I heard. How blessed are you – how blessed are your princesses, your servants, and your citizens who come to hear your wisdom. Blessed be YHWH your God, who delights in you to set you on the throne of Israel. Because YHWH loves Israel, therefore He made you Israel’s king, for in you resides His own nature: both His justice and His righteousness.”

Queen Nikulis had already stayed three times longer than she’d expected. She kept thinking of new questions to ask. But they both knew it was time to part. The next day when they were alone on their two thrones, Solomon asked, “Nikulis my dear, I have answered your questions. I’ve withheld nothing from you these past three months. But you have withheld from me. One question remains, deep within your heart, that you have not yet dared to ask.”

There was a long pause. Nikulis got up slowly from her throne to stand in front of Solomon. Satan was screaming in one ear, and his demon of lust was screaming in the other. But no. She remained the lady. She held out both hands, and Solomon, still seated, took them. “I cannot tell you what is in my heart. It is too much even for me to bear. But my heart is open to you. You’ve read me like an open book from the moment I first entered your door. You tell me the question that is in my heart.”

“Okay. When you first came, your question was, *how did I do it*. How did I know about your throne, your court, even your secret desires. But after I showed you Muwet’s palace and garden, your question changed. Now your question is, *why did I do it – and what do I want from you*.”

Nikulis nodded, trembling. *How did this incredible man get such perception?* She waited for him to continue, not daring to voice a response. His eyes closed, then opened to gaze again into hers. “I vowed to withhold nothing from you. Now I bare my heart. I’ve just lost a precious queen, the finest queen any king has ever known. I am lonely. The ‘why’ is simple. I want you to be my wife. If you accept my offer, that throne is yours. The love garden will remain our secret forever. All my princesses are powder puffs. You are the only one I have ever met wise enough, good enough, and lovely enough to take Muwet’s place as my queen.”

“Yes!” Satan yelled to his chief demon prince. “I think we’ve got ‘em. Now reel ‘em in. Fast. Don’t give ‘em time to even think about our Enemy.”

Queen Nikulis staggered at the proposal. Her legs felt like spaghetti. She might have fallen if Solomon had not been holding both her hands. But he was sensitive to her feelings, and he held her firmly, encouraging her. “There is no hurry, my dear. If you wish, we can talk about it later. Shall we discuss something else for a while?”

“No!” Satan screamed. “Now! Now!” He was hopping with eagerness. “Don’t give them time to think about other things! They might go back to talking about the Enemy! They are so close!”

Nikulis was swept along by the urgency of Satan’s temptation. But Solomon was not. He still had enough spiritual covering to block the majority of the demonic harassment from getting through. But he, too, had been feeling the powerful sensual draw. It was not so much Satan, but his own body that was urging him to pull her down into his lap and seduce her. He did as he was long accustomed to doing in such cases; he cried out to YHWH in his soul, and instantly received grace to remain firm.

Queen Nikulis half hoped Solomon would pull her into his lap and seduce her. She would have given in, gladly. Her body was eager, and her brain on fire. But when he suggested discussing something else for a bit, she took a deep breath, and her mind cleared. “Yes...” She suddenly remembered what Solomon had told her about YHWH’s holiness and hatred of immorality. “Thank you. I would like to wait on that decision for a while. I think I ought to clear up my relationship to YHWH before I decide on a relationship with you.”

“Nooooooooo...!” Satan howled, lashing out in anger against his nearest demon, who happened to be his chief prince of lust. He went flying head over tail; a lesser demon might have been killed by the blow.

Solomon turned her throne to squarely face his own, and sat her down. Then, sitting back to relax, he smiled. “Queen Nikulis, you keep saying that my wisdom amazes you. But now your wisdom amazes me! You are very wise to insist on a relationship with my God before deciding on a relationship with me. Nothing could be more important. And actually, I can help you with that, for I already know quite a bit about your relationship with YHWH.”

“You saw me worshiping Him in the temple.”

“Yes, but I saw much more than that. I saw the holy fear and reverential awe in your eyes as you beheld YHWH’s glory. I saw the repentance in your heart when you heard about His holiness. I saw the joy radiating from your face when you listened to His promises. I saw the eagerness in your mind as you received His wisdom. I saw the delight in your thoughts when you learned about His law. And I saw the longing in your gaze as we discussed all His blessings upon me and upon Israel. But it is what I did not see that impressed me the most. Did you know, foreigners are not allowed in the temple?”

“What? You brought me there each Sabbath!”

“I did. Yet you live. What I did not see, is the fire of the presence of YHWH blazing out and consuming you for violating His holy temple.”

“He would do that? You risked...”

“Hold on, my dear. I’m not that careless. Before you ever came I prayed at length about you; about what I would do if you asked to see the temple. Everyone wants to see it, you know, but the rules are quite strict; foreigners are never permitted. YHWH answered my prayer by saying, ‘Answer her whatever she asks. Show her whatever she wants to see.’ I asked a second time specifically about the temple. He said, ‘Show her, with My love.’ I asked a third time, this time requesting your protection. His response was, ‘Nikulis is Mine – a true Israelite in heart. I swear by My holy name YHWH to protect her so that no one, from Azariah the high priest to the keeper at the gate, even questions her right to enter My holy temple.’ Now tell me, did anyone question your right to be there?”

“Well, no. Nobody said a word. In fifteen visits!”

“There, you see. So I know that YHWH loves you. He already considers you one of His own. He accepts your repentance. He cleansed you with the blood of the lamb just like any other true Israelite, and adopted you in the family of Israel. Your relationship with YHWH is already settled in His heart. It only remains for you to accept Him in your own heart, acknowledge Him as your God, and renounce the idols you once knew.”

Nikulis was ready for this moment. She understood. Her response was immediate. “I accept YHWH into my heart. He is my God, now and forever. And I now renounce as totally false every other god I’ve ever known.”

The two smiled into each other’s eyes, not hearing the bloodcurdling scream of rage as Satan felt the pain of his defeat and fled. Again he re-assigned his demons. “We almost succeeded. We came so close! Next time we’ll get him. Find me another queen, even wiser and more lovely than Nikulis. But this time make sure she is so completely committed to my ways that she cannot be turned by our Enemy! I had no idea He would allow her into the temple! We will not make that mistake again!”

Solomon and Nikulis dined together, and separated for the night. For the first time since he had showed her the love couch in the gazebo, they were not tempted to meet there under cover of darkness. Knowing Solomon to be an early riser, Queen Nikulis returned at dawn to knock quietly at his door. “I have prayed at length to YHWH. He has now given me peace in my heart. I am ready to discuss your proposal whenever you wish.”

But Solomon was not the wisest man on the planet for nothing. He knew, just by the tone of her voice. “You have rejected me.”

“O Solomon. I love you dearly, more than I could ever imagine loving any man! You have taught me, blessed me, encouraged me, enriched my life. You have astounded me with your great wisdom and knowledge, perception and discernment. You first took away all my pretenses, lies, and false gods; then you replaced them with Truth, as you planted YHWH, the God of all Creation, in my heart. There is nothing in this world I want more than to accept your proposal. I’d gladly give up my family, my people, even my kingdom for you.”

“But...?” Solomon knew there had to be a ‘but’ in there somewhere. His shoulders sagged.

“I don’t want to hurt you. I’ve wrestled with how to tell you... I... I still love you. I want to always remain your friend. I want to visit you each year; to come and sit on this throne next to you, and learn from your wisdom. But what would you do if you wanted something very much and YHWH said ‘No’? He is the sovereign God! He gets to say ‘No’. You would obey Him. I know it. I too must obey.”

“You’re sure He said ‘No’? You’ve learned to hear His voice so quickly? Have you confirmed it? The adversary can imitate His voice if you’re not careful. Maybe you need to wait on Him some more.” It was a halfhearted effort. Solomon knew she was right.

“You taught me to know His voice. It is consistent with all of His law and His character. He showed me that I am responsible for a great people who very much need Him and the testimony I bear. I would be selfish to leave them for the adversary to consume. YHWH loves my people, Solomon! He told me He has many precious souls among the Sabeans! I... I am deeply sorry.”

After breakfast Nikulis gave Solomon the treasures she had brought from her land. In turn, Solomon gave her the gifts from Israel which he had seen her admiring as they toured the land. But she insisted he keep the throne, so it would be there whenever she came to visit. She did take the talking parrot, to practice her Hebrew. And she took Mick the affectionate monkey, saying, “Every time he hugs me, I’ll wish it were you instead!”

Her camels were packed. For the first time, Solomon and Nikulis allowed themselves the luxury of a true hug, with her face buried in his great beard. Solomon wrapped his strong arms tightly around her trembling frame. “Good-bye, my love!” he whispered. “You are leaving behind an empty throne, and an empty heart.”

“Good-bye, Solomon, faithful son of YHWH! You have filled my heart with Him. For that I will be forever grateful. I will pray. YHWH will send you another queen even more worthy than I to fill Muwet’s place in your heart. He loves you. He will not leave you lonely.”

“Now you are teaching me!”

“No, my love. It is YHWH who gives wisdom...”

Satan found the one he wanted among the Cushites of Ethiopia. There a tall, stately Nubian queen named Makeda reigned with her husband King Mark over a large area in what is now northern Ethiopia, Eritrea and south-eastern Sudan. Their capital city was Sembel, on the banks of the river Anseba, near what is now Asmara (the capital of Eritrea). It was a land rich in natural resources, both plants and animals. Though loosely controlled by the Sabeans from across the Red Sea, they had given it enough independence to become wealthy and strong. Queen Makeda had come from a royal line of warrior queens descended from Cush. She and King Mark ruled cruelly, by fear and threats, caring not one whit for her people. Any disobedience was punished by mutilation or death.

Queen Makeda was half Cushite and half Sabean, for her mother was sister to the prior king of Sheba. Being an athlete, she kept her lovely body in very good shape. She was smart, shrewd, worldly-wise, and a first-class actress, dancer, and singer. She was also utterly pagan to the core. Makeda collected gods like Solomon collected princesses. It was a hobby with her; all the gods of Egypt and Nubia weren’t enough. She was always looking for more. So to Satan, Queen Makeda was the perfect follow-up to Queen Nikulis. He immediately inspired her to cross the Red Sea for a visit with her cousin. By the time Nikulis returned from Israel, Makeda was there waiting for her.

As you can imagine, Queen Nikulis was raving about Solomon and his wealthy kingdom from the moment she got back to her court. Makeda was quite interested. When Nikulis began telling everyone about Solomon’s God, YHWH, Makeda really got interested. She began asking questions. Her cousin happily shared her experiences, and her new faith. By the end of the week Makeda had learned all about Solomon, his wealth and wisdom, his fascinating God YHWH, *and his need for a chief queen.*

Nikulis insisted that her cousin confess YHWH, and Makeda was quite happy to do that. As I said, she loved to collect gods. This new one enchanted her. She had a little trouble with the bit about renouncing her other gods, but she put on a good act. Nikulis was too excited to notice. Soon Makeda was preparing to return home with another interesting God in her collection.

This was too easy. Nikulis was dubious. It sure had not been that easy for her. “Makeda, you don’t really know YHWH yet. You haven’t seen His awesome glory. You haven’t heard His promises, or the mighty deeds He did for Israel. Now that you accepted Him as your God, I urge you to visit Solomon. Ask him to take you to the temple. Meet YHWH face to face. I swear, you’ll be so overwhelmed that you’ll never worship another god! Tell Solomon I sent you. He can talk about YHWH for days. I know he’ll treat you well. Solomon is a real gentleman. Never once did he make a pass at me, in three months!”

Now, that sounded like an intriguing challenge! But no. “Thank you, cousin Nikulis. I may take you up on that later. But for now, I’ve got to get back to Ethiopia. My country needs me, as you well know.”

“No, your country needs YHWH! You’ve had a tough time keeping your people in line. I hear the news! I heard you’ve had a lot of unrest, fighting, anger... I heard your military had to crush a few rebellions recently. Don’t think I don’t know about the ones you’ve beaten or executed. All of that will improve, I swear, after your people get to know YHWH! He is love, goodness, righteousness, law, and peace. And He is powerful! No one can resist Him. Please! I’ll even write you a letter of introduction.”

“Nah. Israel is a long way and I’ve really got to get back. Maybe later.” She retired for the night, planning to go home the next day. But during the night, the adversary entered her dream. By morning, her plans had changed. “Nikulis, I prayed to YHWH last night. He spoke to me in my dreams. He told me to go visit Solomon, just like you asked. So... could I get that letter of introduction?”

Normally Nikulis would have been skeptical. She knew Makeda to be an excellent liar, to correspond with her first-rate acting skills. But she really wanted to believe that YHWH was leading her new convert, as He had led her so recently. You tend to believe what you want to believe. She wrote the letter. After thanking Solomon profusely for his kindness, Nikulis added. “I send this letter by my cousin Makeda, queen of Ethiopia. She has accepted YHWH as her God, but she really needs to know Him better before she returns home. Her country is pagan and filled with violence. They all need YHWH! Please teach her as you taught me. YHWH will lead you.” She signed it ‘with love’.

Meanwhile, Solomon was not doing well at all. His rejection by Queen Nikulis had hit very hard. He had been so sure she was the one sent by God; so sure he had done everything right; so sure that she had fallen in love with him; so sure that she would accept and they would live happily ever after. It never occurred to him that those dreams of Nikulis and her exotic court had come from Satan. He blamed God for misleading him, or her, or both. For the first time in his life, his faith was shaken to the core. He began to get bitter at God.

Naamah saw it all. She was very understanding. She comforted him. At first he resisted her, for such had been his habit all during his marriage with Muwet. But she gently reminded him, “I am your wife, too! And I’m the mother of Rehoboam your only son and heir. You are deeply discouraged and depressed. I cannot replace Muwet or compete with Queen Nikulis. But I can caress your body and give you good loving.” For once, in his bitterness, Solomon did not even ask YHWH. He lay with Naamah and received the comfort she offered. She rejoiced, giving thanks to her chief god Molech, to whom she had dedicated her son.

Solomon did not make Naamah his chief queen. She never was invited to sit beside his throne. But he began to visit her often in her apartment. Sometimes he slept there with her. Ten years younger than he and still beautiful, she made a good lover. But he wouldn’t show her his secret garden or allow her into his own bedroom.

Logos was displeased that Solomon had gotten bitter, and even more displeased that he should go to Naamah for comfort. She was still an idolater. *For Logos had already answered the heartfelt prayer of Queen Nikulis and sent a queen worthy to fill Muwet’s place in his heart.*

She was Maria, the youngest daughter of Zadok (the high priest when Solomon had first become king). She had volunteered her services to David in his old age, as a lowly cleaning and cooking maid, when she was only fourteen. She loved her king almost as much as she loved YHWH her God and Zadok her father. She never married, choosing to serve king and country rather than herself. Her father had prayed for her every day of his life, believing that she was destined to marry one of David’s sons. She loved them all, as she had loved David.

But no, David’s sons were princes in the land. None of them would stoop to marry a serving girl. Solomon knew her. She had been fifteen when he had left for Egypt to marry Muwet. She had been excited for him, and had shaken his hand and bid him Godspeed as he left, one of the few who hadn’t tried to urge him to stay.

Solomon had appreciated the gesture. After he came home they had become good friends. When Solomon was unsure or discouraged, he would often go down to the kitchen and chat with Maria. She always had a kind word, for she was wise but never judgmental. Her down-to-earth wisdom and positive nature was often just what Solomon needed to encourage him. Indeed, after Muwet had died it was the loving counsel of Maria more than anything else that pulled Solomon through.

When Queen Nikulis had come, Maria was so happy for Solomon. She had worked to fix special dishes for them (for by then she was in charge of the kitchens). Like everyone in the land, Maria was sure that the lovely dark Sabean queen would soon be Solomon’s new chief wife.

When Nikulis had left, Maria had been the first to go to Solomon, give him a much-needed hug, and express her sorrow at his stunning loss. He wept on her shoulder.

Logos intended that Solomon take Maria as his wife. In fact, He had always intended that, from before Solomon had even left for Egypt. Old Zadok had been right, after all. Logos had never wanted Solomon to marry a foreigner. But Maria had been too young, and Solomon hadn’t been willing to wait for God’s highest and best plan. As so often happens when one gets ahead of God, he had settled for God’s second best with Muwet. God had honored his choice, but Maria had been left waiting, all this time.

Though comforted by Maria's hug, Solomon didn't realize that she was the 'queen' that Nikulis had prayed for to replace Muwet. He couldn't see it. Maria was just the cook. How could the cook ever become the queen? God was speaking, but Solomon was no longer hearing.

For all his boasting and bravado with Nikulis about YHWH being his source of wisdom, enabling him to see into her heart and all that – it simply wasn't true. He understood human nature and had gotten very good at reading people's inflections and body language, that's all. Oh, Logos used it for good. God really did love Nikulis – that part had been true. Logos was delighted with her new-found faith and eager to reach many of the Sabaeans through her. However, Solomon's complaint about God misleading him was bogus. Solomon had heard what he wanted to hear, much of it from Satan.

So Solomon went back to Naamah. Maria, queen only deep within her heart, was still left waiting, trusting in YHWH, at peace. Satan had planned that Naamah would be just the first step. After getting Solomon to compromise with one idolater, it should be easy to get him in bed with another. Makeda was on her way.

Makeda didn't have her own caravan like her cousin. She had some maids and bodyguards, and a few gorgeous gowns on her pack mule, but that's about it. She hopped a ship to Ezion-Geber and joined the traders taking the wealth of the Far East to Solomon's court. He didn't know she was coming and had no welcome planned. Indeed, when she made her way up to the new palace, Solomon was gone and the guards nearly turned her away.

"I have come more than a thousand miles to hear the wisdom of Solomon," Makeda asserted.

"Yeah, yeah. That's what they all say. Well he's not here. Go find lodging. Come again in the morning."

She drew herself up to her full height – a truly regal presence in her stunning royal gown – and retorted, "Is this how Israel's king treats the queen of Ethiopia?"

"Yeah. Right... And if you're the queen of Ethiopia, then I'm the queen of Sheba."

Makeda blinked in astonishment. "No, silly! The queen of Sheba is my cousin. She was here last month. You escorted her here with 12,000 cavalry. She entered with a trumpet fanfare. Solomon even had a special throne made for her. She described it all to me. Have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten her? She arrived in a forty-camel caravan. You're here with two maids, a couple' bodyguards, and a pack mule. You don't look like a queen to me."

"Perhaps this will help. Queen Nikulis gave me a letter of introduction for Solomon. See, this is her seal."

"Anybody can write a letter and stick some wax on it. Come again when Solomon's court is open."

Satan was furious with this guard. He simply wasn't listening. He had to get someone else, fast. The only people nearby were a few children playing in the street. Satan quickly persuaded a young girl to look up as Makeda turned away from the guard in disgust. The youngster recognized the resemblance and called to her, "Oh! Queen Nikulis! I'm glad you came back! King Solomon really misses you. He loves you, you know!"

"Thank you, my dear. I'm not Queen Nikulis, but I'm her cousin. Could you tell this guard here? I think we're not understanding each other very well."

The girl was happy to oblige. The guard apologized. "I'm so sorry! You have a strong Arabic accent and I didn't understand you. Please, come with me." He led her to the guest's quarters and left her to freshen up.

Solomon was told about Queen Makeda as soon as he returned. He saw the resemblance and his heart gave a leap. "Welcome! I'm King Solomon. You look like a sister of beautiful Queen Nikulis. What a lovely gown! I'm sorry I wasn't here when you came. I hope you were treated well? Will you join me for dinner?"

Makeda gave him a royal curtsy. "I am Queen Makeda of Ethiopia. I'm a cousin of Queen Nikulis. She gave me this letter of introduction." With a spectacular smile, she held it up to him. "I would love to join you for dinner."

Solomon bowed graciously in response. "Thank you! With a letter from her, you are instantly my friend! Come. Let me show you around until dinner time." Solomon had a way with people, making them feel right at home. And especially after he had read the letter from Queen Nikulis, he treated Makeda with honor and respect. She, of course, had on her best behavior, too. She never even mentioned her rude reception at the gate. She still wasn't sure what she wanted of this man, but whatever it was, using her best acting skills would go a long way toward getting it.

Like her cousin, Makeda was astounded at the ivory throne and the way the court resembled that of Nikulis. She was lavish in her praise, knowing that every man likes to have his work appreciated. Nikulis had told her that Solomon loved to answer questions, so she kept him busy, always gushing with appreciation of his wisdom. So they hit it off right away. By dinner time, they were chatting with the warmth of lifelong friends. She told him all about her kingdom and her troubles with her unruly people, keeping generally truthful about it, except she tried to hide the fact that she had a husband. That turned out to be a mistake. As I said, Solomon's memory was almost perfect, and his traders often went to Ethiopia. "Isn't Mark still king there? He was the last I heard."

A good actress can quickly recover from an error. Makeda put on a sad face. "Yes. Mark was my husband. He was recently killed. That's why I'm here. Nikulis told me that you might have some wisdom on how to recover."

"I'm so sorry." Solomon bowed his head and put a hand tenderly on her shoulder. "Please accept my condolences. I'll be glad to help in any way I can." Satan laughed so hard he almost lost control of Makeda. Here was the wisest man on the planet, snookered by a sad face.

Makeda sighed and wiped a tear from one eye. She was exceptionally good at this, you must understand. "My people are often violent and rebellious, as I said. Mark was strong; able to keep them under control. But now with him gone, they don't listen to me. [This too was a lie. Mark was weak. It was Makeda who ruled the land.] My son will make a great king, but he's still young and inexperienced. And I don't trust my vizier, who's helping him. I think my military is mostly loyal – that's the only thing holding the country together. I would sure appreciate your wisdom."

"YHWH's wisdom." Solomon was quick to correct her. He still knew that all his wisdom came from God. "It sounds to me like the first thing I should do is teach you about YHWH, like your cousin said."

Makeda brightened up instantly, again shining her pearly whites at Solomon. "Oh, yes! Nikulis told me about Him. He's wonderful! I've accepted Him as my God, too. Teach me more, so I can bring Him to my people!"

What can I say? Solomon fell for it. Sometimes, Satan wins a round, and I'm afraid he won this one. After that letter of introduction from Queen Nikulis, Solomon never asked YHWH about it, and wasn't even suspicious of Makeda. He showed her everything that he had showed her cousin. (*Except of course, the temple guards wouldn't allow her in the temple!*) He showed her Muwet's palace, the secret passage, the garden, and the gazebo. And it wasn't long before they were using the love couch, too. Once the passion got loose, there was no stopping it.

Solomon was ashamed, for his tender conscience could still feel pangs of guilt. He should have gotten suspicious when Makeda registered no shame at all. She just eagerly wanted more and more. Their affair went on through fall and winter, giving Satan lots of time to harden Solomon's conscience. By then, everyone pretty much knew what was going on, anyway, so he no longer tried to hide it.

Then a letter came from Mark, pleading for Makeda to return to Ethiopia. Mark needed her. In their matriarchal culture, Makeda was the real power on the Nubian throne. Solomon should have discerned that Makeda was lying!

Now he started to question. Soon the whole thing came out. Queen Makeda had been stringing him along like a sucker, enjoying her vacation at his expense. But he really was upset when he discovered she was still an idolater, having only accepted YHWH as one of many gods in her collection. To his credit, he didn't try to take it out on her. He politely, kindly, gathered up her things and showed her the door. But he was angry with himself for having been deceived, and bitter at YHWH for not warning him!

Queen Makeda showed not one shred of regret. "Thank you so much, dear Solomon. I have enjoyed our time together immensely. I hope that I can come again someday and renew our love. My cousin was certainly right about you! I feel privileged to have known the wisest man on earth! Here, I have a small gift for you." She handed him a magnificent man's ring, made of gold with large, well-cut diamonds. "I would like a small gift from you, as well." She pointed to his pinky finger. On it was a small ring with a star sapphire that glowed like a cat's eye in the night.

"Okay." *Anything to get rid of her. Besides, he was getting the better deal.* "But... why do you want it?" Solomon finally had begun to be suspicious of her.

"I bear our son. When he is of age, I'll give him your ring and send him back here to you, so you can teach him your wisdom, too." She flashed him her most beautiful smile. "Sorry I lied to you about Mark. But this was so fun, and Mark is such a wimp anyway. I'd much rather have you! You're a real man!" She stole one last kiss and said goodbye.

Solomon was utterly devastated. He had lost Muwet, then lost Queen Nikulis, and then fallen to temptation with a foreign idolater. And now he had a son by her? That was the last straw! He fled back into his palace and down to the kitchen, tears streaming down his face. He had to talk with Maria. She was the only one he knew who could listen without condemning. She always had a few words of encouragement when he was down. He was fed up with having to always appear so wise, so perfect, in front of everyone. With Maria, there were no pretenses. She knew him. He found her and poured out his heart of anguish, his moral failure, everything. He never could hide anything from her, anyway. Maria understood, and sympathized. She gave him some words of wisdom, as he knew she would. "Having a son in Ethiopia might not be a bad thing, especially if Makeda sends him here for training. You can train him in righteousness, in YHWH's ways. He could turn out to be a blessing to Ethiopia. But you have been deeply hurt by it all. Before anything else, you need to restore your relationship to YHWH. Go to Him and repent. He will forgive. He will restore you, I know He will."

"Thank you, Maria. You're right. But what do I do about all these feelings of lust in me? Ever since Muwet died I've been terribly lonely. Now my body seems to be driving me to do immoral, disgusting things."

"It's the adversary. You have given him occasion. He wants to destroy you. You can't give in or he will. After you've repented and been cleansed by YHWH, your mind and body must be cleansed as well. *To do that, you must have only one wife, and be totally faithful to her.* I suggest Naamah. She really loves you, you know, and she is the mother of your heir. But you've never really taught her about YHWH. Once she finally accepts YHWH as her God, she'll make you a wonderful wife. You should have taught all your princesses about YHWH long ago."

Maria's advice was wise, and Solomon took it. Satan tried to talk him out of it by feeding his pride. "You're the wisest man on the planet, and you stoop to take advice from a cook? You ought to be ashamed! She's got no right to counsel you! You ought to throw her out on her ear." Solomon heard, but he had known Maria too long to fall for that. She had been his secret counselor for a long time. She had never given him bad advice. He trusted her more than anyone else in Israel.

Logos accepted Solomon's repentance. After a month of cleansing and releasing his bitterness, he felt ready to return to Naamah. He confessed everything to her, too. She gladly forgave him and received him. Maria was right, she really did love him. For a year, all was well in Israel, as Solomon taught Naamah all about YHWH and got her to renounce her other gods. She would do anything for him!

Naamah was glad to renounce Molech, anyway. Even though this was her heritage, she hated and feared him. *Maybe she shouldn't have dedicated Rehoboam to Molech. Maybe that's why he had fallen into immorality. Or perhaps Molech had wanted him to be offered as a firstborn sacrifice. At least YHWH never required child sacrifice!*

One problem remained. She was still a foreigner, and not permitted in the temple. When Solomon suggested Naamah be adopted into Israel, she had a brilliant idea. "You have many wives who, like me, are foreigners. Rather than adopt us all, why not just make a nearby worship grove, a high place for us to sacrifice to YHWH? Most of us would not be comfortable in the temple anyway. But we're all used to worshiping on the high places. You can teach us all about YHWH, and we'll worship Him every Sabbath while you and Israel are worshiping in the temple. Now that you've taught me about YHWH, I can help you teach all the others. They will love YHWH, I'm sure, and they will be ecstatic at finally having a place to worship."

The logic of that fit Solomon's nature perfectly. He knew he needed to teach all his wives to know YHWH. It had been bothering him ever since Queen Nikulis had challenged him on the subject. But he shouldn't have to do everything himself. He'd just delegate it to Naamah. So he found a high place on top of an isolated southern peak of Mount Olivet, just across the Kidron Valley. Nobody would mind if foreigners worshiped there. He retrieved the tabernacle David had made, and set it up, complete with the old furnishings he hadn't needed for his temple. He appointed Naamah as his official worship leader for the foreign women. (It wouldn't really be appropriate for a man to lead the women, anyway.) He taught Naamah how to make a sin offering for them, just like the Levite priests did for Israel. Solomon was very pleased with Naamah. Strong and capable, she took over graciously.

Logos was not pleased. Solomon's compromise was abhorrent to Him. He had taken the easy way, done the logical thing, but it was not God's way.

Naamah soon found she had a language problem. She was not fluent in twelve different languages like Solomon was. She had translators, but it was difficult for some of the foreign women to pronounce YHWH's name. So she told everyone, "You don't have to pray to YHWH in Hebrew. God is great. He understands all languages. Pray to Him in your own tongue. Whatever name you use for God is fine with Him. He hears you." As an example, she substituted the Ammonite name for god, Milcom, in her own prayer. Soon all the foreign princesses were praying to the gods of their ancestors. All the time, Solomon thought they were worshiping YHWH up there! Please don't fault Naamah. She thought she was doing the right thing. The problem was, she had received YHWH into her mind out of her love for Solomon. But she never knew Him in her heart.

The years passed, and Solomon remained faithful to Naamah. In 944 BC, though she was 47 years old and he was 58, she bore him another child, a daughter. Martha was the delight of their eyes; *it is amazing what old age does for your appreciation of children*. Solomon spent his free time with Naamah and Martha, enjoying every stage of her growing-up years. They were happy. Solomon basically put the kingdom on auto-pilot during this time. He had faithful officers and administrators. He let them run it.

Seti returned from conquering Libyans and offered to help Solomon discipline Hadad and Rezon. However, the Hittites were at the peak of their power, and Solomon knew they'd come down to support Syria. He imagined a huge fight, great loss of life on both sides, with the Hittites possibly having the advantage... No. He decided not. He was getting old. His faith was weak. He was looking at their strength in the flesh rather than at YHWH's power. He did not have a lifetime of military victories under YHWH's banner like his dad. He wimped out.

So Seti returned home. Egypt, too, was at the height of its power and glory. They now had peace on all sides. YHWH truly honored Seti for his earlier commitment to Him and to Solomon. Seti spent the remainder of his life in grand building projects, art works, and other public improvements. He also spent time on his mortuary temple and tomb in the Valley of Kings in Thebes. But sadly, with the decline in Solomon's faith came a related decline in Seti's faith, for it had always been dependent on Solomon. As Naamah taught the foreign princesses to worship YHWH with the names of their own gods, so Seti began to worship YHWH, but using the name Osiris, the father-god of Egypt. He built an amazing temple to YHWH at Abydos; at least in his mind it was to YHWH! But he called Him Osiris, just so his workers would understand. Sure. They understood perfectly – from their pagan background! As they were carving the walls, they did what Egyptians always did – deified Seti and glorified Ptah, Ra, Amun, Osiris, Isis, and Horus. In 943 BC, before he even saw the finished carvings on his temple walls, YHWH took Seti to the Nursery, where He lovingly taught him the truth.

CHAPTER 22 – THE KINGDOM UNRAVELS

Rameses II buried his dear father with great honor, working hard to finish his temple, tomb, and mortuary within the seventy days of mourning. Seti had taught him well, militarily and politically. But Seti had never really taught him about YHWH. He was hoping for Solomon to do that. So Rameses II took the throne of Egypt at the age of 25, to inherit one of the greatest, richest, most powerful, best administered kingdoms ever inherited by any young king. Teamed up with Solomon and the mighty kingdom of Israel, he knew that the Hittites were no match. So by the second year of his reign, he was already planning to kick them out of Syria – maybe annihilate them entirely. He renewed Egypt's alliance with Solomon and told him to begin preparing his military to assist him.

The alliance was the same. They even still jokingly referred to it as their 'large bathtub'. But there was a subtle shift of power. Seti had looked up to Solomon, respected him, and valued his wisdom. Rameses II was young, strong, proud, and self-assured. He didn't need YHWH, not with such great power in his own hands!

Solomon was dragging his feet. He no longer wanted a war with the Hittites. Especially when he heard the news from Ethiopia that Queen Makeda had indeed born a son as she had guessed. She had named him Prince Menelik. She swore he was destined to become the greatest king that Ethiopia had ever known. She promised she would send him to Solomon for training when he was eight. Martha would be seven... *Hmm. Solomon wondered. What would it be like for them to marry and go back to rule Ethiopia together? Perhaps if he taught them about YHWH, they could convert the Ethiopians after all.* God is indeed able to take our mistakes and failures and make them part of His plan!

Before he could attack the Hittites, Rameses had to deal with the Mycenaean Sea Peoples. Many of them had rebelled against their king, to become sea pirates, living only to enrich themselves. We now know them as the Sheridan, since they later settled in Shardania (classical Sardinia). They were terrorizing the Mediterranean coast and capturing Egyptian trading ships. Rameses shrewdly filled some innocuous-looking trading ships with soldiers and stationed them at the mouth of the Nile, awaiting the pirates. When they attacked, he arrested the whole lot of them and impressed them into his own navy! Bingo!

Young, fiery Rameses, being a tad hotheaded, didn't wait for Solomon. In 939 BC, his fourth regnal year, he took his army up the coast to the borders of Hamath, a Hittite vassal state. He captured Riblah, enraging old King Muwatalli II. Muwatalli mustered 37,000 swordsmen and 2500 chariots and prepared to retaliate the next year. This was exactly what Rameses wanted. With such a large army headed toward their north border, Solomon would be forced to honor their alliance! This time they would show no mercy on this Hittite king who never kept his word.

Solomon reluctantly agreed, and brought his army to meet Rameses at Jezreel. What else could he do? But his heart wasn't in it. Worse, his wisdom wasn't requested. Young Rameses took charge, and never asked Solomon's counsel. That turned out to be a mistake, as we shall see.

"I've got four highly trained battalions, each with 500 chariots and 5000 swordsmen," he told Solomon. "They are named after my gods Amun, Ra, Ptah, and Seth. "A fifth battalion, the Ne'erim, made mostly of the impressed Sheridan and their Egyptian commanders, is coming up the coast by ship – no doubt docking at Simyra up in Hamath as we speak. So here's my plan. Old Muwatalli has his main army in Aleppo. Last year I took Riblah. This year I'll move north and take the fortress at Kadesh. That will take a week at most. By then the Hittites will probably have reached Ebla, because Muwatalli will be eager to recover Kadesh. So you take your army up the coast to meet my Ne'erim at Simyra. I don't totally trust them, yet; they're untested. They need a wise commander to take charge. Work with them for two weeks; I told them you would be coming. Get them in good fighting order. Then march them over the Homs-Tripoli gap to the top of the ridge overlooking Kadesh. Hide there until after the main battle is engaged – you'll be able to see when the massed forces of Muwatalli get there. Then, just as our front lines are fully engaged, you sweep down and attack them from behind. They'll flee in panic!"

Solomon smelled a rat in all those assumptions, but he wasn't asked. He took his men to Simyra, wondering what YHWH would think of his fighting alongside Rameses' battalions named after the Egyptian gods. He spent his travel time in prayer for God's wisdom.

Sure enough, the 5000 Ne'erim forces were at Simyra when he got there, awaiting his command. He put them through their paces for a few days. They were fine. The Egyptian commanders knew and trusted him already, as they had served under Seti. But suddenly Solomon was filled with a sense of urgency. There was no way he was going to wait here two weeks! Any waiting he would do would be on that ridge above Kadesh, in case foxy old Muwatalli got there earlier than Rameses had planned.

So Solomon took the Ne'erim through the gap up to the ridge. The closer he got, the more urgency he felt. He awoke them way before dawn on the next day, and rushed up to the ridge. When he got there, the sun was up, but the valley was totally shrouded in morning fog. He could see or hear nothing. Now, he was supposed to hide, and send scouts down to get news of the situation from Rameses before attacking. But that didn't 'smell' right. He didn't even stop at the ridge. He just led them down into the fog, preparing to attack as they went.

It was a good thing he did. Old King Muwatalli had totally outfoxed Rameses. His main army had not been up at Aleppo; they had been hiding at Kadesh all along!

Muwatalli had carefully planted some Bedouins by the fords of the Orontes River, with information that he was still in Aleppo. Rameses had found and questioned them, and thus was confident that he had plenty of time. He crossed the ford and set up camp just south of Kadesh, awaiting the arrival of his following battalions. Amun set up camp all around him. Ra had crossed the ford a half-day behind, and was now marching up to meet them. His other two battalions were each half a day apart behind Ra. But suddenly disaster struck.

Muwatalli had hidden his army behind Kadesh. He had seen Rameses come and set up camp, but now the morning fog shrouded him. He crossed the Orontes and attacked Ra as they were still on the march. Completely unprepared and caught by surprise, they scattered and fled in panic. The Hittites then circled up quietly to attack Amun – and Rameses himself! They were still eating their breakfast, having slept in after their long march. In the dense fog, they never saw the Hittite chariots until they were upon them. They also were devastated, scattering in panic.

Now the Hittites were attacking Rameses' own elite bodyguards. Nobody knew what was going on. They didn't have time to get into battle formation. The Hittite chariots swooped in, aiming directly for Rameses. He was screaming out orders to rally his men even as he struggled to hitch up his chariot. Everyone stumbled over each other trying to find stuff. Never has an Egyptian professional army been so badly caught with its collective 'pants down'.

It was right at this moment that Solomon and his army swooped down from the ridge and attacked the Hittites from behind. If he had come one hour later, it would have been all over for proud Rameses. Now it was the Hittites' turn to be surprised. It is difficult to turn and fight an enemy coming from behind, especially in the fog. It was so disorienting. The Hittites knew how many men Rameses had, and where, having watched them make camp. But they had no idea the size of that ghostly force from behind. They began to flee back to the ford they'd just crossed.

Muwatalli had split his forces into two, and only the first had crossed the ford. The second – 18,000 men and 1000 chariots led by old King Muwatalli himself – was just coming down the banks of the Orontes and beginning to cross. The fleeing first army rushed into the ford, only to collide with the second army in the middle of the river. It was massed confusion in the fog. Many of Muwatalli's men drowned in the river. Even the mighty king of Aleppo (who was commanding the first army) had to be fished out of the river and hung up to dry.

By nightfall, all the Hittites had retreated to the east side of the Orontes. The next morning Rameses ordered an attack. By then his shattered Amun and Ra battalions had regrouped and his late Ptah and Seth battalions had arrived. Solomon knew they weren't ready to attack so large an opposing force, but again, he wasn't asked.

The Hittite first army had been badly devastated by Solomon and the Ne'erim the day before, but the second army was not. They fought fiercely. The battle ground down to a stalemate, with huge losses on both sides.

Old Muwatalli still thought he could win. Though he had lost a lot of men, he still had the larger army. But he had lost the element of surprise, and frankly his chariots were heavier and slower than the Egyptian's. Besides, he had received a minor wound, which he hid from his men, but which slowed and discouraged him. Once again he decided to try to save his army to fight another day, after he learned that two of his brothers had died in the fighting, along with some of his high-ranking chariot commanders. He called for a truce.

This time, hotheaded young Rameses did the prudent thing and accepted the truce. On the way south toward Damascus, he was a much subdued Pharaoh, grateful that his fat had been pulled out of the fire by Solomon's timely arrival. Finally he may be able to listen to Solomon. "You know Rameses, the reason I arrived in time to help you is that I only fight under the banner of YHWH, the one true God of the heavens and earth. He is the one who urged me on, even though you had ordered me to delay two weeks. I feared for you from the beginning, because you named your forces after the names of your gods, who can neither guide nor defend you. You need to learn more about YHWH. With Him is true wisdom and strength! That is how Seti won all his battles."

Rameses didn't try to argue. He could not deny that Solomon had saved his bacon. But sadly, as happens so often when a son is richly blessed by the faith of his father, Rameses never really saw his need for YHWH. In his pride, he rejected YHWH and hardened his heart.

Without YHWH, Rameses continued to try to defeat the Hittites for many years. He got close, several times, but never quite overcame their threat. He had other troubles in the Levant, too. He never trusted Solomon. He got bitter. He had been humiliated when Solomon had swooped down and rescued his army, and his life! He never attacked Solomon, of course, but we will hear from him again in the time of Rehoboam. The Bible calls Rameses II 'Shishak' from his Egyptian nickname Sysa. (1 Kings 11:40; 14:25)

Old King Muwatalli only lasted six months after the great battle at Kadesh. His wound never healed, and he died a lingering, painful death from blood poisoning. His kingdom passed to his son Mursili III in 938 BC. The Hittite Empire was at the peak of its power. They now ruled everything from the Black Sea to Israel, plus a few nations even further south. Solomon was afraid to ask for Egypt's help against Rezon of Syria or Hadad of Edom, and they continued to trouble him. He kept up the pretenses, worshiping YHWH and teaching divine wisdom, but from this point on his kingdom began to unravel. He didn't even fully understand why.

Queen Nikulis was doing very well in Sheba. She had succeeded in converting the majority of her people to faith in YHWH. Any who did not convert pretended they had, just to get along. The revival in faith had accompanied an explosion of prosperity; trade was booming. The Sabaeans even began to send missionaries to Ethiopia.

Nikulis kept her promise to visit Solomon once in a while to keep him up on her news, but it was less often than she had hoped. Her people loved her as never any queen had been loved before. Proposals of marriage came in from nations all around. She refused them all. Solomon had become her only true love. When she visited he would set up her throne by his, and they would talk again and renew their friendship. But after she left, Solomon had her throne moved way off in a corner where no one else would use it.

The spring of 937 BC turned out beautiful. The rains were past, all the trees were in bloom, and love was in the air. Solomon and Naamah were happy together with their beloved daughter, Martha, who was now seven. Solomon had continued his building projects, keeping his forced laborers occupied, but his officers handled all the details, giving him more time with his family.

So one lovely morning he and Naamah were alone with Martha in his grand court. He happened to glance over to the corner, and spotted a young fellow sitting on Queen Nikulis' ivory throne. Solomon was indignant. "Hey! How did you get in here? Guards! Who let that boy in my court?" The guards just stood there smiling at him.

He jumped off the dais and ran to look, shouting, "Who are you, anyway? Why are you here?" Of course he used Hebrew, which the youngster couldn't understand. But he was neither shy, nor intimidated by Solomon's gruffness. It was as if he was used to being in a king's royal court. He did as his mother had instructed him: he stood up from the throne and held up his right hand. On his finger was a star sapphire ring. It glowed like a cat's eye in the dimness of the shadows.

Naamah had never seen Solomon so utterly stunned. His rubber shoes squealed to a halt across the polished marble floor. *That was his ring, the one he had given Queen Makeda.* Solomon dropped to his knees and shifted to Arabic. "Menelik? Are you Menelik, my son?"

"Yes." His face broke into a big smile. "My mother sent me here for training. I knew I was at the right place when I saw this beautiful court and my mother's throne, for she told me all about it. Are you King Solomon, sir? My mother told me that Solomon is my real father..."

"Yes, I'm King Solomon and I am indeed your father. I'm very glad your mother sent you. I'm sorry that I didn't recognize you at first." He took his hand and led him back to the dais, where Martha and her mother waited, bug-eyed and mouth hanging open. "Naamah, this is Menelik, my son. And Martha, Menelik is your brother."

Martha had been well-prepared for this moment. She curtsied, then came to Menelik and gave him a hug. She was followed by Naamah. About then, Solomon noticed the Ethiopians still waiting at the door. They at least knew better than to enter the king's court unbidden! They were the aides and guards who had come with Menelik. He invited them in and they caught up on the news. Queen Makeda hadn't come. But though at eight years old this was the first time Menelik had been away from his mom, he was enjoying this grand adventure too much to miss her. And he just adored his new dad.

So Menelik's training began. Now Solomon had his long-desired second son. He might be king someday – in Ethiopia. Solomon worked with him diligently, teaching him daily about YHWH and His wisdom. If nothing else, Menelik would lead his country to faith. Logos was rather pleased. He forgave Solomon's affair with Makeda, and promised to grant him the time he needed to complete Menelik's training, if only he would remain faithful to keep his vows from this day forth.

Naamah was delighted. Her daughter had a playmate – possibly a future lover. They were inseparable from the first day. Naamah loved Menelik like her own son. He was an obedient boy, responsive to training, even more than Rehoboam had been as a boy. Everyone was proud of him. Never was a boy better cared-for or more-loved.

In the fall of 937 BC, Rezon attacked Hazor and burned to the ground a beautiful palace/fortress that Solomon had recently built there. Solomon could not counter-attack, as he knew that the Hittites were just itching for an occasion to face him. Instead, he went down to Egypt to talk with Rameses. Finally, he was humbled enough to ask for help. The Egyptians were glad to see their old friend, and they treated him graciously. Solomon and Rameses discussed the Syrian and Hittite aggression. A royal alliance goes both ways, you know. Rameses agreed to help Solomon take out Rezon the next year.

So in 936 BC, Rameses II came into the Levant and attacked Rezon in a lightning blitz, wiping out his small army and killing him before he could even send for help from the Hittites. He installed Rezon's son Tabrimmon as king over Syria, with the stern admonition that his life and his kingdom depended on staying there in Damascus. Then Rameses established Egyptian garrisons at all the major strategic cities, including Gaza, Beth-Shan (in the Herod Valley below Jezreel), Zarethan (in the Jordan Valley), Kamidi (in the Beqaa Valley) and Simyra (on the Phoenician coastal plain north of Byblos).

Proud Rameses couldn't resist a tiny jab at Solomon on the way back from those battles. "My battalions are still named after my gods, and this time they hardly lost a man. If your God is so powerful, why couldn't He help you deal with the Syrians?" And for once, in all his great wisdom, Solomon had no answer.

Logos was saddened by Solomon's reliance on Egypt. He told Michael, "Solomon has been king too long. He claims to trust Me and receive My wisdom, but in truth he trusts the arm of the flesh, even when I humble him. Never again will I entrust a single man with such great wisdom, power, honor, and riches. It is sure to corrupt him and turn him away from Me. There seems to be no way to really bless someone like I love to do, without his eventually becoming proud and self-sufficient."

Solomon was immensely pleased with Naamah. She had not only proved capable and efficient in managing his harem and teaching all his princesses about YHWH, but she had also become a wonderful mother to Menelik. Menelik was soon calling her 'Mom'. Solomon grew to trust Naamah completely. He was grateful to Maria for her counsel, and glad that he had followed it.

But he had not. Maria had counseled him to teach his princesses about YHWH. He had taught Naamah (or so he thought), but then entrusted her to pass it on to his other princesses. *A kingdom is always run by delegating.* Now he was busy with Menelik's education, and didn't even realize that his princesses were praying to pagan gods in that worship grove on the Mount of Olives!

Even when Naamah asked for two more altars, he didn't catch on. *There are a lot of princesses. If she needs three altars, that's fine with him.* He gave them to her. He didn't realize (or perhaps he didn't want to know) that she was tired of the squabbling between the zealous worshipers of Chemosh, Ashtoreth, and Milcom, so she was setting up a separate grove for each.

Solomon saw what he wanted to see. His princesses were happier than ever. They blossomed under Naamah's expert management. They were no longer locked up in their harem, oh no! They made uniforms for themselves, pure white with black trim and lovely little white bonnets. They embroidered a small black 'S' over their hearts to stand for 'Solomon'. That, and the fact that they always moved together, helped guard their virginity and chastity, which they treasured. They formed a glorious choir. They sang when they marched through the streets on their way to worship each Sabbath. Everyone loved it! Solomon often asked them to sing for his court or for visiting dignitaries. Many learned to play musical instruments, and they formed a delightful orchestra to accompany the choir.

And their art! They created magnificent paintings, tapestries, statues, and murals, which they would sell. Since Solomon supplied all their needs, they would take the extra money they earned and give it to the poor throughout the city. With their black and white 'habits' no one would dare harm them. They became a familiar sight walking through the city. Solomon was quite sure that all these changes, their singing, their joy, their love of helping the poor, were due to Naamah teaching them all about YHWH and their newfound love of Him.

Yes, Solomon was still spending an hour or so each evening with his princesses. He had a big heart, with lots of love for each one, and he wanted each to feel special. After his affair with Queen Makeda, he had determined to gather no more, so they still numbered an even thousand (700 plus their 300 maids). He concentrated on really getting to know each one. He understood his moral weakness. He made sure that Naamah was always with him so there would be no hanky-panky when he visited them. They had all learned to love and trust him wholeheartedly. When he asked them about their relationship with YHWH, they would tell him what he wanted to hear, as they had been coached by Naamah. It was a big, happy family.

But Logos was not happy. In all Solomon's wisdom, in all his uncanny discernment of human nature, he had become blind to his own wives' idolatry. And beautiful, efficient, intelligent Naamah, in her eagerness to please her husband, was only perpetuating the problem. Please don't fault her! Solomon should not have just taught her about YHWH and sent her off to worship with the women on the hill. He should have worshiped with her until he was sure that YHWH was in her heart. She thought of YHWH as an all-inclusive God who just loved everybody, as long as they kept the outward laws like 'don't lie, cheat, steal, kill, or commit adultery.' She never really understood the jealous nature of God and His hatred of idolatry. So finally, as a last resort, Logos took her.

Oh, He straightened her out when she got to Sheol. And once she understood what He was really like, she loved Him all the more. But Solomon was devastated to wake up one morning and find her dead body next to him. *She was only 57! How could God do this to him? Again! And just when he had his life finally all straightened out.* Again Solomon blamed God unfairly for his own failure.

Instead of responding correctly to Logos' discipline, Solomon went crazy. Maria tried to help. Believe me, it shook her faith too! But she still pointed Solomon back to YHWH, back to true repentance and purity of heart.

For the first time, Solomon did not heed Maria's advice. His bitterness became a barrier that he couldn't climb. He broke his long-standing policy of keeping his princesses pure and out of his bedroom. And not just one. He would pick a different one to sleep with him each night. He loved them all; even in this he tried to treat them fairly. Since he was their legal husband, they eagerly accepted his loving, each with the hope she would bear his next son.

When Naamah died, Martha and Menelik were only 10 and 11. They, too, were crushed and confused. Maria, bless her soul, immediately came to their rescue, and became a surrogate mother to them in their time of grief, the only source of stability in their young lives. Solomon got so busy flirting with his many wives that he stopped their education. Maria hid their eyes from his corruption and taught them the ways of YHWH.

Solomon's kingdom began to fall apart at the seams. His many wives stole his heart, his energy, his time, and his enthusiasm for life, as well as his ability to manage the kingdom. He plunged into a dark moral corruption that I dare not even attempt to describe. Finally he learned that his wives' hearts were not pure toward YHWH, but he didn't care. No, he worshiped their pagan gods with them, bowing to a different god each day with his wife of the day. He expanded the three worship groves, and made many more, so that all his foreign wives would feel comfortable worshipping the gods of their ancestors.

Satan was beside himself with glee, boasting that this victory was the crowning point of his entire career. But Logos wept for Solomon. He was sorry that He had ever given him such surpassing wisdom, riches, and power. Finally, in 934 BC, He told His prophet **Ahijah** of Shiloh, "It is time for you to anoint a new king over Israel, because Solomon my son has turned against Me." Solomon was 68 at the time, and had reigned in Israel for forty years.

At the Word of YHWH, Ahijah got a new cloak and went to **Jeroboam**, son of Nebat of the tribe of Ephraim. Jeroboam had been a mighty warrior in Solomon's army, and had stood by his side at the great battle of Kadesh with Rameses II. But after the battle, Solomon had reassigned him to take charge of his Ephraimite work force. That had been a mistake. Solomon's wars were just. Jeroboam had supported him wholeheartedly. But Solomon's building projects just continued on and on. The forced laborers had borne their burden long beyond what Solomon should have asked of them. More than Saul or David, Solomon had fulfilled the threat which Samuel had prophesied when Saul had been 'asked for'.

Jeroboam had seen Solomon's unjust treatment of his workers, and was ready to rebel. Ahijah met him in the field. He took off his new cloak and tore it into twelve pieces representing the twelve tribes. He told Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says YHWH God of Israel, 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom from Solomon and give you ten tribes. However, I will still leave Judah and Benjamin for Solomon's son, for the sake of My servant David and My holy city Jerusalem. But I will make you king over Israel. I will build for you an enduring kingdom as I built for David, *if only you will be faithful to listen to all I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight as David my beloved did.*'"

Jeroboam accepted the word of the prophet. He saw that Solomon had gone crazy, and he knew it was only a matter of time before YHWH fulfilled his promise. But he made a mistake. He told his wife what Ahijah had said.

Normally it is fine to tell your wife, but in this case, his wife told a neighbor, who told another... soon Solomon sent soldiers to slay him. He fled with his family to Egypt. Rameses took him in, as a probable successor to Solomon. Thus he served Rameses all the rest of Solomon's days.

Solomon seemed to be the only one in his kingdom who didn't realize he'd gone crazy. He still went through the motions of being king, of entertaining ambassadors, of ordering his servants and his officers. He still went to his temple each Sabbath. But nothing was going right and he was blind to it. Sin does that. He became suspicious, angry, and morose. He lashed out at his servants for the slightest offense. He would catch people whispering behind his back but when he accosted them, nobody had the guts to come right out and say it to his face. Azariah the priest should have stood up to him, for he certainly saw. But he didn't have the courage of his grandfather. He let it ride.

So Maria, Zadok's daughter, realized it was up to her. She had a lifetime of earning his trust and confidence, earning the right to confront him. But when? Now he always seemed to have one or more wives hanging off his arm, in clothes that made her want to hide her eyes. It had gotten so bad that Maria was ashamed to be seen with him. She cried out to YHWH for wisdom. *Logos bade her wait.*

That was the hardest thing Maria ever did. She truly loved Solomon, with a love so pure as can only be divine. To see him descend into the pit was more than she could bear. She kept Martha and Prince Menelik with her day and night, for she could not trust Solomon alone with them. At first she feared that YHWH would take his life, as He had taken Naamah. But the next year was far worse, and by the third year Maria was praying that YHWH would take his life, before his debauchery destroyed all Israel. Once the doors were opened, there came a flash flood of moral filth across the land. Even little children were heard talking about things which made hardened adults squirm with shame. Teenagers began throwing away their bodies in wild abandon to their youthful lusts, pointing to their degenerate king as justification. Maria tried desperately to guard Martha and Menelik. She soaked her pillow in tears each night. But each night, Logos still said, "Not yet."

After three years of escalating depravity, Solomon was clearly drowning in the cesspool of his corruption. Maria saw it was time. Logos filled her with a holy zeal and bade her go up to Solomon's bedroom. She was not permitted up there. She was just the cook. But Maria knew the voice of YHWH and was ready and willing to obey.

Solomon's door was locked. Maria heard suspicious noises inside. But she obeyed YHWH anyway and knocked on the door, loudly. She continued knocking, through the expected, "Who's there?" the angry, "Go away. I'm busy!" the exasperated, "Dammit stop that infernal racket!" and a few others not nearly so nice.

Eventually the door was flung open. There stood a half-drunk Solomon, still pulling on his royal bathrobe, with an irate, "Why in Sheol is my royal highness being bothered in the middle of the night?" Behind him four princesses lay naked on top of his huge bed, their clothes randomly scattered about the room.

Maria was shocked, and started to cover her face in shame. But the Spirit of YHWH took hold of her. She looked into Solomon's eyes, dark with rage, and began to boldly prophesy. "Solomon, my beloved! I have loved you with an everlasting love, a love pure and true which stands the test of time. I gave you all your heart desired. I gave you wisdom, as you asked; understanding and discernment beyond anyone who ever lived. Besides that I gave you great wealth, honor, and power, so that none could stand against you or say you nay. I gave you a kingdom, the greatest that mankind has ever known, and entrusted to your care My people who are called by My name. I brought all the nations of the earth to bow in submission before you and before My holy name. But you have taken all that I have given and dragged it in the filth of human sewage. You have taken My holy name and made it a curse word among the nations. As if that weren't enough, you have burst wide the dam of idolatry and immorality so that My people, all My precious ones, are drowning in the flood. The very sins that you once hated in Rehoboam you now display openly, shamelessly, before all Israel."

In the corner of her eye, Maria saw the naked princesses gathering their clothes to leave. She hoped they would hear enough to relay it to the others in Solomon's harem. "Therefore I have torn the kingdom from you, and given it to your son whom you condemned and to your servant whom you chased down to Egypt. Put your affairs in order and prepare to meet Me in the realm where lies crumble and deceit can no longer conceal. For I shall demand a strict accounting from you of what you accomplished with the abundance I entrusted to you."

Maria turned and fled, her face flushed. Never had any man dared to confront his king as this lowly kitchen maid had done. She half-expected an angry shout of, "Guards, seize her!" from behind.

But no. The timing had been right. The foul demons of lust, immorality, and idolatry had been vanquished by Maria's righteous indignation. Solomon's conscience had been reawakened. His princesses had fled. He knelt by his bed the rest of the night, in the agony of facing his sins and repenting before a holy God.

The craziness was past. Solomon spent the next week in fasting and purifying himself. He didn't don his royal robes, but wore a gardener's cloak made from sack-cloth. He had the grandson of Zadok make special sin offerings for him. After the next Sabbath, he called the palace to his court. Even his princesses and their maids were there. The great room was packed out to the walls. Everyone was anxious – and a little fearful – of what Solomon might do.

Solomon stood behind his throne. He raised his hand for silence, then bowed and fervently prayed. With tears he openly acknowledged and repented of his many moral failures, rebellion, and lack of trust. He publicly begged YHWH's mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing.

When Solomon was through praying, he also begged the forgiveness of every person in the palace. He ordered a national day of repentance and fasting, to come as soon as the message could be carried across Israel. "My sins have fallen across all Israel, therefore my repentance must also be carried across the land. Please pray with me that all who have been touched by my sin shall also be touched by my repentance. And pray that YHWH will hear us and forgive us before the land is destroyed." Finally, to the shock of all, he called out, "Maria, daughter of Zadok the high priest, please come forward."

As she slowly pushed her way through the crowd, he explained. "When I fell into sin, none of you men had the courage – or the love – to confront me and speak the truth. It was Maria's faithful words from YHWH that opened my eyes to my sin and called me to repentance. For that, I shall ever be grateful. I've had many queens, many princess. I loved them all, and they loved me in return..." Here Maria reached the front. Solomon descended the steps to take her arm and tow her up to his throne, where he sat her down amid the gasps and shocked whispers from the crowd. No one else, neither king, nor queen, nor prince, had ever sat upon Solomon's golden throne! But there sat Maria the cook, her face red, tears running down her cheek.

Solomon went back to stand behind her, putting his hands on her shoulders. "I loved them all..." he repeated, "and they all loved me in return. But none has loved me so truly, so perfectly, or so purely as this faithful kitchen maid who has given her whole life to serve me and to save me from my self." He then went into a lengthy monologue of the times that Maria had been there for him, counseled him, encouraged him, and supported and prayed for him, even from the time she was only fourteen. He had to tell it, for no one else had known.

When he finished, he paused. Every ear was strained to hear his conclusion. "I have had many wives, queens, and princesses... and every single one was a foreigner, an idol worshiper. Some confessed YHWH. Muwet certainly did, and Naamah. Makeda made a great pretense. But in the end they all fell back into idolatry, and my heart was turned away from YHWH who is my first love. I even built altars to worship their gods. To Milcom for my Ammonite princesses; to Chemosh for my Moabite princesses; to Ashtoreth for my Sidonian princesses. That was wrong!

"Therefore..." Solomon pulled out a big sheaf of papers and waved them before the crowd. "... I hereby divorce them all. With these papers I..." But he was drowned out by the shrieks from his harem.

It took a while to quieten everyone. The cries were turning to quiet tears as he went on, "I still love you all, and I will care and provide for you as always. Indeed, I will give you more freedom than ever before, for your art, your music, your ministry to the poor, however your heart leads you. But I will never again have a foreign wife."

Solomon bent his head down to look at Maria, who was still sitting in his throne. “And this lovely woman, this true daughter of Israel, from this day forth as long as I live, shall rule with me as my queen! Indeed she has always ruled with me as my queen, only she has ruled from the kitchen. Now Maria shall rule from the throne where she belongs. I would also like to ask her to take my hand as my chief, and only, wife, if she is willing. But please do not judge her if she cannot accept. For she can only do as YHWH leads her, and He may tell her no. I certainly have sullied my body so that I do not deserve having such a pure and holy wife! However YHWH directs, until He takes my life, Maria is now, from this moment on, Queen of Israel!”

They all cheered and shouted “Hail to the queen” and all that. Everyone in the palace knew and loved Maria. She had given wisdom and encouragement to many others besides Solomon. And not a soul in the palace had failed to receive a blessing from her lovingly prepared meals.

In the heavenlies, Michael couldn’t believe it. “Logos! He did it! He finally did it! I don’t know how You pulled that off, after all these years! Once again I bow in humble adoration of Your awesome Plan of the Ages. You never gave up, even when all seemed hopelessly lost. Your love has won a mighty victory this day!”

Meanwhile, Satan was sulking in the Abyss. “I had him! I know I had him! What did I do wrong? It all happened so fast...” He couldn’t believe it, either.

Solomon looked down again to Maria. “If you wish to wait and pray about it first, I understand. But if you have anything to say now, say it. We’d all love to hear.”

Maria stood. The room grew quickly silent. She rubbed her eyes and smiled, dimples showing deep in her plump cheeks. “First, my lord, I gladly accept your promotion to queen, as long as I can still work in the kitchen sometimes. It is there I do my best thinking, and praying, as I prepare foods for my lord to enjoy. Second, I too have loved your queens and princesses, every one.” She held out her arms toward the back of the room. “And I still do. Foreigners or not, you are in my heart and my prayers. Now if we can only teach you about YHWH and put Him in your hearts, and get you adopted into the family of Israel, you will be foreigners no longer. Instead, I will take you as my sisters and my daughters, my own precious ones! And third,” she stood up and moved around behind the throne, to be face to face with Solomon. “I accept your proposal to be your wife. I don’t need more time to think about it. I have always known that God made me to be your wife, ever since I first came to serve David your father. But I hid my feelings, waiting until you should ask. Now that I have to wait no longer, I shall do what I have always dreamed of doing.” She dropped to one knee before him, took his hand, and kissed it sweetly, saying, “My lord, the king! Your wish, your every desire, is my command!” Solomon lifted her up and embraced her, as the gathering unraveled in joy.

Knowing his love, Solomon’s princesses accepted their divorce gracefully. In the end, they preferred it. Now they had a respectable profession, rather than just being part of a harem. Their lives blossomed in music, art, and deeds of charity. In the repentance and forgiveness that day, they discovered the true faith. They renounced their foreign gods to accept YHWH. Now embroidered with ‘SM’, their black and white ‘habits’ became symbols of love and good deeds for the Sisters of Mercy all over the world to this day.

Logos was pleased. He gave Solomon a full year to enjoy his new wife and to restore his relationship with Martha and Menelik before He took him. Solomon died peacefully in his sleep in 931 BC, at the age of 71. Queen Maria lived many years after, to finish raising Martha and Menelik. Queen Makeda wanted Menelik back right after Solomon died, when he was only fourteen, but Maria wisely refused. “Wait until he is mature enough to stand firm for YHWH,” she insisted. Makeda was having increasing problems in her own kingdom, so she couldn’t argue. She had her hands full, and then some. She had to plead for help from her cousin Nikulis, whose kingdom was prospering.

Five years later, in early 926 BC, Queen Maria took them to Ethiopia. (By then their terrible civil war had been quelled by the Sabeans from Sheba.) Menelik was almost nineteen and his half-sister eighteen. They married just before going. I’ll finish their story first, and then return to Israel, which had become intolerably wicked by then.

They had hardly reached Ethiopia when Maria heard that Rameses had invaded the Levant. As I’ll discuss in the next chapter, Rehoboam had automatically become king after his father’s death, but his kingdom was going about as well as his life ever since he had taken his third wife. Maria knew it was not safe back in Israel, so she stayed to help guide Menelik and Martha. Together they had a calming influence on a rebellious people. Mark and Makeda were glad to have them. Queen Makeda had been influenced by Solomon far more than she knew! She was learning that wisdom is better than deception and cruel force.

Menelik, young as he was, stood up to the plate. “My father Solomon taught me many things, both of wisdom and of foolishness. I can help this nation, if you will let me. I don’t want to take your authority. I don’t want to rule at all. I just want to teach your people to know YHWH.”

They gave Prince Menelik an old stone palace to use as a temple. There he set up the ivory throne Solomon had made for Queen Nikulis, and a replica of the Ark of the Covenant. Then he asked people to come each Sabbath to hear him teach. I’m happy to report that, with the help of visiting missionaries from Sheba, many of the good people of Ethiopia, (including Mark and Makeda) did accept YHWH. Not all, of course, but enough to bring stability and peace to a nation that had been torn by rebellion and strife. Ethiopia’s modern Falasha Jews are the descendants of the many followers of Menelik and Martha.

CHAPTER 23 – JEROBOAM AND REHOBAM

As I said, I don't like stories with sad endings. This one is, so I'll just skim it quickly so we can get on to the fun stuff. I wish I could skip it entirely, but even bad things can be a good lesson, to warn us against gross evil. So here are Kings **Rehoboam** and **Jeroboam** in the fading remnants of Solomon's once-glorious kingdom.

Jeroboam had fled to Egypt after Ahijah's anointing. He returned as soon as he heard Solomon had died. He went with Israel's elders to Shechem, the place of giving the law and the traditional place to crown kings. Solomon's eldest son and heir, Rehoboam, was celebrating his coronation.

Jeroboam was well-known as the head of Solomon's Ephraim workers. So now all the workers appointed him their spokesman to take their case before the new king. "Your father made our yoke hard to bear. Taxes were high, and the forced labor projects seemed to go on endlessly. But if you will lighten our yoke, we will welcome you as our new king and serve you gladly."

Rehoboam foolishly rejected the wise counsel of the elders who had served his father. He wouldn't listen to the sensible appeal of Jeroboam and the many workers that he represented. Instead he listened to his hotheaded peers, the youths in his new cabinet who were still drunk with the power of taking over the kingdom. So he spoke harshly to the people, promising, not relief, but even higher taxes and harder labors. "My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions!" he shouted.

Jeroboam pled with him, but to no avail. The people of Israel were looking to him for leadership. Recalling the prophecy of Ahijah, he made his fateful decision. With more than a little bitterness, he shouted the old chant, "What portion do we have in David, O Israel? Or what inheritance do we have in the son of Jesse? Go to your tents, O Israel. Let the house of David fend for itself!"

So the men of Israel – ten tribes anyway – got up and walked away. Only Judah, Benjamin, and Levi remained. King Rehoboam reacted with a petty power play. He sent Adoniram (who had been in charge of Solomon's entire labor force, and thus Jeroboam's boss) after them, with orders to double their taxes for their impudence. As you might expect, they quickly stoned him to death. Fearful that they'd come back for him, Rehoboam cut short his coronation party and fled in his chariot back to Jerusalem.

Realizing their precarious position, the ten tribes of Israel immediately elected Jeroboam their new king and formed their own army. Sure enough, Rehoboam had gathered 180,000 men of Judah and Benjamin, and was preparing to attack the ten northern tribes, to force them into submission. Now, wouldn't that have been a bloody mess! It probably would have been successful, too, except there wouldn't have been very many people left to govern after Rehoboam finished his massacre.

Knowing that, Logos sent the prophet **Shemaiah** to Rehoboam with a message. Shemaiah reached them just as that huge army was mobilized and ready to march. He shouted to Rehoboam in the hearing of his army, "Thus says YHWH God of Israel, 'Do not fight against the sons of Israel. They are your brothers. Return to your homes, for this division between Israel and Judah is from Me.'"

Rehoboam yelled at his guards to haul Shemaiah off to prison for his impertinence. But before they could obey, Logos Himself intervened. He painted the eastern sky, where the sun was still rising, with a silhouette of a vast battlefield with two advancing armies. In seconds, soldiers on both sides all lay dead or dying, right before their eyes. Rehoboam's army heard the message. They got their stuff and went home. That ended that.

So Jeroboam ruled the northern ten tribes, according to the prophecy of Ahijah. He built himself a modest palace in Shechem and made that his capital. Sadly, though he lived between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, he acted like he had never even heard the Law of God, which Israel had shouted antiphonally between the two hillsides, with the blessings for keeping it and the cursings for forsaking it. Ahijah had even warned him! But it seemed like he hadn't learned a thing, from either the law or Israel's own history.

The first thing Jeroboam did was to get rid of all the Levite priests in the northern ten tribes. (They fled south.) The priesthood for the most part had remained faithful to the house of David, so Jeroboam didn't trust them.

Then he built an alternate capital in Peniel of Gad, east of the Jordan. He wanted an escape location, and he needed to maintain control of Gilead.

Then, if you can believe it, Jeroboam made two golden calves, and installed them in new worship centers he built in Bethel and in Dan. He coaxed his people, saying, "It's really too difficult for you to go all the way to Jerusalem to worship at the Feasts. But King Solomon celebrated the Feast of Sukkot in two places, first in Gibeon at Nob, and then later in Jerusalem. So in the same way, we also have two places and two times to celebrate." So he justified his sin by pointing back to Solomon's error.

Thus Jeroboam chose his own priesthood, picked his own times to celebrate the feasts, made his own sacrifices to his calves and burned incense at their altars, and in many other ways perverted the clear laws of YHWH.

As a warning, Logos sent the prophet Shemaiah to Bethel just as Jeroboam was burning incense on his altar. Shemaiah prophesied that one day a son of David named Josiah would dig up the bones of Jeroboam's false priests and burn them on their own altar. As a sign, the altar would split apart and the ashes be poured out. Jeroboam was angry with Shemaiah; he pointed his finger and yelled to his guards to seize him. Then he found that his arm had frozen, still pointing. It made him look like an idiot.

Now Jeroboam had to eat humble pie. He pled for Shemaiah to pray that YHWH would restore his arm, which he did. But did Jeroboam turn from his evil way? No. So God decided to send a second, worse, warning.

Jeroboam moved his capital to the ancient Canaanite city of Tirzah in Manasseh. That way he could more easily officiate at the feasts at both Dan and Bethel. But after he moved, his youngest son Abijah got very sick.

Jeroboam sent his wife, in disguise, to the old prophet Ahijah, to ask about his son. Ahijah was blind, making her disguise seem a tad ridiculous. But Logos revealed to him who she was anyway. Ahijah said that YHWH was angry with Jeroboam's idolatry and that his entire family would soon be wiped out by calamities. The reason Abijah was sick, was that God had found in him a good heart, so He was taking him up to the heavenly Nursery before the calamities came down. At least Abijah would be mourned and get a decent burial! As prophesied, Abijah died and had a good burial. About that time, if I had been Jeroboam, I'd a' been repenting! But not him. He continued in his idolatrous ways the rest of his life.

That was **Jeroboam of the northern kingdom of Israel**. (From now on, 'Israel' means the northern ten tribes. This may get confusing, because I'm telling two overlapping stories.) King Solomon had died in 931 BC. Both Jeroboam in Israel (the northern ten tribes) and Rehoboam in Judah (the southern kingdom) began their reigns that year. As we said, Jeroboam turned out to be a wicked, disobedient, foolish, and idolatrous king. Now we'll go back to tell the story of **Rehoboam and the southern kingdom of Judah**.

Surprisingly, for the first three years Rehoboam was a good king. His foolishness that had cost him the northern tribes must have knocked some much-needed sense into his head. He dutifully went about securing Judah's safety, building forts and strengthening defenses. He welcomed the Levite priests fleeing Jeroboam and continued his father's support of the Levitical priesthood, so they kept the worship of YHWH pure, for a while. At 41 years old, he already had grown sons. (He had married his first two wives at 21, and now had 18 wives and 60 concubines.) As each of his sons turned 20, he found wives for them and sent them throughout the land to administer his kingdom. Thus the kingdom still looked pretty good, outwardly.

But though he had been well-trained by his father, Rehoboam no longer loved YHWH or His wisdom. By the fourth year of his reign, his moral perversions had flooded the land with immorality and idolatry. As with Solomon, his foreign wives had turned his heart away from YHWH. He built worship groves for their gods and goddesses, established pagan cult centers, carved Asherim, legalized abortions, prostitution, and homosexuality, and soon he had become as immoral as any before him. The kingdom of Judah got just as bad as the Canaanites had been before Israel drove them out! It was awful.

Any humility that he'd gained from his foolish response to Jeroboam had worn off. It had been replaced with an unbelievable arrogance. *He was king! Son of the mighty King Solomon!* Though he had lost the northern tribes, he still owned Solomon's wealth, his fabulous palace and temple, his army, and his harem. He got drunk with power. He foolishly made no effort to renew Solomon's many treaties or friendships with other kings.

The Queen Mother Maria tried to turn him back, to warn him, but he couldn't hear her. He just got angry, no matter how gently she appealed to him. His verbal abuse got so bad that Maria took Menelik and Martha down to Ethiopia in 926 BC, as I described in the previous chapter.

Suzy also tried to help. After three daughters she had finally borne him a son, which she dedicated to YHWH in the hope that he could someday be king of Israel. As Rehoboam was falling into immorality with his other wives, Suzy, the black-haired Arabian beauty, had been listening to Solomon's wisdom. She had learned Hebrew by reading the poems and proverbs Solomon had written for his son. She had learned to truly love YHWH and His wisdom. She reminded Rehoboam of Solomon's training. But he just got angry and began abusing her, too.

Logos put up with him until his idolatry invaded the Levitical priesthood. When a group of priests reproved him, Rehoboam slew them, starting with the high priest, Azariah son of Ahimaaz. Then he put on Azariah's ephod himself, and used Solomon's temple to make sacrifices to the planetary gods, Ashtoreth, and the Baals. *Logos would take no more. He assigned to Egypt the task of taking him out.*

Jeroboam hurried to Egypt to secure an alliance with Rameses II. He told the Pharaoh the whole sad story, from his own perspective. (Of course he never mentioned his own idolatry.) He made Rehoboam out to be the bad guy, and proved it by the fact that ten of the tribes had rebelled. He pointed to Rehoboam's alarming military buildup; his 180,000 man army; his new fortresses. He warned that Rehoboam was mentally unstable; he could not be trusted with all Solomon's wealth and power. He had become a threat, even to Egypt. The fact that Jeroboam had served Rameses so faithfully those two years after Solomon had tried to kill him, clinched it. Rameses agreed to 'take care' of the southern kingdom of Judah.

Thus in 926 BC (the 5th year of Rehoboam and the 17th year of Rameses) the fragile peace in Israel was shattered. Rameses moved north with 1200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. They took city after city, including the cities of the coast clear up to Gezer (which Horemheb had given to Solomon). He then moved inland, to take every city that Rehoboam had so recently fortified. His army moved at lightning speed, not even stopping to loot, continually staying ahead of Rehoboam's disorganized and dispirited army. Rameses didn't really want to fight them. He merely wanted to pull Rehoboam down off his high horse.

Every one of Rehoboam's defenses crumbled. The unthinkable had happened. The victorious Egyptian army surrounded Jerusalem. They'd hardly lost a man. Rameses sent an ultimatum to King Rehoboam, "Open your gates, or I will burn Jerusalem and kill everyone in it."

Rehoboam and the princes of Judah had fled into the fortress in Jerusalem at the approach of the Egyptians. Rehoboam had thought they were so strong, but suddenly he realized the truth of his father's favorite proverb: "Unless YHWH builds the house, they labor in vain that build it. Unless YHWH guards the city, the watchmen keeps awake in vain." (Psalm 127) So when the prophet Shemaiah came and told him, "YHWH says, 'Because you have forsaken Me, I have forsaken you,'" Rehoboam was finally able to hear. He humbled himself one last time. He got down on his knees before Shemaiah, crying, "YHWH is righteous! May He have mercy on me, a fool!"

"Get up, O King. Go open the gates to Rameses. YHWH has heard your repentance and seen your humility. He will grant you a measure of deliverance. YHWH says your lives will be spared. But you will become slaves of Egypt, so you can learn the difference between serving Me and serving the kings of this world."

So Rehoboam, still in his royal robe and with his crown on his head, went to the main gate. He had his guards fling the doors open wide. Then he walked out, alone. True to Shemaiah's prophecy, he knelt, set his crown at Rameses' feet, and put his face on the dirt. "I am your servant. I've been wicked, and YHWH God of Israel is chastising me through you. You may come into Jerusalem, my palace, anywhere you wish, and take anything that suits your fancy. You may take me and do whatever you wish with me. I only ask that you spare my people. They shouldn't have to suffer because of my sin."

Rameses was planning to slay Rehoboam before the eyes of everyone in the city, to make an example of him. But seeing his humility and submission, he changed his mind. Instead, he sent his elite guard into the city to loot all the gold. He held Rehoboam prisoner until they finished. They took the gold utensils of the temple, the decorations of the palace, Solomon's fabulous gold throne and lions, his secret treasury, everything. When Rehoboam saw all the treasures of Solomon leaving in hundreds of ox-carts for Egypt, he was truly humbled – even more so when he learned what Rameses did with all that gold. He overlaid the floor of his palace court with thick sheets of gold, so that visiting dignitaries trod upon it to reach his throne.

When Rameses had finished plundering the city, he set Rehoboam free and returned to Egypt. Rehoboam's plea had been met. Rameses had not harmed a single person in Jerusalem, nor had he taken away their food or means of livelihood – only the gold. In time, Rehoboam replaced it all with bronze. He discovered that Solomon's gold was unnecessary after all. Judah recovered, and life went on.

Rehoboam went to the temple that Sabbath, humbled and repentant. The new high priest, Johanan (Azariah's son), made a sin offering for him and told him the good news. When the Egyptian soldiers had come to loot the temple, he had warned them that foreigners weren't allowed there. They'd laughed and continued looting. When they went to enter the holy place behind the veil, he had warned them again, "YHWH will not be pleased if you try to enter there. He may slay you!"

But they had answered, "Who is YHWH, that we should fear Him? Our gods are surely stronger than He, for we have overcome you!" They started to enter.

But their captain had served with Solomon at the battle of Kadesh, and he still feared YHWH. "Let's go, men. We're finished here. We've got all the gold we need." One young soldier had disobeyed him and tried to enter through the veil anyway. Flames had flared out from the presence of YHWH and consumed him. The others fled with the golden utensils they'd already collected. Thus the golden Ark of the Covenant, the heavy gold lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table of showbread had been spared.

From then on, Rameses mostly left Judah alone. He kept his alliance with Jeroboam and the northern tribes of Israel by periodically heading into Syria to deal with the encroaching Hittites, but even that got really old. Four years later, in 922 BC (his year 21) Rameses made a lasting peace treaty with King Hattushili III. (He had taken over from Mursili III in 932 BC.) Hattushili was glad to do it, as the Hittites were having big trouble with Assyria. Warrior-king Ashur-dan II had taken over Assyria in 934 BC and had become aggressive and power-hungry. So the Hittite / Mitanni alliance no longer had the time for their annual skirmishes with Israel along their southern borders.

Rehoboam sadly never learned his lesson. After such a stern warning, after being so humbled by the Pharaoh, and after seeing YHWH's power protect the furnishings in the temple even when all the rest of Solomon's gold was taken, I would think he would eagerly repent and get rid of all the idol worship and immorality in the land. He did not. In fact it got even worse. Rehoboam's favorite wife was Maacah (daughter of Uriel and Tamar), the one who had seduced him when Suzy and Mahalath lost favor. Maacah served the Ashtoreth of the Sidonians, a fertility goddess. Her sensual idol worship entranced Rehoboam, and led him into blatant idolatry. In his 17th regnal year God took him. As he had ordered, Rehoboam's favorite son **Abijah** (Maacah's firstborn) took his throne.

So it continued. After Solomon, the story of the kings of Israel and Judah becomes like a sick soap opera with but few bright spots. Even the rare good men seemed to have fatal weaknesses. For the most part, the subsequent kings squandered the matchless kingdom of Solomon by their foolishness, idolatry, and immorality (as we see today in America). It ended in Israel's dispersion and destruction.

CHAPTER 24 – KINGS BAASHA TO AHAB, ASA

Abijah loved the immoral worship of his mother's lewd goddess, and continued her ways. He was 36 when he took the throne. Already he had fourteen wives, twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughters. But he had learned a little wisdom from his father's mistakes. He left the priesthood alone and let them continue their service to YHWH. He had heard what had happened to the Egyptian soldier who had tried to enter the temple. He feared YHWH!

Abijah's father had antagonized the northern tribes by capturing towns in Ephraim and Benjamin to expand further north. Thus Judah now held most of the territory of Benjamin and the south quarter of Ephraim. So King Jeroboam built up Israel's army into a formidable force to try to take their towns back. It all came to a head in 913 BC, just a few months after Rehoboam's death.

Jeroboam brought 800,000 soldiers from Israel down to the border of Benjamin near Bethel. Abijah met him with 400,000 men of Judah. A hill called Zemaraim lay between them, so Abijah climbed to the top and called out to Jeroboam's huge army. "Don't you know that YHWH God of Israel gave the rule of Israel forever to David and his descendants? Jeroboam is a rebel! He gathered worthless men to support him to defeat Rehoboam when he was young and timid. Do you think that just because you have a multitude of soldiers, and some golden calves for gods, that you can resist the Kingdom of YHWH? You even drove out the Levite priests, and hired fake priests for your fake gods. But as for us, YHWH is our God! We have not forsaken Him. We have real Levite priests who minister to Him every morning and light the golden lampstand every evening. We keep his charge. He is at our head, to fight for us. Therefore, O sons of Israel, do not fight against YHWH the God of your fathers, for you will never succeed."

It was an awesome speech. (I shortened it quite a bit.) Unfortunately, while he was giving it, Jeroboam's troops were sneaking around the mountain to come up behind in ambush. Abijah didn't have a chance. As he finished his speech, Jeroboam sounded the attack. Suddenly Abijah found that the army of Judah was being assailed from both front and rear! Abijah cried out in panic to YHWH. The priests cried out to YHWH, and sounded their trumpets. The men of Judah cried out to YHWH, suddenly realizing that without a miracle, all was lost. They were terrified and tried to flee, but they were surrounded! Many fell to their knees on the spot, in repentance and prayer.

Logos also heard Abijah's speech. He rather liked it. He heeded their frantic, heartfelt cries. He sent his angelic host to fight on behalf of Abijah and the soldiers of Judah. 500,000 of Jeroboam's army were slain. The rest fled, never to attack Judah again. Wicked Jeroboam reigned another three years, but he never regained his strength. Logos took him in 910 BC as he worshiped his golden calf in Bethel. His son **Nadab** became king in Israel.

But did Abijah learn his lesson, repent of his idolatry and immorality, and begin to serve YHWH in truth? Nope. As soon as the threat was gone, he was right back in the worship groves bowing to the Baals. He even became skilled at carving his own lewd Asherah poles. Logos was frankly disgusted with him. So no more warnings. Logos took him in 911 BC, shortly before Jeroboam died. His son **Asa** took his place as king in Judah.

The story of Nadab king of Israel is short and sour. He continued in his father Jeroboam's idolatrous ways, in which he led Israel into sin with the golden calves and false priests. Logos tolerated him for two years, then in 909 BC **Baasha**, his own army captain, slew him during a foolish attack against the Philistines.

The army of Israel had all hated Nadab. They supported Baasha. At Tirzah they made him the king of Israel in Nadab's place. As soon as he consolidated his power, he killed everyone, male or female, of the family of Jeroboam, according to YHWH's word through the blind prophet Abijah which he had prophesied to Jeroboam's wife.

About this time, Hittite king Hattushili III sent his daughter Maathorneferure to Egypt to seal a second peace treaty with Rameses II in the 34th year of his reign, as if Rameses didn't already have enough wives. The Hittites and their Mitanni allies needed help against the Assyrians. But Rameses was busy building monuments and temples to his own greatness. He didn't send the requested aid.

Besides finishing his father Seti's temples at Thebes and Abydos, Rameses II built a few temples there for himself as well. He added to the temples at Karnak and Luxor. He built five mortuary temples in Nubia. He built Pi-Ramesse (home of Rameses) a fabulous new capital city and palace for his royal residence at Avaris. He embellished it with tall obelisks and stelae to his wealth and power. It was the wonder of the world back then, and to some it still is.

But his greatest monument was actually the temple carved in stone at Abu Simbel. Four colossal seated statues of himself flanked the entrance. It was precisely oriented so that the rising sun at the equinox (our September 23 or March 20) flooded 200 feet into the heart of the temple to briefly illuminate three of the four gods carved there: Amun, Ra, and Ptah. The fourth, Seth, is appropriately always left dark, as he is the god of the underworld.

Did you ever wonder where Rameses got the funds for all these massive building projects? Well, now you know. It came from the gold he had plundered out of Solomon's kingdom, when Rameses humbled wicked Rehoboam.

Satan got a big kick out of that. He found Logos one day brooding over Jerusalem, and tried to taunt Him with it. "What a pity Your wimpy love wasn't strong enough to keep Solomon faithful to You. Now all his wealth is being used to serve me! In the end, I always win! Even splitting up the kingdom didn't help. Both kings now serve me!"

Logos responded sadly. “It is true that you have won some major victories. I grieve for all the suffering you are causing. But there are important lessons here for the wise. As long as you were blocked from tempting him, Solomon was blessed beyond any man. Yet even then, when he began to rely on his own wisdom, his kingdom began to crumble. Now it is clear for all the universe to see that true wisdom, wisdom that always results in abundant blessing, comes only from Me. Look at yourself, Satan! You think yourself so powerful, so cunning, but I swear that you will not taste the blessings – the love, joy, peace, and prosperity that Solomon once had – until you seek Me for wisdom.”

“What makes you think I want Your blessings? You just don’t get it, do You? I love to torment Your people. My joy is to drink their blood. My *peace* and *prosperity* is when I own the multitudes and crush them under my boot!”

“With that attitude, your kingdom will fall, for even those who serve you will come to hate you.”

“You... You...” Satan was trying to say “Fool!” but it simply wouldn’t come out in the presence of the King of the Universe. He had to settle for, “You are so naïve! You still think I am trying to build a kingdom? You think I want people to love me, to worship me and serve me? Oh, no! I’ve grown way beyond that. Now their worship is only a tool to keep them under control until I choose to torment them, to make them squeal in disbelief and pain, to shred their foolish bodies and drink...”

“Enough! Even after all these years you still do not understand My Law. Though I gave you power over My creation, yet you cannot get around My law of sowing and reaping. It is woven into the fabric of the universe. Every pain you cause to others will...”

“Yes, yes. I know. It will all come back on me someday. Or so You say. But if I end up with all Your people, then You won’t have the power to enforce it! And right now, if You haven’t noticed, I have very nearly accomplished that! Israel serves You no better than the Canaanites did, and look what happened to them! You hated them, and told Israel to destroy them. Now You have to do the same with Israel. You have to hate them, too. They’re mine! All mine! I shall love them, every one, as I crush their pitiful...”

“Begone, Satan!” Logos roared. “If you will not learn wisdom, you will have no audience with Me!”

Satan fled, his whiskers singed by the flame that shot from Logos’ mouth. He determined to take out his rage on the new kings of Judah and Israel: Asa and Baasha. Baasha was a piece of cake. He had come up through the ranks as a career military man and was as hardened as they come. He cared nothing for religion; his god was whatever worked. Beyond being surprised that his coup d’état had worked so well, he gave YHWH not a thought. Jeroboam’s idols were doing a good job keeping the people under control. So he let the false priests continue to do their thing.

But King Asa of Judah was a different story, one of the few bright spots in this sordid era. He had been born of idolatrous, immoral parents and grandparents. But they had not taken time to raise him. He was raised by an old nanny who had lived through Solomon’s glory days, descent into depravity, and final reconciliation. She had taught him well, so when his father Abijah died, he was prepared, though he was only eighteen years old.

Satan had ignored Asa until now. *Kids are easy. You give ’em a little freedom, a little power, a little admiration from their peers, and you can get ’em to do anything. And if they won’t, you just get their mother on their case.*

Except for Asa, it was his grandmother, Maacah. As queen mother, she had manipulated her son Abijah all his life, just like she had manipulated and beguiled Rehoboam into idolatry after she had first seduced him. So now she certainly could do the same for her grandson!

But Asa had heard all those stories from his nanny. In the spring of 911 BC, everyone of importance had gathered in the great courtroom of Solomon’s palace to celebrate Asa’s coronation. He took the throne, settled the crown firmly on his head, and called out. “Who among the palace guard is for me?” It was just rhetoric, of course. Everyone in the guard shouted out their loyalty. Then, “Who in the military is for me?” The attending generals and captains shouted their support. “Who among the priesthood is for me?” All the Levites in attendance shouted their support. And so it went, all they way through to, “Who among the Sisters of Mercy is for me?” All the lovely ladies in black and white shouted their support. Thus every soul in the great hall had just sworn their allegiance to the new king.

King Asa took this moment to stand, point straight at Maacah beside him, and in a thundering voice belying his eighteen years, shout, “Then get this wicked woman out of the Holy City! If she ever shows her face in Jerusalem again, stone her! She shall be queen mother no longer, for she seduced the land into sin! Chop down her horrid Asherah pole from on top of the Mount of Olives, and burn it by the Brook Kidron. Do it now! For I shall not sit back down upon my throne until it is done!”

Satan was stunned. His spell over the kingdom of Judah was broken. Within the next few months, young King Asa made a clean sweep of all the idols in the land, commanded the priests to cleanse Solomon’s temple, ordered a strict enforcement of all YHWH’s laws against immorality and idolatry, and exhorted his people to return to the pure worship of YHWH. It all happened so fast that Satan was unable to respond. He found himself blocked, shut out from Judah entirely. About the only thing that King Asa did not do, was to remove the old tabernacle that Solomon had put on the Mount of Olives. The Sisters of Mercy still used it as a worship center. Nobody wanted to stop them! But at least he made sure it was cleansed of the Asherim and was actually being used to worship YHWH.

Logos was very pleased with Asa. For ten years Judah lived in peace and prospered. Satan hated that! And so soon after he had sworn to Logos that everyone in both kingdoms belonged to him! He worked hard to get Baasha of Israel to attack the southern kingdom of Judah, but he couldn't do it. Israel was still too weak. Their army still had not recovered from Abijah's terrible battle with Jeroboam in 913 BC in which they'd lost half a million good men.

Asa married Azubah, daughter of Shilhi, a prince of Judah. She was a good and faithful queen. She too loved YHWH and encouraged him in his faith. Azubah became pregnant in 906 BC, the same year that old Hittite king Hattushili turned the kingdom over to his young son, Tudhaliya IV. The next year, Azubah gave birth to a son. In grateful acknowledgement of YHWH's mercies, they named him **Jehoshaphat**, meaning 'YHWH judged', for Asa realized that God had severely judged his parents and their parents for their terrible wickedness.

But though the kingdom of Judah was at peace, the joint kingdom of Hatti/Mitanni was not. It was still facing attacks from the Assyrians, Anatolians, and Cimmerians. Tabrimmon of Syria was not much help, since his army was on his southern border. (Tabrimmon had allied with Baasha to help protect Israel from potential attack by Judah until they could regain their strength.) So Hattushili left his son Tudhaliya in charge of the northern wars and brought his eldest (and loveliest) daughter down to Egypt for a third alliance with Rameses II. Rameses had accepted Maathorneferure from King Hattushili back in 909 BC. Now in 902, the 41st year of his reign, he had many other wives as well. But lust trumped common sense. Rameses took her older sister, too, and reluctantly agreed to help the Hittites secure their northern and eastern borders.

Rameses gathered the largest army ever assembled. Besides the Egyptian armies, he had Libyans, Sheridans, Nubians, and Ethiopians. His general was an Ethiopian by the name of Zerah, who brought 300 chariots of his own besides the 2000 of the Egyptians. All told, Zerah fielded over a million men; a totally invincible force in those days.

They gathered at Succoth in the spring of 901 BC. They filled the land. They would not be staying on the Via Maris along the coastline. There were simply too many. King Asa heard the news that their plan was to march rapidly through Israel and straight to Carchemish in northeastern Syria, where a battle was already raging. The Hittites were desperately holding on in hope that Zerah would get there in time. But Asa knew that an army that big would plunder and pillage all along the way, no matter how rapidly they passed through. He prayed, "O YHWH! Shall we give them safe passage? Shall we join them to fight the Assyrians?"

Logos answered him. "Gather all your forces and stop them. What they plan is not of Me. I sent the Assyrians to discipline the Hittites, for they have grown wicked, cruel, and arrogant. No one shall aid them."

Asa did not know what his armies could do against such a huge force, but he obeyed the clear Word of YHWH. When he sent out a call to muster the militia, a surprising number showed up. He was actually able to field 300,000 from Judah and 280,000 from Benjamin. He brought them down to the Valley of Zephathah, which runs north past Mareshah and then feeds into the larger Valley of Elah. As the battle began, King Asa remained in prayer. "O YHWH, no one besides You could defeat a force this powerful. We have no strength in comparison. So help us, O YHWH. We have placed our trust in You. In Your name and by Your command we came against this multitude. You are God! Let not man prevail against You!"

Thus once again, all the heavenly host fought for Judah. Logos routed the Egyptian army. They scattered and fled before King Asa. He pursued them all the way to Gerar. The number of the slain was beyond counting. Then Judah plundered their camps, taking all their food and livestock. Asa returned to Jerusalem with incredible wealth, praising YHWH that so few of his own men had died.

The next year was 900 BC. It was on the 30 year cycle of great catastrophes. Saturn and Jupiter both aligned in Aquarius to bring Mars close to Earth. But it had also just followed a Year of Jubilee, when the Venus/Mercury 'Rod of Asclepius' pulled Mars back, bringing 'salvation'. There were no casualties! That fall King Asa heard the news of a small military force on the Via Maris, traveling toward Jerusalem. It was Pharaoh Rameses himself, with only his elite guard for personal protection.

Eager to establish some sort of an alliance, King Asa welcomed him into the palace, and set up a throne next to his. After an hour or so of polite political maneuvering, Rameses casually asked Asa, "Do you have any idea what happened last year when you attacked Zerah?"

"Not really," Asa admitted. "I only did it because YHWH God of Israel told me to. I heard Zerah was going up to aid the Hittites. But YHWH told me they have become very wicked. He didn't want them aided."

"I see..." Rameses stroked his fake chin beard. "Well, now that it's over, I want you to know the rest of the story. At my orders, my ambassadors had given your servants false information. You thought I had sent Zerah to help the Hittites, which was true. But I had told him to first attack you and wipe out your army! Then he was to join Baasha's army, go with them to Syria and join Tabrimmon's army, then head up to Carchemish. I had an alliance with Baasha. He promised to help me against the Assyrians *if I would conquer you*. When we returned, he planned to kill you, take over your kingdom, and subdue your people."

"I didn't know that, but YHWH our God knew."

"Did He also know the result? My failure to aid them will surely mark the end of the Hittite / Mitanni empire. They are so weakened now that they can never recover."

“That bad?”

“That bad. They lost the battles at Carchemish last year. Hattushili is old. Tudhaliya is a foolish, arrogant upstart anyway. King Adad-nirari II of Assyria walked away with a huge amount of tribute. He is too power hungry. He sees the triple intervention of the gods as a good omen for the extensive expansion of his empire.”

“Triple... Oh. You mean the dual flyby of Mars plus the flyby of Venus? We call this the year of Jubilee.”

“Right. It is clear the gods are fighting for them. I see the handwriting on the wall. The Assyrians are drunk with power. They think they can conquer the world. When Tudhaliya rebels against that crushing amount of tribute, the Assyrians will come in and wipe them out. I was really their last hope. So you see, when you destroyed my army, you effectively brought down the mighty Hittite empire!”

“You know, O Pharaoh, it has nothing to do with the alignments of the stars or the passing of the planets...”

“Huh? It has everything to do with it. We all worship the same gods, though by different names. I don’t know if the Assyrians just sacrificed more, or believed more, or prayed more, or what. But it is clear the gods are on their side now. Otherwise there is no way you could ever have defeated Zerah!

“But what I don’t understand, and this is why I came to talk with you – did the gods side with you just to save the Assyrians and destroy the Hittites? Or did the gods help you because you’ve been praying to them? What did you do to gain their favor? I’ve got to learn your secret. I can’t afford another defeat like Zerah had last year.”

“I told you, YHWH Elohim is our God. He always helps us when we pray to Him – if we’ve been faithful to Him! But when we sin against Him, He allows us to be defeated, as with my grandfather Rehoboam when he sinned and you came up here and rightly subdued him. YHWH allowed that! It has nothing to do with the nearness of the planets.”

“My father Seti said that YHWH Elohim is just your name for the planets, the Baals; that’s why it’s plural. That’s why when he built his temple he dedicated it to Father-God YHWH, who is just Osiris, (Saturn) in our language. My father honored all the Elohim: Isis (Venus, the wife of Osiris), Horus (Jupiter, son of Isis and Osiris), even Seth (Mars, adversary of Horus). He said they’re all part of the Elohim. We, the Hittites, the Assyrians, all the nations worship the same gods, only by different names.”

“No, Rameses. You misunderstand our God YHWH Elohim. He is one God, the Creator of the planets and everything else; the earth, the sky, all the heavenly host. He made it all and rules it by the Word of His Power. His name is plural because He is the infinite divine Spirit, who is everywhere, all the time, to everyone, as if He were many Spirits. His adversary is a demon spirit, Satan, not Mars.”

“You mean you weren’t praying to either Seth or Isis when Zerah attacked you last year? I came all the way up here to find out which one you were praying to. Zerah saw you up on that hill, kneeling and praying. He thought it was Isis, as she was nearby. But I was sure it was Seth, because of the way you destroyed my army.”

“No. It was neither. I was just praying to YHWH.”

“Well, whatever you did, I need to know. And I’ve got to teach my sons, especially Merneptah, who will probably take over for me when I’m gone. Right now Merneptah is desperately rebuilding my devastated military. Are you even aware of what happened when you prayed?”

“Not exactly. I saw your army turn tail and begin to flee. I assumed that YHWH simply put the fear of God into their hearts. He often does that when we pray.”

“Well, I didn’t see, because I wasn’t there. I had Zerah in charge. He said that when they began to attack, your army doubled, or tripled, right before their eyes. Suddenly the hills were literally covered with soldiers where there had been none before. The new soldiers’ armor glistened like polished silver or gold. They advanced in perfect, unbroken ranks, mowing down my best men as they stood frozen in shock. Neither arrow nor sword nor spear could faze them. Zerah says it’s the most terrifying thing he’s ever seen, and he’s seen a lot. They couldn’t flee fast enough! I’ve got to know what you did!”

“I told you. I just prayed to YHWH.”

“I don’t get it. YHWH wasn’t even there! Zerah said there was no altar, or image, or sacrifice, or anything.”

“I told you!” Asa was trying not to get exasperated. “YHWH is Spirit. He’s everywhere, even right here. But you can’t see Him. You just pray and He hears you. And He talks to you, too, uh... if you know His voice.”

“He’s here? So... ah... do you know His voice?”

“Yes, sometimes. I prayed about letting Zerah’s army pass through in peace, or offering to help him fight the Assyrians. I heard Him quite clearly, then. YHWH told me to stop him. He said He had sent the Assyrians to discipline the Hittites because of their wickedness.”

“Ask Him about me. What do I have to do to get Him to help me in my battles? I don’t like to lose!”

“Okay. I’ll ask. But it may take a while, or He may not answer at all.” Asa got off his throne, stepped off the dais, and knelt on a small rug in the back corner of the room. Not knowing what else to do, Rameses followed him.

After a long time of prayer, King Asa sat up. “YHWH answered me. But I’m sorry, you won’t like the answer. He’s not going to fight your battles for you.”

“Not under any condition? Surely there is something I can do, some sacrifice, or prayer, or deal, or... or...”

“Well, yes, I guess there is something you could do, but it’s a pretty big thing – you might say lots of little things. YHWH told me that you’re not going to do it.”

“Aw, c’mon, Asa. You underestimate me! I’d do pretty much anything for that kind of power!”

Asa didn’t want to say. He beat around the bush for a while, until his maid came in to call them for lunch. She was shocked to find them back in a corner kneeling on a rug, but she wisely kept her mouth shut about it. That gave Asa an idea. “Rameses, as we walk to the dining hall, look carefully around the palace. Look at everything. Tell me what you see. Then I’ll answer your question.”

So King Asa took him on a tour through the palace. When they got to the dining hall, he seated Rameses to his right. Asa’s wife Azubah and their son Jehoshaphat (who was five) sat to his left. They were served and began eating. Asa kept mum and let Rameses stew for a bit.

Finally his curiosity overcame him. “Asa, you told me to tell you what I saw. Well... I didn’t see anything special. In fact, I was totally underwhelmed! As heir of the glorious King Solomon, I expected to see beautiful statues, murals, carvings; I expected lavish costumes on a thousand slaves bowing to you everywhere you went; I expected a harem full of lovely half-naked women and a zillion snot-nosed kids howling underfoot. I didn’t see any of that.”

“Thank you, Rameses. You saw what I hoped you’d see. That’s the answer to your question. That’s what you have to do if you want YHWH to fight your battles.”

Rameses was giving him this blank, “Huh?” look, so he continued. “You expected to see here all the things you see in your own palace, the lavish decorations, carvings, murals, statues, bowing servants, dozens of wives, and so on. All of those are involved with your pagan gods; their idols and images are everywhere. Even you are considered a god – that’s why your people all bow to you wherever you go, and why so many women want to marry you and bear your children. But YHWH is a jealous God. He tolerates no other gods. *If you want Him to fight your battles with you, you must get rid of everything tainted with idolatry.*”

Rameses sat there with his mouth half-open. This was the first time anybody had ever seen him at a loss for words. The implications finally sank in. “I have to give up all my gods? All my decorations? All my adoring servants? All my wives, too? That’s utter nuts. Lookit all the wives Solomon had, and he never lost a battle. In fact, the only battles I’ve ever lost were that one at Kadesh when King Solomon came and yanked my fat out of the fire, and this one with you. Other than that, my gods have taken care of me just fine. I’m feared the world over. My servants – all my people – love me and bow to me. I’m incredibly rich. My country is prosperous. I take care of my wives. What kind of a God is YHWH, anyway, that He should be so mean and intolerant as to make me give up all of that?”

King Asa realized his next words would be crucial, for Rameses and for all Egypt. He had been well-trained by his nanny in the wisdom of Solomon about YHWH, so he knew the answer. But still he bowed and prayed, out loud, “O YHWH, please give me Your wisdom how to answer the Pharaoh. Defend Your holy name and the goodness of Your character, I pray.” After a small pause, he looked up.

“That’s it? You talk to YHWH just like that?”

Asa nodded. “And He answers me just as easily, when He wants to. He just showed me how to best answer your accusation that He is mean and intolerant. Do you know your Egyptian history?”

“Of course! For two thousand glorious years!”

“Then you will remember the Amalekites, who ruled Egypt for 200 years until the time of Ahmose.”

“Well, yeah! We hated them and drove them out.”

“True, but I know the story from Israel’s perspective, for we rehearse it every year. There are things you were never told about the Amalekites. Their leader, Salitis, feared and served YHWH. But Egypt served all the same gods you now serve. For many years, Egypt had cruelly oppressed Israel and dishonored YHWH, even though He had saved them from the great famine through Joseph. YHWH sent many warnings, but the Pharaohs wouldn’t listen. So he finally brought Israel out of Egypt, leaving your land in ruins and your royal house entirely slain. Then, because Salitis had obeyed Him, YHWH made him the next Pharaoh of Egypt. He ruled firmly but fairly, and it was under his rule that your land was slowly restored, nearly to its former greatness.”

“Salitis and the Amalekites were obeying YHWH? We looked at them as evil invaders. What happened?”

“Salitis had made a tragic mistake. YHWH swore to him that if his army attacked Israel, the Amalekites would be annihilated from the face of the earth. He didn’t really know YHWH then, and didn’t believe it. So he attacked Israel anyway. He was soundly defeated, even though his army was far superior to Israel’s army. As a result, Salitis came to know and fear YHWH, and repented of attacking Israel. YHWH forgave him, and told him that the curse would not fall upon him or his descendants as long as they remained true to YHWH. That’s when YHWH sent the Amalekites to Egypt. Salitis helped your people recover.”

Rameses was all ears. He had never heard the story told this way before. Asa continued, “Salitis tore down your idols and remained true to YHWH the rest of his life. But his descendants forsook YHWH. They actually restored all of Egypt’s false gods! They became very cruel and wicked, oppressing Egypt. That’s why you came to hate them so much, and really, that’s the only reason you were able to ultimately drive them out of Egypt. YHWH patiently warned them, but they refused to listen.”

This was all strange to Rameses. *A God who is patient? Who forgives? Who warns? Who speaks, makes promises, and then keeps His promises? A God who even cares at all?* “So, I suppose that curse that YHWH had given Salitis for attacking Israel finally fell on his descendants.”

“Exactly. But even there, YHWH waited a long time. He gave them warnings, like when you overcame them and drove them out. He actually waited until the last righteous Amalekite had died. Then he told King Saul of Israel to carry out the curse. He told Saul to slay every man, woman, child, sheep, camel, donkey, and every living thing, and burn everything so no trace of the Amalekites remained.”

Rameses frowned. “That’s exactly what I mean! YHWH is mean and intolerant, just as I said! Why kill the women? And the babies? Why kill the animals? What did they have to do with it? That’s just disgusting.”

“Not at all. In fact it is just the opposite. Listen closely. First, YHWH is Truth. He always keeps His Word, no exceptions. If He pronounces a curse, He always follows through when you violate His conditions. There is no capriciousness with Him. He says He’ll bless you if you do this, and curse you if you do that, and He means exactly what He says. You always know right where you stand with Him. His words are not idle words. Second, YHWH sees the bigger picture. He is a very, very big God. He is loving, patient, forgiving, and tolerant as long as there is any hope of repentance, for it is His goodness that brings people to repentance. But He sees! He knows when there is no longer any hope of repentance. He waited until the very last righteous Amalekite had died. Then He demonstrated His infinite mercy and kindness by swiftly wiping out their entire culture, even the babies and animals and all their possessions. That’s what Saul was supposed to do.”

“What? That’s not mercy and kindness! That’s...”

“No. It truly is. You see, wickedness always results in suffering. A wicked king opens the door to suffering on his nation. So when an entire culture is totally wicked, with not one righteous person to ease the pain, the suffering becomes unbearable. Those babies, and even the animals, would have grown up to know nothing but pain and grief. In lashing out against their suffering, they would have gone on to even greater depths of wickedness, thus passing on greater suffering to their children. So the cycle spirals downward with nothing left in the whole culture to stop it. That is when YHWH in great mercy intervenes to put an end to the pain. Then those babies, who would have grown up to know nothing but evil and pain, are taken to meet Him in Paradise (we call it Sheol). There He heals their pain, wipes away their tears, and teaches them His ways of righteousness and peace that they never could have learned in their wicked culture on earth.” Asa beamed at Rameses. “So you see, YHWH is never mean or intolerant. We only think Him to be so because we can’t see the whole picture. He is always good, just, and righteous.”

Asa grinned, as if he had just solved all the mysteries of the universe. “We’re all like Amalekites. YHWH loves to bless us when we obey Him, and He’s patient and forgiving when we don’t, but He can’t change His own Law. He’s a God of absolute truth and faithfulness. When we choose the ways of sin, suffering, and death, He does His best to warn us and those around us who are hurt by our sin, but eventually the Law must be fulfilled and we reap what we’ve sown. When the pain of our sins returns on us and our loved ones, many will repent, and YHWH is quick to forgive and heal. But for those who will not, indeed can not, ever repent – in mercy YHWH takes them to Paradise, so He can teach them the truth about Himself.”

“Huh. He just lets them die and takes them to Paradise. That’s it? Whether king or peasant, rich or poor, all are treated alike? No mortuary temple, embalming, servants, food, and wealth for the afterlife – none of that is needed?”

“Needed? None of that can even go to Paradise! Only our soul. We can bring nothing but our memories. And yes, king and peasant are treated alike, except your choices do matter. There are rewards in Paradise for those who do good on earth, and punishments for those who are wicked. But everyone gets the same chance to accept YHWH for who He is. Or to reject Him, although I don’t know how anyone could reject Him after seeing how loving He is.”

“So...” Rameses was really pondering this. “I have to get rid my gods and statues, and my wives and kids...”

“Wait,” Asa interrupted. “YHWH loves your wives and children too. You can’t just get rid of them. That would be wrong, and a second wrong cannot correct the first. He’ll tell you what to do. With Solomon, he divorced his wives, but continued to care for them. They started the Sisters of Mercy, who have been such a blessing to everyone. It wasn’t his wives, but their idols, their love of false gods, that caused Solomon so much trouble. Once his wives learned to worship YHWH, they were fine.”

“So, I have to get rid of our gods and teach everyone to bow to YHWH instead. Then YHWH will fight with me in all my battles. But wait. You said YHWH is Spirit. What do they bow to? They’ve got to have something to bow to. And they can’t even bow to me?” Rameses paused, horrified. “That will never work, not in my country!”

“It will when they realize that all those gods are false gods, invented by men in the image of created things, with no power to help you. Only YHWH, the Creator of all things, has the power to actually help you!”

King Asa continued with Rameses, but it was hard. Rameses was 68 years old and had reigned for 43 years. He had a lifetime of idolatry and pride to overcome. But he finally said he believed, and returned to Egypt with a promise to see what he could do. Asa was ecstatic at his victory. But as you can imagine, when Rameses got back to Egypt not much actually changed there.

King Baasha of northern Israel was furious that his plan to use Egypt to destroy Asa's armies had failed so totally. He built up his own army and tried again and again to defeat the southern kingdom of Judah. From 900 BC on, he dedicated all his efforts to this. That was pretty stupid, because Logos continued to protect Judah as long as Asa remained faithful to Him, so Baasha's efforts were wasted. The northern ten tribes suffered terribly under Baasha's foolishness, so much so that refugees began streaming into Judah looking for work, and food.

As I said, 900 BC was a catastrophic year. The triple flybys of Venus and Mars did little damage, as 901 BC had been a Jubilee year. But there were a few volcanoes and weather disruptions. Ash circled the globe, stunting crops. Rains failed; fields grew barren; famine stalked the land. The Levant was not exempt. Solomon's huge work force had finally been released to return to their farms; but now their farms were not producing. Jobs became scarce. For four years each year was worse than the last. Asa just prayed and trusted YHWH. But Baasha angrily blamed Judah and continued his foolish and futile attacks.

In early 896 BC Logos sent a prophet, **Azariah**, son of Oded. He met Asa at the temple, right after the morning sacrifice on the Sabbath. Asa was still kneeling at the altar, praying for protection for his people from Baasha and from the growing famine. Azariah shouted out to the gathered multitude, "Listen to me, O King Asa. Hear me all Judah and Benjamin. YHWH is with you, when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him. But if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. After King Solomon's death, Israel was without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without My Law. My people turned away from the truth and served the gods of the nations. There was no peace to those who went out or to those who stayed in. Catastrophes afflicted all the inhabitants of the earth. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for it was God who troubled them with every kind of calamity. But in your distress, you have turned to YHWH God of Israel. You sought Him – He let you find Him! He protected you from Zerah's army. He will protect you from Baasha and from the famine, too. Good King Asa is YHWH's answer to the cries of His people. In you O King, they shall be blessed and find peace. Therefore be strong! Don't lose courage, for you have YHWH's approval on your work!"

Joy swept the crowd, with cheers and shouts asking Asa to respond to the prophet. He raised his arms for silence. "Thank you for the encouragement, Azariah, and also for the challenge. Fifteen years ago, when I first became king, I cleared out the land of idols. For ten years we had peace. We got rich when we defeated Zerah's army! But two years later, we have famine. What happened? We got proud and thought we were invincible. We began to get complacent. We tolerated a slow spread of idolatry and immorality over the land. But from this day forth we tolerate no more! We will seek YHWH, love His law, and hate what He hates!"

The people responded with great enthusiasm. Within weeks, thousands of idols had been found and brought before the priests to be burned. All the cities and towns of Judah, Benjamin, and even the captured cities of Ephraim, were cleansed of idolatry. The Law of YHWH was restored, the priests cleansed, and the sacrifices offered to atone for their sins. They had trusted Venus to save them from Mars, but they had not freed their brother Israelis or restored them to their heritage as the Jubilee Law required. So now they did. There was real repentance! Now they were ready to celebrate the Passover in truth.

Baasha tried to prevent the northern ten tribes from going to Jerusalem. He held his own 'Passover' at Bethel and Dan, as if he cared about worship. However, many of his people still went to Jerusalem to meet with YHWH.

The Passover celebrations at Jerusalem that year were the best in many years. The cleansing of the land resulted in a new and wonderful intimacy with YHWH that most people had never known. This just gave them increased expectations for the next Feast – Shavuot (Pentecost).

The kingdom of Judah was blessed that year. The famine was over, the farmlands restored. Even by the third month, Sivan (our June), it was obvious that Judah was prospering and Israel was not. At the Feast of Shavuot a lot more left Israel to travel to Jerusalem. Baasha was furious, but they went anyway. It was the greatest Shavuot ever held. They sacrificed to YHWH 700 oxen and 7000 sheep, mostly from the plunder they'd taken from Zerah's army. Everyone ate, and was satisfied. One and all, they entered into a covenant with YHWH, to seek and serve Him, and Him alone, with all their heart and soul. They swore to put to death any they found still secretly clinging to their idols. Logos was very pleased. He met with them, rejoiced in their celebrations, and blessed them with peace. That summer the harvest in Judah was greater than any since the time of Solomon. So the kingdom of Judah prospered, and Logos gave them rest on every side for 7 years.

The northern kingdom of Israel had not been doing so well. Baasha still had that treaty with King Tabrimmon of Syria, but the famine reached Syria, too. Though he didn't have much to spare, Baasha agreed to send food to Syria in exchange for military support, but both nations remained too weak to attack Judah. Still Baasha continued his insane grudge, trying to find some way to defeat King Asa.

Tukulti-Ninurta II became king of Assyria in 890 BC. He continued in the policies of his father Adad-nirari II, oppressing and collecting tribute from the surrounding nations and growing strong at their expense. Though he spent most of his military effort in Babylon, he still kept Hatti under his thumb. Foolish Hittite king Tudhaliya IV had no clue what to do. The once mighty Hittite empire steadily decayed, rotting within and oppressed without, with no one to help. Now released from Hatti's grip, the Mitanni quickly transferred their allegiance to Assyria.

In 888 BC eighty-year-old Pharaoh Rameses II crowned his 14th son Merneptah as co-regent. In a good mood, he sent life-saving grain to his starving allies in Israel and Syria. Just in time! The Levant recovered from the famine.

King Tabrimmon died at the age of 66. His aggressive young son Ben-Hadad took over. With Egypt's grain, he strengthened Syria enough to keep its alliance with Israel.

So King Baasha decided he could finally carry out his plan. He took his army down around Saul's old palace at Gibeah. There they began to build fortifications, starting on the nearby strategic heights called Ramah. His goal was to blockade the trade routes between the two kingdoms. He intended to stop Asa from taking any more territory in Ephraim, and he wanted to block his people from going south to celebrate the Feasts in Jerusalem!

Asa was worried. Baasha was thumbing his nose as if to say, "Just try to stop me! My allies Syria and Egypt will teach you a lesson you'll never forget!" King Asa certainly did not want to fight either Syria or Egypt.

Satan was right there to plant a quiet suggestion in Asa's mind. It was so cute, so perfect, Asa was sure that it came from God. He had been getting quite rich from Judah's general prosperity. Likewise contributions to the temple were way beyond what was needed. He took a lavish gift of silver and gold from both the temple treasury and his own, and sent it with his most trusted ambassadors to Damascus to see if they could bribe young Ben-Hadad.

The ambassadors returned with a military alliance with Syria. Asa's plan worked perfectly. Ben-Hadad broke his treaty with Baasha and attacked on his northern border. Baasha took his army and rushed to defend it, leaving the new fortifications at Ramah unfinished. King Asa calmly ordered his army to steal Baasha's fortifications. He used them to strengthen his own defenses in Mizpah and Geba. He was exceedingly pleased with himself.

Logos was not pleased. He sent **Hanani** the Prophet to Asa. "Whatever happened to your faith in YHWH, O King? Because you relied on the king of Syria instead of YHWH your God, you missed out on the opportunity to destroy the Syrian army as you did Zerah's mighty army from the south. I would have fought for you! Have you forgotten how I fought for you before? My people would have been saved from much suffering. Because you didn't seek Me, from now on you will have wars. For the eyes of YHWH move to and fro throughout the whole earth seeking those He may support, any whose heart is completely His."

Asa was a good king, but in this one thing he had a blind spot. He was furious with Hanani the Prophet. He had him thrown in prison. Others in his court saw the unfairness of that and made an appeal to him. So he had them tossed in prison, too. For weeks Asa nursed his anger, justifying himself and rejecting counsel. It settled into his bones, and became a root of bitterness that never left him.

Asa didn't care if the Syrians harassed the northern tribes of Israel. *They deserved it!* Thus he hardened his heart against the cries of his brothers suffering under the Syrian invasion that he himself had invited.

Syria attacked city after city in the northern tribe of Naphtali. Baasha couldn't stop them. Fiesty Ben-Hadad swept deep into Galilee. Over the next three years he took all the fertile lands around Chinnereth (the Sea of Galilee). Israel suffered terribly under the Syrian oppression.

King Baasha had never served YHWH. He hated Asa not just because of that bribe to Ben-Hadad, but also because he clearly saw that Judah was blessed when they served YHWH. You'd think he could put two and two together and get rid of his idols. But in 886 BC he did the opposite. He ordered a fast to the two golden calves that Jeroboam had made, and celebrated the Sabbatical year by sacrifices to Astarte and the planetary gods. Logos was angry about that, but wanted to give him one more chance to repent. Syria captured another city – in Zebulun, lower Galilee!

Baasha's eyes were opened. For the first time he realized that his gods had failed him. Everything he did had failed, while everything Asa did prospered. He needed YHWH – Asa's God! He sent a delegation of ambassadors down to Jerusalem to talk with Asa. They were to plead for terms of peace and implore Asa to break his alliance with Syria and ally with Israel instead. They were to beg Asa to entreat his God YHWH for them. But they each had a knife strapped to his thigh, with orders to kill Asa if he rejected their plea.

Hanani the Prophet had been in Asa's prison for three years. As he did every few months, King Asa came to him and demanded. "Are you ready to acknowledge that my defense against Baasha was of YHWH?"

Hanani answered, "No," as before. "You didn't even ask YHWH. Your defense, though it worked, was wrong. It did not accomplish God's purpose. He does not want you allied with Syria, who is His enemy. Now your brothers in Israel are suffering terribly because of your sin. And you multiply your sins by hardening your heart against them."

"What does YHWH want me to do, go help them? Ha! Baasha has fought against me his entire reign!"

"Yes. YHWH wants you to forgive Baasha and help him. The goodness of God leads men to repentance. YHWH believes that Baasha will finally repent if you help him."

"Forgive Baasha? No! Never! He doesn't deserve to be forgiven." Asa stalked off, leaving Hanani in prison.

That night as Asa was drifting off to sleep, Azubah snuggled up to him and said, "Darling, today I heard sad news from my sister who lives in Shechem. Her husband died fighting the Syrians. She is destitute. They never fully recovered from the famine, you know. The grain Rameses sent is gone. And those wicked Syrians keep on oppressing them. Don't you think we could help them?"

“Now Azubah,” Asa explained in what he thought was a patient and kind way. “You’re just a woman. What could you know of politics? Baasha and the northern tribes have fought me all my life. They are idolaters. Syria is YHWH’s tool to force them to get rid of their idols. Until they do, they don’t deserve our help.”

“I know they don’t, darling, but she’s my sister! And in a way, all of northern Israel is our brother. Do any of us really deserve YHWH’s blessings?”

“Yes, of course. I do! Judah does! We have remained true to YHWH when Israel turned away. We obeyed Him and got rid of the idols. We earned the prosperity we now enjoy. They haven’t. Why should we give them any help at all? We’d just be fighting against YHWH.”

“But can’t we help my sister? It doesn’t seem right for us to have so much and her to suffer.”

“Okay, then bring her down here to live with us. But we are not going to help all your sister’s in-laws up there!” Asa kissed his wife goodnight and turned away, hoping he wouldn’t appear angry. But he couldn’t sleep. All night Logos gently pleaded with him to soften his heart toward Israel. But he couldn’t hear. He figured the voice belonged to the adversary. So he argued passionately against it, even praying that YHWH would force Baasha to repent, and destroy Israel utterly unless they got rid of their idolatry.

The next day, Baasha’s ambassadors came to his court to bow before him, presenting gifts and pleading for help. Asa had not slept well and was in a foul mood. The thought came to him, *Baasha has truly humbled himself. Now is the time to respond with kindness toward your brother Israel.* But Satan was there too, and he knew about the knives. He planted suspicion in Asa’s mind. “Baasha wants my help, after fighting me all these years? I don’t believe it. Guards, search through their clothes. I’ll bet they’re spies.”

The guards stepped up to grab them, but one lunged forward, pulling a knife from his thigh. King Asa would certainly have been slain, for he was unarmed and the young man was very strong and fast. But at the last second, an agile guard caught his ankle and pulled him back. The knife, intended for his heart, only slashed his thigh. He didn’t give up, slashing several more times at Asa’s feet as the guard yanked him away. His injuries were bad, but not life-threatening. Some tendons in both feet had been cut, which might make it difficult to walk, but everything else should heal up just fine. After treatment by his physicians he returned to his court.

First he ordered Baasha’s ambassadors slain. Then he wrote out a message to Baasha, which he sent by the hand of Jehu, the young son of Hanani the Prophet. Jehu gladly delivered the message, hoping that his eagerness to help Asa would get his father out of prison. Jehu traveled to the palace at Tirzah and stood before Baasha. He unsealed the message and read it to the king. It sounded rather curt.

“Baasha, king of Israel, from Asa king of Judah. Your spies tried to kill me and were slain. Your wars against me cannot succeed, for YHWH fights for us and against you. Syria will continue to oppress you until you repent of your idolatry and return to YHWH. If you do not, the Syrians will surely destroy you and all your people.”

Baasha was a little cynical. “So, Asa is righteous and we are wicked? What about wicked Syria that Asa is such cozy pals with? Besides, my people do worship YHWH up here. Except we don’t have Solomon’s temple or the Ark, so they substitute golden calves to give them something to focus on. I’ve never put much faith in them, but I’m sure they’re not idols – just physical images of YHWH. I was hoping...”

Jehu had been raised in the School of the Prophets, like his dad. He was familiar with speaking by the Spirit of God, as he did now. “YHWH, God of Israel, says, ‘I accept no substitutes for obedience. I will allow no images to replace the Ark of My Covenant. I exalted you from the dust to become commander of My army, because honor was found in you. Then, when Jeroboam and his foolish son Nadab would not repent of leading Israel into sin, I gave them into your hands and made you king over My people Israel. Even knowing this, you have walked in the same path as they, provoking Me to anger by your sins. Behold therefore, if you will not repent – if you will not abolish the idolatrous worship of those golden calves – I, YHWH, will consume the house of Baasha. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who led Israel into idolatry. All of Baasha who die in the city, the dogs will eat. And all of Baasha who die in the field, birds will eat...’”

“Enough!” Baasha roared. “Guards, toss him out on his ear! Such impudence! Abolish my worship centers? I may as well give up my kingdom! Curse Asa and all his filthy ‘righteousness’! Curse Judah and her gold plated temple! Tell Asa that if he had assisted me, I would have repented of warring against him, and would have become his friend forever. But now I shall fight him to my dying breath!”

Michael the archangel mourned, “What more could we have done?” Logos just shook His head and wept.

Satan was also there, to taunt. “Haw, haw! So much for Your goodness and love winning the victory. ‘Righteous’ King Asa sure didn’t have much love! He prayed for You to use my ways! I heard it! He prayed for You to force Baasha to repent! By using his own allies, the wicked Syrians!”

“Satan,” Logos answered sadly. “You have occasion. I give you permission to harm Asa, but only in his feet.”

“... and his thigh!” Satan chortled with glee.

“I said, only in his feet. If you violate my Word or My Law in the slightest degree...”

“I know, I know. Your permission is withdrawn, and I get sent into a corner for a time-out.” He fled before Logos could add more conditions.

King Baasha was a dead man walking. He never got over his anger at King Asa. He never smiled again, but only ground his teeth until they broke. He personally led the next skirmish against the Syrians, but he was foolhardy and rash, attacking them like a madman. Unrepentant to the last, he died that night of his wounds.

In the late summer of 886 BC, King Baasha's son **Elah** was crowned king in his place, at their capital city Tirzah. Baasha had reigned in Israel 24 years, and in all that time had never done one thing good in the sight of YHWH. Sadly, his son was even worse.

Let's get his story over quickly. Elah was so bad his own people hated him. By spring of the following year, Elah's drunkenness, immorality, and utter ineptitude had so disgusted everyone that **Zimri**, the commander of half his chariots, could take no more. He snuck into the palace at Tirzah during an evening of drinking, slew Elah, and took the throne. The rest of the royal house was so drunk that they just went on partying. Zimri quickly called for his officers and had them exterminate the house of Baasha.

All those in the city were thrown to the wild dogs. Those in the country were left in the field for the birds to eat. Not a soul of the house of Baasha was left alive by the next morning. Thus the prophecy of Jehu was fulfilled.

However, political intrigue, once loosed, is hard to put back into its bottle. The army of Israel had been fighting on two fronts, for they were attacked both by Syria in the north and by the Philistines to their west. The northern division was commanded by **Tibne**, son of Ginath, while the western division was commanded by **Omri**, son of Omri of Issachar. They both knew Zimri to be a violent and ambitious man, so in the day they heard the news of his lightning coup d'état, they each had themselves crowned the king of Israel.

Omri was closer. He left Gibbethon of the Philistines and besieged Tirzah. When Zimri saw the city was lost, he burned Jeroboam's palace down over his head in a fit of foolish rage. He had been king of Israel all of 7 days.

The next week, Tibne and his army arrived from the Syrian battle-front. By then the majority of the ten tribes of Israel had sworn their allegiance to Omri, so he had to back off. But he didn't give up. Over the next four years he tried to win over the people to himself. It nearly worked, too. He was a great general. His army loved and trusted him.

But Tibne did not know YHWH. In an effort to win the northern tribes to himself he made Dan his capital, and sacrificed to the golden calf at Jeroboam's worship center there. He swore that he was the real protector of Israel and that Omri was just a usurper. But Logos, the true Protector of Israel, was not pleased. In 881 BC (Asa's 30th year) He removed His covering, as we shall see. This left Tibne open to defeat and death by Ben-Hadad and allowed Omri to thus become the sole king over Israel.

You would think that Omri might have gained a little wisdom from the tragedies of the wicked kings before him. But no. He hadn't learned a thing from all that Israel had suffered since Jeroboam's idols were cast. He did more evil than all the kings before him. Amazingly, Logos put up with him for 11 years (885 - 874 BC).

I am not going to describe how unspeakably wicked Omri was. A land is often known by its most significant ruler. Israel had been respectfully known by the nations as *'the kingdom of David, whose God is YHWH'*. and later it was called *'the glorious kingdom of Solomon'*. But all that now changed. For thousands of years after Omri, it was known simply as 'the land of Omri' from as far off as Assyria, Hatti, or Egypt. Nothing further was added. The wrinkled noses and looks of disgust that accompanied the name 'Omri' said it all. His son **Ahab** was not much of an improvement. If you care to read more about the corruption filling their vile lives, just read the prophecies of **Micah**, who decries "the statues of Omri and the works of Ahab." (6:16)

But I must mention a few significant historical events surrounding Omri's reign. In 883 BC Ashurnasirpal II succeeded his short-lived father Tukulti-Ninurta II to become king of Assyria, the same year that Supiluliuma II became king of Hatti. King Ashurnasirpal developed the Assyrian army into an unbeatable fighting machine, to expand his empire from Mitanni across northern Syria to the sea. He took city after city, installing puppet kings in each city to ensure that the tribute continued flowing in to feed his massive war machine. Much of the land north of Israel thus came under the cruel thumb of Assyria. As Rameses II had guessed, Hatti was doomed. Supiluliuma II could do nothing but submit and pay his tribute.

Now the pressure was on Syria. Ben-Hadad came to Tibne in 881 BC, demanding help against the Assyrian threat on his northern border. Tibne quickly fired off a letter requesting assistance from his Egyptian ally. Then he confidently laughed at Ben-Hadad. "You harassed my north border for eight years. Now you want me to help you protect your north border? I'll see you in Sheol first!"

But with YHWH's covering removed, Ben-Hadad was able to kill Tibne, devastate his army, destroy his capital city, and take Jeroboam's golden calf. He then came down to Tirzah to meet with Omri, again demanding help against the Assyrians, threatening to do to Omri what he had done to Tibne. Israel was still weakened by the famine. What could Omri do? He had no choice. He was forced to sign a treaty which permanently gave Syria all the land he had recently captured (Galilee and Bashan clear down to Ramoth-Gilead). Omri also swore to stop fighting against Syria, so Ben-Hadad could concentrate on defending them both against the very real and urgent Assyrian threat.

The only thing Omri didn't do was send troops. He claimed his army was too weak. In reality he was using it ruthlessly against the Moabites and the Philistines.

The famine had spread to Africa. In 883 BC, the 5th year of Merneptah's co-regency with Rameses II, the Libyans rebelled and attacked Egypt. The Nubians also attacked, as soon as they heard the news. Both were quickly defeated by the Pharaoh's superior armies. Egypt reigned supreme. Then in 881 BC they got that letter from Tibne pleading for help against Syria. Rameses advised his son to forget it. *The Syrians and Israelites are always squabbling. Let 'em duke it out.* But Egypt had a treaty with Israel. Merneptah decided to honor it. He sent his army up into the Levant.

Sadly for Tibne, he got there too late. Tibne was dead and his army, or what was left of it, had been taken over by Omri. But Merneptah was there at the negotiating table with Ben-Hadad and Omri as they signed their famous 'land-for-peace' treaty. With the force of Egypt behind it, Syria actually kept it, for a while. (Does Syria ever keep treaties?) But Logos was unhappy with Omri for giving away land that He had promised to East Manasseh and Naphtali. Israel's poverty and famine continued.

Ben-Hadad pled with Merneptah to help Syria, Hatti, and Phoenicia subdue the Assyrians. Wisely, Merneptah refused. The time for that had passed with the loss of Zerah's million-man army back in 901 BC.

The Assyrians had developed an unbeatable strategy. They quartered their massive armies in a few safe strategic places. If any of their conquered vassals foolishly rebelled and stopped sending their tribute, the Assyrians would do nothing, biding their time until the rebels no longer expected them, even if it took several years. Then they would sweep in suddenly and crush the rebels. They were utterly ruthless, to make the world fear them the more.

So Merneptah knew that if he sent his army to Syria's northern border, the Assyrian's would simply wait until he left. And if he tried to attack Assyria on its own turf, he would surely lose. Even the combined forces of Syria, Phoenicia, Hatti, Israel, and Egypt could not defeat the Assyrian war machine in its own land. "For now, just pay their damnable tribute," the Pharaoh swore. "We are yet weak from the famine. But I have sent grain into the Levant, and I will send more as you have need. If we stop this stupid bickering amongst ourselves, we eventually may be strong enough to defeat the Assyrians." They did not yet know that God's hand was against the Hittites.

In 880 BC the Mycenaean Sea Peoples attacked the powerful Hittite Navy in a massive sea battle off the coast of Cyprus. Though Supiluliuma's forces won the victory, they were so weakened that by 877 BC the Mycenaeans took Cyprus, cutting off the crucial and coveted Hittite sea trade routes. That fall they overran Ugarit in Phoenicia with refugees from the famine in Greece. Supiluliuma II was too weak to defend it. His Assyrian overlords had so demoralized him that he actually tried to get them to defend his city! But the Assyrians didn't care. They weren't there to defend anybody – only to get their tribute.

The mighty Hittite Empire had received a double, and fatal, wound. The surrounding nations began to discover their weakness and vulnerability. They were invaded by the nearby Kaska from the north, then the Phrygians and the Luwians. In 874 BC they slew foolish Supiluliuma II and burned Hattusa to the ground. The Hittites never had another strong king, and never recovered. They were ruled for the next 50 years mostly by Assyrian puppets. Their vast empire was slowly carved up by all the nations they had conquered in the past. By 800 BC the Hittite Empire was gone, leaving nothing but bitter memories. Their prior Mitanni allies had been absorbed into Assyria.

Merneptah was a kind-hearted Pharaoh. But there were factions in Egypt who hated him for his efforts to aid the Levant. They accused him of weakening Egypt by giving away so much grain. That may have been true; the glory days of Egypt and its inexhaustible riches were past. Even though Merneptah was in his early 60s, they could not wait for him to die, so they assassinated him in 879 BC. (Old Rameses II was in his 80s and could not prevent it.) Merneptah was succeeded by his son Seti II, who was a weak and ineffective ruler. Within two years a Nubian usurper named Amenmesse took over upper Egypt. Seti II only ruled lower Egypt for another 4 years before he also was killed. His young son, Rameses-Siptah, became a 'figurehead' Pharaoh. Lower Egypt was actually ruled by his step-mother, Twosret. (She had been Seti's principle queen.) Old Rameses II finally died in 876 BC, after a remarkable 67 year reign. He was one of the last of the truly great Pharaohs of Egypt. When Siptah died in 873 BC, his regnal year 6, Queen Twosret simply took over.

In all this confusion and civil war, the Levant got no more of Egypt's grain. Israel's famine continued. King Asa was now in the 35th year of his reign in Judah. He had kept pure the worship of YHWH and the Levitical priesthood. Judah still prospered in spite of the famines and troubles all around. But Asa himself was not in such good shape. His thigh wound had healed, but the slashed tendons in his feet had not. Asa had called in the very best doctors, and had undergone multiple surgeries, but all to no avail. His feet would not heal. The tendons had been repaired, but they would tear again. The wounds would scab over, and then break open again. Infection would set in, finally clear up, and then start over. It seemed like there was never a day when one or the other foot did not have a running abscess. Somehow Asa never quite made the connection between his feet and his (now annual) trips to the dungeon to talk with the prophet Hanani. "So, it's been another year and idolatrous northern Israel is still so weakened by Syria that they can't attack me. Judah is prosperous and blessed. Admit my decision was of YHWH, and you may go free."

Seeing Asa's limp, Hanani recognized the implication. "Judah may be blessed, but you look a little worse for wear. Have you even been listening? And you think I'm the one who needs to repent of not hearing YHWH?"

CHAPTER 25 – ELIJAH, OBADIAH, AND KING AHAB

In 874 BC, God couldn't stand any more and took Omri. His wickedness remains unmatched by any king in Israel's history. So when his son took the throne he was already pointed in the wrong direction, though Logos still had hopes. I need to go back to 886 BC to pick up Ahab's story.

The Phoenician culture was very idolatrous, but King Pheles had been influenced by good King Asa. He had seen the prosperity of Judah after Asa had cleansed the Asherim from the land. Pheles tried to do that for Phoenicia. He was afraid of the Syrians, Hittites, Egypt, and Assyria, and he hoped to somehow win the protection of Judah's God. This threatened his brother, Ethbaal, who was the high priest of all the planetary worship from Nimrod and Ishtar. In early 886 BC wicked Ethbaal staged a coup d'état, killed Pheles, and seized the throne at Sidon. He sent word to Israel, offering an alliance.

Baasha was still king back then, as this was before his last battle with King Asa. He knew Ethbaal was evil, and Baasha should never have agreed to come, but he did. His western general, Omri, came too, along with his son Ahab. While the adults were all at the negotiating table, Ethbaal's flirtatious, strong-willed daughter Jezebel was making out with naïve young Ahab. (She was 18 and he was only 15 at the time.) Old Ethbaal took this chance to get rid of his loud-mouthed daughter. He gave her to Baasha to seal the treaty. But Baasha couldn't stand her and gave her to Omri when they got home. That left her free to 'play' with Ahab while Omri was away at war. Jezebel bore Ahab's illegitimate daughter Athaliah in 885 BC. Ahab officially married her in 881 BC after Omri became king. Omri died and Ahab became king of Israel in 874 BC when he was 27.

I can't say theirs was a happy marriage. Ahab was a weak, foolish king. Jezebel basically ran things. The first thing she did was to order all the prophets of YHWH killed. Then she built a center of worship for Astarte and a temple to the Baals on the hilltop in Samaria (next to the palace Omri had built when he had moved from Tirzah). Jezebel planned to make Samaria the world's foremost planetary observatory and cult worship center. Spineless King Ahab saw nothing wrong with any of that. In her honor, Ahab erected the tallest, most lewd Asherah pole ever carved, patterned in his wife's voluptuous shape. Within the first year of their reign, Ahab and Jezebel had recruited over 800 prophets of Baal and Astarte, in preparation for the next close flyby of Mars in 870 BC. All the astrologers said that would be the closest pass in 120 years, as Jupiter would be in Leo and Saturn in Aquarius. *Israel would be prepared for this historic event! As they fervently worshiped the Baals, Israel would be blessed and all their adversaries vanquished! Ahab and Jezebel would see to it!*

Even all that was not enough to satisfy Jezebel's rich tastes. In Jezreel, Ahab began building her a lavish ivory summer palace and a huge temple complex to Astarte.

Needless to say, Logos was less than thrilled about all that. In 873 BC He called a young man named **Elijah** to deal with it. Elijah was of the tribe of Gad; his family had been among the first to settle in Jabesh-Gilead. They had suffered greatly under the wicked rule of all their kings since Solomon. But Elijah had been raised to pray daily for YHWH's deliverance, pleading that God would, "Please send someone to abolish the idolatry in Israel." One day, Logos answered his prayer with, "Okay my son. *I send you. Go to King Ahab. I'll tell you what to say.*"

Elijah was stunned. *He'd never been in the School of Prophets. He didn't want to be a prophet. Hey, prophets were being killed these days!* He tried out the usual arguments (too young, don't know enough, can't speak well, and all that), but Logos wouldn't even respond to his silly excuses, so he finally went.

Elijah scheduled an audience with King Ahab. He'd really been wrestling with what to say. I mean, you don't just walk up to a monarch and say, "Quit killing YHWH's prophets." Guys were beheaded for less. So as he was ushered in before the king, he was scared, especially when he noticed what a grumpy mood Ahab was in.

Up to the moment Ahab raised his scepter for him to speak, Elijah hadn't a clue what to say. But at that moment, the Spirit of God took over. "As YHWH God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain in Israel these years, except by my word." Then he turned and calmly walked out.

The entire palace seemed stunned and frozen in place as he walked past. They just let him go. But Logos spoke to him at the gate. "Elijah my son, you did well! Thank you. Now, they will be wanting to kill you. So don't return home. Go eastward. Cross the Jordan at the ford. Follow it north to the Jabbok. Follow that east to the tiny brook Cherith and head north. There you will find the hiding place I prepared for you. You shall drink of the brook. And I will command the ravens to bring you food."

"Yes, Lord." Elijah was surprised to hear such clear and precise directions from God. "But Lord? That message I gave Ahab wasn't true! The rain doesn't stop by my word. And I don't stand before You. I never have. I've never even seen You – or heard You before today. All I ever did was kneel and ask You to send someone to save Israel."

"Ahh, my son! In your prayers you have stood tall before Me for many years. And it is not your word that stops the rain or sends it again to the earth; it is My Word on your lips. For you have My heart; My mind; My lips. From this day forth you shall speak My Word."

With ravens bringing food morning and evening, Elijah had nothing to do but fellowship with YHWH and learn from Him there at the brook Cherith – until it dried up! Then Logos told him, "Go now to Zarephath of Sidon. For I have commanded a widow to provide for you there."

Again Elijah tried out the expected arguments. He would be caught as he passed Samaria; the famine was just as bad there as here; with Ethbaal ruling there, Sidon was more evil than Israel; how could he take food from a poor widow; and so on. Again Logos didn't answer, so what could he do but obey? He returned to cross the Jordan and climb the hills into Samaria. The land was devastated by the drought. The air was filled with ultra-fine dust, which dimmed the sun and cooled the earth by day, yet kept it from cooling more at night. It was too cold for evaporation to form rain clouds, and too warm at night to condense the dew. With no moisture, nothing could grow unless it was irrigated. Elijah grieved for his brothers in Israel. "YHWH, it has been 28 years since the last catastrophic pass of Mars. How did this happen? Is this dust from another volcano eruption, like what happened at Thera 120 years ago?"

"I assume you speak of a physical cause rather than the spiritual? I didn't use a volcano. I used a meteorite impact in west-central Arabia. It killed the accursed Amalekites who had returned to live there. It raised a lot of fine dust which has filled the atmosphere. I covered the meteorite with sand so it won't be seen for 1500 years. I don't want people to start worshipping it, too! I'm just trying to get Ahab's attention."

Elijah reached Zarephath and looked around. He saw a woman picking up sticks just outside the city. He prayed, "Is she the one, Lord?" Hearing a cheery affirmative, he went up to her and offered to carry her load of sticks.

"Thank you, kind sir. My house is that one, on the city wall. It is a nice one, for my husband was wealthy. But he recently died, so I really do appreciate your help. I see that you are from Israel, so I know I can trust you. I have rejected the gods of my people, and I worship Israel's God YHWH instead." She chatted happily as she trotted along side, hoping to befriend him. "But you've had a long trip, sir. You must be tired. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"A glass of cool water, perhaps...?"

"Of course." She ran to get it as he set down the sticks. But even as she was going, he added, "... and please also bring me a piece of bread."

She stopped, a frightened look on her face. "Kind sir, I swear by YHWH your God, I have no bread. I have only a little flour and oil to make a flatcake or two. When my son and I eat that, we'll starve unless YHWH sends help. I've been praying desperately for help. I had hoped that... well... that you'd bring me some bread! Aren't you from Israel? Didn't YHWH send you? I've been praying that He would send someone, and today is my very last..."

"Yes He did, Ellah. I am Elijah. YHWH called me to be His prophet. Go, make those flatcakes now. Serve them to me first. After that, I swear there will be enough for you and your son. But you've got to trust me. If you cannot, we all will starve."

She stood staring. It is fearful to serve a total stranger the last of your food. "How did you know my name?"

"YHWH knows your name. You are loved by Him! He asks you to trust me and give up your fears."

That did it. Her decision made, she ran to obey. Her hand shook a bit as she handed the flatcake to Elijah. He said nothing. But he smiled as he ate it, and drank the water. Finishing, he wiped his mouth on his sleeve and said, "Now, go make one for yourself and your boy. For I swear to you by YHWH God of Israel that your bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor your jar of oil empty, until the day YHWH returns rain to the earth."

Ellah returned to her kitchen, still a little shaky. Yes, there was a little flour and oil left. She was sure she had used it all. Now there was enough for another flatcake. She ran back out to Elijah and bowed low before him. "You are indeed a prophet of YHWH. Please, lodge with me and my son. I have a furnished room which shall be your own, and you may stay as long as you like."

Elijah laughed. "Yes, as long as the flour and oil keep multiplying! I gladly accept your kind offer."

Thus began the happiest days of Elijah's life. Ellah was a sweet and cheerful woman, though a bit talkative at times. Elijah developed a deep love for her and her little boy – an active two-year-old named Sammy – and they for him as well. Ellah began to hope that Elijah would marry her and stay there with them forever. Elijah knew his calling wouldn't permit that, so he kept his distance. Yet he and Sammy loved to play together, and Elijah always kept the family covered by his prayers.

So it was a shock to Elijah when Ellah cried out to him one morning, "Why have you come here, O man of God? To remind me of my sins? Sammy took sick last night and when I awoke... I... I found him... dead!"

Fortunately Elijah had the presence of mind to not make some snap wisecrack response like, "... and you think I am to blame for his death?" Instead, he knelt right there on the floor and cried out loud, "Why, O YHWH my God? I pray, let Sammy's life return to him." He then waited in silence, listening.

For a time all he could hear was Ellah's soft sobbing. Then he heard, "Just as you needed to test Ellah's faith, so now I must also test yours."

That didn't make sense to him, but he stood up. "YHWH is testing my faith, Ellah. Give me your son." She went to the bedroom and carried Sammy out to him. He really was dead, his face blue-white; his body stiff and cold. Suddenly he realized what a test of faith this would be! He carried the boy up to his own room upstairs and laid him on his own bed. There he cried out again, "O YHWH God of Israel, why have You brought calamity to this widow? What must I do?"

Again he listened. This time, nothing. He waited. Many things went through his mind. *Life – what is it, and how does it come and go? Is life precious? Or, is my own life any more precious than this widow's son?* Suddenly he knew. "YHWH, I give my life for his." He lay down on top of the little boy, face to face, his mouth over the mouth of the child, breathing in and out in shared breath. He got up. Nothing. So he did it again. "YHWH. You don't need me. You can do Your work through anyone You choose, even this little boy. Therefore I give my life for his." He shared more breaths with the child, and got up. Again, nothing.

This would not be easy. I guess tests never are, or they wouldn't be tests. He determined to keep doing this until Sammy's life returned, or he died. So again he lay down over the body. "YHWH, let his life return." More shared breaths. He got up. Nothing. He prepared to do it a fourth time. But suddenly Sammy coughed and began to gasp for air. "O my God!" Elijah yelled, grabbing him, patting his back, and hugging him.

"You're welcome," Logos replied. Elijah distinctly heard uproarious laughter in the air above him. He carried the now very alive child back downstairs, and handed him to Ellah. "See! Sammy is just fine."

Ellah grabbed him and pulled him close. He smiled up at her. Then he startled them by saying, "Mommy, I went to a bright man's house. His name was Logos. He wore a long white bathrobe. His eyes smiled all the time. He hugged me, and told me jokes, and laughed with me for a while. Then He said it was time to go back home."

"Sammy, did He say anything about me?" Elijah was curious, though he could guess who 'He' was.

"Yes, Uncle Elijah. But I didn't understand it. He said something about growing your faith, because you'd really, really need it later."

Elijah was still pondering that the next morning, when he saw a troop of Israeli soldiers marching past into the city. Ellah saw them too. "Elijah. Are they searching for you? Are they trying to kill you?"

Elijah smiled. "They'd love to, if they could find me! Ahab blames me for this drought. But YHWH picked for me the perfect hiding place, right here in front of them."

For two more years they were a happy family together. Elijah grew in the depth of his relationship with YHWH, learning to know His voice. Though Elijah was 45 years old at the end of this time, it was really during those three years in the widow's home that he became a man.

The summer of 870 BC was grim. Nothing grew. The land of Israel was parched and dry. Food fights in the cities had gotten really ugly, as starving gangs pillaged the land. YHWH had mercy. "I changed My mind, Elijah. Ahab isn't going to repent with just a famine, but My people suffer and die. Tell Ahab I will return the rains to the earth."

"Yes, Lord." Now that Elijah knew YHWH's voice, he was determined to always instantly obey. But as he got ready to leave, he had questions. "Uh, YHWH? You are almighty God. The one true God, who never changes. How then is it that You changed Your mind? Didn't You already know, in advance, what Ahab would do?"

He heard hearty laughter, but he was getting used to that. "How I love you, Elijah! Already you are learning to know Me and My ways. That delights Me! Yes, I am God. I am the fullness of the eternal Father, squeezed into your tiny space-time realm. But when I poured Myself into this realm, I had to trade eternity for time. One cannot dwell in both realms at once. So the infinite Father, who dwells in eternity and knows all things for all time, the one who changes not (for there is no possible change to perfection) remained in eternity, which fully encompasses all past, present, and future. I separated from Him and stepped into this realm where only the now exists – this moment of time. So for now, I am not the God of eternity. I am the God of time and space, the Ever-Present I Am. I know nothing of the future unless the Holy Spirit of the Father tells me. But He only rarely tells me what a person's decision will be. Ahab has a freewill choice to make, and though I can encourage him to make the right one, I can neither force him to do so, nor abandon him to a poor choice. From My perspective, *the future depends on his choice*. Only at the end of time, when Father YHWH's Plan of the Ages is complete and I rejoin Him in eternity with My Bride, will we see how all choices worked together to complete the Father's perfect Plan of the Ages."

Elijah was a bit blown away by all that, so he asked again. "You mean, You don't know how Ahab will choose? If he chooses to repent, You would..."

"Of course. I can apply pressure – by his conscience or through circumstances such as the drought – but each man's choice is his own. At any moment, King Ahab may repent and I would gladly heal him and restore his land. Oh, intercede with Me that he does! For I love him!"

Suddenly Elijah was overwhelmed with the love of God. *God actually loves wicked Ahab?* That boggled his mind. He put his hand on the doorknob. There he paused, as the preciousness of each life sank in. Slowly he turned back to Ellah and Sammy, seeing them afresh through God's eyes. *Of all the widows in this devastated land, God chose Ellah to protect. She is unbelievably precious!*

Elijah set down his bag and came back, enveloping Ellah and Sammy in a big bear hug. It was the first time he had dared to do this. It felt good. Suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit of the eternal Father, he prophesied to her, "YHWH loves you, Ellah. Though He is sending me away now, I know He will provide another, who will take you and be a husband to you and a father to your children. You have blessed me, Ellah, and blessed YHWH! Therefore, His blessing shall never leave your house."

For once, Ellah was speechless, treasuring each word in her heart. Elijah stooped to look five-year-old Sammy in the eye. "Son, I'm not your father. Your heavenly Father, YHWH, will send another man to love and care for your mommy and you. He won't be your real father either, but you can love him as if he were, can't you."

Sammy threw his arms around Elijah. "Nobody could ever be as nice as you."

Elijah hugged him tightly. "Ah, but he will. He will be even better than I, for he will stay with you forever, while I have to leave you now." Now there was another round of good-byes, tears, and hugs, as the emotions of three years flooded out. Then Elijah hit the road south.

When Elijah reached the border of Manasseh near Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley, he was led to wait. Soon **Obadiah**, a servant of Ahab and one of the few in Samaria still faithful to YHWH, came along searching for a patch of grass for Ahab's flocks.

After their greetings (for they knew each other well), Elijah told Obadiah, "Go now. Tell Ahab to meet me here, for I don't dare show my face in Samaria."

"What evil have I done, that you send me to die? There's no place under heaven where we haven't hunted for you! If I tell Ahab that you're here and the Spirit makes you vanish again, it's my head that will roll!"

Elijah laughed. "No, I mean it. I'll be here. As YHWH lives, I will surely show myself to him today."

So Obadiah ran to get Ahab and hurried him up to meet Elijah. Just as he approached, Logos told Elijah, "No! Wait! I changed My mind again. Don't tell him about the rains just yet. Let's try something else first. Afterwards you can tell him about restoring the rains."

So when Ahab called, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" Elijah had no prepared response. He just opened his mouth and let the Spirit speak. "I have not troubled Israel, O King. You and your father have, because you have forsaken the laws of YHWH to follow the Baals. Now, gather all the people of Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel, at the top, where stands the altar to Baal. Bring with you all 450 prophets of Baal hired by your wife, as well as the 400 prophets of Ashtoreth who eat at her table. I'll meet you there. Then we shall decide whether you will slay me – or them! You may pick the date."

Now that was a challenge Ahab couldn't pass up. It was clear to him who would be slain. He agreed. "But you are a fool for letting me pick the date. All of Israel is focused on preparing for the close pass of Mars, which comes in two months, on October 24th. This will be the highest of holy days for Baal in 120 years! Mars is expected to pass very close to Mount Caramel, and all my people have already planned to meet there. They'll be in a frenzy!" He chuckled at the idea. "Heh heh. You won't stand a chance."

"October 24th. First thing in the morning. Top of Mount Caramel," Elijah repeated. "I will be there."

He was. The 450 prophets of Baal were, too, though the prophets of Astarte/Venus had refused to come. Mars had already grown frighteningly large in the sky and was rising with the sun, looming larger by the minute. The earth writhed and groaned, and the expected ocean tides were higher than anyone remembered. This would be terrifying to any who hadn't gone through it before.

The 'frenzy' Ahab anticipated grew silent as Elijah rose to speak. Even the earth seemed to pause in its groaning. "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If YHWH is God, follow Him. But if Mars is Baal [Lord], follow him. I alone am a prophet of YHWH. You have 450 prophets of Baal. So you go first. Choose an ox. Sacrifice it on your altar, but don't put the fire to it. I'll do the same on YHWH's altar. Then you call out to your gods, while I call out only to YHWH Elohim." He paused. For a long minute perfect silence reigned, like some ethereal realm where all is frozen and even hearts stop their beating. Then Elijah's words rang over the crowd, "*The God who answers by fire, He is God!*" Elijah waved his hand toward the charred and blackened gouges in the earth where the arc from Mars had so often struck in the past. They all knew what he meant. They shouted their approval of the contest, as the prophets of Baal began preparing their sacrifice.

Elijah just waited. To him, it was no competition. The prophets of Baal had their sacrifice ready in time for the first expected arc from the magneto-head of Mars, about 9 AM. They all backed down the mountain a bit so they wouldn't get fried, and began their drums, voodoo chants, and dances. The frenzy began to grow. The people got into it as well as the priests. Everyone's hair was flying high with static. The throbbing drums resounded across the valley. 450 hired prophets can make quite a show! This is what they get paid for. They began to ham it up a bit.

By noon Mars was sweeping overhead, its terrifying orb nearly filling the sky. The prophets of Baal really got it in gear. Elijah caught the giggles. He just stood by laughing. He hadn't even started his sacrifice. He didn't care if an arc came from Mars. His trust was only in YHWH.

That just infuriated the pagan priests. Now their dance became a mad hysteria. They started emitting bloodthirsty screams and even slashing themselves with knives and swords. That wasn't in their contract, but some of them had begun believing their own hype. Periodically, when the tumult began to wane, Elijah would egg them on. "Call out louder! He is a god. He's right up there. Surely he will hear you!" or "He must be asleep. You've got to wake him!" or "He's busy. Yell louder! You'll get his attention." Then toward evening as Mars was getting smaller in the sky, "He's leaving on a journey. You've just got to shout louder!" or "He only had to go relieve himself. Surely he'll come back." Then he would fall down laughing again.

Now the sun was nearing the horizon. Mars was a black silhouette in the western sky. The writhing of the earth ceased. The static dissipated, so the people's hair began to settle back down more reasonably. The prophets of Baal realized there could be no more lightning bolts from Mars, not even from its long magneto-tail, and they collapsed in exhausted and bloody defeat all over the ground.

Elijah's 'funny bone' turned cold. *He had not even started his sacrifice. Darkness would overtake him.* The throbbing drums intended to drown out the quaking of the earth were quiet and the people all rested on the ground, so all was silent as he repaired YHWH's torn-down altar. Every eye was on him. Every ear heard as he named the twelve stones in the altar for each of the twelve tribes.

King Ahab was offended at that, for Israel had only ten tribes now. But when he ordered his servants to remove the two stones for Judah and Benjamin, they wouldn't even turn their heads. They remained fixated on Elijah.

Elijah finished rebuilding the old altar. He dug a trench around it and asked some men to get sea water. They got four empty water jugs and went down the hill toward the sea; the ultra-high tide had left a pool not too far down.

Elijah had the wood arranged with the sacrificial ox on it when they returned. "Dump it on top, and then go back for more," he ordered. The men did, twice more, until the wood was saturated and the trench surrounding the altar was filled with salt water.

The sun was setting. The people stood way back – perhaps they knew. Elijah knelt before the altar to pray. "O YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," he shouted so everyone could hear. "Today let everyone know that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant, who has done this according to Your Word. Answer me with fire, O YHWH, that this people will know that You alone are their God and that You have turned Your heart back to them."

There was a sudden flash and crash of thunder, as a single thin, blue bolt of lightning came straight down from heaven. With incredible power it exploded in flames and smoke as it hit the sacrifice, instantly vaporizing the ox, the wood, the twelve stones, and the water in the ditch. Everyone was sure that Elijah was slain. Some thought, *The fool was too close. He should have known better than to stay at the peak when Mars goes by.* But the prophets of Baal had been a bit too close. They picked themselves up and tried to recover their dignity, shouting, "Baal may have ignored our sacrifice, but look how much he hated Elijah!"

But the people knew the lightning could not have come from Mars; it had come straight down, not curved from the retreating planet. Besides, Mars was too far away. Finally the dust settled, and there was Elijah, kneeling beside a smoking black hole. The people fell to the ground in awe, swearing, "YHWH! He is God!" Still a bit shaky from the encounter, Elijah stood and raised his hands for silence.

He didn't have time for a lot of adulation. He shouted, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Do not let one escape. Tie them up and help me get them down to the river bed of the Kishon." They were too weak from the morning's frenzy to resist. And the people of Israel, with their newfound fear of God, were glad to help Elijah.

Darkness overtook them as they reached the Kishon. Elijah shouted to King Ahab, "There is no need for you and the others to wait here. Go to the nearby town. Eat, drink, and refresh yourselves. Return in the morning. I hear the sound of abundant rain! The famine is over!"

One young fellow named Gehazi had been so deeply impressed, he had stayed and offered to help. With his assistance, Elijah slew every last one of the prophets of Baal. It took most of the night. He left their bodies in the middle of the dry river bed. The returning rains would soon wash them out to sea, cleansing the earth of their blood. After his grim job, he felt faint and shaky. He'd never killed anyone before. So Gehazi helped him climb back up the mountain. There he fell to his knees, put his face between his legs, and bawled 'til his tears ran dry. He was still there when the people returned.

The day dawned cloudless and hot. Mars was now just a tiny black dot in front of the sun, but none of the expected, hoped, and prayed-for weather changes had occurred. Still crouched in prayer, Elijah asked Gehazi to go look out across the western sea for clouds. He returned. Nothing. *God must be testing his faith again.*

After praying some more, Elijah sent Gehazi again. Still nothing. Again and again he repeated his request. By now, the people had returned. This was not the show of power they expected. This was worse than watching paint dry. Elijah overheard their restless muttering, "Abundant rain, eh? Famine over, eh? This guy is a fraud. He just got lucky last night when that bolt from Mars struck him."

"O my Lord YHWH. Why are tests always so hard?" Elijah prayed. Still no answer. And still no cloud. Elijah felt ashamed of himself. "I'm sorry, YHWH. I didn't mean to doubt or complain. I do trust You. I'll wait here however long it takes." He sent Gehazi a seventh time.

But this time the young fellow came back with news. "Sir, I see a cloud! But it's only as big as a man's hand."

Elijah thanked him. "Good! There's our rain. Now tell Ahab to hurry down the mountain that the downpour not overtake him." Elijah remained there in prayer, praising and thanking God, while Gehazi relayed his message. But everyone just laughed at him. So Elijah stood up. "Why is everyone laughing? You should be praising YHWH for the rain." Suddenly Elijah remembered the 400 prophets of Ashtoreth (Astarte) at their temple beside Ahab's summer palace. Without another word he retrieved his sword and took off down the mountain like a scalded cat, leaving Gehazi scratching his head.

There was a minute of stunned silence, as Ahab tried to figure this out. Then, “After him, you fools! Don’t let him escape! He promised me abundant rain and by Baal we’ll get some rain or I’ll have his head!” But by then, nobody had a chance of catching him except Ahab, since he had the only chariot. He backed it up, wheeled it around, and started racing down the mountain after Elijah.

A man can run pretty fast downhill, even with a sword strapped to his side. On that steep, bumpy path, Ahab was still way behind when they reached the Valley of Jezreel. Once there, the ground was flat, so Ahab was able to let his horses gallop full tilt. He pulled alongside Elijah shortly before they reached Helkath. “Trying to get to the city to hide, eh. Well, I won’t allow it! You are a fraud, sir! You promised me rain, by god, and I will not let you escape until I get rain!” He stayed beside Elijah, letting the horses block him from turning into the gates of the city.

But Elijah made no attempt to turn into Helkath, or Jokneam, or Megiddo. He stayed on the road, which now headed toward the city of Jezreel. Suddenly King Ahab, who wasn’t nearly as stupid as his actions indicate, figured it out. “You’re going to Jezreel! It wasn’t enough for you to kill the prophets of Baal – you want to kill the prophets of Astarte, too! Well, you’re too late. I’ll get there ahead of you and warn them. When you get there, they will all have swords strapped to their sides as well. You’ll die. You can’t defeat 400 armed men!” He whipped his team into a full gallop, leaving Elijah behind in his dust.

Elijah just loped along at a steady pace. Now he knew YHWH wanted him to kill all the prophets of Ashtoreth. Ahab had just confirmed it. So warning or no warning, he would do it or die trying. But he prayed, “YHWH, it would be a lot easier if you would slow Ahab down. Besides, I’m hot and thirsty and this road is dusty. Now would be a good time for that rain.” At that moment, a welcome gust of wind hit Elijah from behind, blowing off the Western Sea. It pushed him along at a fast, easy pace for several miles. Then the sky grew dark with clouds, and in a few minutes a light, refreshing rain had started. Elijah ran on with renewed strength. Soon the rain turned into a regular downpour, still pushing from behind so it didn’t slow him down. The miles flowed by, until Jezreel was just ahead.

The heavy rain didn’t impede Ahab either, until water over the road caused him to miss the curve up into the city. When Elijah came by, Ahab was cursing and trying to get the horses untangled from his overturned chariot. Elijah waved and shouted, “Here’s your abundant rain, Your Majesty, just as I promised. And just in time, I see. You’re welcome. See you at the palace.”

The 400 prophets of Astarte had no desire to be hit with a bolt from Mars on top of Mount Carmel. This was not their high holy day; they had celebrated the year before when Venus was close. Instead, they’d thrown an orgy at their beautiful new temple beside Ahab’s ivory palace.

A few of them were just waking up from their drunken stupor when Elijah appeared on the scene. All 400 were still there, distinctive by their mystical robes. Elijah had just finished slaying the last of them as Ahab showed up. He looked like a half-drowned pup, muddy, drenched, and miserable. He peeked in, realized he was too late, and headed for his ivory palace next door, without a word to Elijah. He was smart enough to know he’d been whipped. But when he found Jezebel, he reported the whole story. She was furious. She sent orders to muster the army, along with a threatening summons to Elijah vowing, “So may the gods do to me and more, if I do not make your life as the lives of my prophets by tomorrow!”

Elijah headed back west. Gehazi finally caught up with him as he left the Jezreel Valley. They strolled together over the ridge and down to the coast, where they got on the Via Maris and went slowly south through the land of the Philistines. It was there that Obadiah found him and relayed Jezebel’s deadly summons.

For the first time in his life, Elijah felt real fear. How could he hide? Perhaps in Philistia? He hurried south to the intersection of the Via Maris with the Beersheba road. There he thanked Gehazi and insisted, “I won’t need you anymore. Please go back. Find another prophet of YHWH to serve.” He jogged down the road toward Ezion-Geber.

But Elijah had burned up all his energy. Now he ran out of food and water. By noon the next day, the rains had ceased. He was hot, thirsty, hungry, and exhausted. He found a juniper tree for shade and fell down beneath it, praying, “I’ve done all that I could, O YHWH. Take my life, I pray. I am no better than my fathers.”

All his running and lack of sleep had finally caught up with him. It was twilight when he awoke. A stranger was shaking him. “Arise. Eat,” was all he said. There beside him was a loaf of flatbread baked on the hot stones, and a jug of water. Elijah ate and drank. Overcome by weariness, he lay down again and slept all night. Early next morning, he was again awakened by the man; his eyes were piercing; his robe glowed. “Arise. Eat, for the journey is too great for you.” Again, the warm flatbread baked on hot stones and the water. *Where had this man gotten hot stones at night?* Elijah looked up from his breakfast, but the man was gone. So he knew it had been an angel.

Still afraid to return to Israel, Elijah wandered south. He was no longer in any hurry, and didn’t care where he wound up. Ultimately he found himself 200 miles from Beersheba, at Mount Sinai. Elijah climbed the mountain, to a small cave near the top. It wasn’t inhabited, but he saw deep handprints sunk into the stone on either side of the entrance. He decided to live there as a hermit the rest of his life. He didn’t need food; he had gone forty days since he had eaten that angel’s flatbread, and he still wasn’t hungry. *He would just as soon die and go to heaven anyway. Up here he would be closer to God.*

When the rains had ceased in 873 BC at Elijah's word, they had ceased in Judah, too. So King Asa could no longer tell Hanani, "See, Judah is blessed, so my decision to ally with Ben-Hadad must have been of YHWH." Now Judah suffered in the famine. Asa grew bitter against YHWH. Hanani told him he just had to repent and God would heal his feet, but Asa put his trust in his physicians. With his root of bitterness, the infections continued to get worse. Bitterness does that. This time the doctors' efforts failed.

The one good thing about that was that Asa lived long enough to see the rains restored to the land. With the rains came a measure of repentance. As he was dying, he gave orders for the prophet Hanani to be set free. But to his death, he still thought he was right in allying with Ben-Hadad against Baasha. Logos had devoted Ben-Hadad to destruction and had chosen Asa for that honor! He grieved for him, and for the suffering he could have prevented had Asa obeyed and helped Baasha defeat Syria. Thus on the same day that Elijah found that cave on Mount Sinai, good King Asa died at the age of 59. **Jehoshaphat** his son became the king of Judah in 870 BC at the age of 35. Everyone loved him from the first. Judah again began to prosper.

Elijah slept in the cave for several days. It was nice to have no responsibilities, no worries. Then one morning he woke up hungry. So he prayed, "YHWH, please send that angel back with some more of his flatbread."

"Elijah!" Logos' voice was audible, loud and clear. "For heaven's sake, what are you doing here?"

"Oh! Lord! Thank You for coming. My life's work is finished. I have nothing left to live for. There is no place on earth where I can show my face. I alone am zealous for You, O YHWH God of Hosts! The sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets. I'm the only one left, and they seek my life. So, please, just a little more of Your angel's flatbread, and I'll be content right here for the rest of my days."

"Get up, Elijah. Go to the entrance of the cave. Put your fingers into the fingerprints of Moses My servant."

The fingerprints of Moses? Wow! That caught Elijah's attention. He went out and inspected the prints in the stone. Then, overcome with awe, he bowed his head and slipped his own fingers into the deep prints.

Suddenly a rushing wind sprang up, shrieking past his ears. It tried to snatch him out of the cave, but he hung on for dear life, his fingers sunk deeply into the stone where Moses had once also clung. Following the wind, the earth began to shake violently, as if to shake him out of the cave. Rocks crashed down all around him. Still he hung on. Then a roaring fire blew up from below, threatening to burn him out of the cave. Still he hung on, though the fire singed his eyebrows and beard. Finally the fire died out. The cacophony ceased. A gentle breeze fell from above. Elijah sensed the peace of God descending upon him.

Elijah relaxed, closed his eyes, and bowed before the cool breeze. Gradually he became aware that Logos was here. Elijah recognized that quiet voice he had come to love. He opened his eyes, expecting to see down into a blackened and dreary landscape. But instead, he saw into Paradise! The vivid colors and rich smells and sounds caught him unprepared. He would have fainted had he not been holding onto the fingerprints of Moses. But the brightness of the light was gentle on his eyes, and he slowly calmed down with the glory of it all. Then again he heard – softly, laughingly – "Elijah! For heaven's sake, what are you doing here?" He turned his gaze and saw the angel with the piercing eyes and glowing robe.

"Uh. I told You, Lord. I was very zealous for You. But the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed all Your prophets. I alone am left, and they're seek my life, too."

"Izzat so. I see. So, now your life is over. I can't use you anymore, because I'm too weak to protect you."

"Yes, Lord. Thank You for bringing me here. I just want to live here in Paradise with You always."

Logos waited. Elijah thought a minute, then added, "It's not that You're too weak, Lord. I'm too weak."

Logos laughed. "Ah-hah! So that's it. My arm is now too short to continue pouring out grace, strength, wisdom, and guidance day by day, as I have all your life."

"Uh, no, Lord." He fell to his knees. (In this realm his fingers were no longer imbedded into the rock.) "You're as mighty as ever. I guess I'm just burned out."

"That you are. So I invited you here for a vacation. Enjoy it! Walk with Me through Paradise. I have many things to show you. But after we finish, I still have need of your services back on earth."

So for the next few days (or years, for time loses its significance in this realm), Elijah and Logos had sweet fellowship in Sheol. He didn't see many others there, but Logos did introduce him to Al. Al thanked Elijah for ministering to the widow and her son in Zarephath. "I love it here with Logos. I never want to leave. But I am very grateful for what you did for my wife and son. You loved them more truly than I ever did! Thank you."

"Oh! Just thank Logos!" Elijah recalled his prophecy. "Logos? Did Ellah ever remarry? I told her she would find one who would care for her and her son."

Logos laughed again. He was always laughing about something. "Of course! You spoke My words to her. My Word never fails. She met her second husband the day you left. They're now married and very happy together."

Thus Elijah's 'vacation' refreshed and restored him. Once again, he was ready to do anything Logos asked of him. It was time for his return to earth.

“King Asa has died,” Logos told Elijah. “His son **Jehoshaphat** reigns in his place. So far, he serves and loves Me, and I am pleased. But I’m not at all pleased with King Ben-Hadad of Syria. He hates Me. He took Asa’s alliance as a license to bring terrible suffering upon My people Israel, thinking he has Judah’s support. I want you to go to Syria and find Hazael son of farmer Aram who lives just south of Damascus. He will become a commander of Ben-Hadad’s army, and I want you to anoint him as the king of Syria after Ben-Hadad dies.

“Next, go to **Jehu**, son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. Anoint him to be the king of Israel after Ahab’s sons.

“Finally, go to **Elisha**, son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah. Anoint him to be a fellow-prophet, to take your place when I bring you home.” Logos paused. “I hate what Ahab and Jezebel have done to turn My people away from Me. The house of Omri must die for their wickedness. He who escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will put to death, and he who escapes Jehu, Elisha will put to death. Nevertheless, I have reserved for Myself 7000 true sons of Israel who have not bowed to Baal or Ashtoreth, or kissed their idols.”

“Yes, Lord.” Elijah bowed. He was ready to go, though dreading the 300 miles he must walk to get to Damascus. But when he stepped to earth, he was there. He found Aram and anointed his young son Hazael. “You will grow strong,” he told him, “and will be mighty in battle. You will become one of King Ben-Hadad’s chief commanders. After Ben-Hadad dies, you will become king of Syria. This is what YHWH God of Israel says. If you follow YHWH, and learn His wisdom and integrity, he will use you to save all of Syria. But if you reject YHWH, Syria will fall under the Assyrians, because of your wickedness.” Elijah stayed with Aram for a month, teaching them about YHWH and His ways. Hazael, being young, learned eagerly. But Aram his father refused to give up the ancient Syrian gods.

From there Elijah went to Israel, where he located **Jehu**. He anointed and instructed him, as with Hazael. And as with Hazael, he responded well but his father Jehoshaphat did not. In both cases, Elijah had the impression that the fathers would try to pervert the instruction of YHWH. Well, he’d done what he could to prepare these two fine young men to their life’s calling.

From there Elijah headed east, down into the Jordan River Valley to Abel-Meholah. He mused on what YHWH had told him. Elisha would become a “fellow-prophet, to take your place when I bring you home.” That almost sounded too good to be true. Elijah really had been burned out. Now that he had tasted Paradise, nothing on earth enticed him anymore. *So now, he was going ‘Home’ – with a capital ‘H’. All he had left to do was to pass his prophetic mantle on to this Elisha dude, and YHWH would take him Home. No more struggles with false prophets, famines, and widows. No more fleeing or hiding from angry kings and their ever-present goon squads. He was going Home!*

Elijah reached Abel-Meholah, found Shaphat’s farm, and was startled to see a huge ranch. Twelve pairs of oxen were plowing a vast field, guided by twelve fine young men. *Shaphat must be very rich!* He went to the farmhouse to ask about Elisha. A servant said that the twelve men plowing were all sons of Shaphat. The last in the line was Elisha, the eldest. *What an inheritance he would have!* Elijah began to have doubts; none of these men would want to leave all this luxury for the difficult and thankless task of being a prophet in Israel!

But then Elijah realized that was God’s problem. All he had to do was catch Elisha and anoint him. But how to catch him and get the oil on his head? These men were busy! Elijah thought of a plan. “Lord, I hope You don’t mind if I do the anointing on the fly,” he prayed, pouring his anointing oil into the hood of his mantle. Then, on the next pass of the twelve men, Elijah ran out to them and threw the mantle over the head of the last of them. Then he turned back toward Mount Sinai. “There, Lord, I did it. He’s Yours. Just take me Home where...”

His prayer was interrupted by, “Hey! Wait! Let me say good-bye to my parents first, then I will follow you.”

“Huh? What have I done to you? There is no need to follow me. Go back to your plowing. Do whatever you wanna do. You’re in God’s hands. I’m going Home.”

“And I am going with you, for God has called me to be a servant to His servant. I swear I shall never leave your side. But I would like to say good-bye first.”

Elijah took a deep breath. He had not counted on this. The fierce determination in the young man’s eyes was obvious. “Elisha, YHWH wants you to follow Him, not me. My service is over; my life is done.”

“Okay. Then so is mine. For YHWH told me many years ago that to follow Him I must follow you.”

So Elijah had to wait. Elisha sacrificed his yoke of oxen, boiled them using the wood from his plow, and threw a big good-bye party for his family and friends. Hundreds came, as Elisha was well-known and loved. When it was over, Elisha put on Elijah’s oil-soaked mantle and said, “I’m ready.” So they walked off, leaving everything else behind.

While waiting, Elijah had thought of another vital task. He went to Jerusalem to bless the new king Jehoshaphat son of Asa. (This is a different Jehoshaphat; not the father of Jehu.) He told him YHWH was pleased with him, and then added, “As long as you remain true to Him, YHWH will continue to bless you. But don’t forget to train your children as well. One of your sons, probably **Jehoram** (who was sixteen) will take your place someday. If they forget YHWH, all you gain for Judah may be lost.”

Jehoshaphat was busy fortifying his northern border to guard Judah against possible attacks from Ben-Hadad or Ahab, but he swore he would not neglect this vital job.

CHAPTER 26 – KINGS JEHOShAPHAT AND AHAB

Jehoshaphat was a good king. He feared YHWH and kept His Law. He made godly **Jehoiada** son of Jehoiarib his high priest and sent Levite priests throughout Judah to teach God's Law to the people. YHWH blessed and rewarded him with honor and wealth. The surrounding pagan nations feared him and sent gifts; the Philistines sent silver; the Arabians sent flocks of goats. So Judah and Jehoshaphat grew strong. By the end of his reign he had over a million men enrolled in his armies! But early in his reign he made one very foolish mistake.

In 865 BC Jehoshaphat went to Jezreel to visit Ahab in his ivory palace. After the usual formalities he got to the point. "I've finished fortifying my northern border. My army is strong. But your northern border is gone and your army is feeble. You have a worthless alliance with Egypt, who cannot help you as their land is filled with civil wars. King Ben-Hadad has made himself rich at your expense. You should never have given him Galilee or Bashan. He claims to be building his armies to defend us all against the Assyrians but his promises are just lies. He has always had his eye on Israel. He wants all of your land. Then he would be at my northern border! But if we stop our senseless bickering, we can push his forces back to Syria."

Ahab and Jezebel agreed. To seal the alliance, they gave him their first daughter, **Athaliah**. Jehoshaphat was smart enough to remain faithful to his wife, Jaime, and did not want her. But she was cute, so he accepted her anyway and gave her to his first son, Jehoram. (They were the same age – twenty.) That was the foolish, and tragic, mistake. Logos was displeased. He wanted the alliance, and had planned to give King Jehoshaphat the honor of killing Ben-Hadad! Now He decided to give that honor to King Ahab instead.

That same year, Queen Twosret of Egypt died, under suspicious circumstances. She had been a lousy Pharaoh, anyway. Everybody hated her, as she was self-centered, arrogant, and uncaring of her people. Her death marked the end of the 19th Dynasty. Only ten years after the death of the great king Rameses II, and already the land of Egypt had descended into chaos. Various factions in upper and lower Egypt had started a full scale civil war. Rebellions popped up all over. Asian 'missionaries' from Jerusalem had misunderstood their calling – instead of teaching the people about YHWH, they were trying to destroy Egypt's false gods by discrediting the pagan priests and pitting one faction against another. Egypt needed a strong Pharaoh!

That turned out to be the old war hero Setnakht, the son of Merneptah and younger brother of Seti II. He saw the need, rose up with his army, squashed the rebellions, drove out the Asians fomenting them, and brought order from the chaos, to begin the 20th Dynasty. He restored the damaged temples and their priesthoods. Recognizing him as their savior, Egypt loved him. He ruled with firmness, fairness, and kindness, as he had learned from his father.

Some think he killed Twosret to take the throne, and it may be true. Of all the enemies she had, he was most likely to have done the dastardly deed. He certainly hated her. He purged her name from historical records, as well as the names of her son Siptah and the usurper Amenmesse. He dated his own reign to the death of his brother Seti II. But Setnakht loved Egypt, determined to restore her former glory! Within two years he had reunited upper and lower Egypt and installed his oldest son Rameses III as the true Pharaoh of Egypt. (863 BC)

Some significant things had been brewing across the Mediterranean Sea in Greece which will impact our story later. Greece was populated by city-states, mostly ruled by barbarians from Europe. Only the Mycenaeans (around Mycenae on the Peloponnesian Peninsula just south of Corinth) were unified enough to have any major influence in the world. The other major races / cultures of Greeks (the Aeolians, Ionians, and Dorians) were still splintered groups of bickering city-states separated by rugged hills. But the Mycenaeans had allied other city-states into a loose confederacy of semi-related peoples. They became the leading force around the Aegean Sea in the 9th and 10th centuries BC. (This included Achaeans from north-central Peloponnese, so Homer's *Iliad* calls them all Achaeans, though I'll continue to call them Mycenaeans, which is more accurate.) The king and queen of Mycenae were Atreus and Aerope. Their older son Menelaus ruled Sparta with his ravishingly beautiful queen Helen, while their younger son Agamemnon was king of Argos, with his beautiful queen Clytemnestra.

When the blind bard Homer tells this story in his historical fiction epic the *Iliad*, he adds a lot of romance and pathos to it, elevating many actual historical figures to gods, but I'll try to just stick to the facts here. Ever since the legendary king Pelops (for whom Peloponnese is named), the family of Atreus had been well known for corrupt political power, predatory rape, murder, incest, treachery, greed, and violence, as characteristic of the Mycenaean confederacy with their raiders terrorizing the land and pirate ships plaguing the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas.

The narrow strait between Greece and Asia is called (in Greek) the Hellespont. It was a strategic bottleneck in the sea trade between east and west. The Trojans had gotten very rich and powerful by controlling this strait. They called it the Dardanelles after Dardanus (supposedly a son of Zeus). His grandson was Tros, so they became known as Trojans and their land as Troas. Their weapons were iron, their armies were undefeated, and their city walls were strong. Even the Hittites, when their power was at its peak, had stayed away from the Trojans! But great wealth and power brings temptation. Illus, son of Tros, fell to idolatry when he built their capital city, which he named Illium. He set up a spectacular monument to the Titan god Pallas. The Trojans called it the Palladium, and worshiped it as the 'Protector of their Land'.

However, the son of Illus, Laomedon, decided Illium needed more protection than just the Palladium. He hired Poseidon and Apollo to make its walls impregnable, with heavy iron gates. He was even more foolish than his father. When the work was finished, he shut the gates and refused to pay his workers. They left; what else could they do? The walls really were impregnable. But they returned with the unknown Heracles, who disguised himself as a traveling bard and entered the city to sing ballads to the king and his court. That night when they were sleeping he killed the entire royal family except their baby, Priam. Then he let Poseidon and Apollo into the city, which they conquered and renamed Troy after their mutual grandfather Tros.

Well, Priam grew up to be the king of Troy, the most powerful city in the world. He also became one of the most wicked kings in the world. He had 20 wives and more than fifty children, of which we will only mention a few from Hecuba, his chief wife. Hector, the oldest, was heir to the throne. Cassandra, the third-born, became well-known as a prophetess. The second born, Paris, was born with an odd birthmark. The prophets foretold that he would cause the downfall of Troy, so he was abandoned to die in the fields. But a local herdsman, Agelaus, saw the whole thing. He took Paris in and raised him. Paris grew up to be a great bull-fighter. He married a shepherdess named Oenone.

All that is background to bring you to our story. We have reached 870 BC, four years after the Hittite capitol city Hattusa had been sacked by Kaskan warriors from the south shores of the Black Sea. *Bear in mind that 870 BC is the same year that Elijah staged his famous barbecue with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.*

In the year of our story, everyone in Troas was invited to Troy to celebrate the passing of Mars. Troy was near the equator at the time. It was built on a hill containing a lot of magnetite (iron ore). On the regular 30 year catastrophic flybys of Mars, Troy was often hit by electrical discharges. Since its founding as Illium, it had already been struck four or five times, killing a lot of people (though it didn't take down those impregnable walls). Thus King Priam had ordered a national week of worship and prayer to Mars in the hope that they would be spared. He figured that with all his people in Troy, the gods would show mercy.

This time Mars passed over Troy without any serious damage. The grateful people held a big party. As part of the celebration, Paris gave his famous bull-fighting dance, in which he performed amazing leaps and hand-stands over his bull. Everyone was ecstatic. Paris was brought before King Priam and awarded a wreath and the honor of a kiss from lovely princess Cassandra.

But as she put the wreath on his head, she looked into his eyes. Though she had never seen him, she knew. She prophesied, "You are Paris, my older brother, whom we had left for dead!" Of course everyone said Cassandra was mad and Paris should just go home and forget it.

But Cassandra had heard stories about the evil-looking birthmark on his groin. After the party, she told him about it – and its significance! "You must flee! Our father heard me. He will investigate. If he sees the mark he will surely try to kill you!" Paris had wondered about the odd mark; now he knew! He had discovered his royal heritage! *He was no peasant! He was a prince! Son of a mighty monarch!* He fled from Troas, deserting Agelaus and his Phrygian shepherdess-wife Oenone. He set out for far-off kingdoms in search of a princess worthy of his royal heritage.

When Paris reached Sparta, King Menelaus and Queen Helen welcomed him. They had no princess for him to marry. However, Helen had grown to hate her wicked and violent husband. She fell in love with this strong young prince who had been raised a humble herdsman. When Paris prepared to continue his search, Helen seduced him. King Menelaus discovered them, and angrily threw Paris on a ship bound back to Troy. But Helen followed secretly behind, eager to rejoin her lover. As the ship was leaving the quay she managed to sneak aboard without being seen.

Menelaus was furious. He consulted his sages, Calchas and Chryseis. They insisted he go to Troy to regain Helen, who was considered by many to be the most beautiful woman alive. They promised Menelaus the blessing and protection of the gods. He demanded that his allied city-states sail into battle with him. Thus began the infamous Trojan wars. The brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus led the armies of their father Atreus and the allied city-states. They first besieged Troy in March, 869 BC, with fifteen armies and nearly a thousand ships. Menelaus promised them that the battle would last at most a few months. With the blessing of all the gods, it should be a piece of cake.

King Priam had just died. The Trojans didn't want to fight. The Mycenaeans were their trading partners. Many were upset at Paris for bringing Helen and all this trouble into Troy. Hector convinced Paris to end the war without more bloodshed by a duel with King Menelaus. Paris lost, though he managed to retreat back within the city walls without serious injury. But Helen still refused to go back to her evil husband. So the war continued on, to March 21st.

The Mycenaeans (with their iron armor and weapons) encircled Troy, hoping an electrical discharge from Mars would break down its impregnable walls. Mars passed overhead, still growing closer. But as before, the walls of Troy easily withstood the earthquakes. Up to its closest approach, on the far side of the earth in the middle of the night, Troy had suffered no damage. But the next morning, with Mars moving rapidly away, a bolt of lightning from the magneto-tail of Mars flashed back toward Troy.

Alas! It skipped over the city and struck the iron-clad Mycenaeans! It devastated them, killing many. Still King Menelaus refused to quit. Even after the dead were buried, his armies remained vastly superior. He regrouped and furiously attacked, again and again, for ten futile years.

The Mycenaeans were draining all their resources and getting nowhere. Paris, an archer, managed to kill some of the Mycenaean (Greek) heroes with his arrows, notably Diomedes and Achilles. But then he himself was mortally wounded by an arrow from Philoctetes. Helen still refused to return to King Menelaus, so Deiphobus (a brother of Paris) married her. The battle went on.

The walls of Troy remained impregnable to the last. Finally in 859 BC the defeated Mycenaeans left Troy, with a parting gift. They sailed off. Their gift was a big wooden war stallion on wheels, with a plaque to acknowledge the Trojan victory. Cassandra warned against accepting it. She knew the Mycenaeans had come because of Paris and his birthmark! She prophesied the destruction of Troy. But she was still considered mad and was ignored. Laocoon, a Trojan priest, also warned, "Beware! I fear Greeks bearing gifts!" But they ignored him, too. Instead, they believed Sinon, a Mycenaean prisoner, who claimed the wooden horse was sacred and would bring divine protection.

So the foolish Trojans hauled the huge horse inside the city gates to celebrate their victory. Late that night, when they were all in a drunken stupor, the forty soldiers inside the horse (led by Odysseus) opened the gates to the returning Mycenaeans, who had had been waiting on the far side of an island. The Trojans didn't see them return because they had blackened their ships with coal dust.

So Troy was sacked and burned. Menelaus mercilessly killed Deiphobus when he tried to escape with Helen. In anger, Menelaus raised his sword to kill her too, but she dropped her robe and exposed her beauty. Menelaus was captivated. The sword fell from his hands. He forced Helen back to Sparta with him. Everyone remembers her as 'Helen of Troy', the 'face that launched a thousand ships'.

After sacking Troy, Agamemnon forced Cassandra to be his concubine. That begins another story. As he was being unfaithful to his wife Clytemnestra, she had also been unfaithful to him, with Aegisthus, her husband's cousin. This sick soap opera only got worse from here, so we'll sum it up by just saying that the Trojan war changed the face of the political landscape dramatically.

With Hittite hegemony gone and the rule of the Trojans broken, the Mycenaean / Achaean Sea Peoples became the leading power in the Mediterranean. Driven partly by the famine, western Anatolia was flooded with Mycenaean and Ionian settlers. The black pirate ships of Agamemnon and Menelaus indulged in decades of raids and wanton plunder, further weakening the crippled Hittite Empire. The Sea Peoples had already taken Crete, the coastal cities of southern Anatolia, and Ugarit. Now they started south into Phoenicia, Philistia, and even Egypt. The Late Bronze Age was over, replaced by the much-impooverished Iron Age. In addition, diminished Egyptian influence in world affairs allowed the Assyrian kings to expand their control over Anatolia and the Levant.

In Judah, King Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had become quite responsible and mature, under his father's diligent training. His wife Athaliah was young and loads of fun. She bore him a daughter, Jehosheba, and three sons before Jehoram turned 23. The youngest of their sons was named **Ahaziah**.

As I said, 863 BC was the year Setnakht and Rameses III reunited upper and lower Egypt. This began the 32 year reign of Rameses III, the last great Pharaoh of Egypt. From the first, he recognized the threat from the north. His grandfather Merneptah had helped negotiate the treaty between Ben-Hadad and Omri, which had stood firm since 881 BC. But Rameses saw the Syrians getting stronger, while Israel had never fully recovered from their famine. He never trusted the Syrians. He restocked his garrisons throughout the Levant with provisions and expert archers, and left capable Egyptian commanders to direct them.

In the fifth year of his reign (859 BC), Rameses III lost his aged father Setnakht. This was the greatest of tragedies for him, and for Egypt. They honored him as the Pharaoh who had saved and restored Egypt after the chaos. Their 70 days of mourning included the embalming of his body, the royal golden casket, the funeral procession up to Thebes in upper Egypt, rowing him in the royal barge across the Nile, and burying him in the royal mausoleum (which Setnakht had reclaimed from Twosret who had originally stolen it from his brother Seti II).

Rameses had barely returned from the funeral when he was attacked by Libyans from the west. They had heard the Pharaoh was dead, and had invaded the Nile delta in a sneak attempt to take over the rich farming lands there. Rameses was prepared, and not in a very happy mood! All the attackers which were not slain were enslaved.

Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II died the next year, 858 BC. His son Shalmaneser III took the throne. This marked another change in policy. Ashurnasirpal II had gotten old, content to sit around collecting tribute from his vassals. When he died, Shalmaneser III renewed his father's earlier aggressive ways. For five years he worked to extend his power north to Urartu and Lake Van, west to Kizzuwatna and the Taurus Mountains, and southeast to the Persian Gulf. He allied with the king of Babylon and subdued the surrounding Chaldeans. He completed these campaigns by 854 BC. So it wasn't until his sixth year that he turned his attention to expanding the Assyrian empire into Syria and Israel, with amazing consequences, as we shall see!

After leaving Troy, the Mycenaean coalition conquered the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea islands and coastlands. Mycenaeans began moving inland to displace the defeated Hittite/Mitanni Empire. They allied with Phrygians (from Thrace) in 857 BC to take what was left over after the Kaska, Cimmerians, and Assyrians had taken their share. The Mitanni refugees fled north to Urartu, but the Hittite refugees fled south. Their once powerful empire was gone.

Some Hittite refugees settled in Syria. Ben-Hadad gladly added them to his growing armies. Some settled in Phoenicia, Israel, or Philistia. Again, they mostly joined their militaries (that was their main occupation in Hatti). But the vast majority were looking for a new homeland. They were devastated by war and famine, with stories that would wrench your heart. Rameses III tried to find places for them in the Nile Delta. But the trickle became a flood. Egypt struggled to cope with the added burden.

In 857 BC Ben-Hadad saw that Egypt and Assyria were preoccupied. The rest of the world couldn't stop him. He led a coalition of 32 kings to attack Israel in a lightning blitz! Poor Ahab fled from Jezreel to Samaria, frantically sending runners to Judah and Egypt for help. But Syrian spies captured them. Their messages never got through. The Syrians quickly occupied Issachar, West Manasseh, and Ephraim, even as they surrounded Samaria. Old King Ben-Hadad had ruled Syria with an iron hand for 31 years. He had become exceedingly wicked. He would have killed his own grandmother for a good stiff drink. He wrote to King Ahab, saying, "All your silver and gold are mine! Your wives and children are also mine!"

Ahab humbly wrote back, "It is according to your word, O King. I am your servant. All I have is in your service."

So Ben-Hadad wrote again. "Tomorrow I will send my servants. They will search all your houses, take everything they please, and bring it to me."

Ahab was terrified. His counselors urged him not to let them in. "Don't worry, O King. Your fortress is strong. We'll get word to Jehoshaphat somehow!" But Ahab fell to his knees, crying, "Alas, O Lord YHWH! I don't know what to do! Grant me wisdom!" At that moment Obadiah came striding in. The others fell silent.

Obadiah had been Ahab's right-hand man for many years, and they respected him. Filled with the Spirit, he prophesied, "Thus says YHWH! When you were filled with idolatry and pride, I sent famine and sword. But now your heart is humbled; so I forgive and show you mercy. See that great multitude out there? I give them into your hand this day. You will not need the army of Judah. I grant you, O King, the honor of slaying Ben-Hadad! Then you will know that I am YHWH, God of Israel."

Ahab bowed his head to Obadiah. "Yes, Lord!" was all he said, but the heavenly host rejoiced that he had accepted and believed the Word. Ahab sent a message to Ben-Hadad saying, "Your Majesty, I was willing to sign a treaty of submission as your servant, your vassal, as you had asked at first. But I cannot allow you to come into my people's homes and just steal whatever pleases you. That would not be right. I must protect my people."

Ben-Hadad responded, "May the gods do so to me and more also, if there is enough dust remaining from the city of Samaria for each of my men to take a handful!"

Ahab answered back, "Let not him who puts on his armor boast like him who takes it off!"

It was already late afternoon. Ahab bowed again before Obadiah and humbly asked, "By whom will YHWH gain the victory? Who shall lead the battle?"

Obadiah smiled. "YHWH has given you the honor of leading the battle, O King. The young pages and footmen of the city governors shall gain the victory with you. Then afterward, the army of Israel may help with the mop-up."

Frankly, that was the hardest part of Ahab's test. The very thought of him leading a small group of untrained youngsters into a huge camp of ruthless Syrian warriors was almost more than he could face. He hesitated for a long time, face bowed and knees shaking. But finally his head came resolutely up, his decision made. "I submit to YHWH's terms. Bring me the young men who serve the city governors. Then muster Israel's army to follow us."

They managed to round up a meager 232 teenage boys. The rest were afraid and hid when they got the summons. Don't be ashamed of them. The adults were no more brave. Nearly 50,000 of the Israeli soldiers were also in hiding, petrified of the huge Syrian force opposing them! King Ahab's commander was only able to muster 7,000 out of the entire Israeli army who were willing to fight!

A seasoned military man who had fought Philistines and Syrians with his father Omri, Ahab knew just how to handle this motley crew of kids. "The Syrian king told me that he would kill everyone in Samaria and burn the city, so there would be nothing but handfuls of dust here by tomorrow. He has the power to do it, too, so we're all dead men. Look at me! Look me in the eye. *We are all dead men!* If anyone here is scared to die, go home to cry on your mother's breast so you and she can die together. But we have one chance. Obadiah said YHWH will fight for us if you and I lead the battle. If we're going to die anyway, we may as well die killing Syrians. All who want to follow me, line up here. The rest run home to your mother."

To nobody's surprise after a speech like that, not a single kid left. Ahab gave them each a sturdy kitchen knife, and showed them how to tie it to their wrist so it would dangle under their sleeve when their hands were raised. Then, about supper time, they headed for the gate.

With hands raised high, King Ahab led the youngsters toward the Syrian encampment. "That is the kings' tent," he pointed. "The kings and their generals will be drinking there. We've got to get in. As soon as we do, pick out a king or a general. Don't attack the guards; you don't stand a chance. Just duck around them. When I give the word, rush on the one you picked as you pull your knife from your sleeve. Stab deep into any vulnerable place, like the neck or belly. If he strikes you back, don't worry about it; remember, we are all dead men anyway. Keep stabbing until he goes down. Then pick another and do it again."

He had to shut up. A bevy of burly Syrian guards was getting close. They surrounded them and herded them all right into the kings' tent. "We took them alive, O King, as you commanded. One of them is King Ahab. But all the rest are just little kids!" They stood quietly, arms held high.

"Ha. Bring 'umsh to me," a very slurred voice answered. It was old Ben-Hadad. He and the 32 kings around him were already drunk, though the evening was yet young.

"Now!" Shouted Ahab, springing over a table to King Ben-Hadad. In a flash the Syrian king was down, and Ahab was firmly holding a sharp knife across his throat. "You're a dead man unless you order your guards to back off!" he snarled. One guard had a spear hauled back ready to let fly. He could not have missed. For a tense moment they all froze. Then King Ben-Hadad gave the order. His trained guards instantly obeyed his command.

The kids had done their jobs. Once let loose, they were fast and ferocious. Every king in the tent was dead or dying except Ben-Hadad. Ahab hauled him to his feet and pushed him out of the tent ahead of him, the knife still to his throat. "Now, kids. Go to every tent with an officers' flag, and do the same. I'll hold Ben-Hadad here to keep his guards off your backs." Again, the kids did their jobs. With their officers dead, their guards and armor bearers fled, spreading panic and confusion through the camp.

Ben-Hadad's elite guards were not drunk. Their job was to protect their king, and each of them was willing to die for him. When Ahab pushed Ben-Hadad to the center of a clearing so he could keep an eye on his kids, the guards formed a circle around him. Their captain faced Ahab. "Your Royal Highness," he began, trying to butter Ahab up a bit. "I perceive that you are a skilled military man. I'm sure you understand what our duty is, even to the death. So I offer you your life for our king. Release him and I swear we will put him on a horse and ride away with him, to never bother you again. But if you harm him, you and all your kids will surely die."

Ahab didn't trust him. "You swear, eh? It wasn't that long ago that Ben-Hadad swore a peace treaty to my father Omri, in exchange for Bashan and Galilee. You still have my lands, but you violated our peace treaty. Every one of your lives is forfeit. I shall torture Ben-Hadad when this battle is over. I shall pull out his fingernails one by one..."

"You can't win, you know. We have 300,000 men..."

"We have YHWH. He has already struck confusion and fear in your camp. And we have Egypt on our side. The commanders of their garrisons have surrounded you with archers as we speak." Ahab saw from the corner of his eye that his kids were in peril. The confusion had spread, his army was thundering up, it was getting dark, and his untrained kids needed his guidance. They were nearing panic themselves. Suddenly Ahab became afraid for them. "But I'll make you an offer, and I keep my vows."

"Anything, Your Highness, to get back our king."

"My life, and the lives of my kids, for yours. Let me gather them around me unharmed. Kick your weapons in a pile here at my feet. Then you may have your king. But he is dead if any of you stoops to grab a sword."

"Done." The captain bowed and ordered his men to make a pile of their weapons. Ahab called his boys back and had them form a big circle around the pile. Then he released Ben-Hadad, as he had promised.

The elite guards kept their promise. They mounted Ben-Hadad on his horse and rode with him back to Syria.

The moment they were gone, Ahab shouted to the boys, "The horses! We can't let them use their chariots! Fan out in the corral and slash the hamstrings of every horse, like this." He ran into the now unguarded corral and began slashing furiously at war horses. Within five minutes the Syrian's 2000 chariots were useless.

By then it had gotten too dark to see. King Ahab led his boys back to the fortress. The Egyptian archers had done their job, and his army had arrived to finish the mop up. Without officers, no army can win a battle. As Obadiah had said, it was the boys who won the victory.

So the next evening at their victory celebration in the palace, Ahab personally placed a silver medal of valor over the neck of each of the 232 boys. Then he gave a flowery speech, in which he vowed to get a monument carved with each of their names on it, so no one would forget the time they had saved the nation. Then Obadiah gave a speech congratulating the boys and commending Ahab for his obedience to the word of YHWH.

But when it was all over, and everyone was full and happy, another prophet stood up to speak. It was **Micaiah**, the son of Imla. He said softly, "YHWH did not want King Ben-Hadad released. He wanted him slain..."

"Now wait a minute," Ahab interrupted. "I had to release him to save the lives of my boys."

"Your wisdom is not God's wisdom. He would have protected you if you had trusted Him. But you fell prey to fear for your boys, instead of the pure fear of YHWH. Now Ben-Hadad will attack again, until he is killed."

"Attack again? No way. His army was wiped out."

"Actually, it wasn't. You got the officers and kings, the Egyptian archers got 5,000 soldiers, and your army got about the same. But 300,000 warriors fled in the darkness. They will return next spring, for King Ben-Hadad has great wrath. Now you must prepare. Your armies are fearful and weak. Many failed to answer your call to battle, because you have been faithless. Strengthen your armies, and build faith in those who are fearful. *YHWH devoted Ben-Hadad to destruction, and gave you the honor of killing him, as I told you.* YHWH will forgive you, if you will obey Him now."

Ahab was angry with Micaiah for spoiling his victory celebration. Jezebel tried to take advantage of that. In bed that night, she asked, “Where did Micaiah come from? And why is Obadiah still your chief counselor? Remember we agreed to kill all the prophets of YHWH! We’ve got to get rid of them to restore Astarte and the Baals.”

Ahab considered it. But now his anger seemed petty. Micaiah had only warned him about a very real danger. And Obadiah had been exactly right on how to defeat the Syrians. “Jezebel, get out of my bed! I’ve let you push me around for the last time! I am the king! If you won’t submit to me, you shall no longer be my queen. Now go! If I ever see you again it had better be on your knees!”

Jezebel fled. Ahab lay back on the bed and smiled. He should have done that long ago. Now he saw why that Phoenician king had been so eager to get rid of her. He prayed, “YHWH, thank You for saving us from the Syrians. Now save me from my wife, I pray! How can I tame that shrew? She has manipulated me from the day we met. I fell for it just because she has a sensuous body. I’m sorry. I am weak and foolish. Forgive me. And thank You for Obadiah, and even for sending Micaiah. And thank You for those brave boys, every one. They’re so pure and innocent – I’m not worthy of them. And forgive me for being afraid, instead of trusting You...” thus Ahab drifted off to sleep.

The next day, Jezebel was one very repentant queen. She knelt before Ahab, kissed his feet, and wiped them with her long lovely hair. Every word to him was a “Yes, my lord,” or “Of course, my lord.” He wondered how long that would last, but decided he would enjoy it while he could. It lasted a long time. Soon she was back in his bed, but she studiously avoided any mention of her idolatry.

Logos was pleased with Ahab’s change of heart. He sent Micaiah again, “O King, YHWH has forgiven you and answered your prayer. You asked Him how to tame a shrew. The secret is your own heart. When your heart is right before Him, Jezebel will bow in submission and awe. But if your heart turns aside to foolish things, the idols in your own heart will bring forth the idolatry in your wife. You are her covering, but you have only now begun to learn how to cover her. She cannot give up the idols in her heart until you release your own.”

“What? She’s the one who killed YHWH’s prophets and hired the priests of Baal. And you’re blaming me?”

Micaiah tried to explain, “This is not an issue of blame. It is an issue of authority. She is your wife, not your lord. If you make YHWH your Lord in your heart, then Jezebel will submit to Him as well, or else she will flee from you! No woman with a heart full of idolatry can tolerate being close to a godly man.”

Sadly, Ahab was still miffed at Micaiah and couldn’t really hear him. He angrily ordered him out, and then stewed about it the rest of the day.

But that night, with Jezebel still eager to please him, he thought about it. It still didn’t make sense, but it seemed to work. Again he repented to YHWH for his anger at Micaiah. And again YHWH forgave him. Satan was furious about that. He found Logos hovering over Israel and came storming up, “You can’t forgive Ahab! He’s mine! And you certainly will never have Jezebel! I’m not sure what You are trying to pull here, but it’s cheating! You’re violating Your own Law! You...”

Logos just smiled, letting him run on at the mouth for a while but not interrupting. Finally Satan petered out and Logos answered softly. “I have taken nothing from you. I forced no one to seek Me. Ahab is indeed still yours, in his heart, though mentally he has begun to seek the benefits of allegiance with Me. And Jezebel is still yours by choice – mind, heart, and soul. I do not contend with you for what is yours. Yet I do insist that each soul has a real choice, an opportunity to evaluate My claim upon his or her life and accept or reject Me.”

“But You’re not being fair! You acknowledge that Ahab’s heart is mine, yet You have forgiven him these four times! And blessed him! And saved him from the Syrians! And restored his marriage with Jezebel, who is so ‘mine’ I’m amazed that You even look at her. They’re not covered by the blood. They still worship Jeroboam’s idols every Sabbath! You say the universe will cease to exist if the holiness of Your nature or character is compromised in the slightest degree. But You lie! You’ve compromised Your holiness every time you forgive them or bless them!”

Again, Logos waited. For a while it looked like Satan would never pause for an answer, and Logos would not interrupt him to give him one. Finally Satan shouted angrily, “Why are You not answering me?” He just couldn’t stand staring into that perpetual smile.

“I always answer those who are ready to hear.”

Now Satan shut up. In spite of all his faults, he did have a commendable curiosity. He really needed to know how Logos would weasel out of this one.

“You are right that I cannot countenance or condone evil or the universe ceases to exist. But it is not condoning evil to forgive a heart that is repentant. And if I allow a wicked woman to bless someone, that does not condone her wickedness. I forgave King Ahab because there are a few who still pray for him; Obadiah, Micaiah, and Elijah for example. Ahab’s heart has been softened by their prayers so that even he has prayed to Me, several times. Who knows? Perhaps he will accept My goodness and choose Me. As for Jezebel, if her husband chooses Me, she will probably choose Me as well, or leave him. I give them each freedom of choice. So must you. It is My Law.”

Satan left, more determined than ever to get rid of YHWH’s prophets in northern Israel. He hadn’t realized the power of their prayers. But all his efforts failed.

As Micaiah had warned, the next spring (856 BC) King Ben-Hadad fielded an even larger army and returned to northern Israel, loaded for bear. But this time instead of heading for Samaria his forces camped down near Aphek on the Plain of Sharon. Nobody knew why.

Ahab's first reaction was to send for help from his allies, Judah and Egypt, but Obadiah stopped him. "No, O King. You don't need help from your allies. YHWH granted you the honor of killing Ben-Hadad, remember? Now YHWH has given you a second chance. Just wait on Him. He will direct the battle."

So they waited. And waited. For some obscure reason, the Syrians did not seem inclined to attack, and Ahab didn't want to go first. Ahab's 40,000 soldiers looked like two little flocks of goats grazing the hills next to the sea of Syrian invaders filling the plain. Ahab looked glumly down at them. It looked impossible, even to Obadiah, but he kept quiet. Ben-Hadad sure wouldn't be caught drunk again! He was staging chariot races on the flats.

Seven days went by. Then Micaiah showed up. "It is good that you waited for the command of YHWH, O King. He says that the Syrians believe the God of Israel is only a God of the mountains, and if they fight you on the plain they can defeat Him. Therefore you shall defeat them on the plain as well, that they may know that He is God of all the universe. So, here is the command of YHWH to you: 'Go down now, for I have given Syria into your hand.'"

To his credit, King Ahab wasted not a minute. He whooped a war cry and sounded the attack. His waiting army rushed down the hills into the sea of Syrians. To their surprise, the Syrians never even saw them coming. The chariot race had been a double-elimination tournament, and to the final winner was given the honor of racing King Ben-Hadad himself. Of course he was doing his best to make the old king look good. But Ben-Hadad, perhaps recalling his younger glory days, had allowed the speed of his steeds to exceed the strength of his tired old muscles. He had fallen, badly, and gotten dragged along in the sand by the harness. Every Syrian eye was upon him and every Syrian heart was in his throat as Ben-Hadad was gently untangled and attended by the physicians. It was at that moment, with no one knowing if their king would live or die, that a cry went out, "Where is the army of Israel?"

Now everyone looked to the hills. They were bare. The Israelites must be out on the plain. But where? The flat plain revealed nothing but a sea of Syrian soldiers. The Israelites had fanned out and hit the unsuspecting Syrians in a long thin line. Running through the camp side by side, they slashed once and ran to the next, before their enemy could even turn to see who was coming. They were half-way through the Syrian army before the alarm was even sounded. It was an utter rout. Soon 100,000 Syrians lay dead on the sand. Many more surrendered or fled. But many others, especially the officers, retreated to Aphek.

Aphek was a strong walled city of the Philistines. As competitors if not enemies of Israel, they were glad to let the Syrians in and shut the gates behind them. Thus 50,000 Syrian soldiers climbed on the city walls to hurl taunts down at the surrounding Israelites. But Ahab knew just what to do. He had read Israel's history. He sent his musicians with their drums and fifes to lead the march, and by sunset they had the city surrounded, marching and shouting in time with the musicians. The walls of Aphek, built on the sandy plain, could not withstand the constant vibrations. They collapsed, killing 27,000 Syrians. But King Ben-Hadad and his elite guard had fled to an inner chamber. "I will not leave your city until I see Ben-Hadad, or his dead body," Ahab told the Philistines.

They told the elite guard, who came mournfully out wearing sack-cloth, with ropes about their necks. After seeing Ben-Hadad fall from the chariot, Ahab thought he must be already dead, but the captain of the guard said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says, 'Please, let me live!'"

"Oh, is my brother king still alive? I saw him fall. It was pretty bad! I was afraid it might have killed him."

"Yes, yes! Your brother, Ben-Hadad. He is still alive."

"Can he walk? Bring him. For we must talk."

Soon Ben-Hadad came hobbling out, hurt by his fall, but not near as bad as he made it seem. Ahab helped him up to his chariot so they could talk. "I am fairly defeated," Ben-Hadad bowed. "I'm your servant. I swear I'll never attack you again. I will restore to you all the lands I took from your father Omri. [881 BC] We'll be like brothers! You can even put trading posts in Damascus!"

The thought washed over Ahab. *Ben-Hadad is a liar. He's never kept a treaty in his life. That's why I devoted him to destruction. Kill him now that you have the chance.* But Ahab pushed it aside. It sounded too cruel to be from God. "So, you will restore all of Galilee and Bashan, to put our border back where it was in Jeroboam's day?"

"Absolutely. I will swear it by YHWH your God."

Ahab grinned. "I can accept that covenant! Write it up, and we will both sign it. Then I will let you go."

So King Ahab headed for home, rejoicing in his great victory and the peace treaty they had signed. He was so pleased with himself that he went straight to his ivory summer palace in the Jezreel Valley. He would take a well-earned vacation! Nothing could spoil his day!

But as he neared his ivory palace, a wounded soldier called out to him from beside the road. "Help me, Your Highness. For I've been condemned to die. I was asked to guard a man, on pain of death. But I got busy with other things and let him escape."

"Huh. Why appeal to me? You knew the consequences. Yet you let him escape. Your life for his."

Then the 'soldier' threw off his bandages and Ahab recognized him. It was Micaiah. "Thus says YHWH!" he thundered. "You are the man! I told you King Ben-Hadad was devoted to destruction, yet you let him go. Again! So it shall be as you have said, your life for his."

"But... But... he promised to restore all the lands that the Syrians have taken, ever since Jeroboam. All of Galilee. All of Bashan. Even Ramoth-Gilead."

"Your heart is not right, O King! You negotiate for cities and lands rather than obey the clear command of YHWH. This time you have no excuse! I made it very clear after you misunderstood me the first time. YHWH told you that He didn't want King Ben-Hadad released. He wants him slain. Already He has anointed another to replace him. By failing YHWH in this you have cost Israel, and Syria, much pain, and have set the day of your own death." So Ahab turned away from his ivory palace in Jezreel and headed back to his palace in Samaria. He was sullen and angry. He had thought no one could spoil his day, but that nosey prophet Micaiah seemed to have a knack at doing just that.

The fall was hot and muggy. Ahab wanted to go to his cooler summer palace in Jezreel, but every time he thought of going, he would think of Micaiah and get angry. Jezebel comforted him. She was still on her best behavior. Finally he told her why he was angry. "Oh is that all, my lord? Ignore Micaiah. He doesn't have any right to establish the day of your death. Only God does. And He loves you! He helped you win the battle at Aphek! Forget Micaiah. When Ben-Hadad gives back Galilee and Bashan he'll be eating his words. Let's take a vacation at our palace in Jezreel." She gave orders to the servants.

So they spent the final days of fall in their ivory palace. Ahab loved it there. Now if he could just get that horrid prophecy of Micaiah out of his mind. He gazed out across the fertile fields all around the palace. The Jezreel Valley was the best year-round growing area in Israel; cooler in the summer yet warm all winter. That's just what he needed! A winter vegetable garden! He could live here at his new palace all the time, and only go back to his big old stuffy palace in Samaria for matters of state.

But the land around his palace was owned by others. Ahab stared glumly out his favorite window. There was his neighbor Naboth, harvesting a fine crop of grapes. Hmm. After his grape harvest was in; maybe Naboth would sell his land. Or trade it for a better vineyard somewhere else. Ahab asked him at the end of the day.

Naboth wasn't interested. "YHWH forbid! This is my family heritage. How could I sell the inheritance of my fathers? It wouldn't be right!"

Now Ahab was really miffed. He went straight to bed, missing supper, feeling sorry for himself. Jezebel came up to give him a much-needed hug. "O my lord! Why are you so sad that you skipped supper? How can I comfort you?"

Ahab opened up and told her all about it. "Never you mind about Naboth, my lord. You come down to have some supper and enjoy your evening. I'll make a deal with Naboth to get you the vineyard." Ahab was very pleased. His shrewish wife had really changed! He had a delicious supper, and ended up drinking his troubles away with fine wine while his wife entertained him with an exotic dance.

Hardly a week had gone by before Queen Jezebel told Ahab, "Arise, my lord. Go, take possession of your new vineyard. For Naboth is dead."

"Dead? I thought you were just going to make a deal with him." Ahab was sorry he'd asked.

"Yes, we made the deal. It just took a few carefully worded letters on your letter-head and with your seal, to a few key men in high places in Jezreel."

"My letter-head?" Ahab shut up. He didn't want to hear any more. He went out to plan his winter garden.

But as he stepped into the field, Logos told Elijah the Prophet to get up and go meet him in the vineyard. Along the way, He explained the situation; Micaiah's prophecy, how Ahab had become offended, everything. By the time Elijah got there, Ahab had his whole garden planned out, to take best advantage of the winter sun, yet still give a pleasing view from his favorite window. He was just ready to go inside when Elijah the Prophet (now 60 years old) strode in the gate. "Thus says YHWH," he said sadly, "Have you murdered, and then taken possession?"

"Have you found me, O my enemy?"

"I found you because you have sold yourself to do evil in YHWH's sight! Even after He forgave you and gave you the second victory, you still let Ben-Hadad go free. Now thus says YHWH, 'In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall likewise lick up your own blood. Thus I will bring your own evil back upon you. I will sweep you away, and cut off from the house of Ahab every male, to make your house like the house of Jeroboam or the house of Baasha, because you provoked Me to anger by leading Israel into sin.'"

"Now wait just a minute. I didn't do anything wrong here. I just let Jezebel make a deal with Naboth to get me this vineyard. That's all."

"Furthermore, YHWH said that the dogs of Jezreel shall eat Jezebel in front of your own palace! What did Obadiah prophesy to you, O King? That YHWH would bless you as long as you followed Him wholeheartedly, and curse you if you turned away. What did Micaiah say to you? That your own heart was not right before YHWH, therefore you gave your wife your authority to do evil. Tell me, O King, on whose letter-head was the order to kill Naboth? Whose seal was affixed upon it? Don't complain to me about your innocence! Take that up with YHWH Himself." And Elijah strode sorrowfully away.

Ahab was devastated. Deep down, he knew Elijah was right, though in his mind he still tried to justify himself. Yet, there it was. In his entire life, Elijah had never uttered a single word that did not come to pass. He had better believe it! He was filled with horror. He thought of his sons, **Ahaziah, Joram, and Joash**. He had worked hard to prepare them to rule after him. And what about the three sons his daughter Athaliah had borne to Jehoram king of Judah? All killed? Because of his sin? By the time Ahab got up to his bedroom he was crying bitterly. He tore his royal robes and refused to eat. He stripped off his fine garments to put on sack-cloth. He even put ashes in his hair, which is the traditional symbol of mourning.

Jezebel tried to comfort him. But Ahab cried out to her, sobbing, “We have sinned, Jezebel! We have an innocent man’s blood on our hands! We must repent! And we must compensate Naboth’s descendants for his vineyard, and promise them a better one in its place. I will not eat until it is done.” Nothing Jezebel said could change his mind.

That Sabbath Ahab and Jezebel went down as always to the shrine at Bethel to worship before the golden calf. The people loved it when they were there, so it had become a regular routine with them. But this time, Ahab’s worship was hindered. He sensed the wrath of God upon this place. Again, he tried to justify in his mind what he was doing. *But YHWH, we’re worshipping You! The golden calf is just a symbol, an image to remind us of You. We’ve always done it this way. I know Your law says we must go to Jerusalem to worship, but we can’t. Not since the kingdoms were split...*

Satan was accusing Ahab before Logos. “You see, his heart is still mine! There is no one like Ahab, who has sold himself to do evil! He worships my images just like the Amorites before him. He will never love You!”

But then Ahab did a strange thing. He stood up, right in the middle of their worship, and shouted out angrily, “This is not right! YHWH is not pleased with us! I will not worship here anymore.” He turned his back on the idol and its priests to head back to Samaria. The crowd was stunned, as were the priests. Jezebel was stunned, too, but had the presence of mind to shout out, “Never mind him. He’s been in a foul mood ever since he talked to that prophet Elijah. [She spat out his name like it was a curse word.] Please, everyone. Let’s go on with our worship.” She enthusiastically bowed herself back down to the golden calf, hoping the people would follow her.

Elijah had gone down to Jerusalem to worship. He loved to be near the glorious temple of Solomon, near the Ark, near to YHWH. He went as often as he could. YHWH met with him there, as always. Today, just as Ahab turned his back on the golden calf, Logos said, “Get up, Elijah. King Ahab has repented. Hurry to Samaria. Tell him of My forgiveness. For I changed My mind about the evil that I swore would come upon his family. And pray that Ahab’s attitude of repentance will sweep over his family as well.”

Elijah ran all the way to Bethel. He had learned long ago that it’s more important to obey YHWH’s orders than to obey the priest’s silly regulations on how much travel the law permits on the Sabbath. Elijah found Ahab as he was leaving for Jezreel. He called, “King Ahab! Wait!”

“Oh, Elijah.” The despondent king fell to his knees. He had just replaced his royal robes with the sack-cloth. He looked, and felt, miserable, like a whipped pup. “Why do you always catch me at my worst?”

“Not at all, O King. This time I caught you at your best. YHWH is pleased by your repentance. He swore great evil upon you and your family within three years, but now He changed His mind. You will still die at the appointed time, for nothing can change that. But the evil will not fall on your family until after your death. They are protected by your repentant heart. Intercede with me that your wife and children also repent, so that the evil prophesied over your house will be further postponed.”

So Ahab didn’t go to Jezreel. He waited in Samaria until Jezebel returned from Bethel. He excitedly informed her, “Elijah was here! He told me YHWH would not send the evil upon my house during my lifetime, because He was pleased with my repentance.”

“Repentance for what? For standing up in the middle of the worship and making an utter fool of yourself...”

“No. Repentance for killing Naboth, and taking...”

“You didn’t kill him. I did. So why is He pleased at your repentance? You are the king, my lord! You don’t have to repent for what you do. You make the laws in Israel. You can do whatever you want.”

Except control my own wife’s tongue! Ahab thought. But fortunately for him, he didn’t actually say it. “Uh... Elijah said that if you and the kids repent too, the evil he spoke against our house would be postponed even further.”

“Our kids never did anything bad. They’re just kids. They don’t have anything to repent for. And I already did. I always confess my sins, whenever I go down to Bethel to worship. That’s the good thing about having our gods so close. We can have fun, get right down there to confess it, and we’re good to go. I don’t know why you make such a big deal out of it. Your conscience is too sensitive.”

“Killing Naboth didn’t bother you?”

“Of course not. I just told you that I repented already. Does killing Syrians bother you?”

“That’s different. They’re our enemies.”

“And you think Naboth was your friend?”

Ahab shut up. His wife lived in a different universe. He couldn’t even enjoy the encouraging words of Elijah with her around. Logos was pleased that he was getting serious about righteousness.

A year passed since Ahab's amazing victory at Aphek. He sent a letter up to Damascus asking why those Syrian garrisons were not yet gone from Galilee and Bashan. Old Ben-Hadad took a long time responding. When his letter did come it was just a bunch of excuses. "Please, O mighty King Ahab, just give me one more year. I will have all my military forces gone from the entire area. There are too many things going on right now. But never fear, O King! I will keep our treaty. I swear it!"

I know, dear Reader, that you must think Ahab a bit dense to trust a king who never kept a treaty in his life, or a nation world-famous for breaking alliances. You're right. Ahab let it slide. Another year passed. The Syrian garrisons remained fully manned. In fact, it seemed like there were more Syrians there than ever. Ahab finally got suspicious. He wrote another letter. Again Ben-Hadad wrote his most sincere apologies, praising Ahab's patience and kindness. His letter was lathered with so much butter it made even Ahab sick to his stomach. He had been snookered, again. He should never have trusted Ben-Hadad with a treaty. Micaiah was right. Ahab wrote back that if Ben-Hadad was not gone by this time next year, he'd better prepare for war.

Actually, that is exactly what King Ben-Hadad had been doing those three years. By the time Ahab realized it, the Syrians had amassed a powerful force at Ramoth-Gilead, hoping to hold all of Bashan and Galilee, permanently. So Ahab began gathering his own forces. But once again he realized that he didn't have the manpower to attack the Syrians. He decided to elicit help from Judah.

In 853 BC **Jehoram** began a co-regency with his father Jehoshaphat. That was good news to Ahab, as it meant his daughter Athaliah was now a queen of Judah. That ought to give him some pull with Jehoshaphat! He invited the two kings of Judah to a royal shindig at his 'Palace of State' in Samaria. He wine and dined them in style. His wife Jezebel provided the entertainment (she was a world-class belly dancer and loved to show off). When he figured Kings Jehoshaphat and Jehoram were well-oiled, Ahab casually mentioned to them, "Did you know that I have a treaty with Syria to return Galilee and Bashan? Old King Ben-Hadad signed it the last time I defeated him, at Aphek. But Syria has a big army garrisoned at Ramoth-Gilead, even though it now belongs to us. For three years they have been growing stronger. We can't delay any more, or they'll be too strong to defeat. I've prayed about this, a lot, and I really think YHWH wants us to kick the Syrians out. Will you go with me to battle them at Ramoth-Gilead?"

King Jehoshaphat, still rather happy with his wine, responded, "Sure thing, Ahab. I am one with you, just like I promised. My armies are one with yours, and my horses and chariots are yours, too. However, we must be certain that YHWH is with us before we go into battle. I'll send to Jerusalem to get a prophet of YHWH."

"Oh, there's no need. I have many prophets here."

"Prophets of YHWH? I thought Jezebel slew them all – except Obadiah, and he may be dead by now."

"No, no. I have 400 counselors, advisors, and elders, and they all know YHWH. They prophesy the Word of YHWH to me all the time. I'll send for them."

The big controversy in the heavenlies over Ahab and Jezebel had been going back and forth for years. But now it was expanded to also include the two kings of Judah, Jehoshaphat and Jehoram. Satan maintained that his claim to Ahab was inviolable, and that Logos was unfair to even try to convert him. Yet Satan now took the contradictory position that he was within his rights to try to use Ahab and Jezebel's wickedness to corrupt Jehoshaphat and Jehoram. Jehoshaphat had fallen for Satan's plan, so far. The angels were worried. But Satan insisted that they keep quiet and let him do his job.

Logos responded, "No Satan. Just as I allow you to tempt the kings of Judah, so I must present My own truth claims to Ahab. And just as I will gain a son if Ahab heeds and bows to Me, so you will gain a son if a king of Judah bows to you. Jehoshaphat my son is strong in his faith, I am glad that you are testing him, for faith is not true faith until it is tested. But realize that, in using Ahab to tempt him, you have opened up a possibility for the strong faith of Jehoshaphat to persuade Ahab."

"Even if I fail with Jehoshaphat, I still have Jehoram his son! All I have to do is call in my chips on Athaliah."

"So far her choice is for her husband and his choice is for his father. You must honor that. I know that Jezebel's evil influence is strong upon her daughter, but so far she has given you no occasion. We shall see how they mature."

"But now, the established time for Ahab is at hand. Who will entice him up to fall at Ramoth-Gilead?"

"I will, my Lord and King," Michael bowed.

"How will you do it, knowing he will die there?"

"I will entice him. That's my job," Satan sneered.

"And how will you do it, My beloved adversary?" He smiled, as if He was hoping he would volunteer.

"Easy. He has 400 prophets. Most of them have Your name on their lips, but their hearts are committed to me. I will plant a lie in their hearts, the exact same lie in all 400 of them. Ahab will certainly believe that!"

"A few of his prophets are still Mine, yet I concur with your plan. Go, entice him, and prevail."

Jehoshaphat, though still a bit drunk, could see that none of Ahab's prophets were prophesying the Word of YHWH. They knew which side their bread was buttered on. They agreed with Ahab's battle plan. It was as if a spirit of deception had swept over them. Even Obadiah, who was usually spiritually perceptive, seemed taken in.

Jehoshaphat shook his head, a little frustrated. “Ahab, is there not a single prophet in Israel who truly has the Word of YHWH?” He stood up. I will call for one of my prophets from Judah.”

“No, no. I have one more who always has the Word of YHWH. I didn’t call him because he never prophesies good for me, but only evil. He is Micaiah, son of Imla. He always knows what YHWH wants. But I hate him!”

“Please, O King, do not speak evil about YHWH’s prophets! Is he here? Please call for him.”

When Micaiah arrived, he had already been prepped on what to say. “Yes. Go up and succeed. YHWH is with you.” Jehoshaphat was shocked that he would so quickly agree with the other prophets. Maybe he had misjudged them.

But Ahab was not fooled. “Micaiah! How many times must I remind you to speak nothing but the truth in the name of YHWH? Don’t joke with me. I’m dead serious. What does YHWH really say about my battle plan?”

“Does it matter to you what YHWH says? You will go anyway, for so it is in your heart. As I said before, your heart isn’t right before YHWH. Thus He has prophesied tragedy against you and your house. For I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd. YHWH says, ‘Let them return to their homes in peace, for they have no master.’ So go, but you shall not return. As for your 400 prophets, I was in the heavenlies when YHWH sent a deceiving spirit who put lies in their mouths to entice you up to Ramoth-Gilead, for He has decreed disaster against you there.”

“See what I mean?” said Ahab to Jehoshaphat. “I told you he always prophesies evil concerning me. Ignore him. He’s been proclaiming disaster against me for years now and I’ve been just fine.” Ahab had his guards throw Micaiah in prison, again. “Feed him on nothing but bread and water, until I return safely,” he ordered.

“If you return safely, then YHWH has not spoken by me,” Micaiah retorted as he was hauled off.

“Well, I don’t know...” Jehoshaphat mused. “Maybe I’d better return to Jerusalem to pray about it...”

Another prophet then spoke up. It was Zedekiah son of Chenaanah, who’d been actively urging Ahab to go. He openly condemned Micaiah as a false prophet, then he looked Jehoshaphat in the eye and said, “Thus says YHWH God of Israel. ‘Years ago I told King Asa your father to help King Baasha of Israel defeat the wicked Syrians. King Asa not only refused, he allied with the Syrians instead. Hanani warned him repeatedly that his alliance was wrong, but he wouldn’t listen. Therefore I judged him, so the disease never left his feet. Now I assign you to go with King Ahab to defeat the wicked Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead, for I have devoted them to destruction. If you also refuse, you shall die of disease just like your father!’”

Jehoshaphat remembered his father’s long-running verbal battle with Hanani. *He believed Zedekiah.*

So good King Jehoshaphat left Jehoram in charge at Jerusalem and allied himself with Ahab against Syria. Jehoshaphat was completely taken in by Zedekiah. But Ahab had known Micaiah for a long time. Deep down he still suspected that Micaiah’s prophecy was the only one that was true. He worried. So he thought of a plan.

“Jehoshaphat, old Ben-Hadad doesn’t care about you, or even about our armies. He’s not ready to fight us yet. All he really wants is to violate his treaty with me and keep Galilee and Bashan. If we kill Ben-Hadad, his armies will flee and leave us alone. But if Ben-Hadad kills me, he has destroyed our treaty as well! He will be able to keep the land. My son will have to negotiate a whole new treaty with him, and we’ll probably never get the land back. So here’s our strategy. We’ll strike hard, piercing through their defenses right to the Syrian king himself. Instruct all our forces to aim only for the king. However, I’ll be wearing a disguise, so if he tries to do the same for me, his men won’t be able to find me.”

“What about me? Should I wear a disguise too?”

“Naw. No need. Like I said, He’s not after you.”

Michael shook his head in exasperation. “He’s too trusting. He’s been deceived by Zedekiah! Logos, when You gave Satan permission to deceive, I didn’t know You’d allow good King Jehoshaphat to be deceived too!”

“Protect him, dear Michael. He must not die here. But Jehoshaphat is not the issue, only his testimony. Intercede with Me that Ahab can hear it before he dies.”

As they rode their chariots up to Ramoth-Gilead on the border between Gilead and Bashan, the two kings had time to talk. Now that Jehoshaphat was out of Samaria and no longer drunk, he could think more clearly. “What if old Micaiah was right, O King? Are you prepared to meet your Maker? War is hell, you know. The end results are often surprising. Are your sins covered by the blood sacrifice, like we do every Sabbath in Israel? Have you repented and made your peace with YHWH?”

“Well, of course. Have you?”

“Yes, I sure have. I always make sure. I really do love and trust YHWH, but I don’t take His love for granted.”

“Love Him? Ha. Do you really love Him? He’s always been a harsh and fickle God to me. Sometimes He just blesses the socks off me and helps me win my battles, but other times He gets all over my case for the tiniest things, and makes my life miserable.”

Jehoshaphat reigned in his chariot and stepped down, which caused Ahab to do likewise. “I will not go into battle with a king who thinks YHWH God of Israel is harsh and fickle! Do you even know Him?”

Ahab was indignant. “Of course I know Him. I told you how He won my previous two battles with Syria, with great miracles! Their armies were ten times what they are now! This battle will be easy by comparison.”

“I know He knows you and has given you victories. But do you know Him? YHWH is a good God. He’s never fickle or harsh, and the only times He may seem so is when you don’t agree with Him about your sins. YHWH hates sin, especially in someone He really loves and wants to bless. If you think He is harsh and fickle, it tells me that you must be hiding sin in your heart.”

Ahab paused. Suddenly he saw things more clearly. He remembered what Micaiah had said about his heart not being right, about his being more concerned with his lands than obeying the clear command of YHWH. Suddenly he knew that YHWH had not commanded him to go – that had just been his own idea. *He should go home to wait on YHWH. He had never really learned to love and trust YHWH like Jehoshaphat. Maybe he didn’t really know Him after all.*

But then he looked back to his army, now halted and waiting for him. And the army of Judah beside them. *He couldn’t just retreat! It would make him look like an idiot; a fool; a scared wimp! He’d be the laughingstock! He could just hear Jezebel mocking him with her shrill, shrewish laughter! Bile rose in his throat at the thought.*

Jehoshaphat could tell that YHWH was dealing with him. “Whatever YHWH says to you, O King, do it. Even if He says to go back. I’ll stand with you, regardless.”

Ahab hesitated; then suddenly his mind was made up. “No.” Ahab lied. “Just doing a little last-minute repenting here. YHWH has forgiven me, and He says to go on to Ramoth-Gilead, for we shall be victorious!”

A big groan was heard throughout the heavenly host. Logos bowed His head and wept. Michael said, “He was so close. So close! What more could we have done?” Gavriel responded, “The Plan of the Ages shall not be thwarted, even by so great a loss.” Logos answered him, “Yes, dear Gavriel, but what great damage has been inflicted upon My precious Bride by the loss of Ahab! What great suffering, even for thousands of years, has been unleashed upon My people! Ahab was a key, for both Israel and (through his daughter Athaliah) Judah as well. Alas! Weep with Me for the torments they will now endure!”

The battle was fierce. Michael and his host were kept very busy deflecting arrows from Jehoshaphat. A large force broke through his guard and would have killed him had not Michael himself convinced their captain that he was not the king they wanted. Yet early in the battle, a stray arrow struck Ahab right between the shoulder joints in his armor. It didn’t penetrate very far, and Ahab just pulled it out. But it had struck a small artery, and Ahab couldn’t control the bleeding. He told his driver, “Take me out of the battle. I’m wounded.”

The battle raged all day. Nobody knew Ahab was down, for he was disguised as a chariot officer. But even to the last, appearances were everything. Instead of immediately taking care of his wounds, he had his driver prop him up in his chariot, so it would look to his men like he was still directing. But at sunset he died and fell over. Then they recognized him. “The king is dead! Every man back to his own city!” So the armies retreated to camp for the night.

The next morning, Ben-Hadad came out from Ramoth-Gilead with his elite guard, under a white flag of truce. He wanted audience with King Jehoshaphat and the sons of Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, and Joash. After the customary polite formalities, he said, “O Kings, I’m so sorry that you had to be involved in this fight. King Ahab and I had a treaty giving me these lands. He was trying to break our treaty and take them back, so of course he died. But we have no quarrel with you. If you renew the peace treaty with me, we can all go home.”

“Ahab broke the treaty? He said you broke the treaty! He said you promised at Aphek to return all these lands!” Joash, the youngest son of Ahab, was quite indignant.

“Oh, that wicked Ahab! He lied! Do you want me to get the treaty and show it to you? I swear by YHWH your God that I am telling the truth!” He turned to one of his guards. “Go back to my house at Ramoth-Gilead and get the treaty. It’s in the strongbox with all my important papers, right there on top. And bring the treaty I made with Omri, too.”

“But our dad showed us three or four letters from you. You swore to vacate Galilee and Bashan in a year!”

“What? I never swore any such thing. Let me see those letters. They’re forgeries. Why would I ever want to vacate these lands? They were given to me by treaty with Omri! I’m sorry, boys. Your father was dishonest. He was trying to stir up occasion against me, to gain your sympathy and to drive me out. You are his sons. Surely you know how dishonest he can be. But I have proof. The treaties! And even more proof; you yourselves know that I have kept my promises to your father. In the last three years, I have not attacked Israel once. Not even once! That’s what was in the agreement I signed with Ahab at Aphek.

“So you see, I do keep my promises. Even in this battle, I wasn’t fighting you. I was just trying to defend myself. Didn’t you notice?” He sent another guards off to fetch his army general. “When he comes in, you ask him what I ordered him to tell all his captains before the battle.”

So Ahaziah, Ahab’s oldest son, asked the general what he had been told. “King Ben-Hadad told me to command my 32 chariot captains to attack neither small nor great, but only target King Ahab alone.”

Jehoshaphat was stunned. “So that is why they left me alone after they found out who I was.”

“The same thing happened to me,” Joram said.

"I likewise," Ahaziah added. "I thought I would die, for when they struck my horses, my chariot toppled and I was helpless. But the Syrians looked at my face and said, 'I'm sorry, sir, I thought you were King Ahab. You look just like him.' Then he left me alone."

The guard returned with the treaties. Ben-Hadad proudly showed them to the sons of Ahab, and they had to agree. Their father had lied. Even Jehoshaphat was amazed that he had been so snookered by King Ahab! Of course you and I, dear Reader, know that in reality Ben-Hadad was lying through his teeth. His treaty with King Ahab at Aphek had been carefully doctored. But they didn't know. Shrewd old Ben-Hadad had concocted the whole scheme, for he really needed Israel's help.

So after two hours wining and dining, King Ben-Hadad presented the new treaty he had previously prepared for King Ahab's signature. "I had this treaty written up long before Ahab attacked us. I really didn't want him killed, you know. I wish my brother Ahab had not been so full of hate against me. We can't afford to hate each other. We've got to learn to help each other and defend each other. For now we have a much larger enemy on our borders, and it will take all of our forces combined to defeat him.

"It is King Shalmaneser III of Assyria. He has already conquered all of Mesopotamia and Anatolia all the way to the Western Sea. Assyria has been forcing us to pay tribute, but Shalmaneser wants more. He's power mad, and utterly ruthless! He wants to conquer the entire world! He has 100,000 of the best-trained troops I've ever encountered. Year after year, I've been keeping the Assyrians at bay, but if I lose, you know they will sweep down south and wipe out you guys too. My intelligence says that last year they finished conquering Babylon. This year they're preparing to take Hamath, Syria, and Phoenicia! Next year it will be Israel and Judah, I know – if we can't stop them here."

Thus Ben-Hadad got Ahaziah, Joram, and Joash to sign his treaty for Ahab, and even talked King Jehoshaphat into signing it as well. "Now we'll get Ammon and Moab to sign on, too. I can do that; their kings are good friends of mine. King Iruleni of Hamath and King Hadad of Edom are already signed on with me. But it would be nice to have Egypt supporting us as well. Can you get Pharaoh Rameses III to sign it? I'll make a copy for you to take him. Tell him, if we lose this year, they could threaten Egypt next year!"

Old Ben-Hadad's scheme worked. No wonder he is now known as Syria's greatest and longest-ruling king. By that fall he had twelve kings signed onto his treaty against Assyria (nine plus Ahab's three sons). At Jehoshaphat's request, Rameses III agreed to loan the troops from his garrisons in Israel and Byblos; he couldn't send more due to his Hittite refugee problems. Jehoshaphat even got King Gindibu of Arabia to sign on – he sent 10,000 camel riders to help defend the Levant. Thus the Syrian-led coalition became one of the largest military forces ever assembled.

But before I tell the story of the famous battle at Qarqar, we must learn of the alliance Jehoshaphat formed with Ahaziah, the oldest son of Ahab. As they returned from Ramoth-Gilead, Jehoshaphat offered condolences for the death of their dad, and promised to support whichever son became the next king. He mourned with them, helped them bury their dad, and cheered while they crowned **Ahaziah** the new king of Israel.

Jehoshaphat was in no hurry to get home. He trusted his son Jehoram in his absence. He helped King Ahaziah get settled in and appoint his cabinet. Then they signed an economic alliance for inter-state commerce between Israel and Judah, including an agreement to build trading ships together at Ezion-Geber.

But when he finally got home, Jehu, son of Hanani the Prophet, was waiting for him. "Ahab had become evil in YHWH's sight," he called. "The dogs licked his blood as it was washed from his chariot by the pool of Samaria, just as Elijah prophesied. Should you help the wicked and join with those who hate YHWH, and so bring His wrath upon yourself, too? Yet YHWH sees your heart. At least you have hated their idols as He hates them. So now set your heart to seek God and obey Him. You should have asked Him before you made your economic alliance with Ahaziah, for nothing good will come of it. If your father [King Asa] had allied with Baasha, he would have repented and Israel would have been spared this great evil, but with Ahab's death, it is now too late."

"It is never too late, friend Jehu. I have done the godly thing for Ahaziah. Don't be an old sourpuss."

So King Jehoshaphat immediately set about to get his ship-building program going. After that was underway, he traveled through all the cities of Judah, calling the people to repentance, restoring the authority and purity of the Levitical priesthood, and installing godly judges in each city. "Consider what you do when you render judgment," he told them. "You do not judge for men, but for YHWH. He sees all and knows all, so let the fear of YHWH be upon you and be careful how you decide. YHWH our God has no part in unrighteousness, partiality, or taking bribes." He appointed governors, and assigned punishments for any who violated their trust. Thus he rejected the word of YHWH through Jehu regarding his alliance with Israel, and compensated with a lot of good works. Logos was sad that Jehoshaphat so soon forgot to seek His face.

Ben-Hadad was correct. The Assyrians, under cruel King Shalmaneser III, attacked Syria that fall (853 BC). His undefeated forces swept through Mitanni to Pethor on the Euphrates. (That is just a bit south of Carchemish, where some Hittite towns still survived as vassals to the Assyrian juggernaut.) Ben-Hadad's big coalition began gathering at Hamath. They started north about the time Shalmaneser reached Aleppo. The two colossal forces met east of the Orontes River, just south of Qarqar.

The Assyrians had the best army in the world. They had the best training, the best weapons, the best armor, the fastest chariots, and the smartest commanders. They were trained to lightning warfare – strike ruthlessly and move on. No rag-tag coalition of farmers and shepherds could match them. They hit King Iruleni first, mowing down his army like it wasn't even there. Then King Hadad was slain and the Edomites scattered. Syria under General Naaman and Israel under Ahab's sons were next. King Jehoshaphat could see that the battle was not going well for them. He fell on his knees and cried out to YHWH for deliverance.

"Now he wants to seek Your face," Michael said. "Why couldn't Jehoshaphat have done that before he made his foolish alliance with the wicked kings of Israel?"

"Yet I make even his errors and failures a part of My Plan of the Ages," Logos said softly. "He should not be here. He has placed himself and the army of Judah in great danger, for the Assyrians can easily annihilate the entire coalition. But the Assyrians must be stopped, for the sake of King Jehoshaphat my son. I shall use his disobedience to save all the others, even though Syria has deceived him and will soon turn against him again. Go down now, dear Michael, to put the fear of God into the Assyrians! Tell Ahaziah to move his forces to the right flank, and tell Jehoshaphat to get up off his knees and circle his army around the rear. And assign your host to protect them all, yes, even protect the wicked Syrians!"

Slowly the tide of battle turned. The Assyrians were used to advancing so quickly through their enemies that there was no time left for any fancy maneuvers. But somehow, the line of the Syrians held. General Naaman was fighting for his life, and he knew it. Once you engage the Assyrians, you don't change your mind and politely bow out. They had well-established customs of dealing with rebels. It does not make for pleasant dinner conversation.

With the Syrians holding their own in the middle, King Ahaziah looked at the flanks. He understood the benefit of forcing your enemy to fight on several fronts. The river protected the left flank. He could do nothing about that. But that right flank was tempting. He gave the order. What he did not realize was that the army of Judah was moving behind him, marching rapidly around the entire Assyrian army toward its rear. Any general knows you don't let the enemy on your rear! That's where the cooks, medics, and water boys are. Shalmaneser had two battalions in reserve, but due to Ahaziah's move to his left flank, *he didn't see Jehoshaphat moving around behind!*

By the time Shalmaneser got word that the army of Judah was outflanking him it was nearly too late. He immediately re-directed his two reserve battalions to face Jehoshaphat, but now his men were fighting on three fronts! He began to see confusion and uncertainty in his once superbly disciplined army. For the first time in his life, he felt the fear of a possible loss.

Battles are not supposed to take more than one day, not Assyrian battles! Darkness fell, and still the battle raged. Shalmaneser was furious. How can his enemy see in the darkness? Yet now he seemed to be losing more than ever. Suddenly he realized that the silvery moon rising in the east was lighting the faces and glinting off the iron helmets of his own soldiers, while keeping his enemy (who had no iron helmets) in dark silhouettes. The moonlight had changed one of his advantages into a liability. Shalmaneser knew he had lost. He sounded retreat. The remnants of his army turned tail and fled back to Qarqar.

The next morning, Shalmaneser came under a flag of truce to negotiate with the coalition of kings. He put on a big bluster, "Well, are you ready to surrender, or shall I continue to devastate your forces? You can't win, you know. I could lose twice as many as I've lost, and still beat you. Your forces are the most disorganized, poorly equipped pack of fraidy-cat peasants I've ever fought. And I've fought a lot of battles. I've never lost a battle! If this is the best you can do, now you know why!"

The Syrian coalition of kings listened politely to his rant. Most of them had borne the brunt of the Assyrian attack, and fully agreed with Shalmaneser's assessment. But finally King Jehoshaphat could take no more.

"Sir, your army has never been beaten before, because you had not yet encountered YHWH, God of Israel and Judah. But now you have. Even if all the other kings in the coalition choose to leave, we will still defeat you. So let the battle begin. And tonight, don't turn chicken and run as soon as the sun goes down. This battle is to the death. We will not surrender. The very fact that you are here pleading for peace tells me how badly you were defeated yesterday, for never before has the Assyrian army halted a battle midway and sounded retreat!"

Shalmaneser got red in the face and tried to think of an angry retort, but nothing came out. Finally he ordered his officers out of the tent. "I must speak with them in private. Stay at a distance and wait for my return," he commanded. After they left, he confided to Jehoshaphat in a low voice. "You are correct, Jehoshaphat. My forces are devastated and demoralized. We've never even been in a battle that lasted longer than a day. Please, I beg you! Do not make me lose face in front of my men! I surrender! I will take my army and leave. I swear in the name of all the gods I will leave Syria and Hamath alone. I will ask no more tribute from you. As for the rest of you kings farther south, I swear I never intended to attack you anyway! I always planned to stop at Syria. Please, let me return the way I came."

Now old Ben-Hadad was emboldened. He was familiar with the tactic of saving his army for another day, as well as skilled in the art of lying through his teeth when it suited him. "Your oaths mean nothing to me. I think you're lying. Since when did Assyria ever stop collecting tribute? We need more assurance than just your word."

Shalmaneser paused, his head bowed. He had indeed been caught lying. He sighed and looked straight at old Ben-Hadad. "You and I understand each other, you old fox. I will never be able to fool you. Here." He handed over his ring. "This ring is my authority; the seal of my power. With this, my surrender is total. Please have mercy on my army. I will take it right back to Assyria and never bother you again. Take this ring to Aleppo, to Carchemish, to Byblos, to Ugarit, to any of my vassals on your northern borders. Tell them I have assigned you to collect my annual tribute. If you don't tell them how devastated my army is, they will comply, for they fear me greatly. But if you tell them you conquered me, they will rebel and you'll get nothing. It will take me many years to recover, and even more if you are taking all my tribute from my western vassal states. Indeed, I may never recover."

So the Assyrian forces headed back north with King Shalmaneser claiming the victory. But the Syrian coalition of kings headed south with old King Ben-Hadad carrying Shalmaneser's ring. When it was time for the coalition of kings to split up and head for their respective nations, old Ben-Hadad promised to send each of them their share of the tribute he collected from the Assyrian vassals. (He later kept this promise, but only to Ammon, Moab, and Edom.) Thus the westward expansion of the mighty Assyrian Empire was stopped at Hamath and Syria for many years. Though Assyrian history claims that Shalmaneser won the victory at Qarqar, now we all know the truth!

Shalmaneser III, of kindred spirit to Ben-Hadad, only kept his vows as long as it took him to rebuild his army. But though he tried again twice, in 849 and 846 BC, he never got the better of Ben-Hadad. That foxy old king collected Assyria's tribute 'in Shalmaneser's name' and used it to strengthen his forces in preparation for the attacks he knew were coming. He did understand Shalmaneser, very well. King Shalmaneser III finally did conquer Damascus, but not until after old King Ben-Hadad's death in 841 BC. Ben-Hadad I had ruled Syria for an impressive 47 years.

When Ahaziah got back to Israel, he discovered that the Moabites hadn't sent their annual tribute. They explained, "Our tribute this year was our army's participation in the battle at Qarqar." Ahaziah couldn't deny that, so he let it go, which turned out to be a mistake.

That wasn't the only mistake Ahaziah made. He rejected Jehoshaphat's exhortations to get rid of his idols, claiming, "It's just our way of worshiping YHWH! You worship Him your way, and we worship Him ours. YHWH is blessing us. We beat the Assyrians, we have peace, the economy is booming, our trading ships at Ezion-Geber are almost finished, and all is going well."

But it was not true. Things were not going well, for Logos was not happy with Ahaziah. He tried to warn him by sending a big windstorm up the Gulf of Aqaba. Their nearly completed ships at Ezion-Geber were destroyed.

King Jehoshaphat was miffed when he heard the bad news. "YHWH, why did You do that? Those ships were a means of my building a relationship with Ahaziah. Don't You realize that I am winning him, and the nation of Israel, back to You? This is the closest we've been since the death of Solomon! If You will bless my efforts instead of fighting me, we may see all Your people unified again, one nation under Your rule! Don't You want that?"

He went on like that for a long time before he looked up. There stood Eliezer son of Dodavahu, a prophet from Mareshah. "You want to know why YHWH allowed those ships at Ezion-Geber to be destroyed? Because you allied with King Ahaziah. All your good works are likewise worthless if they are not in obedience to YHWH. Ahaziah is a committed fool. He has made himself to be YHWH's enemy, so YHWH devoted him to destruction. Don't fall with him under YHWH's wrath."

Now King Jehoshaphat remembered what the prophet Jehu had told him: "You should have asked YHWH before making your alliance with Ahaziah, for nothing good will come of it." He fell on his face and wept in repentance. Logos forgave him and impressed the lesson on his heart, "Simple obedience is better than good deeds."

So when Ahaziah came to renew the alliance and rebuild the ships, Jehoshaphat refused, telling him what the prophets had said. King Ahaziah never repented of his idolatry. Logos gave him one last warning. He was on the rooftop of Omri's big palace in Samaria, taking pride in the fact that he was the ultimate sovereign of all he surveyed. He leaned against the railing in satisfaction, but it gave way. He fell two stories down onto a decorative parapet. He suffered a broken back, two shattered ribs, a punctured lung, and a ruptured spleen. He was in unbearable agony as they carried him to his bed.

Ahaziah's physicians hardly dared to touch him. It is rather awkward for a king to be so badly incapacitated. At first he just wanted to die, but by the second week he began to fear that he might live! He sent messengers to Ekron to inquire of the Philistine oracle god Baal-Zebub (Lord of the Flies) as to whether he would recover.

Logos immediately spoke to Elijah, "Ahaziah has failed his last test. Even in great pain and anguish of soul, he turned not to Me, but to the pagan oracle of Baal-Zebub at Ekron. Meet his messengers on the road. Tell them that King Ahaziah should prepare to meet his Maker."

Elijah found the messengers at Samaria's gates. "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you go to inquire of Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron? YHWH says that King Ahaziah will surely die. He should spend his remaining few days on earth preparing to meet his Maker."

They hurried back to Ahaziah and reported what he had said. The king knew right away that it was Elijah. "After him, guards! Don't let him escape!"

Knowing Elijah's reputation, the captain of the guard took fifty soldiers with him, and hurried to find Elijah. He was easy to find – just off the road on top of a small hill, a half-mile from the city gates. "O man of God," the captain called, sword drawn, standing proudly in front of his fifty. "His Majesty the King orders you to come down!"

"The king orders..." Elijah looked at Elisha. (True to his word, Elisha had not left Elijah's side since the day the mantle had fallen upon him.) "What do you think, Elisha?" This was a teaching moment. "Do these soldiers even know or care that I am a man of God?"

"I don't know, sir. But we can ask." He turned to the captain of the guard. "Do you serve YHWH, the God of Elijah? Or do you serve King Ahaziah?"

"How dare you question my loyalty to the king?"

"If I am a man of God," Elijah retorted, "Then let fire come from Him to consume you and your men."

Elisha was duly impressed when fire did come down from heaven, consuming the fifty soldiers. "God knows their hearts," Elijah said sadly. "It seems they were fully committed to evil, like their King Ahaziah."

Those watching on the city wall also saw it. Someone ran to tell Ahaziah what had happened. He didn't care about his men, he wanted Elijah. "Send out more soldiers! Bring him to me!" So another captain was sent, again with fifty men. The same thing happened as before. When King Ahaziah heard it, he was enraged. "I don't care how many men die, bring me Elijah!" he shouted.

"I'll go," a third captain said. (I'll call him Captain Andy.) "I don't need soldiers. It's only Elijah and Elisha."

"No! Take your soldiers! Don't let him escape!"

So the third captain came to Elijah and Elisha, with fifty frightened soldiers trailing along behind. He got on his knees before Elijah. "O man of God, I must obey my king and ask you to come visit him. But before you send fire from heaven to consume us, know this. My heart is with you and with YHWH your God. If you do come with us, we will do our best to protect you from the wrath of the king. So please, let our lives be precious in your sight."

"What do you think, Elisha? Does this captain know that I am a man of God?" Elijah was smiling.

"Yes, sir. It's an entirely different attitude, isn't it."

"I agree. Captain Andy, stand up. I will ask YHWH what to do." He prayed, and Logos told him, "Go down to the king, and do not be afraid of him."

When he got to Ahaziah's bedside, the angry king was ready with a vile tongue-lashing that isn't even repeatable in polite company. Elijah hardly listened. Instead, he whispered to his servant, "What do you think, Elisha? Does he know I'm a man of God?"

"The king doesn't have a clue," Elisha whispered back. Captain Andy overheard and nodded. He was beginning to understand why the previous 100 soldiers had been slain by God's fire.

The king's anger finally overcame him to the point where he was gasping for breath, in agony because of the punctured lung. His physicians bent over him, warning him to relax. Elijah took that opportunity to repeat what he had told the messengers. "Thus says YHWH, God of Israel, 'Because you put your trust in your physicians instead of Me, and sent to inquire of Baal-Zebub the god of Ekron as if there were no God in Israel, therefore you shall not recover, but shall surely die. Get your affairs in order. Prepare to fall on your face before your Maker and give an accounting of all your deeds.'"

Ignoring his doctors' orders, Ahaziah screamed out, "Seize them and throw them both into the dungeon until I recover!" Then a painful coughing fit disabled him.

Captain Andy moved to the king's bedside. "Your Majesty, that might not be prudent. He is a man of God. If he calls down fire from heaven upon us now, you would be consumed as well as us. I want to protect you, sir."

"I'll have you thrown in prison, you traitorous..."

But Elijah put his hand on the captain's shoulder. "Never mind that. Captain Andy, we will go with you."

Andy was shocked that he volunteered for such an awful place. "But sir, don't you know? It is filled with rats and mold. What little bread and water is provided will hardly keep body and soul together."

"If I am a man of God," Elijah chuckled, "would any of that matter in the slightest?" He and Elisha followed, while Captain Andy led them down to the dungeon. He hesitated at the heavy iron door, a question on his face.

"Go ahead," Elijah laughed. "Take us to Micaiah's cell. I've been wanting to visit him. All I ask is that you send someone to release us when King Ahaziah dies."

"Ah..." Now Andy understood. "Micaiah will be glad for the company. I tried to get Ahaziah to release him after Ahab's death, but somehow he had picked up on his father's hatred of him. But we keep him in the best cell in the prison, the one with the window. For some reason the rats never seem to go in there."

"Of course not. Micaiah is a true man of God," Elijah told him as he opened the gate to Micaiah's cell. The room was pleasant, with a small window, clean straw on the floor, and even a tiny desk for Micaiah's writings. "And if I'm not mistaken," he put both hands on Andy's shoulders and looked into his eyes, "you are a man of God, too. For you serve God's servants, as I see here."

Thus the three prophets had sweet fellowship there until King Ahaziah died early the next year. (852 BC)

CHAPTER 27 – KING JORAM OF ISRAEL AND KING JEHOAM OF JUDAH

King Jehoshaphat of Judah was having a grand time traveling around his kingdom, teaching God's laws, encouraging godly priests, establishing good judges, inspecting his trade routes, and all the other things a good king should do. He trusted his son Jehoram to rule wisely at Jerusalem in his place. He had trained him well!

But sadly, he hadn't counted on Queen Athaliah. She had been so good, so submissive and obedient! But after Ahab's death at Ramoth-Gilead, Queen Jezebel had gone to Jerusalem to mourn with her daughter. She convinced her to blame YHWH and those lying prophets for her father's death! Thus Athaliah caught Jezebel's spirit of bitterness and rebellion against God, and now Satan was having a field day with her. Her sympathetic, spineless husband Jehoram was just carried along for the ride. Greed, lust for power, ambition, pride, idolatry, you name it; Jezebel (inspired by Satan) made sure that Athaliah was filled with it. Soon they succeeded in turning Jehoram's heart away from YHWH, too. So after Jehoshaphat left on his tour of the nation, Jehoram made his power secure by killing his five brothers and stealing their inheritances for himself. Worse, he let Athaliah hire prophets of the Baals and begin perverting the Levitical Priesthood by adding idols to the temple worship. Logos was deeply grieved, yet He withheld judgment from the house of David for a time, on account of His covenant with David.

But He did mention it to Elijah, there in the dungeon with Micaiah. Elijah borrowed Micaiah's desk and sat down to write a letter. "From Elijah, prophet of YHWH, to Jehoram son of King Jehoshaphat. Thus says YHWH, the God of your father David, 'Because you have not walked in the ways of your fathers King Jehoshaphat and King Asa, but instead have chosen the ways of the wicked kings of Israel by leading Judah into evil, and have brought idolatry into My house with Ashtoreth and the Baals, and have even killed your brothers who were better than you, behold, I now pronounce judgment against you. I will visit disaster after disaster upon your kingdom. If you still will not repent, I will strike your body with a gut-wrenching disease, to bring you to your knees. If that does not bring repentance, nothing will, for by it you will die.'"

King Jehoram got the letter. He put it on the mantle to think and pray over it. But then Athaliah found it and burned it. In the end, nothing improved much in Judah.

Joram, second son of Ahab, had temporarily taken over the affairs of state in Israel until Ahaziah should recover. Then in early 852 BC when his older brother died, Joram was crowned king of Israel. After his throne was firmly established, he told Captain Andy to release Elijah, Elisha, and Micaiah. On his way out, Elijah handed Joram a letter like the one he had written for Jehoram of Judah, warning him to get rid of the idols in Israel.

In the 12th year of Pharaoh Rameses III (852 BC), the Mycenaean Sea People again attacked Egypt, further weakening his now crumbling empire. Secular history records that, but it doesn't record a more momentous event of that year: the passing of Elijah the Prophet.

After his letter to Joram, Elijah knew it was time. He left the palace at Samaria and started down the path to Gilgal. "I'm going Home, with a capital H," he told his sidekick Elisha. "My ministry is over. You can just stay here."

"Not a chance, my master. When YHWH has taken you, we will part. Not one moment before."

So they walked together down the steep path to visit the School of Prophets at Gilgal. They knew Elijah's passing was near. Elijah gave the prophets a word of exhortation. After the good-bye hugs he told Elisha. "Just stay here, my faithful friend. YHWH is leading me back up to Bethel."

"As YHWH lives, as long as you are still alive I will not leave you." Elisha was as firm as before. So they trudged back up the steep hill to the School of Prophets at Bethel. They also knew it was time for Elijah's passing. They came out to meet him, and were surprised to see Elisha too. As Elijah passed out good-bye hugs, one said to Elisha, "Don't you know YHWH will take your master from you today?"

"Yes. I know. Be still."

"You may stay here with us..."

"That's a good idea, Elisha. You stay here. YHWH is calling me back down the path to Jericho."

"You can yo-yo up and down these hills all you want. I won't leave you." So they headed back down the steep path. Jericho, if you remember, had been under a curse from the time of Joshua. But during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, Hiel the Bethelite had determined to rebuild it. He was an idolater, so he tried to turn the curse into a blessing. He sacrificed his oldest son Abiram and laid him under the foundation cornerstone. When he finished the wall, he sacrificed his youngest son Segub and put him under the cornerstone of the main gates, as Joshua had prophesied. Needless to say, he did not get YHWH's blessing. The city was haunted. His whole family and all who had come to help him mysteriously died over the next few years. So now, the only ones living there was a School of Prophets, who used the place as a monastery 'retreat from the world'. When the prophets in Jericho came out to greet Elijah, they were surprised to see Elisha with him, for they, like the other prophets, knew it was time for Elijah to go Home. As they hugged good-bye, a prophet said to Elisha, "Don't you know YHWH will take your master from you today?"

"Yes. I know. Be still."

"You may stay here with us..."

"Yes, Elisha, just stay here. This is your last chance. YHWH is calling me across the Jordan into the desert."

To his credit, Elisha didn't lose his cool. "As YHWH lives, as long as you are alive I will not leave you." So they left Jericho and went down to the Jordan. Fifty curious onlookers from Jericho followed along behind them.

It was early spring, and the ford was impassible. The Jordan River was flooding its banks. "Oh nuts," Elijah said. "I forgot about the river." He turned to his sidekick. "Well, my friend, thank you for coming after all. I might have had a rather grueling swim without you. May I please borrow my mantle back a minute?"

"Of course." Elisha handed it over. Elijah took it, folded it lengthwise, and struck the waters with it. Then he handed it back. Elisha put it right back on. How he loved that mantle! The stains from the oil still darkened the hood, so Elisha sensed Elijah's anointing whenever he wore it. He sighed with pleasure, then blinked. The Jordan had dried up in those few moments. Elijah was walking across on dry land. Elisha scurried to catch up.

On the other side, they walked together awhile without speaking. Then Elijah said, "As you have been faithful to me, so I know you will be faithful to YHWH all the days of your life. From now on, YHWH will be your portion, your wisdom, and your blessing. Now, is there anything you want from me before I am taken?"

"Yes sir. Please sir. I want a double portion of your anointing. As much as you've been filled with YHWH's Spirit, I want to be twice as full."

Elijah slid to a stop, almost falling. After recovering his balance he stared at Elisha, his mouth hanging open in disbelief. "No. That's impossible. No one has ever been as full of the Spirit as I, not even Moses. And you want to be twice as full? It's just... just... No."

"Please don't say no, sir. Please pray about it."

Elijah knelt in prayer. After a bit, he got up, looking a little sheepish. "YHWH reproved me for what I just said about Moses. He says that Moses had more of His Spirit than I know. He agrees to give you a double portion of His Spirit, on one condition; that you see me when I am taken. If you don't see me go up, then you can forget it."

"Go up? I thought I came along to bury you."

"I'm sorry for you. For all those who have faith in death, so it is granted to them according to their faith. I don't have any faith in death. Never have – at least, not since little Sammy returned into my arms from Sheol."

"Faith in death? What do you have faith in?"

Elijah smiled. "This is more than faith, my son. YHWH is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. He is not the God of the dead! I refuse, I totally reject, death! I've asked YHWH to take me up bodily, alive, in a flaming chariot with fiery red horses, to meet Him in Paradise, to greet my fathers and there to celebrate my victory."

Now it was Elisha's turn to gasp in disbelief. What had he gotten himself into? He almost wished he had obeyed Elijah and stayed with the School of Prophets. At least their faith was a bit more down-to-earth. "But... but Sir! D-d-do you think He'll do it?"

"Of course. I've done everything YHWH asked, all my life. I have not failed in anything He set before me. He will not fail me in this. But I really expected to be all alone when I went up. No one else was supposed to know. Surely you don't want every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the country pestering YHWH for the same honor."

"Sir, you don't have to worry about that. No one else in their right mind would pester Him for that. No one else would have that much... that much..." he was going to say brazen gall, chutzpah, hubris, or somesuch, but none of them seemed quite right.

"Faith." Elijah finished his sentence for him.

They walked on. Old Elijah was energized, but poor Elisha was still shocked by the boldness of Elijah's faith. He struggled to keep up, thinking, *And I asked for a double portion of this? Just who do I think I'm kidding? I'll be lucky to get a tenth of his faith! Who am I, anyway? His water-boy. What have I gotten myself into?* A dozen times he was sorely tempted to turn back. Elijah would get ahead as Elisha's strength was flagging. But then he was reminded of the mantle he wore. He reached up to pull the oily hood to his forehead and hurried after Elijah.

For a moment, Elijah disappeared from view after going over a small rise. Elisha panicked and broke into a run to catch up. He came over the rise, and there it was. A flaming chariot, pulled by two fiery red horses. Elijah just strode right up and climbed in. A whirlwind sprang up and blew the flaming chariot up into the sky. Elisha strained to stay focused on his mentor. Elijah turned in the chariot with a smile and a big, cocky wave, as if to say, "There. What did I tell you?" Then he was gone.

"My father. My father!" Elisha cried, feeling faint. He fell to the sand. "The chariots and horsemen of Israel! Israel has no defense without your prevailing prayer!" He tore his shirt down the front, threw sand in his hair, put his head between his knees, and bawled like a baby.

After a long time the tears ran dry. Elisha slowly got to his wobbly feet. *Elijah is gone*, he thought. *But I saw him go, by God, I saw him go!* He clenched his jaw in sudden determination. *He said I'd have a double portion, by God, and I take it! And with it, I shall accept the task of Israel's defense. I've still got his mantle...* He again felt the oily hood, then reverently pulled the mantle off. *Let's see. To get back across the Jordan, I have to fold it like this...* He returned to the turbulent flowing waters. The fifty curious prophets were still there, watching from the other side. "Where is YHWH, the God of Elijah?" Elisha thundered, striking the water with the folded mantle.

Nothing happened. The men on the other side held their breath. Elisha looked down at the turbulent waters and called out, “*Okay YHWH. It’s either the double portion or nothing. Grant it, or take my life!*” He looked back up and stepped into the torrent. Except when his foot hit the waters, they had dried up. He crossed on dry land.

The sons of the prophets gasped and shouted, “The spirit of Elijah is upon him!” They were bowed before him when he climbed up the bank. Of course they were filled with questions. “How did Elijah die? Did you bury him? How did you get back so quickly?”

“Elijah didn’t die. YHWH lifted him up to heaven in a flaming chariot with fiery red horses.”

“Yeah, right... Very clever. What really happened? Did you erect a monument to mark his body?”

“Monument? You joker! There was nothing left to bury. I told you, YHWH carried him up to heaven.”

“Let’s go find his body. We will bury it. We can make a decent monument for him. There are fifty of us, strong young men. You weren’t gone that long. We’ll follow your tracks. Surely he needs a decent burial!”

“No. He surely does not. Return to Jericho.”

“Perhaps the Spirit of YHWH carried him up into the sky by the whirlwind, and then let him down on some mountaintop, as with Moses, or in a valley.”

“Okay, have it your way. Go ahead. But you won’t find him. I’m going back to Jericho.” He started off.

“Uh, sir? The Jordan? It’s flowing again.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding! You think I’m going to waste a perfectly good miracle on your frivolous...” But Logos stopped him and reminded him of his request. He came back and struck the river again, saying only, “Double portion!” Then he walked off, muttering, “Boy. Talk about having faith in death...” without even waiting to see if the water had stopped for them to cross.

They searched fruitlessly for three days, while Elisha ministered to the other prophets in Jericho. They told him about the curse on the city. By prayer and fasting, they’d gotten rid of the hauntings and poisonous air, but the water was still bad. Elisha sprinkled a little salt on their spring, believe it or not. From that day on the water was sweet and their gardens became productive.

Elisha stayed in Jericho until the fifty returned. He chastised them, “What did I tell you? You all have too much faith in death! True prophets have faith for life!” Then he headed up the hill toward Bethel.

But one followed him. Gehazi! “Sir, may I attend you? Elijah sent me away when Jezebel was chasing us. He told me to find another prophet to serve. You are more full of YHWH’s Spirit than any prophet I’ve ever found!”

The School of Prophets at Bethel maintained a pretty low profile. They had to, as the majority of the town now worshiped at the shrine of Jeroboam’s golden calf. They hated the prophets of YHWH, and jeered and tormented them whenever they passed. Sadly, their teenagers had picked it up too. When they saw Elisha returning, wearing Elijah’s hooded mantle, they assumed he was Elijah. They began taunting him about his bald head.

Now, Elisha was young, and still had plenty of hair. He wasn’t going to respond to their taunts, for he discerned the spirit behind them. This was not about hair. It was about the evil one and his hatred for YHWH’s prophets. He prayed, “YHWH, how did these innocent boys get infected with this mocking spirit? What should I do? Do they need discipline? How can I set them free?”

“Send them to Me,” Logos answered sadly.

“Huh?” He looked back, seeing for the first time some of their parents smirking from their doorways. Logos repeated, “Send them to Me. For if they grow up here, they will become persecutors of My prophets, earning great wrath upon themselves. In mercy, I would bring them home early to spare them that. I will finish raising them in Paradise. They are young and flexible. They will come to know and love Me. Their hateful parents have forfeited the privilege and joy of raising them.”

“How in the world do I send them to You?”

“Prophecy destruction to their bodies. That will release their souls to Me. I’ll do the rest.”

Elisha looked around. Fire from heaven? No, that might slay the righteous with the wicked. Sickness? No, it would take too long. The lesson might be lost. The only thing Elisha could think of was a bear – but he knew there were no bears in downtown Bethel. *Huh! If he is a man of God, that’s not an issue.* He turned back to look at the boys. “All of you who know YHWH, go home!” he called. “The rest of you, go to Sheol to learn of Him. In the name of YHWH, let bears come into town to slay your bodies.” Then he climbed the hill to the School of Prophets. He didn’t see the forty-two who were slain by two female bears who ran out of the woods and chased them through town.

Elisha greeted the prophets in Bethel and gave them the news. Then he went north to visit the School of Prophets at the base of Mount Carmel. He ended up at the big palace in Samaria. Joram welcomed him. After catching up on the news, he said, “I got that letter from your master, Elijah. He told me to get rid of the idols. I have done so.”

“All of them? Already?”

“Well, the ones in Samaria anyway. I got rid of the altar of Baal from my father’s temple of Baal on the hill. And I cut down and burned Ahab’s lewd Asherah pole. It was a big ugly carving of my mother. I didn’t like the way men looked at her. *I want YHWH’s blessing.*”

“Well you are starting out the right way to get it. Do you have anything specific in mind?”

“Yes. My brother never disciplined the Moabites when they rebelled and stopped sending tribute. I need to do it. I’m joining up with Judah if they will agree. And their vassal, Edom, too. Will you bless our campaign?”

“I will be glad to bless your campaign once you have cleansed all the idols from Israel. However, with YHWH’s blessing you won’t need Judah’s help. And Edom will be a snare to you. They’re idolaters. They’ll double-cross you.”

“Thank you for your advice.”

“You’re welcome. But it is more than advice. It is God’s wisdom. Call me when all the idols are gone.”

After Elisha left, Joram called for Micaiah and got the same response. Not exactly a blessing, but neither of them had told him not to go. He made a halfhearted attempt to get rid of more idols, then decided that two half-blessings equalled one whole blessing. He mustered his army and headed down to Judah in 851 BC.

King Jehoshaphat had been on the road virtually ever since he installed his son Jehoram as co-regent in 853 BC. He didn’t even know that all his other sons were slain. He trusted Jehoram, and didn’t have a clue about Athaliah. But when he heard that the army of Israel was mustered and heading toward Jerusalem, he rushed home, calling for his own generals to prepare for battle.

Jehoram had been waiting for him to get home. After Jehoram had killed his brothers, he and Athaliah had hatched an elaborate plot to stage an ‘accident’ for his father, thus securing the kingdom for himself. But he didn’t get a chance to pull it off, for Joram’s messengers reached him right after his father stepped in the door. “King Mesha of Moab has rebelled. I must discipline the Moabites. I would be honored for you to join me.”

Jehoram and his father looked at each other. “You okay here without me?” Jehoshaphat asked.

“Of course, Dad. Go ahead. Take the army. We’ll be just fine here. YHWH’s blessings upon you.”

So Jehoshaphat sent word to let Joram know he was coming, and rushed to get his army ready. He never knew how close he had come to death. His son figured, *No sense killing him now. With any luck, he’ll die in battle anyway.*

After linking up with Joram of Israel, Jehoshaphat vowed, “I am as you. My people are your people. Thank you for inviting us to join you. What’s the battle plan?”

“First we’ll go south around the Salt Sea, so we can pick up the Edomite army, too. Then straight to Kir-Hareseth.”

The color slowly drained out of Jehoshaphat’s face. He knew allying with the wicked Edomites was wrong. He shouldn’t have made that vow! Now he was stuck.

“Uh, Joram...? I don’t think we should bring Edom.”

“Why not? Aren’t they your vassals? You helped them recover after the royal house of Hadad all died at Qarqar.”

“The tribute they send me is only in gratitude for my help. King Ed appreciates all I did for Edom after their devastating loss at Qarqar. Their army was nearly...”

“But they’ve recovered. Their army is strong now, and it’s all thanks to you. Their army will be a big help to us.”

“Well, they might. But frankly, I still don’t trust them. They have divided loyalties, you know. For many years they took the side of Moab, Ammon, and Syria against us. Just because we allied at Qarqar against the Assyrians...”

“Nah! After all you’ve done for them? C’mon! They owe you! You helped them establish their new royal house. King Ed loves you! He’ll do anything for you.”

Anything but get rid of his idols, Jehoshaphat thought. But Joram overruled his hesitations. They headed south.

When he had come back from Ramoth-Gilead, King Jehoshaphat had brought his wife Jaime with him on his tour of the cities Judah. Their sons were grown, and she was a big help to him. But now as he rushed off to war, Jaime was left behind. She soon learned that Jehoram had slain all her other sons. Fearing for her own life, she ran out of the palace to find her husband, but King Jehoram’s guard caught her and brought her back.

“I’m so sorry, Mom.” Jehoram put on a mournful face. “My younger brothers all conspired against me to kill me and take the kingdom! I didn’t want to tell dad just before the battle, because it would discourage him, and might cause him to lose.” He wove this lengthy yarn about their attack, how he was nearly slain, and how his guards had to kill them to save his life. Thus he pacified her with lies.

King Jehoshaphat was distressed enough as it was. He still didn’t feel right about allying with King Ed of Edom, and he was even more concerned about heading into the wilderness with his army. He had planned on crossing the Jordan River on their way to Moab, and stocking up with water there. By going around south of the Salt Sea, there were no good places to stock up, and they were running low. When they met up with the Edomites, he voiced his concern, but the other two kings just laughed it off. “We’ll stock up at the Brook Zered,” King Ed told Jehoshaphat. “It’s always running this early in the year. No need to stew about it. Trust me. I know this area.”

“Trust me?” Jehoshaphat muttered under his breath. “That’s just the problem. I don’t trust you!”

They reached the Brook Zered, on the border between Edom and Moab. It was just a dry wadi. Jehoshaphat was furious. “YHWH is not with us! You told me you’d gotten YHWH’s blessings from Elisha and Micaiah! We cannot fight Moab without YHWH’s blessing! We must go back!”

“Hey. No worries, mate. I know this area. We’ll go up the coast of the Salt Sea to the Arnon River. It’s only thirty miles out of our way. You know it is always flowing. Then we’ll head across to Kir-Hareseth from there.” King Ed was way too self-assured.

But the Moabites had heard they were coming, and King Mesha had brought his army out to block them from reaching the river. He surrounded them at a big dry valley, where he was certain he could exterminate them. He knew the Zered was dry. They had to be running low on water! He would not attack, but just keep them stuck beside the Salt Sea until they started dying of thirst. Then he could easily wipe them out.

Joram remembered what Elisha had told him about the king of Edom. He looked at Jehoshaphat, and tried to convince him that it was YHWH’s fault. “Alas, for YHWH has called us here to give us into the hands of Moab.”

“Hold on. Does anyone know of a prophet of YHWH in the area? We need to ask Him what to do.”

“Yes, sir,” one of his aides spoke up. “When we came into the Arabah, we passed some nomads. Elisha the son of Shaphat was there. He was the servant of Elijah.”

“He certainly has the Word of YHWH. Let’s go.” Jehoshaphat cried. The others agreed. They rode their chariots furiously back across the Zered and up the hill toward Judah, back-tracking their route.

They found the nomads. Elisha had come down to encourage them and give them the news about Elijah’s ‘Homecoming’. King Joram found him first. Elisha was disgusted to see him there. “What did I tell you? If you won’t listen to YHWH’s prophets, then go to the pagan prophets of your parents, Ahab and Jezebel.”

“Has YHWH called us three kings to give us into the hand of Moab? King Jehoshaphat is with us.”

“Jehoshaphat?” Elisha saw only Joram and the king of Edom. But then the king of Judah came riding up, thinking he was getting a little old to keep up with these kids. “Were it not for the fact that King Jehoshaphat is with you, I wouldn’t even talk to you. But for his sake, I will ask YHWH. Bring me a worship musician.”

The ‘nomads’ were religious zealots from Judah, in the Arabah for a worship retreat. Their musicians led, and within their worship, YHWH spoke to Elisha. “This is what YHWH says, ‘I see you stuck in a dry valley before the army of Moab, with the Salt Sea at your back. There is no wind, no rain, and you are dying of thirst. So dig trenches in the ground, and I will fill them with water, so you may drink, you and your livestock with you. But this is a small thing for Me. I shall also give Moab into your hands. I want you to strike every fortified city, fell every tree, stop up every water-spring, and mar every garden with stones. For I have a contention with their god Chemosh!’”

The three kings hurried back to their thirsty armies and immediately ordered the trenches dug. It was after sunset, so they dug late into the night. That was just as well, for if they had tried to dig in the hot sunshine, they would have perished of thirst. The next morning, they all slept in, exhausted and completely out of water. Without a fresh supply, they would not survive one more day.

At dawn the Moabites looked over the silent valley. Not a man or animal stirred. All the trenches were filled with water, but in the sunrise it looked red like blood. King Mesha said, “Aha! I knew they’d be getting thirsty. The noises we heard in the camp last night must have been their three armies fighting each other for water. Now they’re all dead, in pools of blood. Let’s go down to collect the spoils of war! Blow the trumpet of victory!”

The army of Moab arose and rushed into the valley. The tired, thirsty forces there awoke at the trumpet call. They barely had time to fill their canteens and strap on their swords before the battle was engaged. Expecting to find only dead men, the Moabites were caught by surprise and roundly defeated. Those who survived, fled back toward the nearest fortified city, Kir-Hareseth.

Joram and Ed wanted to immediately attack them, but King Jehoshaphat said, “I have to first obey the command of YHWH through Elisha. I’ll leave part of my army here to sling stones at their walls, but as long as their entire army is holed up here, I’m going around Moab to destroy the other fortified cities, stop up the springs of water, chop down the trees, and ruin their gardens with stones, just as YHWH commanded. After I obey, He will give the Moabite army into our hands.”

Joram was furious with him. “I’m in command here! This is my battle! Stay here to besiege their army. I want it annihilated! Afterward we can do all that other stuff.” King Jehoshaphat disagreed, so they separated. King Ed stayed with Joram to besiege the city. Jehoshaphat took his army and traveled through Moab, obeying YHWH.

When Mesha saw Jehoshaphat leave he rejoiced. Now he had a chance. He was furious with Ed, for King Hadad and his fathers before him had always been the allies of Moab. He never thought Edom would turn against them. He wrongly assumed that King Ed had instigated the attack himself, and decided that if he could just kill him, the others would leave. He waited a few days to make them complacent, then snuck out of the city under cover of night with 700 of his finest warriors.

They tried desperately to break through the Edomite ranks to kill King Ed. But the Edomite guards were alert and drove them back into the city.

Now King Mesha was desperate. His entire army was holed up in this small city, without adequate food or water supplies. Now the tables were turned. He had to think of something fast, or they’d all starve or die of thirst.

The last straw for Mesha came when he heard what King Jehoshaphat was doing to his land. All was lost! It was time for the ultimate sacrifice! But if he had to do it, he would certainly get his enemies involved as well. He set up the huge Chemosh idol on the city wall for every eye to see. There he made a grand ceremony of calling for all the nations to bow to their god, ending with his sacrifice: his own son, his eldest, who was to rule after him. Then he loudly proclaimed the dreaded curse of Chemosh on any army who dared oppose him.

The Israelites were horrified, but held their peace. Joram began to understand why YHWH had told Elisha He had a contention with the Moabite god Chemosh! He decided to obey YHWH and destroy this evil nation.

But the Edomites feared the curse of Chemosh. They began to panic and run for home. Worse, they infected the Israelite army with their fears, and they, too, began to flee. Joram tried to stop them, but once panic is loosed, it's pretty hard to stuff it back into its bottle. By the end of the day, Joram crossed the Arnon, following his fleeing army toward Samaria. What Elisha had said about the king of Edom double-crossing him, had now come to pass.

Jehoshaphat heard the news. He was very concerned. Mesha still had a very large force, and they were no longer holed up at Kir-Hareseth. Now, I would like to say that the good King Jehoshaphat didn't fear them, even with his smaller army, but rather obeyed the clear Word of YHWH to wipe them out. YHWH had said He would give Moab into their hands! But sadly, that is not what happened. Jehoshaphat should have simply put his trust in YHWH and ignored that demonic curse of Chemosh sworn by King Mesha on the wall. YHWH wanted the Moabite army annihilated, and Jehoshaphat knew it! Instead, when he heard that they had come out of the city and mobilized against him, he also succumbed to fear. He turned tail and fled across the Arnon. Jehoshaphat would live to regret that mistake! For now, Moab had won!

Their land was devastated. Everything that was most precious in this semi-desert land – the trees, gardens, and springs of water – were ruined. Their fortifications around their major cities were pulled down. In rage, King Mesha swore an eternal oath against Jehoshaphat and all Judah. He sent a message to his northern ally, the infamous old King Ben-Hadad of Syria, pleading for reinforcements. He also sent word to his perennial ally King Ben-Shobi of Ammon. They began preparing for war.

Ben-Hadad was now keeping all that Assyrian tribute intended for Shalmaneser III. He had gotten filthy rich. He used most of it to strengthen his own military force. But when he got the message, he sent a big caravan of soldiers, weapons, and military supplies to his allies Ammon, Moab, and Edom. As the final third of that Syrian caravan continued on its way toward Edom, King Mesha went with it. He had a bone to pick with King Ed!

Mesha didn't beat around the bush. "King Ed, you were a fool. You never should have allied with the kings of Israel or Judah. I know they helped you, but their God YHWH is cruel and intolerant. He wants to enslave you. But our gods are strong, as you well know, and YHWH cannot defeat us. However," he smiled and gave Ed a wink. "I forgive you. You are young. Your previous masters, the royal family of Hadad, were tragically taken from you too soon. Perhaps you were unaware of the long-standing alliance we've had with the Hadad's, as well as with Ammon and Syria. You cannot break that alliance, for it is only if we stand together that we can survive our powerful neighbors to the west. So how 'bout it? Here are reinforcements from the rest of us. Will you pledge to renew our ancient alliance?" Ed didn't really like it. He had been impressed with Jehoshaphat and his God. But Mesha was here; they weren't. He signed the treaty and agreed to join the battle against Judah next year.

Old Ben-Hadad did more than send reinforcements to his allies east of Israel. He also brought his captain Hazael to raid Israel's northern borders. He knew that if he didn't keep Israel's army occupied, they would likely join with Judah against the battle Mesha was planning. (Ben-Hadad would have brought General Naaman too, except he had fallen ill with some kind of skin disease.)

His plan worked to keep Joram out of the battle with Moab. But Hazael's raiders kept being blocked by Israel's army. Every time he attacked a city in northern Israel, Joram's army was there waiting. So he split his forces and attacked in two places at once. The Israelites were armed and ready at both places! Ben-Hadad was furious. "How could they have known where we would attack?" he raged. "We must have a spy in our midst! Which of us is giving my battle plans to the king of Israel?"

One of his aides answered, "No, my lord. Elisha, a prophet in Israel, tells the king of Israel everything you say, even the words you whisper in your bedroom."

"Where is he? We must capture him!"

"Right now he is living ten miles north of Samaria in the small town of Dothan. It is unarmed and unwallled."

"Captain Hazael! Take all of your best raiders tonight, slip around past their army, and go down to Dothan. Take Elisha alive if possible. Slay him if he resists."

So by dawn Hazael's troops had surrounded the little town. Elisha's servant Gehazi arose first, and saw them. He was terrified! "Alas, O master! What can we do?"

"Don't fear, my friend. Those who are with us are far more than those who are with Syria. O YHWH my Lord, open Gehazi's eyes, I pray, that he may see."

Elisha returned to his breakfast. But Gehazi stepped out of the house to look around. The hills surrounding Dothan were filled with shining soldiers on chariots of fire drawn by flaming horses.

As he finished breakfast, Elisha heard a knock at the door. “Lord, as you opened my servant’s eyes, I pray you will close the Syrian’s eyes. Let them be blind to what You are doing.” He opened the door.

There stood Hazael and his guards. “In the name of Ben-Hadad king of Syria you are ordered to come with us! If you resist, you shall be slain!”

“Oh dear. You’ve come to the wrong house. You even came to the wrong city. Just tell your men to follow me. I’ll take you to the one you seek.” Elisha led them down the road into Samaria, right into the middle of Joram’s elite forces. Of course King Joram wanted to kill them all, but Elisha refused. “You don’t kill prisoners of war! Feed them and send them home satisfied. Then they won’t trouble you again.” So they did. Hazael gratefully took his raiders back to Ben-Hadad. They returned to Syria in mid 850 BC, to leave Israel alone for many years.

In the meantime, (spring 850 BC) Mesha’s coalition of armies had gathered at the south end of the Salt Sea and headed north to Engedi. It was the largest force he had ever seen. Now he would get his revenge against Jehoshaphat! Besides King Ed and King Ben-Shobi, King Mesha had a fourth king, King Maon of Mount Seir. Mesha had cajoled the Meunites to join by bribing him with Syrian supplies, and also by threatening to attack him next if he would not join his coalition. The Meunites were mighty warriors, with Arabian steeds. They had proudly maintained their independence from Arabia and the Levant for many years. Mesha would soon regret forcing them to join him!

King Jehoshaphat had been utterly devastated by the loss of his children. Yet he still trusted his son Jehoram, believing his fabrication about their conspiracy against his rule. He and Jaime mourned the rest of the year. Their army returned home, discouraged by their defeat in Moab. So nobody was ready when an alarm sounded from Tekoa. A big army had been seen down by Engedi. It was the biggest army they had ever seen.

Jehoshaphat was shocked. Who could it be? He had dealt with the Moabites last year! Then he remembered. He had left most of their army intact at Kir-Hareseth. They probably now had reinforcements from Ammon and Syria. *Oh, no! They will really be mad after the damage he did to their land!* King Jehoshaphat was afraid. He proclaimed a fast across his kingdom and called all the prophets of YHWH to Jerusalem to seek the Lord with him. Then he went to Solomon’s temple, put his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the Covenant, and poured out his heart. “YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, I am undone! Last year in Moab I was afraid and disobeyed You. Now they have returned to slay me. I know, I was faithless, and deserve to die. But they want to destroy Your people, Your heritage, all of Judah! And I know that Syria is behind this, for wicked old Ben-Hadad has grown strong and very rich. *How long, O Lord, will you prosper the wicked?*”

“I prosper the wicked?” Logos became a bit indignant. “I devoted Ben-Hadad to destruction long ago! Need I remind you of your father Asa’s treaty with him against Baasha? I had chosen Asa to destroy him! Then I hoped for you to do it, but after you so foolishly took his daughter Athaliah, I assigned that task to King Ahab. He didn’t listen to Me either. *How long will it be before My people simply heed My voice and reap My blessings?*”

So King Jehoshaphat spent the day praying, fasting, and repenting before YHWH. When the prophets and elders from the cities of Judah got there that evening, he prayed, “O YHWH, God of our fathers, God of the universe, Ruler of the nations, power and might are in Your hands. No one can stand against You. Remember Your covenant with Abraham, to give this land to his descendants forever. And remember also Your promise to Solomon as he finished this temple, saying that if judgment fell upon us – sword, pestilence, or famine – and we come to this temple, bow before Your holy name, and cry out to You in our distress, that You will hear and deliver us. So now, behold, the sons of Moab, Ammon, and the tribes of Mount Seir have come against us. You wouldn’t let us invade them when we entered the land, but made us go around them. This is how they reward us! O God! Judge them! We are powerless against them, for they are supplied by wealthy Ben-Hadad. Please show us what to do. Our eyes are on You.”

Logos saw the repentance in Jehoshaphat’s heart. He determined to answer his prayer through a Levitical priest, **Jahaziel**, son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah. “Thus says YHWH,” he said. “Neither fear nor be dismayed because of the great multitude arrayed against you. The battle is not yours, but God’s. Go down tomorrow against them. But you will not need to fight. Stand and see the salvation of YHWH! Bow before Me to worship. For I have given them into your hand.” They thanked YHWH with joyous songs and heartfelt shouts of praise.

At dawn the armies of Judah and Benjamin assembled at the edge of the wilderness by Tekoa, halfway between Bethlehem and Hebron. They faced east down an immense dry valley leading to Engedi and the Salt Sea. Jehoshaphat formed them into ranks at the head of the valley. He put musicians and singers in front of them to lead the worship.

The soldiers had not done a lot of singing together, so the worship leader gave them a few music lessons. Then, when they saw their enemy coming up the valley, he led them in the easy and well-known antiphonal chorus: “Oh, give thanks to YHWH for He is good. *His lovingkindness endures forever.* Let Israel now repeat, *His lovingkindness endures forever.* Oh, let all who fear YHWH now conclude, *His lovingkindness endures forever.* YHWH is for me. I will not fear. *What can man do to me?*” (**Psalms 118**)

The chorus echoed across the valley and down to the mystified attackers. The soldiers loved it! They sang it over and over, until it began to unnerve their enemy.

Then the worship leader instructed them in another familiar chorus: "Ascribe to YHWH, O sons of the mighty. Ascribe to YHWH glory and strength. Ascribe to YHWH the glory due His name. Worship YHWH in holy array. The voice of YHWH is upon the waters. The voice of YHWH thunders above the waters. The voice of YHWH is powerful. The voice of YHWH is majestic. The voice of YHWH breaks the cedars. The voice of YHWH throws out flames of fire. The voice of YHWH shakes the wilderness. The voice of YHWH roars down the valley, *yes even the Valley of Tekoa!* In His temple everything cries 'Glory! Glory! Glory! YHWH will give strength to His people. YHWH will bless his people with peace.'" (Psalm 29)

Still clambering up the steep slope, the attackers began asking, "Who is up there that we can't see? Why are they so confident?" They were now close enough to see their faces, not tense in fear as they expected, but raised to the skies in joyful praise. Maon king of the Arabian Meunites turned to King Ed of the Edomites, on his left. "This is utter nuts. We've been snookered. They must have a zillion men up there. I'm out'a here. Care to join me?"

King Ed had been forced to come. He admired King Jehoshaphat and his God, and he had no desire to fight against him, especially when he heard worship like that. Frankly it thrilled his soul. "You bet, Maon. There is just no way I'm going up against them!"

So together they hatched a plan, to escape stage left as soon as they reached a small opening in the valley up ahead. They prepared their captains. It would be close, but they figured the other two kings wouldn't dare try to stop them, as the army of Israel would be right on their tails!

They were wrong. King Mesha, from the center next to the Arabians, saw what was going on. Furious at being double-crossed, he ordered his soldiers to turn on them. He was closest to the fleeing Arabians. His larger army managed to nearly annihilate them, as their escape route was narrow and they were blocked by the Edomites.

Mesha should have immediately returned, but he was angry. He chased the fleeing Edomites nearly down to the Salt Sea. King Ed and the slowest of his men were slain, though many escaped after their dead run down the hill.

When Mesha finally got his army re-assembled and back to the valley, King Ben-Shobi was furious with him. "You blithering idiot! You dodo bird!" and other names not so nice. "How dare you leave me here facing Judah all alone! King Jehoshaphat might have attacked me at any moment. They must have a million men up there. You left me here like a sitting duck. You can fight the <expletive deleted> Israelites all by yourself. I'm going home."

"Oh no you don't! We're in this together, remember? You got as much from Ben-Hadad as I did. I know that Jehoshaphat's army is small. I defeated them just last year. They ran like scared rabbits!"

"Then you can bloody well defeat them again this year! I am toast!" He told his aide to blow retreat.

"Belay that order!" Mesha shouted out. "I am still in command of this coalition. You will obey me, or I will have you strung up for mutiny!"

"What coalition? Look around. You just killed half of 'em. You couldn't command the family dog!"

"Mutiny! Mutiny!" Mesha screamed, hopping up and down in a childish hissy-fit. "Guards! King Ben-Shobi has rebelled. Bind him in chains until this battle is over."

"It's already over. Captain, about face. We're going home. Sound that call to retreat."

As you can guess, within minutes the two armies were at each other's throats. Both kings were soon dead, and it all went downhill from there, literally. By that evening, when the singers looked down the valley after a glorious day singing, their enemies were all corpses on the ground.

When they marched back to Jerusalem in triumph, Jehoshaphat again put the singers and musicians in front. They came through the gates to the awesome sounds of Psalm 29. Now, this had been a very large army. When the Israelites went down the valley to collect the spoils of war, it took them three whole days to haul it all back to the city. They renamed it The Valley of Beracah (Blessing, Praise). We remember it as the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

The dread of YHWH fell on the surrounding nations when they heard how He had delivered Judah from that vast army without even having to fight. The kingdom of Jehoshaphat had peace on all sides the rest of his life. Even old King Ben-Hadad feared him, and feared YHWH!

Even more important for Jehoshaphat, his son was duly impressed, and came to fear YHWH that day. He repented of the evil he and Athaliah had planned for his father. He threw a party honoring his father and their army, and he even honored YHWH for their miraculous deliverance.

Judah prospered and grew strong. Satan was furious. "How did You do that?" he growled. "That wasn't right! Jehoram is worse than Joram! He killed all his brothers! He is secretly worshipping at my altars with Athaliah! He still chose Athaliah, even after I put in her the spirit of Jezebel!"

"I know what he is doing, Satan. But you forget. His wickedness is covered by the prayers and righteous acts of Jehoshaphat. Jehoram repented of the evil he had planned for his father. All of Judah now reaps the blessings."

So Satan left Judah. He returned to the kingdom of Israel in dreadful wrath. He had occasion there, and he made good use of it. Plague, famine, disease; he even tried to stir up old Ben-Hadad against Israel once more. Truly terrible sufferings had resulted in Israel from King Asa's alliance with Syria, and from King Ahab's disobedience in not killing King Ben-Hadad either time he had the chance.

CHAPTER 28 – JEHOSEPHAT & JEHOSEPHAT DIE

King Jehoshaphat had ruled for 24 years. At the age of 56, he basically decided to retire from public life. He and his lovely wife Jaime bought a farm in the country. He still sometimes traveled around to visit his judges, his officers, and the Levitical priests he had established throughout all the cities. But he remained unaware of the hilltop groves that Jehoram had established for Athaliah's Baal worship. He still trusted his son, always wanting to believe the best. So Logos sent a warning. Elisha came visiting at his farm. "My master Elijah warned you to train your children to know YHWH's ways. Elijah said that if your son forgets YHWH, all the good that you have gained for Judah may be lost. You swore you would train him, but you have failed."

"Not so, my friend. I faithfully trained him. Jehoram is a good boy. He serves YHWH to this day."

So Elisha told Jehoshaphat the whole sordid story about Jehoram's assassination of all his brothers, the plot to kill his father, the secret worship groves for Athaliah's prophets of Baal – the whole bit. King Jehoshaphat was devastated. He had been totally deceived, by his own son. When Elisha left, he and Jaime spent days weeping and praying for YHWH's wisdom. What could they do? The whole kingdom was in Jehoram's hands!

Satan, who had this big 'sacrifice your eldest son' kick going on back then, tried to talk him into staging a coup d'état with his army, assassinating Jehoram, and taking back the kingdom. But Jehoshaphat had heard the horrible consequences when Mesha had sacrificed his son on the wall of Kir-Hareseth. He couldn't do it.

Logos sent Elisha again. He told Jehoshaphat, "YHWH has heard your prayers and forgiven you. Pray to release your son Jehoram to Him. He will bring judgment upon him, and all Judah, for his sin. That may do it, for Jehoram has already begun to repent. But as for you, O King, sell your farm; use your wealth to minister to the poor in Israel. They now suffer terribly under the evil flooding the land. I will bless your labors for my precious ones up north."

I'm sorry. Jehoshaphat had always been a sensible man, and that prophecy just didn't make sense to him. Judah was prospering, so he should pray to release them into YHWH's judgment? On the other hand, the northern kingdom was suffering under YHWH's judgment, so he should sell all that he had to go help Israel prosper? He wrestled with that for a long time, not sure if it was YHWH.

The ten tribes in Israel were indeed suffering, terribly. Elisha followed his own advice, and traveled about the land aiding the destitute. Many tales could be told of God's miracle provisions for His precious ones, but a few will have to suffice. A widow of one of the prophets that Ahab and Jezebel had slain was in hock up to her eyeballs. Her creditors were beating down her doors, intending to sell her sons into slavery to pay the debt.

All she had left was one tiny jar of oil. Elisha merely told her to borrow empty jars, as many as she could, and pour her jar of oil into them. She obeyed. Her faith multiplied the oil until all the jars were full. She sold the fresh olive oil to pay off her debt. Enough money remained to support her during the rest of the famine.

This next story is my favorite. It actually began shortly after Elijah first anointed Elisha to replace him, back in 870 BC. Because of his wealthy father, Elisha had plenty of extra pocket money. Elijah gave him a vacation each year, and he chose to spend it helping Israel's poor. They were numerous during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, especially up north where the Syrians controlled Galilee and Bashan, so Elisha often went through the town of Shunem, north of Jezreel. The mayor of Shunem, Ben-Solem and his wife Sandy, were well off, with a big house in the center of town. Sandy saw Elisha ministering to the poor one day, and invited him over for lunch. She was impressed with his concern for their city. "Whenever you pass through Shunem, you must stop here for a meal," she ordered.

So over the years Elisha became friends with Sandy and Ben-Solem. Sandy told her husband, "I think he is a holy man of God. He is a blessing everywhere he goes. Let's turn that attic upstairs into a spare room for him."

So they did. It became his home-away-from-home. Now Elisha felt indebted to the old couple, but they were rich. When he asked what he could do for them, they said they needed nothing. But Gehazi was with him this time, as this was just after Elijah had 'gone Home'. So Elisha asked, "Gehazi, what can we do for them?"

Gehazi was surprised that Elisha hadn't noticed. "Sir, they are old and have no son, no heir."

Elisha agreed. He told Sandy, "At this time next year, you'll embrace a son – YHWH's gift for your kindness."

She didn't believe it. "Oh, no, my lord! O man of God, don't lie this way to your maidservant."

Gehazi was more shocked than Sandy. As they headed back south after their ministry tour, he asked, "Sir, weren't you being a little bit presumptuous there? What if she is, ah... too old to have a son?"

"Were Abraham and Sarah too old to have a son? If YHWH accepts my ministry to the poor, He will grant my request, for I know He can give her a son. Remember what Elijah taught me about having faith for life? Well, I do."

Sure enough, next year when they came around on their regular tour, Sandy had a son, whom they named Sammy. Remember Ellah, the widow of Zarephath, and her son Sammy? Every Israeli mother wanted to name her son after the great prophet of Israel's golden age. Thus my story includes two Sammys. The first was in Zarephath at the time of Elijah. Now, 25 years younger, this Sammy lived in Shunem at the time of Elisha.

Five years went by. The Sammy in Shunem was the delight of his elderly parents' eyes. Ever since Elijah had gone up, Elisha had been very busy with his new calling, prophesying to the kings of both Israel and Judah. But now in the troubled times of Joram king of Israel, Elisha also continued his ministry to the poor. He was beside the foot of Mount Caramel in 846 BC when he saw a familiar sight. It was Sandy. He quickly sent Gehazi to bring her to him.

When she came, she silently got off her donkey and fell at Elisha's feet, grabbing them with both hands.

Gehazi was upset. She had told him she was fine. He tried to pull her away. But Elisha said, "Let her alone. Something troubles her. YHWH has hidden it from me."

"Did I say I needed anything, my lord? Did I ask you for a son? Did I not say, 'Don't deceive me!'"

Now Elisha understood. He saw a vision of Sammy lying dead on the bed Sandy kept for him in Shunem. He gave Gehazi his staff, and told him to hurry there and lay it on Sammy's face. Then he smiled at Sandy. "Your son will be fine, my dear. I promise. YHWH is just testing your faith. Go back home with Gehazi."

"Not so, my lord. As YHWH lives—as you yourself live—I will not leave you!"

She was adamant, so Elisha agreed to go to Shunem with her. They met Gehazi on his way back. He had failed. "The lad has not awakened. I think he's dead."

So now we find Elisha doing exactly the same thing that Elijah had done for that other Sammy, 25 years before. As before, the real test was in Elisha's faith. He had so blithely claimed to 'have faith for life' but did he really? He cried out to YHWH for Sammy and laid himself full length upon him, finally ready to give up his own life for his. And after three times, Sammy's life was restored, just as before with Elijah and the first Sammy. Thus Elisha knew for sure that YHWH had granted him a double portion of Elijah's spirit, even to raising up a Sammy to life all over again!

There were many other stories, too. Miracles seemed to follow along behind Elisha everywhere he went during this difficult time. There was the story of the wild gourds which poisoned a whole pot of stew for a group of hungry prophets—Elisha threw in some flour and a prayer, and the stew was safe to eat. And the story of the hundred hungry prophets with only twenty servings of bread and fruit—Elisha prayed and prophesied over the food, which then multiplied so there was plenty and some left over. Then the story of the band of prophets who were building a new home, when an axe head flew into the river. Well, iron ax heads were pretty scarce back then. Elisha threw a stick on the water, and the axe floated back up to the woodsman!

Yes, Logos took good care of His saints and prophets during the famine. But I heard one story from 849 BC that just doesn't seem to fit in with all that.

This story began in Syria, where old Ben-Hadad had made himself obscenely rich from the misfortunes of the surrounding nations. He had Shalmaneser's ring, and he used it mercilessly. He had become every bit as wicked as the Assyrians he had conquered at Qarqar. However, now his victorious General Naaman, who had been with him at Qarqar and many battles since, had contracted leprosy. It was sad to see such a distinguished warrior disabled by this disease that made his skin peel and his fingers rot off. General Naaman sent a message to King Ben-Hadad, "Slay me, my lord, for I can no longer serve you. I am a leper!"

Ben-Hadad was not so merciless as to slay his honored general. He wrote back, "Call on all our gods. And call on the gods of all the nations we've conquered, too. I will do the same. Perhaps one of them will hear and cleanse you." He sent Naaman a list of all the gods he knew, together with the dates that he would be calling on each one.

So they both prayed on the same day, for each of the 70 gods and goddesses on their list. It happened that number 44 was YHWH, God of Israel. It also happened on the same day that a young slave girl from the captured territories of northern Israel told her mistress, "If my master Naaman were with that prophet in Samaria, he would cure him from his leprosy, I know." Her mistress told Naaman, who told Ben-Hadad. He sent Naaman to Samaria with a letter to King Joram. It read, *To King Joram of Israel, from King Ben-Hadad of Syria, greetings! Now behold, I have sent my beloved General Naaman to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy, that he may return and serve me.*

Joram nearly had a cow. "Am I God? To kill or make alive, or to heal a man of leprosy?" He tore his clothes in frustration and anger. "Ben-Hadad is seeking a quarrel with me. He already raids my border cities whenever he wishes. What more can he have but the kingdom?"

But the next day, he received a note from Elisha, who was now staying with the School of Prophets at Gilgal. "Why have you torn your clothes? Send the leper to me. Then he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots to stand at Elisha's doorway. Elisha sent Gehazi out to meet him. "Uh, sir? My master says, uh, go wash seven times in the Jordan River, right there at the ford. Then your flesh shall, uh, be restored. So then, well, uh, you will be all better."

Naaman left in a huff. "I thought he would be a great prophet, and he would come out and bow down to me, wave his wand, call on the name of his God, and speak some mystical incantation, and then I would be healed. But that joker is ridiculous. I'm wasting my time here."

But his servants urged him, "If he had asked you to do some high and difficult task, would you not have moved heaven and earth to do it? How much more, my lord, when he tells you simply wash and be clean?" Thus they cajoled him on down to the Jordan River.

But the Jordan was at flood stage, boiling with muddy water. Naaman took one look and shouted, “Not on your life! Any of the rivers of Damascus are cleaner than that! I’ll go wash in them and be clean.”

Again, the servants coaxed him, “We’ve come a long way, sir. Please wash here as the prophet said. If it doesn’t help, we can always go home and wash again.”

So Naaman gave in again. After the seventh dip, his flesh was indeed restored! It became soft and pink like that of a young boy. Now Naaman was happy, and grateful! He returned to Gilgal to find Elisha and thank him personally. “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. So please, accept a little present from your servant.”

“As YHWH lives, before whom I stand, I will accept nothing from Syria.” Elisha was adamant. “Nothing at all. YHWH my God provides for all my needs.”

Naaman nodded, “Wow. I understand. Then may I have two donkey loads of earth from your land? For I will no more offer sacrifices to the Syrian gods, but only to YHWH God of Israel. But I need a bit of Israel upon which to build Him an altar so I can worship Him. Also, I just remembered that my master used to lean on me when he bowed to his false god Rimmon. He expects me to bow with him. Will YHWH pardon me if I bow to Rimmon?”

Elisha laughed. “Yes, you may have the dirt; as much as you wish to carry. And yes, YHWH will pardon you for bowing to Rimmon, as long as your heart is right and pure before Him, for He is the God who sees, and He judges according to the heart. Now, go in peace.”

So Naaman left, rejoicing and praising YHWH in truth. The sad part of the story is that Gehazi ran after him and wheedled some money and clothes off him. Thus for his greed, the curse of Naaman’s leprosy fell on him and his descendants. Even after all the time Gehazi had been with Elisha and Elijah, he still didn’t know YHWH as the God who sees. But even that turned out for good, as we shall see.

People who do not know their history wonder why this story is told of Elisha. It just ‘doesn’t fit’ with all the other wondrous stories of Elisha’s kindness to YHWH’s precious ones in Israel. So why in heaven’s name did Elisha help the Syrians? They were Israel’s enemies—God’s enemies! Why would Elisha aid God’s enemies? Isn’t that treason? To understand it, you need to hear the rest of the story.

Naaman went back to Syria to enter the palace of his old master King Ben-Hadad. He strode right up to the throne, bowed low, and then dropped off his outer cloak to expose his baby-soft skin. He stretched out his arms, then spun completely around, so Ben-Hadad could see him all over. “Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god!” King Ben-Hadad whispered repeatedly. “Joram did it! He really did it! I see it, but I don’t believe it.”

“Not your god, O King. And not Joram. YHWH!”

“Huh? YHWH? That tightwad God of Israel?”

So Naaman told Ben-Hadad the whole story. It was a good story, but after worshiping Rimmon all his life, it was just a story – until that fall when Shalmaneser III again attacked with his lightning forces, reinforced and retrained! He knew Damascus was very strong, so he attacked Hamath, with everything he had. King Iruleni had survived the battle at Qarqar, but he did not survive this one. He was dead and his army scattered before his ally Ben-Hadad even got there. Shalmaneser III was ready for him. It was payback time for Qarqar! The Assyrians were still fresh, while the Syrians were fatigued by their rapid march all the way from Damascus. Old Ben-Hadad and Naaman looked at each other. Without speaking, they both knew this could be their last battle. What happened next is incredible, for an experienced general like Naaman knows that the momentum of his first charge can win or lose a battle. Naaman held up his hand, signalling a halt. His men relaxed to catch their breath, drink from their canteens, and regain their strength. He and Ben-Hadad got down from their chariots and knelt together to pray.

Ignoring the thunder of the Assyrian hooves coming closer by the second, Naaman led, “YHWH, God of Israel, the Assyrians seem to be more and mightier than we. If You will help us, we will fight for You and give You the honor of the victory. We commit ourselves into Your hands.”

“Amen!” old Ben-Hadad said, fervently. The listening heavenly host shouted for joy. Satan screamed in rage and ran off yelling, “It’s not fair! I had him all his life! I can’t believe he just did that!” over and over. He went back to Hazael, with whom he had been working ever since Elijah had anointed him as the next Syrian king.

As you can guess, YHWH won a spectacular victory at Hamath. Shalmaneser’s forces, though superior in every way, were defeated, to regroup and try again another day. Ben-Hadad and Naaman went back to Damascus rejoicing. They immediately sent for Elisha, telling him the good news and asking for him to come to Damascus to teach them more about YHWH.

That seemed like a great opportunity. Elisha wanted to go! But Logos said no. “King Ben-Hadad is filled with lust, idolatry, greed, and ambition. He does not really want Me. He wants the protection I give to those who trust in Me, and the power I have to win his battles. He was awed by My miracles, but he only wishes to add My name to his list of useful gods. Ben-Hadad’s heart filled with pride after I used him to defeat Shalmaneser. He doesn’t know that he was merely My tool to stop the Assyrians from sweeping on through Syria and conquering My people Israel, for Israel’s wickedness is not yet full. However, Naaman is truly Mine, and Hazael, who was taught by Elijah and has seen My power in Israel, is nearly Mine. Pray that Hazael remains faithful, for all of Syria would then receive My blessing through him after Ben-Hadad dies.”

So Elisha wrote a polite letter back to Ben-Hadad, assuring him he would come up to Damascus as soon as YHWH permitted it, but at the moment his ministry was to the nation of Israel. “But I thank you profusely, O mighty King Ben-Hadad, for stopping Shalmaneser III. YHWH has indeed won a great victory through you! He told me that you have been His tool to save Israel from the Assyrians. They would surely have overrun us if you had not stopped them. May God’s blessings rest upon you for that. Also, greet Naaman and Hazael for me, for they share in the blessings of your great victory.”

King Ben-Hadad was pacified. He restored to Israel the land he had taken in Galilee (but not Bashan). For seven years the Syrians lived in peace with Israel. That really frosted Satan, for King Ben-Hadad was truly his. It just bugged Satan no end to find his favorite son unresponsive to his temptations. However, in the end, Satan did finally succeed with Ben-Hadad, as we shall see.

But the famine in Israel continued, especially in the northern tribes in Galilee and Bashan which had been so impoverished by the Syrian occupation. It got so bad that the next time Elisha came to Shunem, he suggested that Ben-Solem and Sandy take Sammy and move south until the famine was over. They had plenty of money, so they rented a stone cottage in Philistia by the sea, leaving their big home empty like much of the rest of the town.

King Jehoshaphat was still wrestling with the word of YHWH through Elisha about going up to Israel to help those struggling with the lengthy famine. That was simply not logical to him, and he was a very logical person. He also enjoyed his dinner, and would far rather stay in Judah, where food was plentiful. And he loved his farm, and all of Judah. Elisha’s prophecy was nuts, he decided. He was called to Judah, not Israel. His primary job was to ensure the continued prosperity in Judah. He could not do that by selling his farm and traipsing up north.

So how could he help Judah? Jehoshaphat knew the principles. A wicked king results in God’s judgment on the land. His son Jehoram had turned out to be wicked, or so Elisha had said. So the only way to help Judah is to get him to repent, by force if necessary. He could still depose his son. He was still the king. He still had the loyalty of the army and most of the people. He headed for Jerusalem, leaving Jaime on the farm. Logos grieved for him and his foolish choice, but did not stop him.

This is so sad. I’m sorry to tell it, for Jehoshaphat really was a good man, a caring and kind man. But he allowed his own human logic to turn him aside from the ways of God, which are higher than our ways. Jehoshaphat confronted his son Jehoram about his sins and blamed him for the spread of idolatry in Judah. (He never understood that Israel’s idolatry was partly a result of his own failure: his foolishness in accepting Ahab’s daughter Athaliah for his son to seal that alliance.)

Jehoshaphat did not want to publicly shame his son, so he spoke to him in his bedroom, with no one but Athaliah there with them. Jehoram actually responded rather well to the tongue-lashing. He had, after all, been well-trained by his father, and he loved him. He was not stupid! He had seen the blessings of YHWH on Judah, and the famines in idolatrous Israel. But he was weak. He had let himself be swayed by Athaliah’s idolatry, and now his father swayed him back. “I’m sorry, Dad. You’re right, of course. We’ve got to get rid of the Baals and Asherah poles in Judah. Work with me on this, please. I really do want YHWH’s blessing on the land.” It was on his lips, but it wasn’t in his heart, for his heart was still captivated by Athaliah.

Dear, sweet Athaliah. Jehoshaphat had no clue to her heart. She’d always seemed so submissive and respectful to Jehoram, that his father never even suspected her. She said nothing, only smiled and nodded. But she was planning murder in her heart. Before Jehoshaphat could leave the palace, he had ‘fallen’ over the carefully rigged bannister and tragically died in the ‘accident’ that she had helped her husband plan five years before. The year was 848 BC. Jehoshaphat was 57 when he died, and Jehoram was 37. Judah mourned the loss of one of their last great kings.

By 846 BC the influx of both Sea Peoples and Hittite refugees had become a heavy burden on northern Egypt. So Rameses III moved his capital from El-Lahun to Memphis. Then he elevated one of his many sons to a sort of co-regency, and sent him farther north to Pi-Ramesse (at Avaris), trying to help them get settled. We know him as Rameses IX, which sounds out of sequence, but that is because Egyptologists did not have a correct chronology back then. It began to get confusing and frustrating.

Rameses III had reigned for 18 years. Some of his sons had already died. So in 844 BC he decided to place other sons in various cities as co-regent ‘local Pharaohs’. These include the sons known as Rameses V, VI, and VIII, who all ruled more or less concurrently. Though this seemed like a good plan at the time, it resulted in the further weakening of Egyptian power and unity, and it caused even more confusion. Rameses IV was too young; he will fit in later.

Their focus on lower Egypt allowed the high priests of Amun at Thebes (in upper Egypt) more freedom than was wise, which paved the way for the eventual demise of the 20th Dynasty, to begin the Third Intermediate Period.

Also in 846 BC, Shalmaneser III tried to conquer the Syrians at Hamath – again. For the third time, he lost to Ben-Hadad, Naaman, and Hazael. (Once at Qarqar, twice at Hamath.) They prayed to YHWH before the battle, and thanked Him after the victory. However, that pride in King Ben-Hadad’s heart grew strong. He began thinking himself invincible. You know pride goes before a fall. Yet he still protected the Levant from the aggressive Assyrians, and kept the peace on his southern borders, too. Naaman’s miraculous healing thus bore good fruit for God’s people.

With Jehoshaphat slain, the idolatry in Athaliah's heart ran rampant throughout Judah. Jehoram was upset that his wife did not consult him before killing his father, but she countered, "Hey. We agreed on this five years ago. It had to be done. Your dad wasn't just criticizing you. He was trying to pull rank and force you to submit to his theology, or he would have deposed you or had you killed! What I did was just self-defense!" Her outward smile hid a scheming, ambitious, and cruel heart.

So Jehoram shut up, allowing Athaliah to run things in Judah in the same way her mother Jezebel had run things in Israel. She had accused his dad of being intolerant. He decided that he'd better be more tolerant of his wife, and her worship, or he might be next. Her idolatry flourished.

Logos grieved for Judah. How far they had fallen from the time of David and Solomon! He decided to warn them. With the death of King Ed and a third of his army, the Edomites had gone through a period of chaos and power struggles. The Meunites and Moabites next door were even worse off, having lost nearly all of their mighty men. Jehoram was harsh with them. The modest tribute that Edom had gladly given to King Jehoshaphat was never enough for Jehoram. He demanded more. They were unable to pay, since their land was weakened by defeats. After three years of turmoil, a military captain took power in Edom by promising to free them from the bondage of Judah. I'll call him King Max. He took the money Syria had sent for that last battle, and sent it down into Arabia to buy fast war horses. Then he started whipping their army back into shape. The Meunites and their Arabian relatives noticed. They also did not like the new Judah, and wanted to get out from under their heavy burden of tribute. The men of Libnah noticed as well; they had been driven out by Joshua and were still nomads in the Sinai. Within a year their devastated armies had begun to recover.

As Shalmaneser was attacking the Syrians at Hamath in 846 BC, King Max began his rebellion against Judah. He asked for others to join him. The Meunites couldn't; they had few men left. The Arabians were too far away. But the Libnites joined him and sent their army to Bozrah. When Jehoram's ambassador came to collect the annual tribute he saw their two armies. He was unimpressed. "If I were you I wouldn't rebel with those puny armies!" he sniffed. "You'd better have your tribute ready."

"Actually, sir, we have no tribute collected. We are barely making it. Your demands are too steep! Four years ago all our young men were massacred by King Mesha of Moab. We haven't yet recovered. But if your honorable King Jehoram lightens our burden we will serve him."

"Right. And you really think he'll buy that?" The ambassador turned on his heel. "My guess is that he'll have our army on your doorstep in a week." He was right. The next week Jehoram was camped near Bozrah with the vastly superior army of Judah.

But King Max had a cunning plan. When the Judean army, tired from their long march, had all gone to sleep, he encircled their army with his. When all was ready, he sounded the attack and rushed upon them with great screams, shouts, and the thunder of horses' hooves. You see, October of 846 BC was the time of the close pass of Mars, although it wasn't a particularly close encounter since only Jupiter (not Saturn) was lined up. But Max hoped to frighten the sleeping soldiers into thinking 'the catastrophe' had fallen upon them.

It didn't work. Jehoram was no dummy. He had been through a few wars with his dad. His spies had seen the Edomites preparing for the night attack, and he had put two and two together. He had ordered his men to sleep with their armor on and their weapons in their hands. Thus pre-warned, they didn't fall for the old 'arc from Mars!' cries and easily drove back the Edomite attackers.

So the next day at noon when Mars was at its closest, Jehoram and his guard entered the palace at Bozrah. Now King Max was eating humble pie. King Jehoram sniffed disdainfully. "We didn't lose a man last night. How many did you lose? I admire your courage but you are a fool even thinking about rebelling against Judah. However, I'll overlook it this time; you've already lost too many. I'll just take my tribute and be on my way."

"Your Royal Majesty!" King Max bowed low. "The only reason we rebelled is, we can't pay all you demand. If you will reduce it by half, we will gladly pay."

"By one-third."

"Done. Thank you kind sir!"

As he was heading back to Jerusalem, Jehoram was thinking, *That was cool. Baal really fought for us that time. Now I see why Athaliah was so insistent in restoring our Mars observatories. I should support her more. I expected to lose a lot of men and get very little out of that old skinflint Max. But thanks to Mars, I got two-thirds of what I asked and didn't lose a man. I can handle that. From now on I'll worship YHWH each Sabbath, and pray to Baal when we go to war.* (Mars, their god of war, was called Baal.)

He still remembered the letter Elijah had written him from prison, the one that Athaliah had burned. It had promised him terrible calamity, and a deadly disease. Well, so far he was blessed abundantly. Winning a war so easily can really boost one's pride, but as with Ben-Hadad, he was headed for a fall. Jehoram would live to regret his increasing compromises with idolatry.

In two years (844 BC) the Edomites were ready. The Arabs, Meunites, and Libnites were also finally ready. Some Hittite warriors who lived in Philistia even joined the coalition. They all agreed, "We'll give no more tribute to that despised king of Judah!" How quickly things had changed from the times of Jehoram's father, good King Jehoshaphat, whom the surrounding nations all feared and loved, and to whom they had gladly paid tribute!

The Arab coalition developed a rather unusual battle plan. It was King Max's idea. He said, "The Judeans are actually very kind and generous. I was an army captain when King Jehoshaphat ruled Judah, and they treated us fairly. It is only his son Jehoram who's the problem. So let's pretend we are going to march toward Hebron. Once we get started, have some warriors on fast Arabian horses gallop around behind us to the king's palace in Jerusalem. Their army will be preparing to engage our footsoldiers, and won't be there to protect the palace. Just kill Jehoram and the royal family and plunder the palace, then gallop right back. You'll be back before the main battle begins."

So they tried it. It caught Jehoram totally by surprise. Every good general knows that a weaker force is not going to split up just before attacking a much larger force. He was mystified when the Arabian horses rode off. He was still praying and sacrificing to Baal. By the time he figured it out, his palace was sacked and his family was slain.

Jehoram left the battle and drove his chariot furiously to Jerusalem, but he was too late. He walked through the palace weeping bitterly for his wife and their three sons. (His daughter was married and gone.) Now he understood the grief of his own parents when he and Athaliah had slain his brothers. He fell to his knees and repented. He even thanked YHWH that he had not been in the palace when the attackers had come; he would have been slain as well. He humbled himself, and determined that with Athaliah gone he'd try to be more faithful to YHWH. Logos heard and forgave him. Then in the quiet of the evening when nothing was heard but his weeping, his wife Athaliah and their youngest son Ahaziah came out of their hiding place. What a joyful reunion! *[Note: this Ahaziah is not Israel's King Ahaziah, who is already dead.]*

So, now did they get rid of the idols and return to the pure worship of YHWH? No. Instead, they got two wives for Ahaziah (even though he was only 19) and urged him to father as many sons as possible, to restore the now nearly extinct royal line of the house of David.

For the same reason, Jehoram also married several other women, and bore children through them. Sorry, but that was the way it was with kings in those days. Queen Athaliah didn't like that part, but as long as her own son was the crown prince, she tolerated her rivals.

Logos granted them one final warning. In the spring of 842 BC, Jehoram got a stomach ache. It turned into a bout of diarrhea, like what you get from bad water or minor food poisoning. It went downhill from there, becoming a serious case of dysentery. King Jehoram no longer felt comfortable in public, so he 'temporarily' installed his son **Ahaziah** on the throne of Judah, at the age of 21. Ahaziah already had two sons by then; the younger was **Joash**, whom we shall meet later. Sadly, Jehoram's response to God's warnings was the opposite of what Logos wanted. He put his trust in his doctors, and got bitter at YHWH.

In 842 BC at Memphis, Rameses III promoted his General Smendes and sent him north to help Rameses IX. He sent Smendes even farther north, all the way to Tanis, (which is north of Avaris, near the mouth of the Nile) and gave him power as a 'local Pharaoh'. Thus Smendes I began Egypt's 21st Dynasty at Tanis. At Rameses II's old palace at Pi-Ramesse (at Avaris), Rameses IX could not manage the big influx of refugees and other changes in the Nile Delta. The glory of Egypt's New Kingdom waned, to begin the chaos of the infamous Third Intermediate Period (TIP).

Israel's famine had continued for seven years now. Ahab's son Joram had turned out to be a worthless king. He did nothing about the famine. Elisha realized he must do more than just minister to the poor. He again went to Ahab's ivory palace in Jezreel. There King Joram lazed in the lap of luxury while his people starved.

"O King, Elijah warned you to get rid of the idols in the land. I bailed your fat out of the fire when you allied with the Edomites against Moab. I helped you keep Ben-Hadad and Hazael off your north border for, what has it been? Eight years since Syria last attacked you! Yet still you allow the idolatry in Israel. Don't you know, YHWH can't really bless you until you cleanse the land of idols!"

"Well, I did get rid of a lot of them. But because of this famine, the people have gotten rather desperate. They are praying to all the gods of the heathen..."

"You didn't get rid of the golden calf at Bethel! You still worship there. Don't blame your people. Don't you realize that your own idolatry is what caused the famine?"

"But I worship YHWH there..."

"YHWH will never accept worship through graven images or idols made with hands. Get rid of them. All of them. YHWH wants to bless Israel, but He can't. Unless you obey His command, He will bring the famine right down into Samaria, yes, even here in your own palace. And old Ben-Hadad will be right behind, to utterly wipe the house of Omri and Ahab off the face of the earth, unless you repent and get rid of those idols."

"Ben-Hadad won't attack Israel any more. He worships YHWH now! His generals, too! They've all converted."

"Ben-Hadad belongs to the adversary, who can push his button any time he wants. He'll come. I know. Right now Satan has occasion against you." King Joram was shocked. He actually heard Elisha. He made another halfhearted attempt at getting rid of idols. He didn't succeed at Bethel, as the priesthood there was so powerfully entrenched it would have cost him the kingdom to dislodge it, but he did stop going there to worship. He got rid of some of Baal's observatories, and cut down quite a few Asherah poles. He prayed, and fasted one day a week. He even put sackcloth against his skin, hidden under his royal robes.

Elisha came again. “O King Joram, hear the word of YHWH! He sees your efforts, and commends you for a good start. But halfway obedience is still unacceptable. If you value your own kingdom more than obedience to YHWH, you will lose it. Disband Jeroboam’s priesthood at Bethel. If they resist, slay them all. If Jezebel resists, depose her from being queen mother. Let’s see a little zeal for YHWH! You’re the king. Show some backbone! Order your servants, and even your army, to go through the whole land and get rid of all the idols. Then go back to the worship of YHWH as He commanded.”

“Would that stop the famine? Would that prevent old Ben-Hadad from attacking me again?”

“You’re still asking the wrong questions!” Elisha was trying hard not to be exasperated. “That would make you right with God! When you are right with God, even a widespread famine or an attack by Syria becomes a blessing!” Well, Joram didn’t totally understand that, but he actually did want YHWH’s blessing. He began working a little harder at cleansing the land of idolatry. It was a big job.

Old Ben-Hadad informed his generals, “Israel doesn’t worship YHWH anymore. Lookit how impoverished they are! They’re starving. Their army doesn’t have the strength to blow their nose. And Joram does nothing for his people. He’s a lazy, self-centered, slob. I believe YHWH wants us to go down there and take Joram out. Why, I could make a better king than he! I’ll order those people to worship their own God. And I can enforce it, too. So let’s go down now and besiege Samaria.”

Though Ben-Hadad had given up Galilee, he still retained the lands Omri had given him in Bashan, down to Ramoth-Gilead where Ahab had died. His ‘doctored’ treaties had made that a permanent part of Syria. So now King Ben-Hadad ordered his battalion at Ramoth-Gilead to meet him at Samaria. He ordered Naaman and Hazael to take their battalions into Galilee, reestablish control there, and then join up with the rest of the army at Samaria.

General Naaman refused. “O my lord the king. I am your faithful servant. I have been loyal to you for a long time. But I cannot fight against Israel the land of YHWH, nor against Elisha, who healed me of my leprosy. Slay me if you wish, but I will not go.”

“YHWH ordered us to go!”

“Did you really pray about that, sir?”

“Well, not very long. But I know that’s what He said. Here, bow with me now and we’ll pray together.”

So the three of them knelt together and prayed, just like they did before going into battle. As they arose, Naaman’s face was white. “You are correct, sir. YHWH did say to go. But He also said we would fail, and you would be slain! Our army will flee in defeat! And afterwards, Israel will use our army’s provisions to end their famine!”

Ben-Hadad didn’t believe a word of that. He had heard a different result (for he was listening to a different god). He was just glad that Naaman was now willing to go with him. *Israel had no chance against him. Naaman’s foolish fantasy about their failure was ridiculous.* They left for Samaria.

As Ben-Hadad knew, Joram’s army was too weak to defend the country. They all holed up in Samaria in a last ditch effort to hold the city for King Joram and the queen mother, Jezebel. But with so many people in the city, the food (which was scarce due to the famine) had completely run out in a week. Day by day Joram walked the city walls praying, fasting, and weeping. There atop the wall he heard heart-wrenching tales of woe. For the first time he really began to identify in their sufferings. He realized he had been careless and insensitive, not to mention lazy and self-centered. At first when his mother had sacrificed infants to her gods he had just pretended not to see. But now it got personal. He heard firsthand of cannibalism – starving women eating their own babies. He could take no more. He tore his royal robes (revealing the sackcloth underneath) and screamed out a vile oath, “May God do so to me and more, if Elisha’s head remains on him today!” He ordered General Joe, his chief military advisor, to go get Elisha’s head.

When the Syrian army had come to Galilee many, including Elisha, had been driven into Samaria. Elisha was now staying in the boarding house of the local School of Prophets. As General Joe approached, Elisha said, “See how this son of Ahab the murderer has sent his general to take off my head. But wait! I hear his master’s feet not far behind. Bar the door until the king arrives!”

Sure enough, King Joram was close behind, ashamed of his temper tantrum. He told General Joe to back off. “I’ve changed my mind. This evil is from YHWH. We can’t blame His prophet. Nor can we expect any help from him. I’m afraid we’re simply doomed. Let’s go home.”

At that, Elisha opened the door. “Hear the word of YHWH, O King. He hears your repentance and sees your heart, for He too grieves over the suffering of His people Israel. Therefore behold, tomorrow at about this hour, two gallons of fine flour or four gallons of barley shall be sold at the gate in Samaria for just one dollar.”

“Ha!” Joe laughed bitterly. “That’s impossible! God Himself couldn’t do that, even with windows in heaven.”

Elisha looked sadly at the general. “Sir, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it.”

When they left, Elisha said to the others with him, “Now we must pray, that YHWH will open up the eyes of my servant Gehazi, one last time. For in Gehazi is the key.” So they prayed. Gehazi had been a longtime servant of Elisha. But ever since Naaman was healed of leprosy, Gehazi had been a leper, an outcast. He had joined the other lepers begging at the gates of Samaria.

He was there this evening. Along with the rest of the city, the lepers were starving. At sundown, something stirred deep within Gehazi. It was a brief vision of a scene long ago at Dothan, when he had seen the hills all around filled with shining soldiers on chariots of fire drawn by flaming horses. Gehazi brightened up. "Hey, guys. We're all dead men anyway. How 'bout we go over to the Syrians? They've got food. If they share some, fine. But if they kill us instead, I guess that's okay, too. Don't you agree? We'll just get to heaven a little sooner."

So they went to the Syrian camp. No one was there. "That's what I thought," Gehazi said. "I saw in a vision the army of the hosts of heaven. They have come down and frightened the Syrians off." The lepers found abundant food. After they'd eaten their fill, they started collecting valuables. But Gehazi said, "We're not doing right. Our people are starving and we're not sharing this good news. If we wait until morning, YHWH will punish us."

"Forget it, Gehazi. They care nothing for us. Why should we care about them? Besides, you know the law forbids lepers to enter the city. The gates are locked for the night so you can't sneak in, and the guards for sure won't let you in. They'll kill you first."

"I am going. By YHWH I know this is right. YHWH will protect me. If a leper can't get in to tell them the good news, then YHWH will heal me so I can get in."

"Yes!" Elisha shouted joyfully to all the others in the School of Prophets. "Gehazi has done it! Praise God! The city is saved! Once again, God's Plan of the Ages has worked to turn a great tragedy into a great victory!"

Gehazi approached the city gate. He called out to the gatekeepers from a short distance away, as any leper must, "Is anybody awake in there?"

"Come close, you scum, so I can see your face!"

Usually at this point, a leper would have to say, "I am unclean. A leper. I cannot come any closer." But Gehazi did not, for he knew if he had, the guard would shout, "Then get the <bleep> away from here and leave me to sleep in peace!" and his message would not get through. So he trusted that YHWH would protect him, and came close to the light from the window. "Sir, I have just been to the Syrian camp. They're all gone! They left their food, their animals, their weapons, their valuables, everything. We need to notify the king right away."

The guard didn't bat an eyebrow at him. Gehazi at first thought he just hadn't noticed his leprosy, but as the guard let him in the gatehouse, he felt his face and looked at his hands. *His leprosy was gone. His skin was soft and smooth as a baby's. YHWH had healed him, as he had believed.*

"I don't really believe you," the guard said gruffly, "but that's none of my business. Go with Jack, here, and tell it to the king. You had better hope he believes you."

Jack ushered Gehazi before a haggard and red-eyed King Joram. He told his story again. The king didn't believe him, either. "That sneaky old fox Ben-Hadad!" he exclaimed. "He's hidden his army to entice us out."

"Please, O my lord the king!" General Joe insisted. "Remember what Elisha told us? At least let me take five horsemen and scout around."

"We don't have five horses left in the whole city!" Joram growled. "All we have is my two chariots and my own personal steeds to draw them. But I guess if you perish out there it is no worse than our dying in here. Go ahead. Take my chariots and report back."

So General Joe took his armor bearer, and they rode out after the Syrians. It was not hard to find their trail – they had cast off their weapons, armor, and even their clothes all along their way. Joe traced the trail down to the ford of the Jordan. The Syrians must have returned to Ramoth-Gilead. General Joe came back and reported.

"A good night's work, General!" Joram smiled for the first time in many days. "I shall give you the honor of announcing the good news to the city. You take charge of opening the city gates in the morning."

General Joe was filled with pride that his king should so entrust him with the good news. This looked like another promotion. Joram still had no direct heir, though he had been trying for years and had married six wives. General Joe grinned, thinking, *He must be intending to have me succeed him! Bet I'll make Israel a pretty good king!*

Joe stood proudly by the gate as the gatekeepers opened to the enthusiastic crowd that had gathered at his good news. When the gate was opened, the boldest among them hurried out. Soon, amid the shouts of joy, the stream through the gate became a flood. General Joe was trampled in the rush for the spoils. All his dreams vanished. Thus the prophecy of Elisha was fulfilled.

It took an entire month for all the spoils to be collected and distributed, for the Syrians had gotten very rich. The famine was truly over. Ben-Solem and his wife Sandy were relieved. They joyfully returned with Sammy to Shunem. However, in their absence, squatters had taken their big beautiful home and were now farming their land.

Gehazi was honored in Samaria as a beloved hero. Everyone in the palace was eager to hear his story. But he had experienced a change of heart, and had become a true believer. His gratitude knew no bounds, as he showed off his baby-soft skin due to YHWH's healing. He wanted to tell, not just his story, but YHWH's story, including all the miracles he had witnessed during his years with Elisha.

Ben-Solem's family reached the palace just as Gehazi was regaling the king's court with the story of how YHWH had returned Sammy back to life. Gehazi finished the story just as they entered the hall.

As Gehazi ended, the elderly couple came up to bow before the king. A handsome nine-year-old boy stood smiling between them. *Could it be? Is such a coincidence even possible?* Ben-Solem made his appeal for his home to be restored to them. As soon as he heard his voice, Gehazi knew. “Your Highness! This is the couple I was just telling you about. And I’ll bet that is Sammy between them. Sammy! Is that you? Yes! He is the one that Elisha raised back to life, O King!” Needless to say, King Joram was very impressed. He sent someone with them up to Shunem to make sure they got their house and land back, plus their rightful portion (ten percent) of the value of the produce that their land had produced for the squatters.

Elisha was very pleased that his old servant had won such a wondrous victory over the curse that he had taken from Naaman. He welcomed Gehazi back into his service. They praised God that He can take such a terrible curse and turn it into such a marvelous blessing.

Jezebel, the queen mother, was not pleased. She had developed a deep hatred of YHWH in her heart. YHWH’s laws were too rigid, too intolerant. YHWH just didn’t seem to understand that it was the movements of the planets that controlled their lives. They needed to pacify the gods of the planets to avoid the destructions they often brought. Jezebel had never forgiven Ahab for letting Elijah kill all her prophets of Baal and Astarte. Even as Joram worked to get rid of the idols, Jezebel was working to restore them and their pagan priesthood, with modest success. It was easy to point to the regular catastrophes from the close passes of the planets and say, “If you had only worshiped Baal a bit more fervently, he would not have done this to you!” or “See! You escaped the catastrophe! It is because my faithful worshipers of Baal are protecting you!” Quite a few of the people in Israel actually believed her.

However, in 842 BC when Samaria was delivered from the Syrian army and the famine, neither Mars nor Venus had been close. YHWH was getting all the glory, for Gehazi was blabbing His praise all over town. Jezebel was furious. She determined to kill him and Elisha, and maybe all his friends, too. She carefully laid her plan.

Early the next year (841 BC), Logos told Elisha to take Gehazi up to Syria and anoint Hazael to be the next king. When they arrived at Damascus, the gatekeeper sent word to Ben-Hadad, who immediately ordered Hazael to take a gift and greet them. (Frankly, the gift was more of a bribe—forty camel’s loads of the finest produce of the land!)

Just as Elisha was anointing Hazael as king, Jezebel’s personal guard was entering the home of the School of Prophets where he had been staying. They slew everyone there without mercy, and reported back to Jezebel that the job was done. But when she checked, neither Elisha nor Gehazi were among the slain. Jezebel went on a rampage across the land, torturing and killing YHWH’s prophets to try to find Elisha. Nobody knew that he had gone to Syria.

King Joram, when he found out what Jezebel was doing, was very upset. Even though she was his mother, she was out of line, especially after YHWH’s deliverance through Gehazi and Elisha. Joram realized that Jezebel had been manipulating him, Ahaziah, Joash, and even King Ahab, all their lives. Joram had destroyed the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah poles that Ahab had set up in Samaria, but he had never torn down the big temple of Baal on the hill. He was about to, but Jezebel found out. She had fortified it and armed the priesthood there. She had also strengthened Jeroboam’s worship center at Bethel, and restored the golden calf at Dan.

King Joram discovered that Jezebel had done a lot more than that. Though as Ahab’s chief queen, her three sons Ahaziah, Joram, and Joash had been the only ones in line for the throne, yet King Ahab also had many concubines, by whom he had fathered 70 other sons. Jezebel had given these boys to the leading men of Samaria to raise, with her son Joash directing them. They were now powerful young men. Like a mafia family, they ruled the city behind the scenes. Joram had become only a figurehead king, and hadn’t known it. In reality, Prince Joash, the city mayor, was ruling through his 70 half-brothers, who were all under the control of Jezebel! Joram found himself helpless to stop his mother and her entrenched idolatry.

Hazael smiled at Elisha’s shock over the huge ‘gift’. “Your son Ben-Hadad king of Syria sends his greetings. He would love to see you, but he is currently indisposed.”

“Oh? Just how so is that old fox ‘indisposed’?”

“He just fell and hurt his face. It’s taking a long time to heal. He asked that you pray that he recover soon.”

“You don’t suppose it had anything to do with his attack on Samaria last fall, do you?”

“Oh, no sir. He... Well, sir! YHWH told us to come to Samaria! We prayed about it! YHWH said...”

“I saw into the heavenly realms when YHWH asked who would entice Ben-Hadad into Samaria to die there. YHWH had devoted him to destruction many years before. Both Ahab and Asa had failed to execute His command. Satan, YHWH’s adversary, volunteered to finish the deed. It was he who enticed Ben-Hadad to Samaria, to be defeated by the host of heaven there.”

“Oh good sir, Ben-Hadad didn’t die. He’s only injured. He just asked that you pray for him, that he recover.”

“I told you, I saw into the heavenly realms – the entire tragicomedy. I saw your mighty king fleeing terrified from the heavenly host. I laughed as he raced pell-mell down toward the Jordan. He didn’t even slow down when his boots and socks flew off. He was so scared he peed his pants. You told the truth that he was not wounded from battle. Ha, ha! His injury is from falling on his face in the rocks as he fled down the hill like a frightened fowl.”

“Uh... sir? Does that mean I should tell him he'll die?”

“No, not at all. Tell him he will not die – not from his injuries in Israel! But I know that he will die...” Elisha stared into Hazael's eyes, until tears came to his own.

“Kind sir. Why are you staring at me like that? And why do you weep?”

“Because I know the evil that you will do in Syria when he dies and you become king. And I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel, as well. You will burn their strongholds, kill their young men, dash their little ones against the stones, rip up their pregnant women...”

Hazael was horrified. “What is your servant, but a dog, that I should do such a terrible thing?”

Elisha answered as he was anointing Hazael as king, “You have a choice this day, O King Hazael. I know that Elijah also anointed you king of Syria. But now you must choose to give yourself to YHWH. If you do not, your self-nature will fall to such evil that you will come to despise yourself—even loath your own life.” Hazael took offense at Elisha. *He had already chosen YHWH. He did not have an evil nature, he had a good, serving, caring nature. He had served the king for many years, honorably and with great distinction. How could Elisha say such horrid things about him?* He turned and left the weeping prophet.

On his way back to King Ben-Hadad, Hazael did a lot of thinking. He was anointed king of Syria. Elijah had said it, and Elisha had just confirmed it. But he was getting old in the service of Ben-Hadad. So if his old master was going to die anyway, maybe he should help him get it over with.

Once again, the heavenly host grieved with Logos as He wept. “How easy it is for the human nature to take offense, and to reject the very thing that would bring him the most benefit. And now, how greatly will Syria suffer, and Israel, and other nations around, because of the wicked choice of this one Syrian warrior!”

When Hazael returned to the king's bedside, he smiled and bowed, excitedly lying that Elisha had gladly received his gift and had prayed for him, and that he would soon recover. But with his change of heart had come a change in eyesight. Ben-Hadad's wounds all over his face were deep, and ugly. The surgeons had tried again and again to stitch things up, but his once-noble face had become lopsided and evil-looking. No wonder Ben-Hadad had no desire to appear in public. Hazael realized he would do the old man a big favor by dispatching him.

So early the next morning, before anyone else was up, Hazael stealthily entered the king's bedchambers. He put his strong hands over old Ben-Hadad's ugly mouth and nose, and held them there until he was dead. It didn't take long. The old man was weak. As Hazael waited he planned to put on this big act of sorrow and humility at the funeral. Everyone knew how much he loved his old master.

CHAPTER 30 – HAZAEL / JEHU / ATHALIAH / JOEL

Ben-Hadad had fathered many children, but none that he trusted to rule after him. He had left instruction that his general Naaman would rule Syria after he was gone, or Hazael, should Naaman become incapacitated. Knowing that, Hazael ensured his throne by sending his trusted bodyguard to Naaman's house the morning of the murder, to assassinate him as well. Though mighty in battle, General Naaman could not defend himself against the treachery of his friend. So in 841 BC, Hazael became the king of Syria. Old Ben-Hadad had ruled Syria for 47 years since his father Tabrimmon had died in 888 BC.

Remember that at that time Jehoram king of Judah was still sick of dysentery. His doctors had been unable to help, so his son **Ahaziah** was still on the throne at Jerusalem. He was only 22 and a spoiled brat, but Jehoram's older two sons had been slain by the Arabs when they had attacked his palace, so he had no choice. Strangely, Jehoram seemed to have forgotten Elijah's letter that Athaliah had burned. He made no attempt to repent or seek for YHWH; he just grew more angry and bitter instead.

Young Ahaziah was a simple fool. When Joram son of Ahab heard that Ben-Hadad was dead and that Hazael had taken over as king of Syria, he excitedly sent for Ahaziah. “Old King Ben-Hadad has finally died! Now we can take back Ramoth-Gilead, and the rest of Bashan! Will you join me for the battle? We need to move on it right away, before the Syrians recover from Ben-Hadad's death.”

The 400 prophets, counselors, and wise guys from Ahab's court nodded and agreed with Joram's battle plan – except one old prophet whom everyone hated: Micaiah. He insisted, “You're a compromiser. You've got to remove the idols in the land first, or you'll wind up like your father Ahab.” All the other prophets assured him that Ahab had died because he listened to Micaiah. Ahaziah was fooled, convinced that these wiser, older men really had God in their back pocket. So after he got the okay from his mother, Athaliah, foolish young Ahaziah agreed to join Joram's attack against the Syrians.

Joram was correct; the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead were caught napping. Many had gone up to Syria for the funeral, including all of their officers. Joram and Ahaziah easily regained the city and the surrounding lands. But King Joram was injured leading the charge. He returned to be treated in Jezreel. King Ahaziah accompanied him. The battle was over, but they knew Hazael would soon return with reinforcements to retake the city. They left Captain **Jehu** (grandson of Nimshi) in charge of Ramoth-Gilead, with the stern warning, “Don't underestimate the Syrians! Their new King Hazael is a brilliant general with a ton of experience. He wants this land, and he'll do anything to get it back. He's got that phony treaty he says Ahab signed to let him keep it, but I know it's bogus. And Hazael's a liar just like Ben-Hadad. So watch your tail!”

While Joram was returning to Jezreel, Elisha was instructing a very young prophet I'll call Jim. "Please take this oil to Ramoth-Gilead," Elisha told Jim. "Find Captain Jehu. First get him alone, then anoint him to be the next king of Israel. After you finish, run for your life."

Jim found Jehu, got him alone in a back room, and poured the oil on his head. But then (as Elisha expected) the words just flowed from the Holy Spirit. "Thus says YHWH, God of Israel. 'When you were young Elijah anointed you to become Israel's king. Well, now it is time! I anoint you to take the throne of Israel from the house of Omri and the house of Ahab. *I command you to strike down every male in the house of Ahab*, to avenge the blood of My servants the prophets which he slew, and which Jezebel his wife slew. I have chosen you to eradicate the house of Ahab from the face of the earth, for he knew what was right and what I required of him, and did not do it, thus earning wrath upon himself and terrible suffering upon My people Israel. So show no mercy; do not spare; young and old, every male of Ahab's house must perish. The dogs shall eat Jezebel his wife, and none shall bury her.'" Suddenly the flow of prophecy stopped. Jim put his hand to his mouth; his eyes grew big, and he fled.

Jehu left the room in a daze. The other captains all wanted to know what Jim had told him. They knew Jim was a prophet sent by Elisha, and after that episode at Samaria, not a one of them doubted Elisha. But this young prophet's ranting had sounded like a madman! Jehu finally straightened them out. "Well, uh... actually... uh, he anointed me king over Israel. And commissioned me to take out the entire house of Omri and Ahab..."

He thought they'd laugh at him, but no. They laid out a red carpet, blew a trumpet, and began shouting throughout the city, "Jehu is king of Israel! All hail to King Jehu!" The shout spread like wild-fire. Everyone knew that King Joram had been injured, so they just assumed that he had died. They all knew that he still had no heir (though he had seven daughters by his six wives) so they assumed he had chosen the ever-popular Jehu to replace him. *Good choice*, they thought. *Jehu is zealous, smart, strong, and he loves Israel. He'll make us a great king.* So everyone joined the exuberant shout, "Long live King Jehu!"

"Well, if this is your choice, then seal off the city, that word of this not reach Jezreel," Jehu commanded, for he knew that King Joram was still alive. As he and Bidkar (his first officer) mounted their chariots, he told his remaining officers to hold the city. Then he and Bidkar rode furiously toward Jezreel, hoping to catch Joram by surprise.

Thankful that Joram's wounds turned out to be not too serious, Ahaziah mused, "That battle was so easy. We must have had YHWH's blessing! That one prophet, Micaiah, said that Elisha told you to get rid of all the idols, including Jeroboam's golden calf in Bethel. Then you'd get YHWH's blessing. Did you really close the Bethel worship center?"

"Yeah. Well, I tried, but the priests that run it are too strong. I couldn't get rid of them. The temple of Baal on the hill above Samaria is still there too. Jezebel runs it like a military camp, and I'd have to kill her and all her prophets to get rid of it. Wouldn't I look like a schmuck if I sent my army after my own mother! But I got rid of the other idols. Most of 'em, anyway. Elisha commended me..." He was interrupted by a shout from the watchtower.

The watchman on the tower over Ahab's ivory palace saw Jehu and Bidkar coming in a cloud of dust, while still a long distance away. King Joram was not so injured that he was uninterested. He climbed the tower to see. It was two soldiers on chariots, flying like the wind. He ordered that couriers be sent to find out if they came in peace. But when the couriers got there, the soldiers flew right past them without even slowing down to talk. More couriers were sent out, and they too were left behind in the dust. The watchman noted, "The only man I know who drives his chariot that furiously is Jehu Ben-Nimshi! I wonder if he comes with news of a Syrian victory at Ramoth-Gilead?"

"Help me into my chariot. And Ahaziah, you get into yours as well. We must meet him and be prepared for whatever news Captain Jehu has." They hurried down to the stables and mounted their chariots. By the time they got out, Jehu was already there. He had driven his chariot right into Ahab's winter garden!

King Joram rode up beside him. "What news, my good captain? Is Hazael defeated? It is peace?"

Jehu stared into King Joram's eyes for a long minute, breathing heavily. "Peace? There'll never be peace in Israel as long as the idolatry, witchcraft, harlotry, and murders of your vile mother Jezebel remain unpunished!"

Joram froze, until the implications sank in! He reigned his horses about and screamed, "Treason! Flee, Ahaziah! Jehu has turned traitor! Guards..." But Jehu drew his bow full strength. With the deadly accuracy of a skilled warrior, he shot his arrow clean through Joram's heart as he fled.

"Bring him back," Jehu told his first officer Bidkar. "Dump his body here in Naboth's field. For I remember when I served under Ahab, YHWH prophesied through Elijah that dogs would lick Ahab's blood in the same place that dogs licked the blood of righteous Naboth. So that is appropriate for Ahab's wicked son as well."

Ahaziah had driven his chariot completely through the garden and past the toolshed. He was getting away. "After him!" Jehu shouted. "He and his wicked mother Athaliah are as bad as Joram and his mother Jezebel! We'll deal with Joram's body later." So Bidkar chased Ahaziah, finally catching up with him at the outskirts of Samaria, where he was trying to find a place to hide. Bidkar lassoed his horse and led him and his chariot back to Jehu. But when he saw Jehu he left his chariot behind, leapt on Joram's chariot, kicked off the body, and escaped again, heading west.

For a second time Jehu drew his bow full strength. It was a long shot, but again his aim did not fail him. The arrow found its mark deep in the center of Ahaziah's back. He continued all the way to Megiddo before he died. Bidkar found him, and brought his body back to Jehu. He gave it to Ahaziah's servants to take to Jerusalem for burial. But after they finished dealing with King Ahaziah, there wasn't anything left of King Joram's body to bury. The dogs of Jezreel had consumed it in Naboth's field.

Jezebel had seen the whole thing from her large picture window on the top floor of Ahab's ivory palace. She was unprepared. She had a few personal maids and guards but no real defense. So she decided to try the next best thing: seduction. She fixed her hair, painted on her makeup, and put on her skimpiest see-through gown. Then she sat in her upper window waiting for Jehu. When he and Bidkar drove up to the palace, she called from the open window. "Jehu, my dear captain! Do you care to come up here to my bedroom to discuss terms of peace? I'm waiting, eager and willing. Or will you end up like Zimri, who murdered his master Elah and only reigned for seven days!"

Jehu didn't even answer. He saw what her intentions were! It disgusted him. He called in the open window. "Anyone up there on the side of righteousness? Anyone disgusted with the idolatries of Jezebel? Anyone who hates her like YHWH does? If so, throw her down!" Well, as it turned out, most of those in her palace were disgusted with Jezebel. They readily threw her down from the upper window. Her blood splattered on the walls of the palace, and clear out to the two horses and chariots. But to make sure, Jehu drove his chariot right over her body before going into the palace for dinner.

After dinner he ordered the servants, "Go out and bury that cursed woman. After all, she is a king's daughter." But when they got out there, the dogs had nearly finished her off. Almost nothing remained to bury. Jehu remembered the prophecy Elijah had given Ahab. "The dogs of Jezreel shall eat Jezebel in front of your own palace." Exactly so it had come to pass.

Now Jehu had to deal with Joash and the seventy sons of Ahab who ruled Samaria. Virtually all the city fathers and other city leaders were in on the 'take', since they had raised the seventy sons of Ahab and derived their power from them. Jehu sent an urgent message to Prince Joash. "King Joram is dead. So is King Ahaziah. Pick the fittest and best of your master's sons, set him on the throne, and prepare to battle with me for the royal line of Ahab."

As the last true son of Ahab and Jezebel, Prince Joash determined to take the throne himself. But the city elders were afraid, thinking, *If Jehu has already slain two kings, how can we stand against him?* They wrote back, "We are your servants. We'll do whatever you say. We don't want to be the ones to choose the next king of Israel. You do whatever seems right to you, and we'll support you."

Jehu wrote back, "Okay. If you are willing to serve me, bring me the heads of all of Ahab's sons by tomorrow! Don't let one escape. YHWH has sworn their annihilation. The first one you shall slay is Joash son of Jezebel, for he supported her in all her abominations."

Joash's face turned white as he read Jehu's letter. He crumpled it and ran to put it in the fire. But the city elders tackled him and hauled him back. Reading the letter, they realized they were all dead if they did not cooperate. So they slew Joash on the spot. Then they fanned out to their respective districts and slew every one of the 70 sons of Ahab. They put their heads in two ox carts and hauled them up to the ivory palace in Jezreel. Jehu had them dumped on either side of the palace gate.

The next morning, **Jehu** stood in the balcony of the ivory palace to address the people. The seventy heads of Ahab's sons made two ghastly piles beside the gate. Jehu's captains made a big show of crowning him with Ahab's royal crown while they all shouted, "Long live the king! Long live King Jehu!" The new king stood to address his people. "I conspired against my master Joram at the direct Word of YHWH. He ordered me to slay all of the house of Ahab and Jezebel, to avenge the blood of His prophets whom they slew. All you who brought the heads of Ahab's sons..." he waved toward the piles of bloody heads, "you are innocent, for it was of YHWH. Understand therefore that nothing shall fail of the Word of YHWH which He spoke through His prophet Elijah, saying that the house of Ahab and Omri shall be totally eradicated, like the houses of Baasha and Jeroboam, who caused Israel to sin."

Immediately after Jehu finished killing all the relatives of Ahab and their supporters in Jezreel, he left with his army to do the same in Samaria. On the way, he met a large group of relatives of King Ahaziah of Judah. They said they were coming up for a party at Jezreel with Joram, Ahaziah, and the queen mother Jezebel. She had invited them up for a celebration of her gods! Jehu had them all taken right down to the shearing house of Beth-Eked and slain.

They threw their bodies into a pit and again headed for Samaria. On the road they met **Jehonadab**, a priest of the clan of Rechab. (The Rechabites had solemnly vowed to keep themselves holy unto YHWH. As a sign, they never drink wine.) After verifying that Jehonadab was in full agreement with what he had done, Jehu let him in on the plot. His help would be crucial!

They had to work fast, before townspeople discovered his true intentions. Jehu addressed the people of Samaria. "Your King Joram was wounded by the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead, and has died. He had no heir, so I was crowned king in his place, at the ivory palace in Jezreel. But we need the blessing of the gods on my rule here! So gather all the prophets and worshipers of Baal to the temple of Baal on the hill. As I'm sure you know, King Joram only worshiped Baal halfheartedly. Well, that is why he died!"

“I will show you how Baal is supposed to be worshiped! Proclaim a grand celebration! Send invitations all across the land! Make sure every Baal worshiper and priest is here!” He made a big deal out of it. He made festive ephods for the priests. The Baal worshipers rejoiced! King Joram had been worse than halfhearted, for he had persecuted them. But now they had a king who would support them and worship with them! They all came, every last one.

On the appointed day, the worshipers packed out the temple of Baal. King Jehu stood up front to welcome them. He called out, “What we do here will be an abomination to those who don’t understand the true worship of Baal, so I’m sending my priest around to verify that there are no servants of YHWH here.” He sent Jehonadab, who looked at every face and nodded his approval. (The Rechabites were a holy clan who remained separate from all except those who worshiped YHWH. Jehonadab could recognize true believers, but no Baal worshiper would know him.)

When he was sure there were no believers in YHWH there, Jehu sacrificed the oxen for the burnt offering, and distributed the meat. Baal worshipers liked it rare and bloody, so he made sure it was. There was plenty of strong sweetened wine there, too. As they were feasting, Jehu and Jehonadab snuck out of the temple. As he had arranged, there were eighty soldiers now stationed all around the pagan temple, under orders to let none escape, on pain of death. Jehu found his army captain and gave the order, “Take as many soldiers as you need. Go into the temple. Kill everyone there. Let not one come out alive.”

After killing all the worshipers, they broke down the sacred altar of Baal, burned the sacred carvings, and then defiled the temple, turning it into a public latrine. Thus King Jehu eradicated the Baal worship from Israel.

After they were all finished, Jehu joked about it with Jehonadab, “Well, my friend. I guess we showed them how Baal is really supposed to be worshiped!” So Jehonadab continued working with Jehu and his men to find and kill all the relatives of Ahab who lived in Samaria. They didn’t stop until the houses of Ahab and Omri were extinct.

All this killing wasn’t limited to Israel, either. As soon as Athaliah heard the news that her son Ahaziah was dead, she quickly slew all the males of the royal house of David and Solomon except one: her husband Jehoram.

However, if you recall, Jehoram was then seriously ill, rotating all his time between his bedroom and the toilet. So **Athaliah** seated herself on the throne of Judah ‘until the king gets better’ (which she knew would never happen).

But as careful as Queen Athaliah had been to guarantee her throne, she had mis-counted. She missed baby Joash. **Jehoiada** the priest had recently married godly Jehosheba, the older sister of the late King Ahaziah and thus Joash’s aunt. Jehosheba was babysitting her one-year-old nephew when all the rest of his brothers and uncles were slain.

Jehosheba hid Joash until it was safe, then took him to the temple. The priests took care of him, determined to protect the last male heir of the throne of King David. Jehoiada, the high priest that year, was pleased with what his new wife had done. Logos was pleased, too. He gave them a child of their own, though he was old.

Athaliah ruled for six miserable years. As she knew, Jehoram didn’t recover. After a year (840 BC) he died in indescribable agony, just as Elijah had warned him in the letter he’d sent from prison. He was buried in a field with the peasants. Not one soul mourned his passing. His death only emboldened the brazen Athaliah. While Jehu was busy trying to clean up the mess Ahab and Jezebel and their sons had made in Israel, Queen Athaliah began restoring the idol worship of Rehoboam all over Judah.

You see, good kings Asa and Jehoshaphat had made a clean sweep of all the idols in Judah, cutting down the Asherah poles and destroying the pagan altars. But they had never actually torn down the worship centers that had been dedicated to Baal. Nor had they gone through the land and slain the prophets of Baal and Astarte like Elijah had done. The main house of Baal on top of the Mount of Olives, where King Solomon had set up the old tabernacle and three worship groves for Naamah and his other wives, was still there. In fact, Rehoboam had built a large temple around it, and developed a complex of buildings and walls to accommodate and protect his pagan priests.

They had gone into hiding, but with Athaliah, they came back stronger than ever. She helped them rebuild their altars and carve new Asherim. She spent the entire six years of her reign re-establishing worship groves, altars to Baal, and planetary observatories on every high hill in Judah. Thus Judah plunged back into idolatry, even worse than during the reign of Rehoboam. It was pretty awful. But at least the northern kingdom of Israel returned to YHWH after Jehu eliminated all the Baal worship, right?

Actually, no. Jezebel’s idolatry was never limited to Ashtoreth and the Baals. She was an equal-opportunity idolater. In today’s terms, she would be considered exceedingly tolerant. She tolerated and even encouraged every pagan religion. The only things she couldn’t stand were “those narrow-minded, bigoted, intolerant, hateful, fundamentalist worshipers of YHWH, with their jealous God and their exclusive adherence to His laws and to His command to worship at the temple in Jerusalem.”

But the ‘worship of YHWH’ at Bethel and Dan using those golden idols was quite a different story. They were open-minded, inclusive, friendly, and enlightened! Their idea of ‘YHWH’ was a liberal god who loved everyone, understood their weaknesses, readily forgave all their sins, and didn’t mind how he was worshiped so long as they called on his name. Their priests had reinterpreted his strict laws to permit worship before those golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Of course Jezebel had supported them!

So when Jehu purged the land of Baal worship, he left those golden calf temples alone. He didn't know. He thought they really were worshiping YHWH there. In fact, he backed the 'priests of YHWH' at Bethel and Dan, on the mistaken assumption that for Israel they were equivalent to Solomon's temple in Jerusalem for Judah. So Logos sent Elisha to Samaria to correct him. Elisha bowed before King Jehu. "This is what YHWH says about you, O King. 'I am pleased with your zeal for My name. Because you have done well in executing what I asked you to do, to blot out the house of Omri and Ahab from the earth, and even gone further to accomplish what was in My heart, to annihilate the prophets of Baal from the land, I shall give you a lasting kingdom. Your sons to at least the fourth generation shall sit on your throne. However, if you would extend this even further, I ask you to remove the worship centers at Bethel and Dan. Though they speak My name, their hearts are far from Me, for they worship false gods, gods of their own making, golden calves, and idols in their hearts.'"

Jehu had expected YHWH's commendation, for he had worked very hard to get it. But he had not expected the criticism, gentle though it was, and he was angry. "Wait a minute, Elisha. I checked out those worship centers. They actually do worship YHWH there, in a kind and loving way. The people all love it there, with the upbeat music, the non-judgmental sermons, the feasting and dancing, and of course the de-emphasis on all the messy stuff like blood sacrifices. In fact, they are a lot more tolerant and loving here than at Solomon's temple in Jerusalem! There is just no way I'm going to get rid of those worship centers and make my people go down into Judah to worship. Besides, do you have any idea what Athaliah is doing in Jerusalem? Now, that's pure evil! There is no way in Hades I'm going to tell my people they need to go down there!"

Logos was sad at his response. He wanted so much to bless Jehu. Satan came crowing about his victory. "You really ought'a listen, Logos. You really are narrow-minded and intolerant, You know. That's why I always win. I'm an expert at the art of compromise. You need to understand how I gain the hearts of the people by taking what You started, and just 'adjusting' it a little bit here and there to make it un-complicated, comfortable, non-condemning, effortless, bloodless... You could learn a lesson from..."

"No Satan. I am Truth. When you mix the truth with your lies, no matter how good your compromises, you still end up with a lie. And the end of lies is pain, death, and destruction. It's inevitable."

"Oh, but it doesn't have to be! They are just little lies. Look at how good those people are! You ought to simply overlook the little lies and bless them anyway."

"You've missed the point. I do bless them, just as much as I can, for I love them. But the brief blessings on earth pale in comparison to My goal – to bring them to live with Me in glory. That requires holiness, for I am holy."

So Logos determined to send a little discipline upon Jehu and Israel to see if He could bring them to seek His face wholeheartedly. He used Hazael, king of Syria.

When King Joram (with Jehu) had taken advantage of Ben-Hadad's death to retake Ramoth-Gilead, Hazael was caught unprepared. Syria had lost all of Bashan and Gilead. Worse, as they prepared to take it back, King Shalmaneser III attacked Syria for the fourth time. This time, he was successful, bringing the Assyrian armies into Damascus. They hardly lost a man, since Hazael was distracted by his loss to Jehu in Gilead. Thus Hazael suffered two major defeats in the first month of his reign. (841 BC) He was deeply humiliated, finally realizing that calling on the name of YHWH is not a magical incantation to guarantee victory. He had to return Shalmaneser's ring (which he had taken from Ben-Hadad when he'd killed him). Hazael bowed low and promised to serve Assyria and send tribute.

"Ben-Hadad was a formidable foe," Shalmaneser said. "I'll miss him. I liked him, for we thought alike. You are a weak, foolish king. I like that, too, for you will be easy to control. So I'll let you live. I will not trouble Syria anymore as long as you serve me and pay your tribute."

Hazael agreed, and sent Shalmaneser off with most of the spoil which old Ben-Hadad had recently collected from other Assyrian vassals using Shalmaneser's ring. Hazael was angry that Jehu had taken advantage of Syria's time of weakness to regain Bashan and Ramoth-Gilead. Now he began preparing his armies to take it back.

So when Jehu refused to get rid of Jeroboam's golden calves and remove the idolatrous worship centers, Logos allowed Hazael to defeat him at Ramoth-Gilead and retake Bashan. The next year Hazael came farther south, taking all of Gilead (East Manasseh) down to Mahanaim on the Jabbok River. The year after that, with the help of their ally Ammon, they came farther yet, taking all of Gad. The year following (836 BC), with the help of Moab and Ammon, he took Reuben, clear down to Aroer on the Arnon River. Now Syria and her allies held everything east of the Jordan. Hazael continued increasing his forces there, obviously intending to conquer Israel itself!

King Jehu was terrified. Logos sent multiple warnings, not just from Elisha but other prophets as well, but Jehu couldn't hear them. Instead, in 835 BC Jehu actually went to Assyria to talk to Shalmaneser III! He brought lavish gifts of gold and silver including golden vessels from the house of Ahab and Jezebel. As his servants presented the gifts, Jehu bowed with his face to the ground before King Shalmaneser. "O mighty king..." and a lot of other flowery language I'm going to skip over. "I pledge myself and my humble kingdom of Israel into your service. Please accept this gift as a token of my gratitude for defeating Hazael king of Syria. I'm very thankful, for Syria has been a thorn in my side for many years. I support you in keeping them under control. They need a strong and wise ruler like you."

“But Hazael is still being very aggressive. I allowed their raids until now, only because I did not want to offend you, their master. Yet now he has gone too far, threatening the very heartland of Israel. I must protect my people. Rather than risk the destruction of Syria and consequent loss of tribute, I urge you to send him a letter telling him to back off. I’m sure Hazael will obey. He fears you. That will avoid further bloodshed, and your tribute will keep flowing.”

King Shalmaneser III was pleased with Jehu, his gift, and his attitude. He agreed, and wrote that letter to Hazael. It basically said, “King Jehu of Israel is my faithful vassal too. If you don’t back off and stop provoking him, I will retaliate against you. And you know what that means!”

Hazael stopped. Jehu was right. He feared Assyria! Jehu was very pleased with himself. But Logos grieved. He had wanted Jehu to repent and seek His face. He would gladly have given Jehu peace with Syria and restored Israel’s land, for He too wanted the wars and killing stopped. Now, Logos wept for all the suffering Hazael would inflict on His people, for the Syrians had become wicked and cruel.

There was no denying it. Both Israel and Judah clearly deserved YHWH’s judgment. His law in the book of Moses details the ‘Blessings and Cursings’ – blessings upon their land as long as they remained true to Him and obeyed His commandments, but cursings when they turned aside to worship other gods and put their trust in other nations. Now they had earned the cursings! Logos sent one final warning, in the fall of 835 BC as the final harvest of the year was ripe and ready to reap. It was an army of locusts which filled the skies from horizon to horizon. They swept in from the eastern desert, first devastating Moab and Ammon, then stripping the gardens of Reuben and Gad.

If Jehu or Athaliah had repented, Logos would have blown all the locusts into the great Salt Sea. But no. Satan had occasion. The vanguard of the locust army did drown in the Salt Sea, but the vast majority was blown clear across it and up into the hills of Judah and Ephraim. The locusts ate every green thing as they swept across the land, leaving indescribable barrenness in their wake. It was devastating! The precious summer harvest for which they had worked so hard – now gone in a day!

Logos sent the prophet Joel, son of Pethuel, to follow up and explain His warning. “Consecrate a fast. Proclaim a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all their people to the house of God, and cry out to YHWH! Alas, for the Day of YHWH is near! It is come as destruction from the Almighty! Has not food been cut off before our eyes? ... gladness and joy from before the house of God? Blow a trumpet in Zion! Sound the alarm from My holy hill! Let the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the Day of YHWH is coming; surely it is very near! A day of darkness and gloom. Like the dawn spreading over the hills, so comes a great and mighty army. There has never been anything like it before, nor will there be for many generations.

“A fire consumes ahead, and a flame burns behind. The land is a garden before them, but a desolate wilderness after they pass. Nothing at all escapes them. Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness. YHWH utters His voice before His army. His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His Word! The Day of YHWH is indeed great and awesome – who can endure it?”

“Yet even now, declares YHWH, return unto Me with all your heart. Come back to Me with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your heart instead of your garment, and return now to YHWH your God. For YHWH is gracious, compassionate, merciful, slow to anger, quick to forgive, and reluctant to punish. Who knows whether or not He will turn and relent, and leave you a blessing instead?”

“Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather your wives, children, and nursing babies. Let the priests, YHWH’s ministers, weep between the porch and the altar. Let them all beseech YHWH, crying, ‘Spare Your people, O God. Do not allow Your inheritance to become a byword among the nations. For why should the pagans say of us, “Where is YHWH their God?”’”

Surprisingly, both Israel and Judah heard Joel and repented. Jehu was appalled at the devastation. He truly repented for trusting Assyria for deliverance from Syria. Though he never understood the importance of getting rid of those worship centers of Jeroboam at Bethel and Dan, at least he did as Joel had written. The people of Israel turned their hearts back to YHWH. So for a time, Israel had peace. Indeed, Hazael never returned in the days of Jehu. Israel recovered from the famine. That fall, Hazael even removed his forces from the lands he had invaded east of the Jordan: Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. For the remainder of his reign (22 years), Jehu had peace in Israel. Jehu just gave all the glory to God. He never realized how God had done it. *For he hadn’t ever seen what had happened at Jerusalem!*

That was a lot more complicated. As I said, both Israel and Judah repented, but though Jehu led in the repentance in the northern kingdom of Israel, Queen Athaliah in the southern kingdom of Judah did not! She was unfazed by the prophecy of Joel. Instead of calling the land to fasting and repentance like Jehu did, she burned Joel’s prophecy and told her guards to assassinate Joel! As far as we know, she was successful, for we never hear of poor Joel again.

Jehoiada the high priest had made two copies of Joel’s prophecy before sending it to Queen Athaliah. He sent one copy up to King Jehu in Israel. After reading the other copy a few times, he called the priesthood in Jerusalem together and read it over again to them. “The locusts are a warning from YHWH,” Jehoiada told them. “Joel’s prophecy points primarily at us priests. If we fast, weep, and repent, the people of Judah will follow our lead. And if they repent, our queen will repent too, or God will take her!”

So Jehoiada called for fasting and repentance among the priesthood. He was right; within the month, people all across Judah had also begun fasting and repenting, even without hearing Joel's prophecy.

What could Hazael do with the army he had brought down to conquer Israel? He too was hurt by the army of locusts. Though they couldn't deplete his own supplies, yet every army is dependent upon the land they occupy. Hazael could expect no more food from Reuben or Gad! He had to obey Shalmaneser, but he surely didn't want to just go home. *So he decided to take out Judah instead.*

Athaliah had ruled in Jerusalem for six years. In all that time, she had not done one good thing for Judah. Like her mother Jezebel, her focus was to strengthen the worship of the Baals and the planetary gods. Judah still had a good army, but was basically undefended, because no army can win without a good commander. Militarily, Athaliah was clueless! So in 835 BC when the Syrians began massing across the Jordan from Gilgal so soon after the locusts had devastated the land, the citizens of Judah were terrified.

They knew better than to talk to their clueless queen. Instead, they went to Jehoiada, the high priest, who read them Joel's prophecy. They'd been fasting and repenting before – now they understood! They and their families did as the prophecy said. They prayed in solemn silence as Jehoiada went into the holy place of the temple. He lay prone by the altar of incense waiting on YHWH for hours.

When he came out, he was very solemn. "YHWH says that the only way to prevent invasion by the Syrians is to assassinate Queen Athaliah and install Joash son of David on the throne in her place!" *The people all agreed.*

Well, Jehoiada was no military man, but somebody had to lead. First he selected five army captains he could trust. (He knew they were regular worshipers at the temple.) Then he sent them and their men throughout Judah to every city and town. They called the Levites, the elders, and the leading men to come to the temple courtyard.

When they arrived, Jehoiada gave them the weapons King David had stored in the temple, and organized them for defense. Then he shouted out, "Behold, the king's son shall reign, as YHWH has spoken concerning the sons of David. Let Joash be brought out." As they were bringing him from his secret quarters in the temple, Jehoiada explained, "When Athaliah killed all the royal offspring, my wife Jehosheba saved the youngest son of Ahaziah. He is now seven years old. He is the last living son of David."

So they put royal robes on **Joash**, put a crown on his head, and put the sacred book of the law in his hand. Then Jehoiada anointed him as the next king of Judah. Everyone shouted, "Long live the king! Long live King Joash!" The trumpets sounded, musicians began playing a psalm, and the joyous people broke out in spontaneous praise and worship. It got waaaay louder than Jehoiada had expected.

Queen Athaliah heard the celebration. She hurried to the temple, furious that she had not been invited to the party. But when she saw the newly crowned boy-king, she realized the truth. By then, the guards had seen her. As they surrounded her, she tore her clothes, screaming, "Treason! Treason!" but not a single citizen of the realm would lift a finger on her behalf. The guards dragged her, kicking and biting, from the temple porch down to the gate to Solomon's stables. There they put her to death.

The guards returned and said that the queen was dead. Now the shouts of praise increased! Then old Jehoiada the high priest gave an exhortation. He swore a covenant between himself, the new king, and the people, that they would be YHWH's people, to serve only Him. He exhorted them to tear down the house of Baal and kill Mattan (whom Athaliah had hired as the high priest of Baal).

Another shout of praise accompanied the worshipers as they took their weapons and exuberantly rushed out of the temple and across the Kidron Valley to the southern peak of the Mount of Olives, now called the 'Mount of Offense'. They tore down the house of Baal and killed everyone inside, including Mattan. They broke apart the stone altar, and burned the idols and Asherah poles. Then they returned to spend the rest of the day with Jehoiada, worshipping YHWH and honoring the new king Joash.

Toward evening, Jehoiada asked his five captains, "When you killed Athaliah, did you search through the palace to deal with all who had remained loyal to her?"

"Yes, sir," they replied. "The palace is clear."

"How many did you have to kill?"

"Actually, no one at all, sir. Everyone hated her guts. You wouldn't believe how eager they were to swear their allegiance to you and to the new king."

So Jehoiada and his armed men brought Joash out of the temple that evening and sat him on the royal throne of David. All the people in the palace bowed to swear their allegiance. Then they sat down to a great feast together.

And not one of them was aware of what a great victory YHWH had won for them that day! For King Hazael and his powerful Syrian army had crossed the Jordan and climbed the hill toward Jerusalem. No one had seen them but the defenseless Schools of Prophets at Jericho and Gilgal, and they had only bowed in prayer for their nation. Not being a king or a military man, Jehoiada had never thought of posting a lookout for the threat they knew was there!

The Syrians had come up the Jericho road and had nearly reached the city when the jubilant mob came streaming out the eastern gate of the temple toward the house of Baal. Within sight of Jerusalem, the Syrians had heard the loud shouts and singing from the temple. Now they beheld thousands of screaming armed men charging their way. They were terrified, and panicked.

Someone must have warned Jerusalem! The Syrians turned tail and fled clear back to the Jordan, running like scared rabbits. Nothing Hazael could do or say would turn them around. So they went home, to Syria, abandoning all the lands they had captured east of the Jordan. It was 25 years before Syria would dare to attack Judah again.

God's army of locusts got to the Western Sea, where it turned south. But Satan wasn't finished with it yet. He also had occasion against Egypt, which had tenaciously clung to its many false gods. Rameses III had been blessed by God with a long and prosperous reign. He'd been a pretty good king. He had helped King Jehoshaphat, and had spent a good deal of Egypt's resources aiding the refugees from the north. He had worked hard to halt the aggressive Mycenaean sea pirates, and had protected his people. But though he had seen the miracles of YHWH, and had heard many tales from Israel and Judah, yet he still clung to the Egyptian gods, believing in YHWH only as 'Israel's God'.

So Logos allowed Satan to send that army of locusts across Egypt as well. It devastated the land, causing a famine that lasted for years. History records that in his regnal year 29 (835 BC) Rameses and his corrupt officials were hardly able to meet the payroll for his workers.

Sadly, Rameses III did not heed the warning. Logos sent another warning, in year 32 of his reign (832 BC). He was assassinated in a plot by his minor queen, Tiye III, who wanted to steal the throne for her son Pentewere. Though Rameses III survived the attack, he was so badly injured that he died the next year.

Before he died, Rameses III reluctantly crowned his youngest son as Pharaoh Rameses IV at Memphis. He was immature and foolish. Bear in mind that Rameses IX still reigned at Pi-Ramesse, and other sons of Rameses III ruled at El-Lahun, Leontopolis, Heliopolis, and other places. The Egyptian Empire had begun to break up into chaos. Rameses IV only ruled four years – then was assassinated in 828 BC by a usurper whom we know as Rameses XI. He also killed Rameses IX at Pi-Ramesse, and may have killed other sons of Rameses III as well. But he had opened a door that could not be shut. Civil wars began to break out all across Egypt. Starving, angry people do not make loyal subjects, especially when their kings are selfish fools!

Though Rameses XI supposedly 'ruled' for 28 years, it was all downhill. Famines and civil wars continued. The high priests of Amun at Thebes rebelled. Rameses XI tried to suppress them, but failed. A strong high priest named Herihor rose to power. In 821 BC he made his son Piankh high priest in his place and proclaimed himself Pharaoh of upper Egypt, to begin the 21st Dynasty at Thebes. Thus the high priests at Thebes virtually declared upper Egypt a separate country. So for the remainder of the sorry reign of Rameses XI, Egypt was divided, as it degenerated into the chaos of what we call the Third Intermediate Period (TIP). By the end of his reign, mighty Egypt was nearly bankrupt.

CHAPTER 31 – KINGS JOASH AND JEHU

With his third defeat, Hazael of Syria was subdued. Shalmaneser III of Assyria was pacified, getting tribute from both Syria and Israel. So he turned his attention to remnants of the Hittites who had rebelled at Tubal and Kanesh (Cappadocia). Shalmaneser III began building a luxurious new palace at Calah with the added tribute. Egypt was now basically out of the picture, riddled with internal problems. So both Israel and Judah were free to prosper. Though they did have minor skirmishes with their perennial enemies to their west (the Philistines and Phoenicians) and to their east (Ammon, Moab, and Edom), overall, the next 20 years were peaceful.

Jehu actually made a pretty good king in Israel, though he never did obey YHWH's command through Elisha to get rid of the golden calves. In his stubborn pride he insisted they were worshiping YHWH there. He loved to join them each Sabbath. Even though Athaliah was gone, Jehu still considered the worship at Solomon's temple in Jerusalem to be a bit intolerant and legalistic. Nonetheless, Jehu zealously kept the worship of the planetary gods out of Israel, and God blessed him for that. He also developed a good, supportive relationship with King Joash of Judah all his life, which was beneficial for a time, as we shall see.

Joash was only seven years old when he began to reign. He couldn't really do much his first ten years, so the queen mother Zibiah (the widow of Ahaziah) ruled for him. And in fact, she couldn't do a whole lot on her own either, so the old high priest Jehoiada became her daily counselor and confidante. Sweet Jehosheba and others in the kingdom helped as well. They all loved her and Joash her son.

Jehu of Israel swore an alliance with the boy-king from the beginning. He had hated Athaliah as much as anyone, and was delighted when he heard that old Jehoiada had pulled off his coup d'état. Within days of Athaliah's death, King Jehu and his court paid King Joash a royal visit. Jehu vowed to join his army with Judah's, and to personally lead the two armies if needed, since Judah had no good military general at that time. Jehu fulfilled his promise, too, several times. He was a capable and shrewd military leader. The nations of the Levant learned to properly fear him.

Joash was an intelligent boy. Under the tutelage of Jehoiada and Jehosheba (who had become like surrogate parents) Joash grew up with excellent character. As long as Jehoiada lived, the Levitical priesthood in Judah remained strong and pure, and Logos was very pleased. If there were any flaws at all in Joash, it was that he was too kind and good! The Baal worshipers from the days of Athaliah were never slain. He disciplined them a few times, and ordered them to stop their idolatry. But he didn't exterminate them like Jehu had, and he never went around the land tearing down their altars and destroying their worship centers on the high places with the zeal Jehu had shown. So Judah remained free of idolatry only in Jerusalem.

Old Shalmaneser's own son Assur-danin-pal rebelled against him from Nineveh in 825 BC. For more than two years the civil war raged, until the rebellion was at last crushed by another son of Shalmaneser. But alas, when the dust had finally settled, the great King Shalmaneser III was dead. His second son became King Shamshi-Adad V. The rebellion smoldered underground until about 820 BC, further weakening the Assyrian Empire. It would not begin to regain its former strength for about 80 years.

Concerned that the royal line of David might die out, Jehoiada found King Joash two wives as soon as he turned eighteen (in 824 BC). The next year, he had a son named **Amaziah**. The new prince was the talk of the two nations. Everyone in Judah and Israel loved him. Again Jehu paid his respects and swore a partnership. Peace reigned throughout the land. After two years, Joash's second wife also bore him a son, named **Amoz**.

In 822 BC a Libyan prince named Shoshenk I realized Egypt's weakness. He rose to power in Bubastis in the Nile Delta, to begin the 22nd 'Libyan' or 'Bubastite' Dynasty. He made his first son, Osorkon I, co-regent, and sent his next son, Iuput, to Thebes to subdue rebellious Herihor. Then he subdued Rameses XI at Pi-Ramesse and Smendes I at Tanis. This began to unify Egypt under Libyan rule. Shoshenk was Egypt's first strong leader since Rameses III. He began helping Egypt recover from the chaos of the TIP. He maintained Libyan control over the weak Pharaohs of the 20th and 21st Dynasties. He improved his military, determined to recover the trade routes and restore Egypt's power and prestige around the world. [See endnote.]

In 817 BC, Smendes I died. His son Psusennes I began a 49 year rule at Tanis. In 816 BC Piankh died; Pinudjem I his son became the high priest of Amun in his place.

After 28 years as king of Israel, Jehu died in 814 BC at the age of 63. He could have been a truly great and good king. He was certainly zealous all his life to keep the land free of the planetary gods and to protect God's people (both Israel and Judah) from the surrounding nations. But he simply couldn't hear YHWH's desire that he get rid of Jeroboam's idols at Bethel and Dan, so Logos took him home. His son **Jehoahaz** ruled Israel in his place.

Jehu had always known, deep down, that something was wrong in the way he worshiped. He certainly had heard plenty of warnings from the prophets! So after he got to Sheol and bowed his heart and soul before Logos, one of his questions was, "Lord, why was my worship at Bethel not acceptable? I was sincere, zealous, loving, and non-judgmental! I called on Your name in truth!"

"Did you? What says My Law? Did you obey it?"

"I kept Your law! All the same sacrifices, everything the Levites did. Well, all except that one about gathering at Jerusalem three times a year. We couldn't do that after the split between Israel and Judah."

"Some, as far as Dan, did gather at Jerusalem."

"But You can't expect most of them to do that. It's just too far. That would be hard for them."

"I see. What about My second commandment, the one that prohibits making or bowing to graven images?"

"Yes, we cut down and burned all the Asherah poles. There was not one left in all the land."

"And the golden calves?"

"Oh, they weren't 'graven'. They were cast, molded. 'Graven' only refers to carved images like Asherim."

"What about My first commandment, the one that prohibits having any other gods before Me? Why did you set these golden calves before Me?"

"But, Lord! The golden calves are not gods! They are just physical pictures, representations of You, to give us something to focus our minds on as we worship."

"Why then are they made like the gods of Egypt?"

"Uh... I don't know, Lord. I never thought about it. Maybe we should have made it look like the sun, or a man, or... no, wait. Those are also gods of Egypt. Well, we should have made it look like a scroll. Or like the tablets of Your Law. Then it would not be a pagan god."

"But it would be equally abhorrent to Me. This is why. I am Spirit. I am eternal. I am Life – everlasting Life. I am uncreated, the Source of all created things, the Giver of all blessings. The instant you use a created thing to represent Me, anything at all, you've lost the picture. You've turned your focus from what I'm really like, to something less. Your idols, no matter how glorious, all fall short of My glory. Your golden calves were pretty pathetic, but let's say that you had a perfect statue of Me, 20 feet high, in solid, polished gold. Would it portray Spirit? Would it show everlasting Life? No. Of course not. How could it even begin to represent My glory? Or say you idolized a man, the greatest, wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon himself. Would he display the fullness of My glory? No. What happened to Solomon? Though better than the idol, even the greatest of men fall far short!

"You think of worship as something to appease Me; to make Me happy with you so I will bless you. That is wrong. I don't need to be appeased. I don't have an ego needing to be pampered or flattered. I bless you because I love you, regardless of what you do, though this love sometimes takes the form of discipline or judgment. No, worship is for your own sake, to lift you up into My presence, soften your heart, and bend your will to Mine. This turns your nature toward the divine so you can share My glory. If you focus on an idol, does that lift you up into My presence? No! Just the opposite! It drags your faith down into the realm of physical things. It conditions you to trust or hope in created things instead of your Creator."

“But Logos! I didn’t do that! My faith was in You. Always! I never trusted created things.”

“Oh? Your faith was in your own worship of that idol at Bethel. Your trust was in your armies and in your alliances with Shalmaneser and Joash. Your hope was that I would bless you because of your zeal in destroying the house of Ahab and Jezebel and their Baal worship. Those are all in the physical realms. Look at the fruit: at King Joash, who admired and learned from you. And at your son Jehoahaz.” They peered down through the veil.

Jehu looked, and was appalled at the results of his own religious impurities. Ten years had passed since his death. Libyan Prince Shoshenk I and his co-regent son Osorkon I had grown strong at Bubastis in lower Egypt. In 812 BC Herihor had died; his son Pinudjem I ruled upper Egypt as the high priest of Amun and ‘acting Pharaoh’ at Thebes. The ugly civil war in Assyria was over, and Adad-nirari III son of Shamshi-Adad V had taken command of Assyria in 810 BC. He had gotten aggressive, and was again collecting tribute from Damascus. In Syria, the young son of Hazael, whom we know as Ben-Hadad III, was crowned co-regent with his father in 807 BC. Syria also was growing stronger.

And in the midst of all these powerful nations, both Israel and Judah were ignoring their true protection, YHWH God of Israel. Jehoahaz (Jehu’s son) had turned away first. He never did have a heart for God; worship at Bethel was just a ritual to make him look good. After Jehu had died, Jehoahaz had put his son in charge at Bethel. He had given them a blank check to worship however they pleased. Thus within 10 years all the idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel had returned. Jehu wept to see it.

But surely, good King Joash had not fallen for that! Jehu looked closely. Venerable Jehoiada died in 808 BC at the age of 130, in the 27th year of Joash’s reign. Now that his friend and benefactor was dead, his true colors began to come out. Joash had depended on Jehoiada to maintain the religious purity in the Levitical priesthood and to keep the idolatry out of Judah. Joash seemed to have no personal convictions about the matter one way or the other. Within a month after Jehoiada’s death, wicked counselors had persuaded King Joash to approve the worship of the Baals and Asherim right alongside of the worship of YHWH, and to allow the idolatrous worship centers to be restored on the hills of Judah. “Why, O Lord? Why both Israel and Judah? And so soon after my death!”

“It is because your focus was not on Me, but on the physical rituals and icons of your worship. You never got to know Me. Though you were zealous to please Me, you did it according to your own understanding. You served Me as a laborer works for pay, hoping to buy My approval and blessings. I always hoped for a relationship with you! I wanted to share with you My love and joy, My wisdom and understanding, My very nature, to teach you My ways. Your idols blocked all that.”

For the first time, Jehu really understood. He wept in humble repentance for a long time. Then he asked, “Lord? Why me? Why was it all dependent on me?”

“I called you. I empowered you. I poured My grace on you to become My cleansing, healing, and protection for My people Israel. They all rejoiced in your successes and groaned at your failures. They all were blessed by your righteousness and suffered for your sins. That’s just the way it is. The leader always carries the higher burden.”

“Why did King Joash also fall away from You? It seems like You’re blaming me for that, too!”

“Joash should not have fallen away. Sadly, he never grew up. His father died when he was a baby. He was dependent on you and Jehoiada as surrogate fathers. He never learned to know or obey Me for himself. So when you both died, he had no one to lean on, except some wicked advisors who eagerly gathered around him. I really thought that by the age of 34 he should have learned to stand on his own two feet and just do what is right, but no. Once again, it was your idols. Like you, he focused on the physical realm and never learned to know Me. He admired and followed you more than you know.”

Jehu was stunned that his idolatry had caused so much trouble. “But Logos, what can You do for him?”

“I cannot force him to change. Yet I can and will still encourage him to turn to Me by sending him disciplinary warnings. We shall see how he chooses to respond.”

Let’s return now to 814 BC to retell this story from earth. Judean King Joash was a compromiser, a jellyfish. He seemed to have no backbone. He was deeply saddened at his friend Jehu’s death. He went up to the temple at Bethel for the funeral ceremony and then to Samaria for the burial. He then spent a month with Jehu’s son, the new King Jehoahaz, grieving with him and pledging Judah’s continued friendship. Nothing wrong with that, except he became more tolerant of their idolatry, and even grew to enjoy the liberal style of worship at Bethel.

But when Joash tried to take it back to Jerusalem, old Jehoiada, Judah’s venerable high priest, refused. “O King, live forever! May your throne ever increase! But let not my lord the king seek to alter the pure worship of YHWH, God of our fathers, in ways which He has not commanded us. He does not tolerate the pagan...”

“Don’t be so hard-nosed! Learn to be more tolerant! Jehu was a man of God, and so is his son Jehoahaz. Their worship is much more broad-minded, inclusive. They made everyone feel right at home in their Bethel temple. Their worship is expansive, filled with love. We need to relax a bit! YHWH’s commands are too strict.”

“Then slay me now, O King. And slay my sons, and all of YHWH’s priests, too. For what you suggest would bring God’s judgment down upon our land.”

“Oh, loosen up! I’m not going to slay anyone. If you feel that strongly about it, go ahead and have it your way. But you are going to a lot of unnecessary trouble.” Thus the jellyfish moved with the current, and Jehoiada kept the idolatry out of Judah. Joash truly loved him, who had been a father to him all his life. So he said no more to him about it. But he had truly loved Jehu, too, and his son as well. He often visited Israel, to worship with Jehoahaz in Bethel. His heart was no longer with the pure worship of YHWH at Jerusalem. Logos sent prophets to warn him, but King Joash couldn’t hear them.

One of those prophets was the son of Jehoiada and next in line to be high priest, **Zechariah**. Each month as Joash returned from Bethel, Zechariah would meet him at the city gate. “Return, O King, to YHWH God of your fathers. He grieves for you, for your heart is not right. Do you think He does not see your waywardness?”

King Joash would just respond with some smart-aleck retort like, “Is YHWH really such a tightwad that a man can’t even visit his own friend in Israel?” But after a while, Zechariah’s challenges began getting on his nerves. He tried using a different gate, but Zechariah somehow knew, and met him anyway. Joash grew to hate him.

Jehoiada the high priest was 130 years old, and he knew his time to die was near. He asked for a private audience with King Joash, who was glad to grant it. But instead of the usual, “My lord the king” greeting, Jehoiada began, “My son, how I have loved you, and cared for you, and prayed for you, every day of your life...”

“And I love you, too, my father. Truly no one ever had a better father than you have been to me.”

“Why then, if you love me, do you hate my son, my own flesh and blood, who is like me, and who will take my place when I am gone?”

“Oh no, I don’t hate Zechariah, my father!” Joash lied. “I get upset at him sometimes when he criticizes my friendship with the king of Israel, but I don’t hate him.”

“He only speaks to you in love, my son. He fears for you, lest your friendship with the king of Israel turn your heart away from following YHWH.”

“Oh, no chance of that, my father. You have trained me well. I will always follow YHWH just as you have taught me. And Zechariah will make a fine high priest after you have gone. You needn’t worry.”

“I am not worried about Zechariah. I am worried about you, O King. You pay lip-service to YHWH, but your heart is not pure toward Him.” Joash did his best to reassure and comfort Jehoiada (for he knew he was dying). But it seemed that all his promises were to no avail. The old high priest saw right through them. He died later that year, still grieving for the fine young man he had worked so hard to protect and guide.

All Judah mourned his death. Jehoiada was a truly great man. Everyone loved him. They buried him in Jerusalem in the same plot where David and Solomon and the kings of Judah were buried, for he had been like a king to them. Zechariah his son took his place as high priest.

When the time of mourning was past, Zechariah came to King Joash. “My father was too lenient with you, O King. I will be more bold. In the name of YHWH God of our fathers, I prohibit you from going up to Bethel to worship. I further prophesy that if you disobey, God’s judgment will fall on you and on all Judah!”

“You? Prohibit me?” Joash, who already hated him, got angry. “You’re forgetting who is king around here!”

“It is not I who commands you, my lord the king. It is YHWH Himself, the King of kings, speaking through me. He has been patient with your waywardness for too long. I believe this may be your last warning from...”

“Well I know this is your last warning, you rebel! Next time you dare to speak so against the king, I’ll have you slain!” Joash was trembling with fury. “Guards, throw Zechariah out!” Joash looked around the court. Everyone seemed to be frozen, cowering in the corners, afraid of the wrath of the king. Nobody was responding.

“Guards!” Joash screamed. He sounded like a spoiled kid. Bruce, the captain of his personal bodyguard, came and knelt before him, as Zechariah headed out the door by himself. “Your Royal Highness! He is YHWH’s anointed high priest! I do not have the authority to lay a hand on him, even at your command!”

Suddenly the fear of God fell on Joash. He regretted his angry outburst. But the words were spoken and he couldn’t take them back. His entire court had heard. He retired to his bedroom, ashamed at losing his temper.

There were some in the royal court who were not so noble as the captain of the guard. They urged King Joash to compromise. “Your Royal Highness! You don’t need to go to Bethel to find the kind of loving, tolerant worship you desire. We’ll improve the worship right here in Jerusalem. We’ll invite some of the priests from Bethel down here. They can instruct us.” So they did, with the king’s full permission. They re-established the worship of Astarte and the Baals on the Mount of Olives. Soon it spread to other places too, all across the land. Within the year, the worship of the pagan gods was again established in Judah.

Logos sent warning after warning. The rains failed. The economy in Judah began to falter. Syria prepared for a major military campaign against the Levant.

Zechariah also tried to warn King Joash, but when he returned to the palace, Joash banned him from entering the court. Joash remembered his promise to kill him the next time he spoke out against the king. He didn’t want to have to fulfill his rash vow.

The worst warning came through the king's first son and heir, Amaziah. He was a tender-hearted boy, eager to please his parents (Joash and Jehoaddan). He was 15 when the priests from Bethel set up their worship center on the Mount of Olives. At that young, impressionable age, he saw where his father's heart was, so he began to spend his days up on the Mount of Olives, 'helping out'.

Well, having the king's own son there was a big boost for their claim to legitimacy! They treated him royally, even making him an honorary 'priest'. This is rather an ego builder for a fifteen-year-old boy. Amaziah responded by throwing himself wholeheartedly into their 'worship', including the, ahh... sensual aspects.

The temple prostitutes and lewd Asherah poles soon awakened lust in Amaziah. He looked around the palace for someone to 'love'. His boyhood friend Jecoliah, the daughter of the captain of the guard, was nearly his age. Amaziah began bringing her up the Mount of Olives 'to worship with him' and succeeded in seducing her there. On duty beside the throne, Bruce never knew.

By the summer of 806 BC it became obvious that young Jecoliah was pregnant with Amaziah's child. He went to his father and asked to marry her. Now the fat hit the fan! Righteous Bruce, the captain of the guard, wanted to resign his post, take his daughter, and move far, far away, but Joash wouldn't let him. "No, no, my faithful friend. Running away never solved any problems. I'm sorry for what happened too, but our grandson will need a father as well as a mother. Let them marry. Just think, Amaziah will be the king here someday. You will be the father-in-law of the king. Wouldn't you like that?"

"Your Highness, it's not that. I worship and serve YHWH, God of our fathers. But you and your son have turned away from YHWH to worship Ashtoreth and the Baals. I want no part of that for my family."

For once, King Joash was speechless. Bruce had never talked back to him like that. Joash knew it was not Bruce but YHWH Himself warning him, just like Zechariah always tried to do. Once again, the jellyfish flowed with the current. "I'm so sorry, Bruce. I'm sorry to all of you. I've failed you, and failed YHWH. I repent. I'll get rid of the pagan priests on the Mount of Olives, and train my son to worship YHWH. I want the best for my son, just as you want the best for your daughter."

So King Joash closed the pagan worship center and sent the priests packing to Bethel. (Jehoahaz welcomed them.) Bruce gave his daughter Jecoliah to Amaziah in marriage. Bruce and Joash worked together to retrain the young couple to worship YHWH. Peace was restored in Judah.

Well, you know about how long that lasted! The heart of King Joash was still set on the worship at Bethel. Within a year, the pagan priests were sneaking back to the Mount of Olives, for the people loved it so!

At the end of 806 BC Jecoliah bore Amaziah a son. They named him Prince **Azariah**. He was adorable! The people in Judah came to pay their respects and to shower the tiny prince with gifts. The matrons of Judah nicknamed him 'Uzziah' and the cute nickname stuck. Jehu was watching it all sadly from the heavenlies. "How much they tolerate! How soon they forget! Joash swore to get rid of the pagan priests, but already they are back. And King Amaziah's illegitimate child should have been born in shame, but now he's given honor as a young prince."

Ahab put his arm around Jehu. "I am sorry, my friend. It was my daughter, Athaliah, who perverted Judah, just like my wife Jezebel perverted Israel. And it was I, the wimp, who let them. So it's all my fault."

"Now now, My sons! This isn't a 'name it and blame it' game." Logos laughed. "Come away – you've looked long enough. Now you understand what your weakness, your failures, have caused. Yet I do not condemn. Such failure and weakness is common to the human race ever since the fall of Adam and Eve. See! Now you have learned wisdom. Now you understand where tolerance of evil leads, and the suffering that results. And every one of those you have seen below will also learn – some the easy way, some through discipline, sorrow, and pain, and some only after they too reach Sheol. Thus My Bride grows pure and strong even as humankind grows ever more wicked. And darker days are yet to come."

"Darker days? How could it get much darker? Both Israel and Judah have turned away from You."

"It seems that some must reach the bottom of the hole before they can look up. And it is not just Israel and Judah. Hazael, king of Syria, has also turned against Me. I made him king. I gave him every opportunity to know and serve Me. He was to be My blessing to Syria, and through them to Israel as well, for he was to keep the Assyrians at bay while My people prospered. But with their plunge into idolatry, Hazael has embraced evil in his heart. Thus Satan has been given occasion against them."

Jehoshaphat joined the conversation. "Why, O Lord? Why are they so quick to fall to idolatry?"

Logos sighed sadly. "My realm of Spirit seems unreal and distant. They are quick to forget all I have done for them. But the planets – Mars coming near every two years and Venus every five – they are close, ever in their minds. Thus they fear the planetary gods more than Me."

Ever since his humiliating defeats by Jehu at Gilead and by Shalmaneser III at Damascus, King Hazael had totally rejected YHWH. His little 'magic prayer' had failed. He had spent every waking hour plotting and preparing for his revenge against Israel. Then, after his shameful defeat at Jerusalem when Jehoiada's worshipers had frightened his army off by their enthusiastic attack on the house of Baal, King Hazael nursed an intense hatred for Judah, too.

Hazael still feared Shalmaneser III, so he left Gilead and Bashan alone, as ordered. But Shalmaneser had not said anything about Philistia or Phoenicia. They had gotten very decadent, and everyone hated them anyway. No one would care if Hazael moved his army down the coast, and picked off their cities one by one. Hazael had conquered them all the way south to Gath by mid 804 BC.

Jehoahaz, king of Israel, didn't care. He knew his father Jehu had bought off Shalmaneser III, and that Hazael wouldn't dare to attack him or they would face the wrath of the Assyrians. He fired off a letter to Hazael congratulating him for conquering their mutual enemies in Phoenicia and Philistia and then politely reminding him of the Assyrian alliance that protected Israel.

And Joash, king of Judah, didn't care, either. He had prepared his army for anything. He now had over 300,000 men who could muster at a moment's notice to fight for him, more than three times the army of Hazael. Yes, I know. He was trusting in his army more than in YHWH. He would live to regret that! He sent a letter to King Hazael similar to the one Jehoahaz had sent, casually mentioning that he and his highly trained 300,000 man army would be happy to help out if needed. Neither Jehoahaz nor Joash had any clue what Hazael planned to do at Gath.

With the close pass of Mars coming in 804 BC, Joash officially authorized the priests of Baal to reestablish an observatory on the Mount of Olives. Purely for scientific observation, you understand, and to alleviate the fears of the people. But he wouldn't worship there anymore. Oh no! He had promised Bruce, and he kept his vows. He faithfully took Amaziah to the temple to worship YHWH. But YHWH did not accept his half-repentance, nor did Zechariah the high priest. For months, every time the king entered the temple, Zechariah would find a way to speak to him, and warn him of his wayward heart. "You swore to get rid of the Baals and Asherim. But they are back, and you have authorized them!"

"Shut up!" Joash commanded. "I also swore to get rid of you if you spoke out against me again."

But Zechariah would not shut up. Every time he saw the king, he would remind him, "Why do you continue to transgress the command of YHWH? Don't you know, that is why your kingdom does not prosper? Because you have forsaken YHWH, He has forsaken you, and given you into the hand of Hazael king of Syria."

"That is so silly. I have been at peace with Syria all my life. Besides, Hazael would be foolish to try to attack me. My army is three times the size of theirs!"

"The strength of your army can't save you if YHWH isn't with you. Repent or perish!" Finally Joash couldn't take any more. He hired some worthless men to accuse Zechariah of rebellion and treason. They stoned him as he served between the temple porch and the altar.

Elisha, at the age of 90, still ministered to the needs of the poor in Israel. Old Ben-Solem and his wife Sandy had passed on, but Sammy still maintained the upper room in Shunem for Elisha's use. Sammy was mayor of Shunem, loved by all for miles around. He had a wife and 8 happy children at his table. Never has a family been so blessed by YHWH! You can't out-give God.

Elisha now returned to Samaria. His pace was slow. He hoped this might be his last trip. He got into line to see the king. In his culture the aged were honored and usually invited to the front of the line, but not Elisha. He was kept waiting all day. He realized that neither King Jehoahaz nor his son **Jehoash** really wanted to see him. Finally he wrote a letter, left it with a doorman, and went to the local School of Prophets for the night.

The next day King Jehoahaz read Elisha's letter. After again (for the umpteenth time) warning about his idolatry, it said, "You think you have peace with Syria, O King, but you do not. All your reign Hazael has been plotting his revenge against you. Assyria is too far away and cannot help you. But if you repent of your idolatry and call to YHWH, He will save you from Syria."

As usual when he got warnings from Elisha, he threw it into the fire. "Hazael has not troubled Israel ever since my father Jehu paid tribute to Assyria for their protection," he told his son. "Notice how they passed around Israel when they attacked Phoenicia and Philistia. They fear Assyria. They'll never attack us."

But Hazael had other plans. He understood how armies worked in those days! He had been a military man all his life. Standing armies were small, and often attached only to the king. The primary power of a nation's army was in its militia. They were mostly farmers, ready to muster only when called upon to defend their nation. Hazael sent a polite response to each of the two kings' letters, thanking them for their kind offers of assistance and reassuring them that he didn't need their help. He only intended to conquer the rest of Philistia and restore law and order to the vital trade routes that Egypt had so badly neglected. After that he would return home – *or so he said!*

Hazael mobilized his forces at Gath and headed away from Judah toward Ashkelon. But that evening, as soon as his army was hidden behind a hill, they turned right, skirted the hills between Ekron and Gibbethon, and came up the Valley of Aijalon to Jerusalem. Under the cover of darkness, they surrounded the city. Joash was completely snookered. He had ignored the warnings of Zechariah and Elisha and had not even sent out a call to mobilize his forces. Now with the city surrounded, all he had was his own personal guard. He tried to get messengers out to mobilize his army, but Hazael was ready for that. His spies captured them all. So all King Joash could do was to wait. *Jerusalem was well-fortified. The Syrian army was small. They would eventually get tired and go home.*

But two could play this waiting game. Hazael did not attack. He left the siege to his son Ben-Hadad III, while he led half his army from city to city, executing the mayors, elders, city fathers, and militia captains. (The generals were all with Joash.) He took the spoils to feed his army, and sent the excess up to Damascus.

When Joash got that news, he knew he was beaten. In great agony of soul, he cried out to YHWH, but the heavens were brass. He tried to get a word of wisdom from a prophet or priest, but ever since he had ordered Zechariah killed, they weren't exactly on speaking terms. Finally in desperation, he sent Hazael an unconditional surrender, with all the tribute he could gather – all the silver and gold from the temple and from his own palace. As he saw his treasures going out the gate, he again lost his temper. He raged against God, trying to blame YHWH for his own failure to heed the warnings of Zechariah.

Logos wept. Jehu, Ahab, Asa, and Jehoshaphat wept with Him. "That is the wrong response. Even after all My warnings, he still blames Me rather than seeking My face. I will give him one more warning. Satan, come."

Satan came, eager to get permission to torture this king who seemed so loved by Logos. "Satan, you have occasion. You may touch his body if you wish, only you may not take his life. And remember, any pain you may cause will return upon yourself someday, so I urge you to be gentle."

"Of course, of course. I won't hurt him at all. I'm feeling very kind and loving today," Satan sneered. He quickly entered into Joash's rage. Within five seconds he had increased his already elevated blood pressure to the point where a blood vessel in the left side of his brain burst. It was a major stroke. Joash slumped to the floor, paralyzed on the right side of his body, and his speech incoherent.

Satan was correct; that type of disability left Joash in little pain. But how humiliating it is for a king to be half paralyzed, unable to talk clearly, with half of his face frozen! Finally Joash was at the bottom of the hole. He looked up to God in true repentance. He could no longer deny that his own waywardness and refusal to heed the repeated warnings of the prophets and priests had caused these calamities. The long process of restoration began.

Hazael went north, using the same tactics against Jehoahaz son of Jehu. Ben-Hadad III blockaded Samaria, allowing no messengers out to send for help. Then Hazael conquered city after city. He slew their leading men and took their spoils for himself. He had planned this for a long time, and he was doing a thorough job of it.

King Jehoahaz had little gold or silver left; his father Jehu had given it all to Shalmaneser. He sent message after message to Hazael, promising, begging, blustering, and threatening, but all to no avail. Hazael conquered nearly every city in Israel over the next year. There was not one blessed thing Jehoahaz could do about it.

Finally, even Samaria was forced to open its gates to the Syrians. King Hazael sent his son Ben-Hadad in to claim the city. He was utterly ruthless, as conquering tyrants are apt to be. He threw King Jehoahaz into his own prison, after slaying all his officers before his eyes. He took all the valuables, the pretty women, and the handsome children. He set up Syrian governors over the conquered cities. Thus Ben-Hadad III established a reign of terror beyond your imagining. It was worse than awful. It was the greatest tragedy ever to befall the land. His soldiers were given free reign to plunder, rape, and murder as they pleased, and none could restrain them. How truly came to pass the word of YHWH through the prophet Elisha after he had anointed Hazael king of Syria, when he had wept and said, "I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel. You will burn their homes, slay their young men, rip up their pregnant women, and dash their babies against the rock." Now Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad III fulfilled it all.

Not a spot of land remained untouched by the heavy hand of Syria – *except for the city of Shunem*. Though it was at a crossroads in northern Israel, and though the Syrians often passed through, yet peace covered the city and its surrounding farms like a blanket. Elisha blessed Syrians just as he did Israelites. Sammy the mayor was kind to all, opening his large home to whomever needed shelter. His kindness gained the admiration and respect of the Syrian commander assigned to rule the city, who realized that Sammy could rule it better than he. They restrained the Syrian soldiers from harming the Israelites there. Satan never realized that there was no looting, raping, or killing there, as Elisha prayed a blindness over the adversary's eyes so he could not see the little slice of heaven in the midst of that hell-on-earth called Israel.

Alone, forsaken, not knowing if his wife or children remained alive, Jehoahaz fell on his face in the filth of his dungeon. He, too, was at the bottom of the hole, and there was no place to look but up. As the days stretched into weeks and the weeks into months, Jehoahaz began to see things more clearly. There were no priests of Baal with him – only the still small voice of the Spirit of YHWH. Jehoahaz remembered how YHWH had blessed his father Jehu, as long as he had zealously opposed the idolatry. But for the first time, he began to see how the golden calf of Bethel had blocked the blessings. In the dungeon he had no golden calf to focus on. So he finally lifted his focus higher, higher, even up to the realms of Spirit. He cried out to YHWH in true repentance. YHWH met him, and comforted his soul. As with Joash in Judah, the long process of healing began.

That dark, dirty dungeon floor became flooded with light and purity. As Jehoahaz turned his face to YHWH, the desperate cries of the people of Israel were also released, to rise to the throne of heaven. Logos heard. He looked upon the horrible oppression and suffering of Israel. He felt compassion for His people, wept with them, and chose to forgive their idolatry and send a deliverer.

CHAPTER 32 – PHARAOH SHOSHENK I

802 BC, the 20th regnal year of Pharaoh Shoshenk I (founder of the 22nd 'Libyan' dynasty) was a good year for Egypt. Now in control of the Egyptian Pharaohs Pinudjem (high priest of Amun) at Thebes, Psusennes I at Tanis, and Rameses XI at Pi-Ramesse, Shoshenk felt like Egypt had recovered from the Third Intermediate Period (TIP) and its chaos. He was confident that he could reclaim Egypt's vital trade routes through the Levant. He left his co-regent son Osorkon I at Bubastis, and began a major campaign against Syrian and Assyrian aggressors to the north. His first stop was Philistia. It was easy to kick the Syrians out of Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, and Gezer, as Hazael made no effort to hold them. He had only used them as the staging ground for his sneak assaults on Israel and Judah. Then Shoshenk moved his modest but effective army up to Jerusalem.

Joash was a sorry sight, but was glad to see him. With a crooked smile, he told him the whole story – tolerating idolatry, not heeding the prophets, his explosive temper, the stroke, and his resulting paralysis. Shoshenk was very sympathetic. He encouraged him by providing funds for restoration of the temple and palace. He left Joash a skilled therapist, who helped him improve his slurred speech and recover some of the movement on his right side.

Shoshenk then led his army up to Samaria. Knowing he was badly outnumbered, Ben-Hadad III and his cohorts fled, sending messengers to Hazael for reinforcements. Shoshenk entered the city as a triumphant liberator, to joyous and grateful cheers. He found the repentant King Jehoahaz in the dungeon and brought him, washed and dressed in his royal robes once again, out on the balcony before the people. His first wife Jehoaddan was still alive; they brought her to the balcony as well. The city was pure joyous bedlam at the reunion and their king's restoration. Jehoahaz made a big speech, in which he swore, "All that our ancestor Joseph did for Egypt during the great famine, you have repaid twofold! May YHWH bless you and all Egypt, for you are the great deliverer He sent to us in our time of terrible need, as in the ancient prophecy!"

Shoshenk responded humbly, "Not yet, I'm not. There are still many cities to deliver. By your leave I will see what we can do for the remainder of your land." True to his word, Shoshenk moved throughout Israel, city by city, just as Hazael had done the year before. Except Shoshenk drove out or slew the Syrians and restored Israeli leaders in each city, even providing food and funding to get their ravaged economies started again.

Hazael rushed reinforcements down from Damascus. They massed the Syrian warriors at Jezreel, Megiddo, and Taanach, to fill the Jezreel Valley with armies. By the time the Egyptians had freed all the cities south of there, the Syrians were dug in and ready for the attack. They had been preparing for this all year, and had fielded a huge force. They had even hired Moab and Ammon to help.

Shoshenk probably should have been frightened. The Syrians were well-prepared and well-trained. But Joash had blessed him, Jehoahaz had blessed him, and all the people had blessed him. He just felt, well, blessed!

He began the battle at Jezreel with prayer, "YHWH, God of Israel, this is Your land. These are Your people. I only fight to restore it to You and them. Assist me I pray."

History records a great, even remarkable battle, with an amazing victory for Egypt. Historians have no clue how he pulled it off. But now, dear Reader, you and I now how. For it was a miracle battle, with Logos and His heavenly host fighting for them. The Syrians were soundly defeated and driven back to Damascus. Israel's cities and lands were freed, including Bashan and Gilead. Shoshenk recovered all the treasures of Solomon's temple and the palace at Jerusalem, and restored them to their rightful owners (who returned all the sacred vessels to the temple).

The men of Megiddo helped Shoshenk build a nice monument celebrating his incredible victory. (A piece of it has been found by archaeologists.) You may have thought a grateful Israel should have sent soldiers to fight with Shoshenk against the Syrians. If so, you have no idea of the devastation during their occupation. The Sacred Writ tells us that in all Israel there were not more than 50 horsemen, ten chariots, and 10,000 footsoldiers left alive after the Syrian scourge. And they were all needed just to restore law and order in the freed cities. The starving Israelis had been reduced to near cannibalism, and once set free, it was touch 'n go for a bit. If Shoshenk had waited even one year, Israel could not have survived as a nation.

[Note: If you are confused by this story, having been taught that Shoshenk I was the Shishak of Rehoboam's time, who plundered Solomon's temple, I am sorry. Not all that we have been taught is based on sound chronology. If Shoshenk I were the Shishak of Rehoboam's time, then the Bible has lied to us, for there is no Exodus from Egypt, no plagues or devastation of the land or slaying of the firstborn, no crossing the Red Sea or drowning of Egypt's army, no fall of Jericho or conquering of Canaan by Israel. For those all came at a time when Egypt was powerful and wealthy during the long rule of Rameses the Great, and when the Levant was at peace. But when the chronology is corrected, the Holy Scriptures are proven true, in every detail. Then we discover that rather than plundering Israel, Shoshenk I was the great deliverer spoken of in 2 Kings 13:5, as I have told in my story above. To give credit where credit is due, Egyptologist David Rohl is the one responsible for correcting the Egyptian chronology.]

Shoshenk I had made his son Osorkon I co-regent with himself when he first became Egypt's Pharaoh at Bubastis. Osorkon had become an excellent ruler – firm, and yet kind. So Shoshenk just sent him the army and stayed at Jerusalem. Solomon's temple had intrigued him. Joash gladly made a place for him at the palace. He lived in peace there among YHWH's people the rest of his days.

Hazeal did not do so well. With his army decimated, he came back to Damascus in disgrace, walking ahead of the Egyptians with his arms bound behind him like a common criminal. There he was forced to give up all the treasures he had stolen from Israel and Judah. There his own son assassinated him the next year. Ben-Hadad III was even more evil and cruel than his father or grandfather, but his military power had been broken by Shoshenk. Never again was he able to so greatly devastate Israel, though in his hatred he still looked for opportunities to harass them.

Of historical note, it was about this time that the blind bard Homer wrote his famous *Iliad*, which immortalized the heroes of the Trojan Wars. In time, Homer's writing had a huge impact on Greece, as they could identify with the Greek gods and heroes. Homer's works became like a Bible to the Greeks. Also by about this time – 800 BC – the once mighty Hittite/Mitanni Empire was virtually gone, and its scattered remnants had mostly been absorbed into whatever cultures would accept the fleeing refugees.

Sadly, after he was freed from the dungeon and restored to his throne, Jehoahaz forgot his repentance and his vows to YHWH. The golden calves remained in Bethel and Dan. The lewd Asherah poles still stood tall in Samaria. Israel returned to business-as-usual, and idolatry filled the land. How could anyone be so stupid, you ask? Stupid happens, especially in leaders who become proud and self-sufficient and forsake God's ways. (Just look at what is happening now in America.) So Logos allowed Ben-Hadad III to again raid Israel's northern border, taking two or three cities a year. Jehoahaz, rather than again repenting, was angry at God for not protecting him. He got sick in 799 BC and died two years later. His son **Jehoash** began to rule in his place.

Jehoash was a compliant child. As first-born, his father had groomed him from birth to be king. When he was 20, his father had arranged his marriage to Jenny, daughter of the high priest of Baal at Bethel. Jehoahaz had then given Jehoash authority as viceroy over the religious aspects of the kingdom, including the worship at Bethel and Dan. King Jehoahaz had then smugly dropped all pretense of religion; that was his son's job. Thus the rest of his reign idolatry had flourished in Israel, which is why God had allowed the Syrians to devastate the land.

Jehoash had fulfilled his duties according to his father's wishes, becoming zealous to support the idolatrous priests at Bethel and Dan. In fact, he and Jenny had supported them so strongly they'd even named their son **Jeroboam II**, after the one who had initially cast the golden calves!

So when his father King Jehoahaz died, Jehoash (at 34) was accomplished at managing the affairs of the idolatrous priests of Baal, but was not very skilled at managing the kingdom. Jehoash was glad the Syrian invaders were gone, but he had never observed any direct connection between them and his idolatry. His father's repentance had never touched him. His focus was still on the pagan worship.

However, King Joash in Judah remained true to his vows of repentance. The stroke had reached his soul, and he never forgot the lesson. He reigned the rest of his life in humility and faithfulness. The shame of his paralysis and slurred speech became like a badge of honor to him; he reckoned it as the touch of God upon his life. He had a couch set up next to the throne. He would lie there and talk to Amaziah on the throne, who would translate the slurred speech into words everyone could understand.

Everyone loved the new King Joash. Gone now was the jellyfish who flowed with the currents of wicked men. Though his body remained weak, his heart grew strong. At first Amaziah (at 20) was a bit ashamed to have an invalid father by his side. But he'd grown proud of his father by the time he turned 25 and was crowned co-regent (in 798 BC). Joash's character had been refined in the fire and had come out as pure gold. From all over Judah people came to see this man who was so broken in body, yet so powerful in spirit. It was almost like the glory days of King Solomon, when true wisdom from above flowed from the mouth of a wise king to a grateful people. Logos was pleased.

So in 796 BC everyone was shocked when two of Joash's servants, Jozacar and Jehozabad, conspired against him and assassinated him upon his bed one night. They were caught and cast into the dungeon. The nation went into mourning. They prepared to bury good King Joash in the place of highest honor among the kings of Judah in Jerusalem. When Amaziah read his will before the people, he found an unusual request. Joash had written, "Bury me not among the kings of Israel, for I am not worthy. I failed to keep my vows before God, allowed idolatry to flourish, and slew the ones God sent to warn me. It was only when I was laid low that I was able to look up and repent of my sin. Therefore, bury me among the peasant, the commoner, for I am no better than the least of God's people."

Amaziah didn't want to do it, but the people urged him. This was a big thing, to have a king who so loved them as to want to be buried among them. They made a place in the center of their own cemetery, where they laid his body to rest like their fathers. Instead of a costly monument, the people carved a simple headstone for his grave. It read, "Good King Joash. He loved us all." Again, Amaziah objected, offering to build something a bit nicer, to make his headstone stand out above the others. But the people said, "Please, O King. Wait a year or two; You shall see." Sure enough, all their lives his headstone was conspicuous with profusions of fresh flowers. Such was their love.

After King **Amaziah** (age 27) had laid his father to rest, and after he had established his kingdom, he brought Joash's killers to trial. In his mind, this was going to be a pretty short trial! "Why did you kill my father the king? How could you harm such a kind, just, and good man as he lay defenseless in his bed? That is inexcusable!"

They feigned righteous indignation. “We are both related to Jehoiada the high priest, who raised King Joash and supported him all his life. After Jehoiada died, Joash forgot the goodness he had shown him, and slew his son Zechariah for no cause. His bloodguiltiness remained on him. We waited for YHWH to take his life, but He never did. He commissioned us to do it instead. We have only obeyed YHWH according to the law of vengeance.”

That pulled Amaziah up short. He had no clue how to handle it. *What if they were right? Let's see. What would his father do?* Amaziah remembered a prophet who had often come to his father's bedside to cheer him up. His name was **Zechariah** son of Mahli (not to be confused with the one that Joash had killed, Zechariah son of Jehoiada). Amaziah sent for him, and related their story.

Zechariah commended Amaziah. “O King, you were wise to call me – YHWH reward you for your wisdom and carefulness. These men have told you a half-truth. YHWH said to me, ‘Though repentance and the blood of the lamb has cleansed the bloodguiltiness of Joash in My sight, yet these relatives of Jehoiada did have occasion though My law to exact vengeance. Yet they are still guilty, for they did not execute him in the daylight, after a proper trial, at the testimony of witnesses, but rather stealthily in the dead of night when he was powerless to defend himself. Also, the motivation of their hearts was wrong. They didn't care one whit about their great uncle's death. They were only afraid that their own sins would be uncovered. For the foreign wives of their fathers had brought idolatry into their homes, even while King Joash was working to cleanse the idolatry from Judah.’”

Amaziah was shocked. The fathers of these two were high officials in his government – and they had foreign wives involved in idolatry? He ordered them and their families to come before him, demanding that they tell him the whole story. He discovered that Jozacar's mother was Shimeath the Ammonitess, and Jehozabad's mother was Shomer the Moabitess. In both homes, the mothers had brought their idols with them. Rather than convert their wives to YHWH, their fathers had tolerated the idolatry. Their sons then grew up to defend it. So when Joash in his repentance had sent out orders for the idols to be gathered and burned, the two sons had conspired against him in order to protect their family idols!

In righteous wrath, King Amaziah ordered that both families be executed on the spot. But as his guards began to carry out his orders (amid cries of anguish), Zechariah son of Mahli again spoke up. “My lord the king! May I remind you of the Law of Moses, wherein YHWH commanded, ‘Fathers shall not be put to death for the sins of their sons, nor sons for the sins of their fathers. Each shall be executed for his own sin.’”

Amaziah held up one hand, and the whole court froze. For the longest moment, not a sound was heard.

Finally, he dropped his hand. “I agree. Belay that last order!” he told his guards. A sigh of relief went through the two families. Amaziah ordered them back and grilled each one. Now he learned that only the two sons were in on the conspiracy. Their parents, brothers, sisters, wives, and even their own children had known nothing.

While he was questioning the children, he sent their parents back to their homes, with orders to bring all their family idols to the court to be burned. They returned, and made a big show of burning them in the royal fireplace. But an hour later, some guards came in with more idols from their two houses, even bigger and nicer than the ones they had burned.

“I had my guards follow you, to see if you would obey me. What are these, found in your houses?”

Caught red-handed, they had no defense. Clearly they loved idolatry more than their king. So Amaziah ordered both sets of parents executed along with the two sons. But he had compassion on the rest. He arranged for them to be returned to their homes, and made sure the children would be cared for and their family heritage kept for them. Logos was pleased that his reign began in righteousness. The prophet Zechariah commended King Amaziah again. He encouraged him to continue what his father had begun. “You have a good start, O King! Now restore the purity of the Levitical priesthood as YHWH commanded in the Law of Moses. Serve YHWH all the days of your life, and He will bless you, and all of Judah, forever.”

Amaziah's lovely wife Jecoliah was also very pleased. She had been hurt, much more than her husband knew, by his treachery in seducing her at the pagan temple on the Mount of Olives, and then by her shame in bearing their illegitimate child. Everyone else had forgotten, and young Uzziah (now 10 years old), was loved by all. But Queen Jecoliah had not forgotten. She was determined to raise her children free from immorality and idolatry. So when she saw King Amaziah take firm action against the idolaters and yet show mercy on their families, she loved him for it. Their marriage had been struggling with issues of trust and communication. Now Jecoliah began learning to respect her husband in her heart.

Up in Israel, old Elisha was not pleased at King Jehoash. He was still supporting the golden calves, the Baals, and the Asherim throughout Israel. He would rant and rave whenever Ben-Hadad III took another city, but he couldn't do a thing about it, and he knew it. The father had praised YHWH when Shoshenk had delivered them from Syria, but now the son was cursing YHWH as Syria began to return. It was time for another visit. Elisha, at the age of 99, painfully made his way back to the palace in Samaria. *This has got to be my last visit!* he thought. Again, he was not honored by inviting him to the head of the line, but at least he was not ignored. He finally reached the bored king. Jehoash called, “Next! And what do you want, old man?”

“I need justice, O merciful king,” Elisha began. “My ranch was wiped out by my neighbor’s cows. They broke in through my old, rotted fences and ruined my harvest. Then a wealthy friend from afar heard of my plight and paid for my lost harvest. But I never repaired my old fences so last year my neighbor’s cows destroyed my gardens again. I told my wealthy friend, but this time he refused to help. I’m furious with him. Grant me justice! Send your army to destroy him and all he has.”

“You lazy old fool! Repair your fences! How can you be angry at your friend for not helping you the second time? If I give you justice, it’ll be forty lashes on your back.”

Elisha bowed his head sadly. “You, O King, are the man.” He said it softly, entreatingly.

“What?” King Jehoash was completely mystified. “I am what man? What are you talking about?”

Elisha looked into his eyes. *Was he ready to hear?* “YHWH saved you from the Syrians. But did you repair your fences? Do you know why Hazael subdued Israel in the first place? Did you hear my warnings? And now you’re furious with YHWH for not helping you the second time?” Now Jehoash recognized the wizened old face before him. He had indeed been warned, repeatedly, not just by Elisha but by other prophets as well.

Suddenly he made the connection. “Oh. Do you mean, getting rid of the idols is like repairing my fences?”

Elisha beamed. “Yes! Now you’ve got it! YHWH is your protection, your fortress. When your land is righteous, no enemy can break through. But when your land is full of idolatry, it’s the same as telling YHWH, ‘Go away. We’ve got all these other gods and we don’t need You.’ So YHWH leaves, even though He loves you (for He will not force His love upon you). Then you have no more protection, for your pagan gods are not gods at all.”

This momentous year was 795 BC, fifth regnal year of King Jehoash in Israel. He fell to his knees at Elisha’s feet. “O my father! Forgive me! You are correct. I have been the fool. Pray to your God to forgive my foolishness.”

“My God? YHWH is God of Israel. You had better start repenting and praying to Him, and obeying Him. If you do not, it will cost you the kingdom!”

Well, it turned out that King Jehoash didn’t even know YHWH. Worship and prayer were just outward rituals to impress the people. YHWH’s Law was just an old scroll for the priests. Jehoash didn’t know how to begin. So Elisha stayed there for a month, teaching him and encouraging him as he sent out orders to begin cleansing the land of its idolatry. They became very close. Jehoash learned to love YHWH, and his prophet. But Elisha was feeling his age. It was time to go home. King Jehoash sent him home in honor, with rich gifts, in his own cart drawn by his own fine white steeds.

As Elisha had promised, the raids from Syria stopped. Adad-nirari III brought the Assyrian army and besieged Damascus. He subdued Ben-Hadad III even before that year was out. Elisha had been right. YHWH’s protection was worth more than all Israel’s chariots and horsemen. Awed, King Jehoash praised God!

So now it was time for Jehoash to put to practice all he had been taught. I’m happy to report that he did a tolerably good job. He first brought his army to the worship centers at Bethel and Dan, *deposing the pagan priests and removing the golden calves in early 794 BC*. Over the next three years he cleansed the entire land of idolatry. How ironic it is that King Jehoash, who had so strongly supported the pagan worship and so loved the golden calves that he had even named his firstborn son after their founder (Jeroboam), should be the first king of Israel to actually remove them!

When he brought the golden idols back to the palace he gave them to his son, with instructions to melt them down to recover the gold for the treasury. That turned out to be a mistake. For Jeroboam II (at the age of 16) was too young to handle the temptation of all that gold. Instead of melting it down, he hid it in his mattress.

Now that the raids had stopped, Israel’s economy began to recover. Prosperity returned to the land. Israel regained its strength. Jehoash began to rebuild his army which had been so badly devastated during the Syrian invasion in 803 BC. Israel began to flourish again.

Then they heard the tragic news that Elisha was dying. Ordering his physicians to follow, Jehoash raced in his fastest chariot to Elisha’s side. “My father! O my father! The chariots of Israel and her horsemen!”

“No, no, my king!” Elisha laughed. “Do not ascribe unto me what YHWH has done – and will continue to do if you continue to serve Him with your whole heart. YHWH is very pleased, O King! He has a gift for you! Open that window facing Syria. Now help me shoot this arrow. Put your hands on my hands as I draw back the bow.”

The arrow flew out the window toward Syria. “That is YHWH’s arrow of victory for you. He shall draw the Syrian armies down to Aphek and give them into your hands. You shall totally defeat them, wipe them out, to show YHWH’s approval for what you have done in cleansing the land of its idolatry.” King Jehoash bowed his head in thanks and acceptance of YHWH’s gift.

Elisha put down the bow, and told Jehoash to pick up the remaining arrows. “Now for the cities that Ben-Hadad took from Israel, strike the ground with those arrows.” Jehoash tapped the ground, not once but three times, being careful not to damage the arrows. His attention was distracted by Elisha’s seeming robust health and alert mind. Whoever had said he was dying? He could yet live for years! The king’s physicians were waiting outside, but Jehoash saw no sense calling them in.

Elisha waited. Jehoash smiled and handed back the undamaged arrows. Elisha took them, and in a fit of pique, broke them across his knee. "I am disappointed in you, O King. Put more passion, more zeal into your obedience! You should have beat these arrows into the ground, until their feathers flew off and their tips were broken, until there was not enough left of the shafts to kindle a fire. Then you would have struck Syria until you had forever destroyed its power over Israel. But as it is, YHWH will give you only three additional victories over Syria. Choose them wisely, O King! YHWH wants to restore Israel."

Then, as if his outburst had sapped his remaining strength, Elisha collapsed into his bed. "My life is over, O King. YHWH awaits me with His hand outstretched. A smile is on His face and my reward is in His hand. Truly He has granted the double portion according to my faith. But there'll be no flaming chariot or red horses for me. Just bury my body where you find that arrow we shot. Let none mourn my passing, for I go to a better land than this." His head dropped onto the pillow. He was gone. It happened so quickly that Jehoash didn't have time to call for his physicians. He knelt and prayed by the body for a bit. The peaceful smile on the white old face told the story. Elisha had reached that 'better land'.

They found the arrow on his northern border, directly between his house and Syria. It was indeed a fitting place for a burial, for the man who all his life had stood between the house of Israel and her enemies. They buried him there, sad, but rejoicing as Elisha had commanded.

Ben-Hadad III had been rebuilding his army ever since Syria's defeat by Shoshenk I in 802 BC. In 800 BC he had recovered enough to begin raids on northern Israel each year, though he was planning something much worse. But his defeat by Adad-nirari III of Assyria had put a stop to those raids in 795 BC. So those three years that Jehoash was cleansing Israel of idolatry, Ben-Hadad was rebuilding his army again, bigger and stronger than ever. He nursed an overwhelming anger and bitterness against Israel.

In October of 792 BC, near that time when Mars comes close to strike fear into their enemies, the time when kings go to battle, Ben-Hadad rushed his restored army west to the Great Sea. Phoenicia was already their vassal state; they marched past Tyre and camped in the plain beside Aphek. (A town just north of Mount Carmel and just down river from the bountiful Valley of Jezreel; not Aphek LaSharon.)

King Ben-Hadad III awoke his army before dawn the next morning, determined to get up through the Kishon River Canyon and capture the five cities of the Jezreel Valley, Helkath, Jokneam, Megiddo, Taanach, and Jezreel, before King Jehoash could even assemble his army. Once he had the valley, it would be nearly impossible for the Israelites to dislodge him. *He would simply camp there while his army ravaged and plundered the entire land! This time even Egypt wouldn't be able to stop him!*

Imagine his surprise when he saw King Jehoash and his army waiting for them at the head of the canyon. *There must be a spy among them!* He was angry, but what could he do? The cat was out of the bag. Well, it wouldn't help them. Ben-Hadad knew from his spies that Israel's army was only a tenth the size of his, and all fresh recruits. There was hardly a seasoned warrior among them. *Besides, Mars was bearing down and would surely fight for them, now that the Israelites no longer prayed to his god. They'd run like frightened rabbits when his superbly trained forces attacked.* He ordered a direct assault.

Huh. That turned out to be a mistake. They weren't running like rabbits; they were holding the line, and his own men were falling before them like flies. *Where did they get their courage? Surely the sight of such a vast army had put the fear of his god in their hearts?* Well, maybe the canyon was a bad idea. He could only engage a small part of his forces at once. Ben-Hadad ordered a gradual fall-back to draw them down onto the Plain of Aphek. Surely there his immense army would overwhelm them.

They didn't take the bait. They waited shoulder to shoulder across the canyon, their line unbroken. Well, there are other ways into the Valley of Jezreel. He ordered his men around and up into the broad Mishal Valley. There is no way the Israelites could block that approach to the highlands! From there they would hike across the plateau and over one ridge into the Jezreel Valley.

Well, they made it into the highlands, all right, but the Israelites were waiting for them at the top of the ridge, and again their line held firm when Ben-Hadad ordered the attack. His men were getting spooked; too many had been lost. Time for another change in plans. Again, a gradual fall-back failed to draw the Israelites out onto the plateau where he could overwhelm them. So, back down the Mishal Valley to the Plain of Aphek.

There is one more way into the Jezreel Valley: over Hali Pass. No time to rest. This route is quite narrow toward the top, so he had to get his lead platoon over the pass before the Israelites got there. Ben-Hadad drove his men on with all the fury of his wicked nature. They had just made it to the top when the heads of Israelite soldiers began popping up on the other side like ghosts materializing before them. His men wavered. Some even turned to run. Ben-Hadad screamed out his orders to take Hali Pass at all costs. He had borne enough of this nonsense! Surely the Israelites were exhausted from all the running. They could never hold it! His superbly disciplined warriors regrouped and assaulted the pass.

But alas, it was his own soldiers who seemed exhausted. The Israelites fought like they had at dawn. Now his men were getting frantic. Too many of their comrades had died. It was time for an orderly retreat. They would draw slowly back down to the Plain of Aphek and rest for a day or two, while he thought of a new approach. It had been a bad day.

But when he sounded the retreat, his so-called ‘well-trained warriors’ turned tail and fled. Ben-Hadad started to laugh. Now his own men looked like scared rabbits! But then his laugh froze on his face. He had made a mistake. The valley was too narrow, and his retreating forces had run into those still coming up the valley. Right then the earthquakes from his god began. It was mass confusion. Before he got everyone turned around, the Israelites had swarmed over the pass to pick off his fleeing men.

They were headed for him! Their arrows were nearly reaching him! Ben-Hadad fought his rising panic and wheeled his chariot around. But now he too was blocked by the confusion in the valley. He screamed for his men to get out of his way, but there were too many; the valley was too narrow. He lashed his horses, urging them on even if it meant trampling over his own men. His fear was catching. The ‘orderly retreat’ turned into a royal rout. By the time he reached the Plain of Aphek, half his men had fled toward Damascus. He and the stragglers followed in shame. *Their god Mars had failed them, and had aided their enemy.*

King Jehoash addressed his men. “We have had a very good day. As YHWH told me through Elisha His prophet, we have won a major victory over Syria this day! Though they were much stronger than us, they fled before us, for YHWH was with us. Every one of you is to be commended, for you stood firm in faith in YHWH’s promise, fighting valiantly in the strength of His might. The Syrians lost at least a tenth of their army, while we’ve hardly lost a man. Truly, YHWH is to be praised!”

Thus he gave glory to God. The people shouted their amens. But Jehoash wasn’t finished. “Elisha the prophet promised me three additional victories over the Syrians, and told me to choose them wisely, for YHWH wants the Syrians utterly destroyed out of Israel. They now hold twelve cities in Galilee plus eight in Bashan and Gilead. So go home. Refresh yourselves with your wives and families. Rest on the Sabbath. On the day after the Sabbath, meet me at the foot of Mount Moreh beside Endor. Get there by bed-time and go right to sleep, so you’ll be well rested. Be ready to march at dawn the next morning. We must make the most of the three victories YHWH promised.”

The grateful soldiers all gave a mighty cheer. It wasn’t so common for kings to treat their subjects with such kind consideration in those days. They returned home to rest and celebrate the Sabbath and their wondrous victory.

Jehoash also went home to celebrate. His wife, Jenny, was very impressed at his victory at Aphek. She had seen all the changes in her husband ever since that prophet Elisha had come visiting. Jehoash had told Jenny about Elisha’s prophecies of the victory at Aphek, followed by three more victories to take back the cities the Syrians had stolen. Jenny hadn’t believed a word of it. But now the first prophecy had come true! It was a miracle she couldn’t deny! Their small army should never have beaten Syria!

Remember that Jenny was a daughter of the high priest at Bethel. She and Jehoash had married shortly after his father King Jehoahaz had taken over from Jehu. For years they had been passionate about her father’s golden calf at Bethel. Their son Jeroboam was named after the founder of the worship at Bethel. For a long time, everything in their lives had revolved around that worship center.

But the changes she had seen in her husband since the last visit from Elisha had duly impressed her. Jenny had listened intently when Elisha had taught her husband, insisting that her precious golden calf was not really YHWH. And now she was in awe. That night, as they lay together in bed, Jenny complimented her husband. “I’m amazed at you, Jehoash! It is hard to give up all we’ve worked for all our lives. I was upset with you when you shut down my dad’s worship center. But now I think you’ve found something better! I think you made the right decision to listen to Elisha. Your victory was just... just incredible, you mighty man of valor! I’m so proud of you!” Thus she encouraged him. She swore that if he really did gain those three more victories over Syria, she’d abandon her father’s idols and worship only YHWH with him.

King Jehoash brought his son Jeroboam II (now 18) with him to Mount Moreh. They decided on a battle plan. It was a big stretch, but after praying about it together, they were confident that YHWH would honor it. Jehoash was pleased to see a lot more men gathered here than he had seen before; evidently their last victory had encouraged more recruits. He ordered them to get a good night’s sleep. They would need it.

By dawn the next morning, he had them up and ready to march. “Since I only get three victories over Syria, I’m going to make the most of them,” he told his men. “Our first victory, today, will be over all twelve cities of Galilee. We’ll start with Yanom, Hamath, and Madon by the lake. We’ll take one right after the other – no stopping to loot or re-establish Israeli control. (We’ll do that later.) Just kill the Syrians and wipe out their garrisons. We’ll continue fighting until we finish with all twelve, even if we have to fight through the night. I’m glad you’re well rested. Let’s go, and remember, YHWH has promised us the victory!”

He had the order mapped for the most direct routes. He had supplies delivered at strategic points. He had the army organized into relay teams, so the tired men were always being replaced by fresh ones. Never was a battle better organized. They charged through the Syrian garrisons and their defenders like they weren’t even there.

Jehoash didn’t try to stop the frantic messengers that the Syrians sent up to Damascus. It was part of his plan. He knew it would take three days for reinforcements to arrive, and by then he would be done. They finished up on the second day, exhausted but utterly victorious. After a good night’s sleep, they split up and spent the third day bringing order to each of the twelve freed cities.

Sure enough, on the fourth day, a furious Ben-Hadad and his army began to assemble on the Syrian border. Jehoash noted with satisfaction that his army wasn't as large or as well-disciplined and confident as it had appeared before. Fine. He would let them stew for a bit. They were already defeated, in his mind. But he would pick the time. His soldiers were spread out among the twelve cities. They had finished clearing out the Syrians; now they were meting out justice, restoring the lands to their rightful owners, and appointing governors. They relaxed, enjoyed their work, and ignored the Syrians.

King Ben-Hadad III was mystified. This wasn't the way battles were fought. His army was assembled, and no army came out against him. *That was so foolish. Any general knows that you must mass your forces together to meet the enemy! Israel's army was split up between twelve cities. How stupid! The Syrians could attack one at a time and wipe them out with ease. What were they thinking? They must have planned some kind of a trap. No king could be that dense.* Ben-Hadad chafed at the delay. He sent spies to each city to see if he could learn what was up. The spies returned humiliated. "They saw us, sir, but didn't try to catch us. They just laughed at us and thumbed their noses, calling us 'fraidy-cats' and losers."

Ben-Hadad raged and swore. A thousand times he decided to attack one or another of the cities, but each time he pulled back, with a nagging fear that he was attacking the wrong one first, walking into their trap. They were entirely too confident. He began drinking heavily. He cursed a lot, and couldn't sleep at night. His advisors and astrologers couldn't reach any agreement. Two miserable weeks passed. Everyone was on edge and at each other's throat. To top it off, now they began running out of food and fighting over what was left.

Ben-Hadad was no dummy. He may have had a far superior army, but he knew he had lost the battle of the mind. His confidence was gone. His last three defeats tormented him unmercifully. After a particularly bad day, he determined to call the whole thing off and come back some other time. He ordered retreat at dawn.

So his men were packing their stuff for the long march home when King Jehoash attacked. The Israeli army had snuck up during the night and attacked full force at dawn. *Why hadn't his scouts seen them? Why hadn't he been alerted? Was everyone in his entire army an incompetent nincompoop? What had happened to all their training? Get the battle lines formed! Hook up my chariot!* Ben-Hadad was screaming orders for five minutes before he realized no one was listening. They were fleeing for Damascus, unarmed and only half-dressed. This has got to be the most humiliating defeat any king has ever experienced.

The Israelis spent the rest of the day gathering the spoils from the Syrian camp, praising YHWH. "That's two!" King Jehoash told his happy men.

Halfway to Damascus, King Ben-Hadad realized his cities in Bashan and Gilead were vulnerable. *Aha! This time he would not be caught napping! He would get there before the Israelis came. He still had more than three times their soldiers, plus more horses and chariots to boot. They would not take another city from him!* He turned what was left of his battered army toward Bashan.

Jehoash knew he had only one victory left. He aimed for the big one, *Damascus itself*. Even his own army couldn't believe his audacity. He was sure his young son Jeroboam II could do it, leading the main army. Jehoash led a tiny diversionary force to Bashan to keep Ben-Hadad occupied. His faith was vindicated. Jeroboam II captured Damascus in a brilliant and amazing battle. King Ben-Hadad and his beleaguered forces finally dragged themselves back home, to find the Israelites in control. Syria was brought to heel. Wicked Ben-Hadad III never recovered from his losses. He paid tribute to Jeroboam the rest of his life, and never again violated the borders of Israel. Jeroboam executed all their military officers and captured vast quantities of plunder and weapons, leaving Syria defenseless and dependent on Israel for protection. Of course on their way home, the victorious Israelites reclaimed Bashan and Gilead, too.

True to her word, Jenny became a believer. Those four miraculous victories against Syria's much larger force, according to Elisha's prophecy, was proof to her of the power and love of YHWH. She bowed her heart to Him, and worshiped beside her husband the rest of her life.

But now they had a problem. Their son **Jeroboam II** had just won an incredible victory. Jehoash honored him by crowning him co-regent. Within the year he established himself as a strong and wise ruler. He was fair, tough, canny, and respected by all. He married a lovely daughter of Joash, Princess Buelah. Vivacious and outgoing, she had a smile or cheery laugh for everyone. Standing beside her handsome young husband, Buelah was the picture of a perfect queen. In 788 BC, they had a beautiful son, named Prince **Zachariah**, who was the delight of the kingdom.

So what was their problem? I'm sure you guessed it. *Jeroboam had never melted down those two golden calves like his father had asked.* Whenever Elisha had come to the palace to teach his father, Jeroboam had also heard. So he knew about the Syrian oppression when his father and grandfather had worshiped those golden calves, and about the miraculous victories over Syria when his father had chosen YHWH instead. But his understanding was just a mental assent. His heart was still captivated by the idols.

He knew he ought to melt them down, and even tried a few times – it's not that he was disobedient. But all his life he had worshiped them alongside his folks. And now his land was at peace, and he was the king. He was young, strong, and feeling invincible, as is so common to youth. It's called pride. With everything going so well, young Jeroboam II never really saw the need to seek after YHWH.

CHAPTER 34 – KINGS JEROBOAM II & UZZIAH

So far Amaziah had made a pretty good king. With the help of Queen Jecoliah and her father Bruce, he had stayed true to YHWH. He had restored the Levitical priesthood under **Pedaiah** (son of the Zechariah Joash had killed). He still struggled with lust; his two years in the house of Baal on the Mount of Olives and his seduction of Jecoliah had hurt him more than he knew. But righteous Bruce was firm, guarding him from his own impulses as well as from his enemies. Also, his wife understood him all too well, and helped keep him true to his vows to her.

Their oldest son Azariah, known universally as Uzziah, was growing up to be all that Bruce had hoped. King Amaziah had brought the wise old prophet Zechariah son of Mahli (who had comforted his father Joash after his stroke) into the palace to tutor Uzziah. Zechariah knew YHWH's voice and understood His ways. He saw visions of God. As long as Zechariah lived, Uzziah, his family, and the nation of Judah remained true to YHWH.

So, in 790 BC, the land rejoiced when King Amaziah crowned his popular young son **Uzziah** as co-regent at the age of 16. When will nations ever learn? *People always rejoice when righteousness prevails over wickedness.* The land of Judah enjoyed widespread peace and prosperity.

Osorkon I died in 788 BC after ruling at Bubastis for 15 years. His brother-in-law, Takelot I, took over. He was a Libyan warlord, son of General Nimlot at Herakleopolis.

At Thebes, Pinudjem I also died in 788 BC. His oldest son, Siamun, succeeded him as the 'Pharaoh' over upper Egypt. His other two sons, Masaharta and Menkheperre, fought for the honor of becoming the high priest of Amun in his place. Masaharta won, but Menkheperre killed him after nine years. Most of the Pharaohs and priests of Amun were related, so familial rivalry was common.

With young King Uzziah co-ruling at Jerusalem, his father felt more free to pursue his military obligations to Judah. The Edomites at Mount Seir had rebelled, building their armies and refusing to pay their promised tribute. Amaziah decided it was time to teach them their place.

King Amaziah took a census of the men in Judah and Benjamin, and found that together they had over 300,000 able to handle a sword. You'd think that would be plenty, but Amaziah was an over-cautious man. In 786 BC he sent \$200,000 to King Jeroboam II to hire 100,000 mercenaries from Israel. The contract was signed and the troops on their way when King Amaziah was accosted by Zechariah. "No, O King. Do not allow the mercenaries from Israel to come with you into battle, for YHWH is not with them. Jeroboam II is hiding idols in his heart. Go into battle, but if they come with you, though you are very strong, yet God will defeat you before your enemy, for He has the power to give you the victory – which He will do when your ways please Him – and the power to bring you down in defeat."

King Amaziah was duly repentant before Zechariah, whom he had learned to love greatly. He merely asked, "But what shall I do about all the money I sent them?"

"Give it up, O King. YHWH has more for you."

Without even giving him an argument, Amaziah went out to face the troops, even now arriving at the palace. He should have just thanked them, told them that he had changed his plans and they were no longer needed, told them to keep the money for their trouble, and sent them back home. But instead, he thoughtlessly blabbed all that Zechariah had told him about Jeroboam hiding idols in his heart, and YHWH not being with them. Even that would not have been so bad, but he sent them off with, "YHWH assures me that I will win the victory over Edom without you, but if I allow you to fight with me, I will lose. So you need to go back to Jeroboam and tell him to get rid of those idols." Now, you know he meant well. But it sure made the mercenaries angry. They saw his criticism as a reflection on their fighting abilities! They took offense, and went away grumbling and plotting how to take revenge.

Sure enough, as Zechariah had promised, Amaziah won an easy victory against the Edomites. He captured their stronghold, Sela ('the Rock', now known as Petra). To honor God for his victory, he renamed it Joktheel ('God has conquered'). The plunder he got covered their tribute plus all that he had lost for the hired mercenaries.

He was congratulating himself back at the palace in Jerusalem, when a cadre of his servants came to him. "Your Royal Highness. We found something among the spoils from Edom which you must see. Follow us."

They led him to the house of Baal on the Mount of Olives. Remember that his father King Joash had cleaned it out and ordered the pagan priests back to Bethel after Amaziah's affair with Jecoliah. The priests had secretly returned, but until now had kept their activities low-key. Now the place was buzzing with excitement. Amaziah was horrified and repelled, and at the same time intrigued and attracted. He smelled the sweet incense, saw the lewd Asherah poles, heard the mesmerizing chants, and a flood of bittersweet old memories swept through him.

His servants led him into the high holy place of Baal. His mind was screaming, *No! Get out! Flee for your life! Don't allow these idols to enslave you!* But his heart was drawing him in, as when he'd been swept away by it in his youth.

Amaziah was so sure he would not get trapped again. He had been obedient to YHWH and to Zechariah His prophet. He had righteous Bruce to help defend him, and his faithful wife Jecoliah who loved him dearly and would not let him get trapped into sin again. *Some of these priests he recognized. They had been old friends of his. They'd been sent to Bethel. How did they get back in here, anyway? He would just see what they seemed to be so excited about, and then he would order this entire enterprise destroyed.*

When he saw, Amaziah gasped in astonishment. They'd found the golden idols of Edom, and the priests had installed them above the altar of Baal. They had arranged mirrors around to reflect the light onto the idols, and their freshly polished gold glistened like the sun. The fragrance of the burning incense and the overall impact of the spectacular scene were overpowering. Without hardly even realizing what he was doing, King Amaziah fell to his knees in worship, just as he had done when he was young.

Logos cried out in agony. "Surely he had learned his lesson! He had everything going for him, every possible aid and example, My prophet Zechariah, a faithful wife, and wise counselors! What more could I have done?" Michael and Gavriel joined His sobs.

Satan came cackling over his victory. "Now you see that I am stronger than You! Everyone sins at least once. No matter how hard You try to cleanse them, I can just push their button and back they fall into the same old pattern. There really is nothing You can do about it."

"Why do you not grieve for the suffering Amaziah and all Judah must face as a result of his sin? Yes, Satan, you have indeed won a great victory, but it shall only be to increase your own agony at the judgment. Now go."

Their suffering began that very day, as the offended mercenaries from Israel attacked their brothers in Judah. If you will recall, Rehoboam had conquered all the cities of Benjamin and the lower quarter of Ephraim after the split between the two kingdoms. Jeroboam I had tried but failed to take them back. There had been other skirmishes, and the border had shifted back and forth a bit, but for the most part, Judah still held what Rehoboam had taken. Now the rejected mercenaries decided to take their vengeance out on those cities and take them back for Israel.

They started from the border of Samaria and swept through the cities of Ephraim clear down to the original border of Judah. They killed the 3000 soldiers who had been sent by the kings of Judah to guard those cities, and took a great deal of plunder. In all, they reclaimed for the kingdom of Israel half of Benjamin, including Mizpah and Jericho, and nearly all the captured cities of Ephraim down to Beth-horon.

King Amaziah didn't really care. Easy come, easy go. Those beautiful golden idols of Edom in the house of Baal had captured his heart. He kept telling himself he would destroy them, after slipping up there to 'admire' them one last time. But it never happened.

Uzziah was now 21, and doing well as co-regent. This left King Amaziah free to sneak out. Old Zechariah saw him one day and followed. He saw Amaziah head up the Mount of Olives. He asked YHWH to show him what the king was doing, so he was prepared when he returned. "Why, O King, have you bowed down to the gods of Edom, who could not even deliver Edom from your hand?"

"Oh, I would never bow to idols anymore, Zechariah! I just went to the Mount of Olives to see what was going on up there. I will destroy the idolatry I found there."

"Why do you think YHWH allowed Israel to capture the cities of Benjamin and Ephraim?"

"I don't know. Israel owned them before. I guess they wanted them back. That's okay with me."

"They killed 3000 of your soldiers, and displaced all the people of Judah who were living there, and stole from them a great amount of plunder, and..."

"And I am supposed to care?"

"You had better care! Those are your people, over whom God gave you charge to protect!"

"So what do you want me to do? Muster my army against Israel to take them back? I'll be glad to..."

"No. Repent of your idolatry! Cleanse your heart! YHWH our God is the Protector of Judah, your fortress, your strength, if only you will remain true to Him. Did you learn nothing at all from your battle with Edom?"

"Wait a minute. I have no idolatry. I worship..."

"Do you think that YHWH is a God who cannot see? You were on your knees bowed before the gods of Edom, burning incense to them in worship. I saw you."

Now Amaziah realized he'd been caught red-handed. "Hey! I hired you to tutor Uzziah. I never appointed you as my royal counselor. So get off my back! Why should I have you struck down like a common rebel?"

Zechariah shut up. For a time, he just stared sadly at Amaziah, who began to feel foolish for his angry outburst against his friend. Finally Zechariah sighed and softly said, "Now I know that YHWH has planned to destroy you, because you've done this terrible thing and have refused my counsel." He walked away without another word.

Now King Amaziah really felt bad. He asked YHWH for forgiveness. But whenever he started to order the idols destroyed, their seductive beauty would again sweep over him. He couldn't do it. He was trapped. It was like ordering a wife or a son to be slain! He gave up.

So instead, he determined to take back those cities of Ephraim and Benjamin. Zechariah had said he should care about them. Surely YHWH will approve. His 300,000 man army was certainly big enough. He had hardly lost a man to the Edomites. He wrote a letter to King Jehoash of Israel, saying, "I hired your mercenaries to defend me. Instead, they took my cities and abused my people. So meet me in battle on my northern border by Beth-shemesh. If you defeat me, you may keep the cities. If I defeat you, they will belong to Judah forever." Amaziah almost showed it to Zechariah before sending it, but he was afraid of what the old prophet might say.

King Jehoash wrote a long letter back, beginning with a parable. “The thistle said to the cedar tree, ‘Give your daughter to my son in marriage.’ But then a wild beast trampled the thistle, and that was the end of that. Thus will be the end of those who lift themselves up in pride. I know, you defeated Edom, but I also know it was not you, but YHWH who helped you. So do not boast of your strength. Though your armies are much greater than mine, yet I know that YHWH is on my side here. I have gotten rid of the idols in Israel, and YHWH has become my protector. So just remain at home. Why should you provoke trouble for yourself or for your nation?”

Amaziah assembled his army anyway, intending to take back the cities if Israel didn’t show up. So what could King Jehoash do? He left Jeroboam II in charge at Samaria, and brought his army down to face Amaziah. Along the way, he prayed. “YHWH, I don’t want to fight this battle. You are my defender. You fight for me.”

Logos answered him, in ways he never expected. The battle itself was very brief. Before they even engaged their weapons, the much larger army of Judah got spooked at something – nobody knows what. They turned and fled in fear, back to their own homes. But as King Jehoash stood open-mouthed in awe at the easy victory, Logos spoke to him, “Take Amaziah back to Jerusalem and humble him before his people. He has been wicked, and you are My tool of discipline. Break down the city walls, and take his silver and gold as your payment for teaching him My lesson.”

So Jehoash ordered his troops to rush in and take King Amaziah alive. He was still screaming at his fleeing troops, so it was easy. They brought him to Jerusalem. There they broke down about 200 yards of wall, from the gate facing Ephraim to the western corner. King Jehoash then drove his chariot in triumph through the breach in the wall. He forced the greatly humbled Amaziah and his commanders to walk through in front of him dragging their chains. In obedience to YHWH, King Jehoash took the silver and gold, and levied a small annual tribute for Judah to pay. Any who opposed him (including Obed-Edom, keeper of the temple treasures) were taken hostage. But Zechariah had warned Uzziah, so he submitted to Jehoash and his officers. Amaziah, thoroughly shamed, submitted too.

As he was leaving, King Jehoash spoke to Uzziah in the hearing of his entire court, “I’m sorry to be so blunt, but your father is a fool. Even knowing that YHWH had given him the victory over Edom, he still held idols in his heart. I understand, because I used to do that too. But Israel will never again bow to idols. We only serve YHWH now. Learn that lesson early, the easy way, rather than suffering defeat like your father Amaziah.”

Amoz, Amaziah’s half-brother by Joash’s second wife, stood and prophesied by the Spirit of YHWH, “O King, beware your own pride. Your son Jeroboam II also hides idols in his heart, *and in his mattress.*”

Of course when King Jehoash returned to Samaria and confronted his son with Amoz’ accusation, Jeroboam II just laughed it off. “Oh, Dad. You know how people lie about others to cover their own faults! I’d never keep idols in my bedroom! No way! Those golden calves were melted down and put in the treasury long ago.” Jehoash naïvely believed his son and said no more about it. Logos was grieved that he didn’t heed His warning through Amoz.

Shoshenk I, the great deliverer, was dead. Osorkon I had ruled well from Bubastis for 34 years, but after he died, the fragmentation of Egypt’s Third Intermediate Period returned as before. Libyan warlord Takelot I did not have any love for Egypt. In 783 BC his son Osorkon II married 21st Dynasty Psusennes I’s daughter to begin a co-regency with him at Tanis. Egypt needed another strong ruler.

Also that year, Israel’s King Jehoash fell ill. Jeroboam wanted to bring in the physicians, but he refused. “Not so, my son. I’ve placed my trust in YHWH, and have obeyed Him. He is my protector and healer. I will never need a doctor again. YHWH Himself will heal me.”

But as his strength was fading, his servant announced, “A young man at the gate wants to see you. He claims to be a prophet, with a message from YHWH for you.”

Jehoash said, “Yes. Let him in...” at the same time that Jeroboam said, “Have him wait until I’m done here.” But Jehoash’s voice was weak while Jeroboam’s was strong, so the servant went back to tell the prophet he’d have to wait.

“I must see Jehoash before he dies. Tell Jeroboam he need not fear. I won’t expose him in front of his father.”

When Jeroboam heard this, he blanched, gulped, and agreed to see him. So when the prophet entered he ignored Jeroboam and went straight to Jehoash’s bed. “Put your affairs in order, O King, for you are dying. YHWH is indeed your healer, but His healing is not always accomplished in this realm. There is no illness in the realm to which you go. You will like it there, I know. Be at peace. Do not fear.”

“But I have so many more things I need to do! How can YHWH allow me to die so soon? My son is yet young and inexperienced. He needs my counsel and my prayers.”

“Your son is responsible for his own decisions now, for better or for worse. You have told him what is right. He must choose to follow it or not.”

“If I had let Jeroboam get the doctors when I first fell ill, would I have recovered?”

The prophet paused, staring into Jehoash’s eyes. “Yes, O King. You would have lived another twenty years – twenty years filled with pain, sorrow, and anguish of soul. It is better to go to Sheol when YHWH calls for you.”

“The future! You can see the future! Tell me in truth – will my son do well? Will he prosper? Will he remain true to YHWH and be a blessing to Israel?”

Again the prophet paused. “O King, It is not for me to pre-judge your son. How well he does depends upon his own choices. But I can say this: your son Jeroboam is strong in Israel. He will protect her from her enemies. He will enlarge her borders, yes, even to the entrance of Hamath in the north and to the Red Sea south beyond the Arabah. So be at peace. Rejoice in all that YHWH has led you through, and prepare to greet Him face to face.”

“Who are you, that we may honor you when your words come to pass?”

“I am **Jonah**, son of Amittai. I come from the town of Gath-Hepher in Issachar. But I seek no honor, except that which comes from YHWH when I have done His will.”

Jonah bade King Jehoash God-speed and left the room, still without a word to Jeroboam. He hesitated, then ran after him. He caught up at the gate. “Wait, Jonah! Thank you for your encouragement to my dad. I knew he was dying, but he refused to admit it. You have helped me, and I am grateful. Tell me how I can reward you.”

“Destroy the golden calves you hide in your mattress.” Jonah was startlingly blunt.

Jeroboam gasped, bug-eyed. “I can’t! I’ve tried! Every time I determine to get rid of them, my heart races, my breathing constricts, my eyes water, and I begin to faint. I just can’t do it! But... but I don’t worship them.”

“You’re a fool. Satan is toying with you. You have given him occasion against you, and against Israel. Whenever he wants, he will yank your chain and you will fall. You’re the king. If you can’t get rid of them, tell your servants to do it.”

The reproof struck home. Jeroboam bowed his head. “Okay. I’ll do it,” he said softly. “Bless me before you go.”

“I blessed you already, O King. I prophesied your strength and your success. Now it’s up to you to obey YHWH and pursue it wholeheartedly. If you will get rid of the idols and remain faithful to YHWH, He will give you a lasting kingdom and good success in all you do.”

Jeroboam was humbled. He tried. He really did. But he still treasured those idols in his heart. It overwhelmed him to touch them or look at them. Finally he had his servants construct a locking strongbox under his bed. He put the golden calves in it and gave the key to Buelah, his wife. “The idols are in there. Hide the key. Don’t give it to me, no matter what, until I’ve broken free of their spell and am ready to melt them down. I will fight this besetting sin, and I will beat it, if it takes all my life. I want YHWH’s blessing.”

“That’s kind of silly. I’ll just wait until you’re gone, then take ’em out and melt ’em down myself.”

“No, no! Don’t touch them. I don’t want you trapped by this awful spell. You’ve no idea how powerful it is. I’ve been trying to destroy those idols for years. If I’m really to be free, I must be the one to melt them down.”

As Jonah had foretold, King Jehoash of Israel died in peace in 783 BC. Jonah had given him time to settle his affairs and officially transfer the kingdom to his co-regent son King **Jeroboam II**. He, Queen Buelah, and their son Zachariah (now 5) were happy and loved by their people. That fall Jeroboam decided to begin what Jonah had prophesied – to strengthen and enlarge Israel’s borders.

In 782 BC, Adad-nirari III of Assyria died in the grand palace at Calah (18 miles south of Nineveh, but still part of Assyria’s famous capital city). Shalmaneser IV, his son, took over after his death. He was a weak and depraved king. Assyria began to disintegrate under his reign.

However, his general Shamshi-Ilu was very powerful and popular; he turned out to be the only one in Assyria willing to confront the king. “O King, live forever! I have been loyal to your father, and I am loyal to you.” He bowed to the ground and laid his sword at the king’s feet. “But sometimes the most loyal is the one who is willing to tell you the truth. Though he was very young when he took the throne, your father became firm and focused. He always put the good of Assyria first. Both in his building projects and his battle campaigns, he set high goals and pursued them with all his might. Assyria is stronger because of him. But you, O King, are not like your father. Your highest goal is your own gratification. As a result, Nineveh – even all Assyria – is committed to personal pleasure, gluttony, drinking, gambling, and sex. Where is the self-discipline? All our warriors have become weak like water. I am proud of my king and my country, but I am not proud of what they have become. I fear that if you, O King, do not practice the self-discipline of a warrior, Assyria will be destroyed. They all look to you, O King! For them to be strong, you must be strong! I only want to help you, my king.”

Shalmaneser IV had no desire to give up his profligate ways. He was suspicious. Maybe his general was planning a coup d’état. He banished him from the palace. But just the same, his general’s words troubled him greatly. His eyes were opened. Shalmaneser began to see wickedness infecting Assyria, everywhere he looked, especially in his own capital city. He asked his counselors and wise guys, but they were all ‘yes men’, afraid to tell him the truth.

Finally he made the rounds of the temples, praying to all his gods for his people. In his father’s newly built temple of Nabu (god of wisdom) he spotted General Shamshi-Ilu in earnest prayer. Thus King Shalmaneser discovered that they both wanted the same things.

Logos heard their prayer. *Yes, He is able even to hear the repentant prayers of idolaters in a pagan temple.* He came to Jonah. “My friend. I’m grateful that you were obedient to give My Word to Jehoash and Jeroboam. Now I have another task for you. Go to Nineveh, that great Assyrian capital. Prophesy against it, throughout its entire length and breadth, for its wickedness has recently been brought to My attention.”

Jonah woke up in a cold sweat. That couldn't have been YHWH! Nineveh indeed! He would be slain in the streets. He got up and washed his face, then went back to bed. The same vision returned. He thought about it. *No, it couldn't be YHWH. I am a faithful Israelite, called only to Israel. YHWH would never let me prophesy in a city of our enemies, especially those ruthless Assyrians! What if they repent?!*

After three or four more times, over several days, Jonah feared he was having a nervous breakdown. He needed a vacation. The stress of talking to the kings of Israel was too much for him. He grabbed his swimsuit and sunglasses and headed for Joppa, the nearest city by the Western Sea. But as he was lying on the beach, soaking up some rays, he fell asleep. That evil vision returned, of the shining man asking him to go to Nineveh. It was just too much! He had to get away – far away. He gathered his stuff and hiked over to the docks. He found a small vessel bound for Tarshish, an obscure mining and smelting town on Sardinia Island. Sounded fine to him. He paid his fare and went aboard.

The weather was fair and the winds from the south, so they were soon making good time. Jonah had not been sleeping very well lately. Maybe he could catch up. He went into the cargo hold to find a hammock. Soon the ship's gentle rocking had Jonah in a deep slumber.

But before they were even out of sight of land, a bad storm blew up from the east. The sailors barely got the sails down in time to save their ship from capsizing. The waves got short and choppy, then grew to monstrous height, as the wind whipped their tops into white froth. The ship's cargo was mostly clay vessels of fine Israeli olive oil to trade for iron ingots. But she was too heavy. Waves began crashing over the sides. The frantic sailors began throwing the precious olive oil overboard to lighten the ship. The captain ordered everyone on board to pray to their gods as they fought the storm. He couldn't even believe it when he found Jonah still sleeping. "Get up! Call on your God! Plead for mercy, that we not perish!"

But the storm only got worse. The captain had never seen his skilled sailors so terrified. This was not just a storm; this was the judgment of God! They threw the dice to determine whose sin it was that brought such calamity upon them. Three times they threw them; three times they fell on Jonah's number. That was too big a coincidence, even for Jonah. His eyes were opened, and he knew that his 'nightmares' had really come from YHWH.

Still, the captain was very kind. He didn't assume or accuse. "Tell us about yourself, Jonah. Do you have any idea why the dice always seem to point to you, or what may have caused this calamity?"

"Good sir, I am a Hebrew, of Israel. I serve YHWH, the God of heaven and earth, who created the sea and the land, and who upholds it all by the Word of His Power."

"Why then, if you serve a God that powerful, does He not answer your prayer and save us all?"

There was no denying it. "I disobeyed and rebelled against Him, sir. This storm is surely YHWH's judgment against my sin. My life is forfeit. Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then it will be calm for you once again."

"No!" the captain shouted. "Let not your blood be upon our hands! We are only a few miles off shore. Men, row for all you're worth against the storm. We shall return to shore so Jonah can obey his God."

So they turned about and faced the storm. They dug their oars down deep, and for three hours no voice was heard but the grunts of the desperate, struggling men. But with the wind and waves directly against them, they could make no headway. The land faded from sight.

The captain realized he had lost. He began praying aloud, "YHWH, God of Jonah and of Israel, have mercy upon us, we pray! Do not let us all perish on account of Jonah's disobedience. Show me what to do. For I want to do what is right in Your sight." As the struggling men said their amens, the captain knew what he had to do. "Stop your rowing. Take Jonah and throw him into the sea, just as he has said. YHWH will protect us, and him."

They tied two half-full wineskins together for a life-preserver. Then with one last fervent prayer they entrusted him to YHWH and threw him overboard. The raging seas immediately swept him out of sight.

Within minutes the wind died. The men knelt on the deck and gave thanks to YHWH, fervently vowing to serve Him and only Him the rest of their lives. By the time they finished praying, the waves had died down too.

They searched the ocean, hoping to find Jonah. Instead, they saw dark mounds bobbing gently in the calm sea. They rowed over to the closest. It was the top of an olive oil jar, still sealed and full of oil. Olive oil is lighter than water, so the jars had just barely floated. They spent the rest of the afternoon recovering all their precious oil. Not one jar had been lost! Again they bowed and gave thanks to YHWH.

The sun was setting. An evening breeze sprang up, so they set sail again for Sardinia. Surely, Jonah's God had been merciful to them! They offered up another prayer for Jonah, wherever he might be. When they looked up, the captain shouted excitedly, "There he is! Two points off the starboard bow at two hundred yards. Make for him at all speed! Now we can take him back to Joppa so he can obey YHWH His God."

The breeze was light, so they put out the oars and raced toward him. He was still alive! They were barely thirty yards away, when a huge great white shark, longer than their entire ship, surfaced under him, mouth agape, and swallowed him whole.

The captain commanded his sailors to pray again. “Clearly,” he said, “Jonah’s God is not to be trifled with. He is a good God, for He calmed the seas and restored our cargo. But He is also a just and holy God, who does not let sin go unpunished.” So in this brief encounter, these rough sailors learned more about God than many of us learn in a lifetime. They will serve Him forever.

Jonah was in serious trouble. Though the shark had swallowed a large amount of sea water and air with him, yet most of that was forced out the gills, leaving poor Jonah to slide down its esophagus clutching only his precious wineskins. As you might imagine, breathing became an urgent problem. But Jonah was praying desperately, and Logos reminded him of the air in his wineskins. By the time that was gone he had reached the stomach and found the air bubble at its top. The stench was horrendous, and the stomach acid ate into his skin, but Jonah was still alive! He prayed desperately, vowing to never again disobey the voice of YHWH!

The stomach was churning, contracting, trying to push him down into the stomach acids to digest him. Jonah clung to his ‘life preservers’ and tried to keep his feet out of the potent brew. Just when the air got too bad to breathe and the stomach acid too strong to stand, the shark would take another gulp of something on the surface, bringing more fresh air to the bubble at the top of the stomach and slightly reducing the concentration of the acid. Jonah soon reached a coexistence with the shark. It was certainly a living hell, but so far, Jonah was the living! Periodically he would sip his precious wine to soothe his throat and ease his terrible thirst, and then blow some more air into the wineskins. The rest of the time he spent repenting and praying, pleading for mercy, and quoting Psalms.

Jonah did not know how long he was in the belly of the shark. At least part of the time he was asleep, or fainted, or hibernating, or some combination of the three. But he awoke when the shark began thrashing violently about, trying to get rid of this man-sized lump that felt like lead in its stomach. Great gulps of sea water and air refreshed Jonah, as the shark broached the surface again and again. “YHWH, if You only get me out of here alive, I’ll go wherever You want and do whatever You ask!” Jonah vowed fervently, for the umpteenth time.

“Even go preach in Nineveh?” Logos responded with laughter, as the shark with the upset stomach could take no more and vomited Jonah out near the beach.

Jonah rinsed off the acid in the sea, and blinked in the sunset. His clothes were in tatters, his skin bleached and pitted, and his hair and beard purest white, but he was alive. “Yes, Lord. Even to Nineveh!” He still had the nearly empty wineskin ‘life preservers’. He finished off the wine, and hiked up the shoreline to some fishermen who were mending their nets. “What day is this?” he asked. “I’ve been imprisoned in the belly of a shark.”

“You sure have!” They roared in laughter. “You look half-digested!” As they got him some fresh clothes, they told him that it was the end of the Sabbath, for the sun had just set. Counting back, Jonah realized he had been in the belly of the shark for exactly three days and three nights.

Jonah returned home to spend a few days recovering from his ordeal. His skin remained blanched and pitted, and his hair white. Now the vision of the shining man returned. This time, He commanded, “Arise, Jonah. Go to Nineveh that great city. Proclaim whatever I tell you.”

“But Lord, in that previous vision You told me just to prophesy against it, because of its terrible wickedness.”

Jonah heard laughter in the heavenlies. “Are we still in an arguing mode, my friend? Shall I call for another great fish to complete our shark lessons, or have we learned willing obedience here?”

Jonah did not return the laughter. “I am going, Lord. And I will tell them... whatever You tell me to say.” So Jonah packed immediately and began the trip to Assyria. He didn’t need another shark lesson. He took a ship from Joppa north as far as he could go. Then he hiked east, over what is now called ‘Jonah’s Pass’ to Carchemish. There he crossed the Euphrates and followed the traders through Heran and along the base of the mountains to the Tigris, and south to Nineveh. It took him 3 weeks.

Bandits all along his route preyed on the weak. The traders and merchants traveled in well-armed caravans. Jonah didn’t have a lot – just money for food along the way, but he knew that traveling alone was still dangerous. Yet nobody bothered him. Whenever bandits would run up to accost him, they would take one look and flee, sometimes screaming in fear, or sometimes vomiting in revulsion. Thus Jonah began to appreciate his ghastly appearance.

He got to the outskirts of Nineveh on September 11, 780 BC. This was forty days before the expected close pass of Mars – its closest in 90 years (since Elijah’s barbecue with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in 870 BC). Everyone was frantically preparing for the big event. Even if the terrible lightning bolt from Mars missed them, the earthquakes often toppled buildings and walls. They were already frightened, for deep down they knew they had earned the ‘wrath of the gods’ by their wickedness.

So when this acid-bleached geek with the pockmarked skin showed up yelling, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!” you’d better believe they listened! Nineveh was a very big city. Suburb after suburb all along the Tigris River, each wealthier than the last, formed a continuous business district twenty miles long and half a mile wide. Jonah wove back and forth through each area from north to south. It took him an entire month to reach the royal district of Calah, surrounding Shalmaneser’s palace. Each day his warning got more urgent. Finally reaching Calah, it was, “Yet 10 days and Nineveh will be destroyed!”

All along his route the Assyrians listened to him. They began repenting, fasting, wearing sackcloth and ashes, and crying out to all their gods to save them. Jonah didn't care. He knew their gods couldn't save them, but did he tell them about YHWH? No. He wanted them destroyed. He had obeyed YHWH. He had warned them of their coming calamity. He hurried through wealthy Calah and got done a few days early. Then he found a small hill to the east where he could view its destruction. This would be a great place to enjoy the fireworks. Jonah used his extra time building a shelter of sticks to shade him from the hot sun.

Shalmaneser IV had already been warned once by his general, Shamshi-Ilum. They'd been going to the temple of Nabu together to pray for wisdom. They came out one day to find Calah in an uproar. They were told, "Some white-haired weirdo has the city all stirred up with prophecies of Nineveh's destruction for our wickedness!" Shalmaneser was terrified. It was as his general had warned! He sent slaves to bring Jonah into the palace.

Jonah didn't hold out much hope for real repentance, but he went with them. He was shocked to discover King Shalmaneser covered with sackcloth, sitting on the floor in a pile of ashes. "Please, tell me everything you have told my people!" the king pleaded, tears in his eyes.

"I gave them the Word of YHWH God of Israel, that after three more days, Nineveh will be destroyed for its wickedness." Jonah sniffed disdainfully.

"What must we do to avoid this catastrophe?"

"There's nothing..." Jonah started to say, but YHWH stopped him. "YHWH didn't say anything about..." He was stopped again. The last thing he wanted was to teach them to make atonement for their sins and be spared.

"Tell me!" the king urged. "If we repent, is your God YHWH a God of mercy who forgives sin?"

"Well yes, sometimes, but only for those who know YHWH, keep His Law, and worship Him in truth. There is no knowledge of YHWH here in Assyria. None at all. Thus I don't think there is any way you can be spared."

Shalmaneser was suspicious. "It sounds to me like you don't want us to be spared." He sent him away. "Proclaim throughout the city, by decree of the king, 'I declare a total fast. Let neither man nor beast taste any food or water. Let everyone put on sackcloth until the calamity is past. Let everyone earnestly repent, turn from their wickedness and violence, and call on YHWH, the God of the Hebrews. Who knows whether He will relent and withdraw His fierce anger from us, that we may not perish?'"

The proclamation went out to a city where most were already fasting and praying. Now they knew where to direct their prayers. The terrified people put away their sins to obey the king wholeheartedly. It was really rather amazing, the transformation. Logos was pleased.

When Jonah returned to his shelter on the hill, he was pleasantly surprised to find a fast-growing weed beginning to cover the sticks with leaves. What luck! His shelter will be comfortable with leaves overhead. Only three days left now until the fireworks. Then he'd go home.

Logos called Satan into His presence. "Satan, Look over your city, Nineveh. Tell me what you see."

Satan looked, and tried to utter some vile swear words, but of course they wouldn't come out in Logos' presence. "By the heavens and the earth! What have you done to my city? It is utterly destroyed!"

"Destroyed? I merely brought one reluctant prophet and opened the eyes of one pagan general. Is your great city so weak that two halfhearted men can destroy it?"

Satan looked intently through the city. Not one single person could he find who still belonged to him. Every one had repented and was crying to YHWH for mercy. Every one had ceased his violence and immorality and stopped pursuing selfish pleasures. All, even the children, fasted and prayed. "That's impossible!" Satan was awed. "No one could do that. 1000 prophets or generals could not do that. This was my city! Why was I not notified?"

Logos laughed. "Do you notify Me whenever you try to pervert My Holy City? Come, come now. This is still your city. I only give you a preview of your defeat. When the consequence of their wickedness stares them full in the face, when judgment looms up before them, when their eyes are finally opened to the truth, of course they repent. But they don't know Me or love Me. When the calamity passes, they will return to you. However... what if I send a missionary to teach them of Me, now, in the midst of their distress? Do you think they might hear?"

"No! No... Well uh, yes, they might. But You can't! You just said this is my city. You said they'll return to me. You cannot now go back on Your Word!"

"Oh? I didn't say when they would return to you. For the moment, this is My city. So I believe I shall have a little fun here. But I know My time is rather limited. Whom shall I send? I have no one who knows Me within almost 600 miles, except Jonah..."

"And he hates them and is hoping they will all be destroyed. A likely candidate for a missionary!"

"Hmm... you're right, Satan. I must grant you that. Maybe Jonah needs another 'shark lesson' after all."

"Ha. We are 500 miles from the nearest shark."

"Well. We shall see. You had best go take care of your favorite planet. Isn't it about time for your blood sport? I have work to do with Jonah." Satan suddenly realized the implications. He had aimed Mars to pass directly over Nineveh, for he surely had occasion. It would have been destroyed. Now his 'occasion' had been repented away!

Satan quickly zipped up to recalculate the orbits of Earth and Mars. Sure enough, Logos' angels had gotten busy at Nineveh's repentance. Mars was now lined up to fly harmlessly over the Western Sea. Satan was furious. *The closest approach in 90 years, and no one will even be hurt.* He looked around for some other place where he had occasion. Syria? No, what a waste that would be. They were already devastated by defeats and Ben-Hadad III had gone insane with despair. His son Rezin was still too wet behind the ears to even know right from wrong. Similarly their vassal states Phoenicia or Hamath were no better off. Satan looked around for something finer to destroy. He needed an alternate target, and needed it now!

Israel? Jeroboam was still hiding those golden calves but had repented. For the moment his sin was covered. Judah? Maybe. But Amaziah had just been humbled. He might repent. Satan decided not to push his luck.

Egypt? Ah! He always had occasion there. They had a zillion pagan temples he could destroy, and so many gods even Satan could never keep them all straight. Their vain Nomarchs, bickering priests, and competing Pharaohs offered no protection at all. Satan frantically worked to readjust the orbit of Mars. *Will he be in time? It will take a prodigious effort to move it over that far.*

Jonah was immensely enjoying his shelter. This will be a blast. Just two days left before the fireworks. Mars was coming from the night side of Earth, so Jonah studied its orbit at dusk and at dawn. Something didn't look right. With one day to go, he was sure of it. The orbit was not lined up with Nineveh. Mars was going to miss. After all his preaching, YHWH won't follow through!

The sun rose on the last day. The earthquakes started, but they too were nowhere near what Jonah expected. He had hoped to see the palace at Calah crushed, the towers fall, the walls crumble. At 8:30 AM, Mars crossed Earth's orbit over to the 'day' side. Soon it was a dark disk covering a fifth of the sky. But it was coming in waaaay too far south. After all his efforts, it looked like Nineveh would be spared! Jonah was devastated.

Then the last straw – the weed shading him wilted. Its leaves dried up and blew off. When Jonah got up to look, he found that a sharkworm had eaten through the stalk. That made him angry! To top it off, a scorching east wind sprang up off the Zagros hills, making his shelter feel more like camping in a blast furnace. Jonah went whining to YHWH. "Lord, I did everything you asked. But You failed to follow through. You have made me out to be a false prophet and a fool. Now You took away my shelter, and brought this searing wind to make me feel miserable. So take my life already! Death is better than life."

Logos answered softly, "Why are you angry, Jonah?"

"Don't play games with me. You know why. I had a good shelter before You sent that sharkworm."

"Ahh... it's the sharkworm, is it?"

"Well, Lord, I miss that lovely plant. It made it almost comfortable here. But the worm killed it."

"The plant. Yes. You have compassion for the plant, which you did not sow, or water, or cause to sprout, and which sprang up one night and was destroyed in another. Should I not have compassion on that great city, Nineveh, in which there are over 120,000 children too young to know their right from their left? Do you really want to see My precious ones die, with towers falling on their heads and their blood washing down the streets?"

Suddenly Jonah's eyes were opened. He saw the city, not as just walls, towers, and palaces, but as people. Needy people. Ignorant people who had no knowledge of God, no atonement for sin, no law, and no hope. Jonah bowed. "No, Lord. That is Your adversary's character. He loves to see people die. I'm sorry. I was thinking of them only as 'the enemy'. What would you have me do?"

"Go to them. Love them. Tell them about Me."

"But Lord! You are Israel's God! The Assyrians have their own gods. They can't be saved. They don't have Your Law. They have no Levitical priesthood, no Ark of the Covenant, no temple, nothing! They couldn't come to Jerusalem to keep the Feasts if they wanted to."

Jonah heard the familiar laughter in the heavenlies. "Ahh... the old arguing mode again, my friend? We need more shark lessons, do we?"

"No, no! No, Lord. I... I'm not arguing. I just need to understand... what can I tell them?"

"Tell them of My love. Tell them that My adversary would have killed them but for their repentance. But I will bless them, provide and care for them, and protect them – if only they will flee their wickedness, their violence and immorality, and learn to walk in My love."

"What about the Feasts? The Levitical priesthood? The sacrifices? The atoning blood of the lamb? I'm no Levite."

"Those all point to the coming Redeemer. You've been through the baptism – under the water for three days and three nights! You died and have been raised back to life. So for now, you represent the Redeemer for them – now that you have the right attitude and have learned to obey Me. So I appoint you My priest after the order of Melchizedek."

For a long moment, Jonah was silent, staggered at the thought. But finally he took a deep breath. "Yes, Lord!" He got up immediately, dusted himself off, and headed down the hill toward Calah. Nearly everyone had fled the city. They were sitting around in little clumps in the fields, still in sackcloth, praying. He called to them as he passed. "Come! The danger has passed. YHWH has heard your prayer. Follow me." Even though Mars had clearly not yet reached its closest approach, many got up to follow.

So Jonah had thousands of people behind him when he came into the palace, static streaming off his flying white hair. King Shalmaneser was still groveling in a pile of ashes in front of his throne. He had not even tried to save himself by abandoning the stone palace for an open field. Jonah entered and bowed in respect. "O King, live forever!"

King Shalmaneser IV recognized him immediately. "Jonah! I thought you wanted us all to die!"

"What I wanted is of no consequence. YHWH has heard your prayers. He has seen your repentance and that of your people. He is pleased. He loves you. He has turned away His wrath and offered you life, if you will take it. Mars will not harm you. Get up, O King. Wash your face and anoint your body. Put on your royal robes. Would you allow me to dine with you? For YHWH our God has commissioned me to teach you about Himself and His Law."

Shalmaneser looked out the window. Mars was near its closest approach. Though it was way too far south to cause serious earthquakes, he knew that its electric-arc 'sword' could reach halfway around the globe. For a moment, fear crossed his face, with a temptation to continue his fast until it was really past. But he chose instead to just believe. He got up. "Thank you, Jonah. And thank YHWH. I accept your offer, for I would love to learn of Him. And my people would, too." He ordered his servants to prepare a meal, and went off to wash and change.

Jonah went to the balcony. Thousands of people were gathering. "Your city has been saved," he called. "YHWH has heard your prayers. He is pleased by your repentance." But at that moment, an electric spark leapt from the red planet to the very spot where his shelter stood on the hill, vaporizing it. Fascinated, Jonah watched as the arc built in intensity, creating a huge hole right where he had sat. Then it moved toward the city, digging a trench in the ground on the same path he had taken toward the palace. Those who had not followed Jonah were fleeing in terror. The heavenly sword reached the city wall. It was aimed at the palace. Jonah didn't flinch. He held up a hand, yelling, "Stop! In the name of YHWH, God of Israel!"

Instantly, the arc was gone, leaving the pungent odor of ozone in the air. Mars was moving away. The worst was over. Everyone began bowing to Jonah. They called him 'Savior' and 'Lord' and proclaimed his praises. *Well. If he represents the Redeemer, he'd better get used to it.*

The king came out on the balcony, now dressed in his royal robes. He put one arm around Jonah and raised the other. "The fast is over! YHWH has heard us! Jonah has agreed to teach us about YHWH. We worship Him from now on. Go home, eat, drink, celebrate, give YHWH thanks. I'll teach you all that I learn about Him."

So the city was spared. Jonah fulfilled the type of the Redeemer for Nineveh. Multitudes of Assyrians came to know YHWH through the preaching of Jonah.

Egypt did not share their happy ending. As Satan had hoped, Mars raked by with devastating results. The royal buildings which were designed to be earthquake-proof stood up, but many homes were leveled. Huge storms swept over the land from north to south, with hurricane force winds and torrential rainfall. The combination was disastrous. The Nile flowed backwards all the way up south to Thebes, Karnak, and Luxor, causing terrible flooding. It was Egypt's worst single flood ever, worse even than the seven years of flooding at the time of Joseph and Amenemhat III. Fortunately the storm was over in a day; if it had continued, all of Egypt might have been destroyed. History records this: "In the third year of Osorkon II, first month, second season, twelfth day." This was the 'flood of Egypt' and earthquake that the prophet **Amos** later used as God's warning of the end of the age. (8:8-9) Tanis, in the mouth of the Nile delta, recovered from the flood in a few years. However, Osorkon II wanted no more flooding. He left Tanis to his father-in-law (Psusennes) and returned to Bubastis, where he was co-regent with his father, Takelot I. Psusennes I stuck it out at Tanis until his death in 769 BC. The last 5 of his long 49 year reign were co-regent with his son Amenemopet. All of this only extended the TIP. Egypt remained weak, splintered, and chaotic.

Assyria remained at peace the rest of Shalmaneser's reign, with no aggressive military campaigns. Jonah lived in the palace at Calah for many years, teaching them of God's Law and His love. He needed no more shark lessons. He was continually in awe that YHWH is able to claim for Himself even such a wicked, ruthless, and violent people. Jonah became their high priest, offering the lamb for their sins each Sabbath and instructing them in God's ways.

I wish I could say that the Assyrians had learned their lesson, and that they remained a peaceful, God-fearing people forever, but it wouldn't be true. There always seem to be some who hate God's wisdom and ways and reject His love and blessings. In this case, it was the nobles of the court, led by Shamshi-Ilu, the very same general who had first warned Shalmaneser IV of his wickedness.

At first, Shamshi-Ilu supported Jonah. He too was glad for the deliverance from Mars. He too wanted the land cleansed of the immorality and drunkenness, for he could see how it had weakened Assyria. But as the years went by, General Shamshi-Ilu was appalled. He was a military man. He was self-disciplined and honorable because that's how to inspire confidence in the troops to win battles. But now King Shalmaneser didn't even want to fight! The military campaigns to further the glory, power, and wealth of the mighty Assyrian Empire had totally ceased! His 'fighting machine' was getting rusty from lack of use! Finally he went to Shalmaneser. "O King, live forever! I swear my loyalty to you and to our mighty nation." He laid his sword at the king's feet. "But again, I must tell you the truth, and warn you of a flaw I see in this administration, which, if left unchecked, will weaken and may even destroy us."

“Dear friend! You may always speak freely to me.”

“But Jonah should be here, for it involves him.”

So they waited while Jonah was called. Shamshi-Ilu addressed him directly. “Jonah, before you came, my lord the king was weak with dissipation. He lived for selfish pleasures, and cared not that Assyria was crumbling around him. I was glad when you came and taught him the ways of YHWH, for when he became honorable and good, the whole land became strong and proud again. We are feared the world over, and no one dares to attack us. I am grateful to you. But now I have a different problem. Does your God YHWH not believe in fighting?”

“Sure He does. And He’s very good at it! If wicked nations try to attack us, YHWH helps us defeat them.”

“No nation will dare attack us if we attack them first, to prove to the world how strong we are! But ever since you came here, my lord the king has not attacked any of the surrounding nations. Some of our vassal states have stopped sending tribute. They think we’ve gotten weak! We must put the fear of Assyria back into their hearts!”

He turned back to Shalmaneser IV. “O King. Do you remember back when you attacked the Urartu along our northern borders? We crushed them. What glory for Assyria! And how great was our plunder! We...”

“Now wait a minute!” Jonah interrupted. “They didn’t attack you. They never even threatened you. They just wanted to live in peace and provide for their families. YHWH would have you leave them alone.”

“That is the flaw I see in this administration, O King. Jonah has come and made us strong again, but what good is strength if we never use it? The Assyrian Empire must expand each year or we will decline. The other nations must fear us – be terrified of us – or they will despise us and we will lose the tribute that is rightfully ours!”

Jonah laughed lightly. “Spoken like a true military man at heart. But may I suggest a different way? Instead of attacking ruthlessly and making the surrounding nations fear and hate you, your job as general should be to guard the borders you have, guard your trade routes, and punish the wicked. Then you will prosper by peace, agriculture, and free trade. Assyria will become wealthy, powerful, and glorious, without making other nations hate us. It will be like the glory days of King Solomon’s mighty empire. He never attacked them, but every nation in the world sent tribute because they both feared and loved him.”

Shalmaneser understood, and agreed. He ordered his general to do as Jonah had suggested, and swore that there would be no more offensive military campaigns while he was king. But General Shamshi-Ilu still longed for the glory days of the Assyrian conquests. He hated being just a ‘policeman’. He worked with his forces to keep them trained in all the military skills of the past.

A few others of the royal court agreed with General Shamshi-Ilu. Among them were the younger brothers of Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Assur-nirari. They got together with the general in the spring of 772 BC to plot against the king, and against Jonah. Shamshi-Ilu took the lead. “We can do nothing at all until Jonah is out of the way, for he sees the future. And we cannot attack him, for his God is powerful. But I believe he has a weakness. He is too proud of his status as the fabled ‘Redeemer of Assyria’. We must find the loveliest lady in the land to seduce him. We will teach her all the right words to say to pamper that pride of his. That shouldn’t be very hard. While he’s being seduced, he won’t be listening to his God. Then we will be able to kill him, and Shalmaneser too, so Ashur-dan will become king. Then Assyria will be mighty again.”

Nina had been a prostitute in her youth. But the coming of Jonah, and YHWH, had changed all that. She forsook her immorality and learned to love YHWH, and she just adored Jonah! So she hung around the palace when Jonah taught the people, and around the altar as Jonah sacrificed the lamb. Shamshi-Ilu could see the love in her eyes. She’d be perfect. She wouldn’t need much coaching. He came to her one Sabbath right after Jonah had finished teaching. “Where do you go, my dear?”

“I go home, my lord.” Nina was afraid. She was just a peasant, not used to talking with a general.

“Your home... Are you happy there? At peace with your husband and your lovely children?”

He had touched a painful spot in her life. “I am happy, my lord. I have no husband or children yet, but YHWH will grant them in His time.”

“Ahh... Indeed He will!” Shamshi-Ilu was familiar with the lingo. “My dear, YHWH has sent me to you for that very purpose. You have repented and humbled yourself. Now He would lift you up, yes, up higher than I, higher than a queen, higher than the king himself!”

“Who am I, that YHWH should so exalt me?”

“Who are you? Ha! Has not YHWH already told you? Has not He already opened your eyes? I know that He has! For I have seen the love in your eyes for Jonah.”

“For Jonah...?” Nina gasped in incomprehension.

“Yes, for Jonah. He is higher than the king. YHWH has called you to be his wife. Don’t deny it. The love for Jonah that fills your heart is from YHWH. You cannot escape your destiny. Now is the time. YHWH has sent me in answer to the prayers of Jonah himself, for he is lonely and is even now, at this very moment, beseeching YHWH for a wife.” That was the icing on the cake. Nina swallowed it, hook, line, and sinker. Under the guidance of Shamshi-Ilu she spent the week purifying herself, bathing in the finest soaps and perfumes, and dressing in the lovely gowns that he provided. All the while he coached her carefully.

Finally she was ready. She knew all the right things to say, the right expressions, everything. Shamshi-Ilu took no chances. When he wasn't coaching Nina he was with Jonah or with the king, assuring them of their wisdom in halting Assyria's military aggression and praising them and YHWH for the peace Assyria had achieved.

The king's court was open and Nina was in the line waiting. *Instead of fighting Assyria's glorious battles, King Shalmaneser has been reduced to sitting on his throne and listening to the whining and snivelling of the common people. Look at him! He loves those silly peasants more than the thrill of victory over the nations; he would rather give aid to the city's weak and destitute, than collect tribute from our conquered vassal states. But all that will come to an end,* Shamshi-Ilu vowed, ... *beginning this very night!*

He smiled. Nina was indeed beautiful, with her long golden hair so carefully brushed and her flowing white gown so perfectly fitted to the soft curves of her young body. Indeed, she looked like an angel clothed in light, floating above the confines of earth. At her turn, she walked forward in graceful sweeping movements as she was taught, and curtsied demurely to the king. "O King, live forever! YHWH's blessings be upon you and upon our great land, for you have brought us peace and joy."

Shalmaneser liked her already. "YHWH's blessings upon you, too, my dear. What may I do for you?"

"I only ask your permission, Your Majesty, to do as YHWH has commanded me. For He has shown me that Jonah has been secretly praying for a wife, and YHWH has chosen me to fulfill his prayer. But I do nothing without my lord the king's approval and blessing. So let the king test me, and prove me, to see if I be a worthy wife for Assyria's great prophet-redeemer."

Shamshi-Ilu almost laughed out loud. That came out perfect, in a blend of humility and confident assurance. Better even than he had imagined. It helped that her heart was in it. She was already in love. All he had done was to convince her that she was YHWH's chosen one.

King Shalmaneser IV didn't have the spiritual sense to discern his way out of a paper bag. But he went through the motions testing her. "Do you believe in and love YHWH, and in His prophet Jonah as the redeemer of Assyria? Do you swear allegiance to YHWH, Jonah, and myself?" and so on. All fluff. Of course she answered yes to everything. Her wholeheartedness was evident; her beauty and grace undeniable; her love transparent. In no time it was over. The king passed judgment. "I hereby declare that you are a fit wife for Jonah. So by the authority vested in me as king of the empire, I betroth you to him, subject only to his approval and acceptance of YHWH's gift."

That night the king had his servants prepare a special betrothal dinner. Then he invited Jonah and all the nobles of the court, including General Shamshi-Ilu.

Nina was seated at the king's left hand, between him and his queen. Jonah, still completely in the dark, was seated at his right. Shamshi-Ilu and the two brothers of the king (Ashur-dan and Assur-nirari) sat to Jonah's right; they were the only ones in the hall who really knew what was going on. The festive meal was lavish and long. For two hours the others were left wondering, *who was that lovely young lady sitting beside the king?*

Finally, when everyone was satisfied and a tad tipsy from the wine, King Shalmaneser stood up. "You are all wondering why I called this special gathering? We are here to celebrate Jonah, the great prophet whom YHWH sent to save us from our sins, the redeemer who has brought Assyria back from the brink of destruction and restored our strength! Jonah, we honor you! Stand here beside me..." He put his right arm around his shoulder, as the rest of the group clapped and cheered lustily. The king held up his left hand for silence. "YHWH is very pleased with you, Jonah. He has sent you a gift, the answer to your secret prayer." At this, he stepped back and with his left hand lifted Nina to stand in front of him – right next to Jonah! "This is Nina. YHWH has chosen her to be your wife, to comfort you all the rest of your days and to reward you for your faithful service to Him. I have tested her and found her faithful and true, to YHWH, to Assyria, and to you, my friend. So by the authority that YHWH has entrusted to me as ruler of the realm, I have betrothed Nina to you, subject only to your approval and acceptance."

Jonah smelled a rat. He had never made any such 'secret prayer'! Subject to his 'approval and acceptance' indeed! As if he could just turn her down here in front of the entire court with everyone clapping and cheering for him! That would be a slap in the king's face. Jonah fired up a quick flare prayer, "God help! What do I do?"

"Humble yourself. Their flattery has made you blind. You are not their redeemer. I am."

So Jonah turned to speak to the king. But foolishly he turned to his left, for that is where the king had been all during the meal. Now Nina was standing there, looking adoringly up into his eyes with a beaming smile that would capture the stoutest of hearts.

Jonah never completed his turn. His knees grew weak; his heart raced. The king had deliberately put them very close; her sweet warm breath caressed his neck and her perfume overwhelmed his senses. Once their eyes met there was no escape. She was perfect in every way, from her glorious honey hair, to her smooth light skin, delicate eyebrows highlighting her sparkling eyes, that upturned nose inches from his, her blushing cheeks, red with eagerness, delightful dimples, and that compelling smile framing perfectly-spaced white teeth. Suddenly he found himself wrapped in her embrace. Their lips locked together as if they were made to fit. The gathering unraveled in wild and joyous applause.

Minutes passed. The cheering faded. "I take it that's a 'yes?'" the king said happily. The couple remained locked in their embrace. "Then by the authority vested in me as king of the empire, I pronounce you husband and wife. May this gift of YHWH bless you the rest of your days!" The cheering and clapping began anew.

It was late when the last guest left for home. The king gave the newlywed couple a big hug. Then with a twinkle in his eye he commanded them to enjoy their wedding night, and gave them a push down the hall toward Jonah's apartment in the palace.

Now Jonah was having second thoughts. He didn't even know this woman who clung to him so tightly. He'd never even had a chance to pray about her. Was she really a gift from YHWH, or had he been snookered? He prayed frantically as they went down the hall. He heard some laughter in the heavenlies, but it didn't sound like Logos. It sounded more like the adversary. But he couldn't tell, as the whole time, Nina bubbled enthusiastically in his ear, "YHWH is so good! He filled me with love for you from the moment I first saw you walk down from the hill. I'm just a peasant girl. I adored you from a distance, but I never thought I'd get the chance to share my love with you! But only a week ago, YHWH showed me that I was the one He made for you. He brought me before the king, and gave me favor with him. It all happened so fast. Surely the king's heart was turned by YHWH! He is so good!"

Thus the famous prophet Jonah was carried away, like a lamb to the slaughter. One last 'shark' test, which he failed. He rationalized, "Well, there is nothing I can do now. I'm married. God doesn't like divorce, so I may as well enjoy it. She certainly is beautiful. It'll be fun getting to know her." So he put aside the nagging doubts and fears and led Nina into his bedroom.

Shamshi-Ilu didn't go home. He hid in the shadows, waiting until the palace was asleep. He had it all laid out. *He would assassinate Jonah and Nina first, as soon as their talking stopped and their lovemaking began. Then killing the king should be easy, for during the banquet he had given the guards a sleeping potion.* But the voices continued on and on from Jonah's apartment. Two hours later they were still alert. *What was going on? He was running out of time. The king's guards could awaken from their drugged sleep.*

Well, Jonah was obviously too busy to warn anyone. *Maybe he should assassinate the king first.* So, with the stealth of a skilled military professional, Shamshi-Ilu entered the king's apartment and sliced off the heads of Shalmaneser and his wife in one quick slash, using the sword of the lead guard. He then carefully returned the bloody sword to the hand of the sleeping guard. It looked good, but he went back to spatter some of the king's blood down the fronts of several of the guards for good measure. With that finished, he returned to the door of Jonah's apartment. They were still talking.

Satan was beside himself laughing. The great Jonah, after all his 'shark testing', had fallen in an instant to the allure of a pretty face. Leaving his demons of seduction surrounding Jonah (with orders to notify him if they saw any problem), Satan zipped up to taunt Logos. He seemed surprisingly interested. Satan regaled him with the whole story and boasted about his easy victory. It took a long time, for Satan can be rather loquacious. With the infinite patience of the Eternal, Logos listened cheerfully. At first Satan didn't suspect, for Logos is always that way. But then... *Oh no!* Satan shut up in mid-sentence with a look of horror on his face, and fled.

Jonah and Nina were having a good 'pillow talk'. At first it was the typical family history and gooey fluff that leads to intimacy. With Satan off boasting to Logos, the demons began to get bored. *They already have him in bed with her – what more do they need to do?* They let their thoughts drift, no longer paying attention to what was being said. Trust me, they have heard it all before. Suddenly Jonah had a frightening flashback of his days in the shark's belly.

"Nina?" Jonah pushed her back a bit so he could look into her face. "You're incredibly beautiful, and I am glad we're married. But we really don't know each other yet, and I don't feel comfortable about this. Would it be okay with you if we wait on the...? Uh... you know. I feel a bit like I'm in bed with a stranger! It all happened too fast."

"Well, sure. I forgot – I've loved you for years, but you've just met me today. Take as long as you need." She smiled brightly. "We've got a lifetime together!"

So they separated from their passionate embrace. Slowly Jonah's mind cleared. "I think I know what's wrong, Nina. I sinned against YHWH by not asking Him about you. Let's pray now. I'll repent and ask what YHWH would have me do about you." It took a while, but Jonah persisted in prayer until he heard from Logos, who urged him to quickly get dressed and escape out the window with Nina. Seeing them dressing, the demons hurried to tell Satan, who had just left Logos. After ordering his demons back to work, Satan went to Shamshi-Ilu. But the old general was still hearing alert voices and couldn't understand Satan's urging that he barge right in to finish the job. By the time he finally did, Jonah and Nina had gone. They ran down to the canal by moonlight. Logos directed him to some friends.

The lengthy time of mourning was a big exasperation to Shamshi-Ilu, for he had to wear a long face and appear to be shocked and saddened by the tragedy. Besides, there were a few who suspected him. But he had a reputation of integrity and loyalty, and showed no ambition for the throne himself, so they believed him. Finally the time of mourning was past. Ashur-dan III, Shalmaneser's oldest brother, was crowned king in his place. Shamshi-Ilu swore fealty to the new king, who immediately ordered him to execute those evil guards who 'did the dastardly deed'.

With Ashur-dan III, Assyria returned to her cruel, bloodthirsty ways. Satan could hardly contain himself with glee at his easy victory. Even knowing by now that he usually loses in the exchange, he came up to taunt Logos. “After all Your work, Your precious missionary, the only one within 600 miles, fell in one night, and there was not a blessed thing You could do to prevent it. It was pride, my own specialty, that captured him. Do You see now how strong are my ways? You’ll never defeat me!”

“You don’t even know where Jonah is. I have led him to the homes of those who love Me. They will hide him and keep him safe. He is learning to love Nina in truth. She is rather good for him. I’ve turned his defeat into victory.”

“Who cares? I’ve driven Jonah from the palace and placed my own servants in charge. Assyria will soon become as ruthless and aggressive as ever.”

“I admit, Assyria is yours, especially Nineveh and its kings and nobles. I do not contend with you for what is yours. I merely show you how tenuous is your control and how transitory is your possession. Nineveh is a mighty city of two million people and the greatest army on earth. Yet with two people, one mine and one yours, I captured the city and all its people and held them for eight years.”

“With the loss of Your only prophet in the empire. He has no power left. He can’t even show his face!”

“True, Jonah has no military or political power left. But true power is in the hearts of all the people he has touched. My church shall grow strong.”

“With no political covering! A king and a general who hate them! They will be swept away by evil!”

“Some will hate the evil, and will pray. Who knows? Perhaps their prayers will reach My ears. My judgments against their evil may turn some back towards Me.”

“No! You can’t bring Your judgments upon my city! They are mine to torment! Mine! Mine! Do You hear?”

“No need to get so testy, My beloved adversary. I am not trying to take what is yours. I merely point out that those who have chosen Me will pray and mourn over the evil they see. That may cause your own torments to act like My judgments, bringing many to repentance and restoring their faith in Me.” Satan left his mouth hanging open. He had long suspected God was using his torments to turn people from their wickedness, but this just confirmed it, and told him how. It was their prayers! He would have to be more careful. He fled.

In their wickedness, terrible warnings fell on Assyria. A major plague devastated Nineveh in 765 BC. A fearful eclipse came in 763 BC. Some heard, repented, prayed.

A true church was born. Jonah, its first apostle, lived there with his faithful Nina for 35 years. Assyria never again has been devoid of a witness to YHWH’s goodness.

With that story of Jonah concluded, I must now back-track a bit to catch up with the kings of Israel and Judah. We left Jeroboam II ruling well in Israel, with the golden calves locked up under his bed. But we left King Amaziah of Judah in deep yogurt. After opening up his heart to the golden idols of Edom, Amaziah had been humiliated: first when the mercenaries he had hired turned against him and captured the cities in Ephraim, second when he had failed to get them back, even with his 300,000 man army, and finally when King Jehoash had broken down the wall of Jerusalem and brought him home in chains. Jehoash had exposed his idolatry before his own court, and had called him a fool. Logos had hoped the triple tragedy would bring true repentance, but no. Amaziah had a choice, and he chose instead to harden his heart. He still carried out his duties as king. He got the walls of Jerusalem repaired, and guided Judah in planning for the close pass of Mars due in 780 BC. But he became bitter, angry, and sullen.

Then as Mars grew larger in the sky, Amaziah openly and brazenly began to call upon Astarte and the Baals for deliverance. Much to Uzziah’s horror, King Amaziah even reestablished the pagan worship center on the Mount of Olives! 780 BC turned out to be a bad year for Judah. Satan had not expected such luck. The devastation he had aimed at Egypt spilled over into Judah as well. The last straw for King Amaziah came as the earthquakes shook down the entire section of wall he had just rebuilt.

Amaziah took it very badly. He cursed and shook his fist at the heavens. Finally Uzziah could take no more. All this time he had said nothing against his father, even when he had called on the pagan gods. But now, he took him aside to the conference room and closed the doors behind them. He entreated his father earnestly, but respectfully. “Dad, you turned away from YHWH the God of our fathers, and called on the pagan gods of the nations, the Baals and Asherim, and the gods of Edom. Not one good thing has happened to you or to Judah ever since. Don’t you remember how YHWH would bless and protect you before you bowed down to the idols of Edom? Renounce them now. Turn back to YHWH, that His face may shine upon you once more!”

At that, Amaziah’s hard shell cracked. He fell on his face before his son, crying out bitterly in repentance. Uzziah forgave him, and swore that YHWH would forgive him too. But he also urged him to voice his repentance before his people who had also suffered under his sins.

So he invited all the leaders and nobles of the people to his court. Amaziah stood before them to publicly repent of his sins. He told the entire story of how the idols of Edom had captured his heart. He held nothing back; he truly humbled himself, accepted responsibility for the trouble he had caused, and begged the forgiveness of his people. Logos was pleased, and forgave him.

Then, in a burst of false humility that is akin to pride, Amaziah went way beyond what Uzziah wanted. “I am no longer worthy to be your king,” he swore. “I’m just a wicked, worthless old fool. Uzziah is now your sole king.” He took off his ring and crown and handed them over. “I’ll hide my face in shame. You shall not see me again.”

Everyone, especially his wife Jecoliah, stood in shock as Amaziah walked off the dais and out the door. By the time they recovered and raced after him, he had thrown off his royal robes and disappeared into the crowd. For months they searched. Finally they concluded that he must have gone down to the Western Sea and drowned himself. Jecoliah and Uzziah were heartbroken.

After the time of mourning for King Amaziah passed, the leaders of the people gathered at Jerusalem. Uzziah had been co-regent for ten years. Now it was time to crown him the sole king. The people were eager to hear whether Uzziah would reign like his father or not. He addressed them. “My father was a good man, a faithful king over Judah,” he began. “Amaziah followed the commands of YHWH, loved his wife, took good care of his family, and protected Judah from her enemies. Until he fell prey to the spell of the idols of Edom, no fault was found in him. Do not curse him for the evil that befell him at the end. Rather guard yourselves from idols that such evil not befall you as well, for we all are in great danger when idols corrupt the land! You asked if I will rule like my father did?” He paused for dramatic effect. “The answer is yes, just like my father, for he was a great man and I love him. Except for this: I will destroy all the idols from the land. I will keep my heart pure toward YHWH, and guide my actions by His Law. I will love all His people, especially His priests. And I will hate all that He hates, which you also hate – that which you hated in my father when he fell to idolatry.”

Uzziah paused. The gathering erupted in applause. In the crowd Uzziah saw Zechariah son of Mahli, the prophet who had blessed his grandfather Joash after his paralysis, and who had prophesied to King Amaziah all during his reign. He was an old man, but he still had fire in his eyes and a spring in his step. The king called him to the front and invited him onto the dais to stand beside him. “You all know Zechariah the Prophet. He ministered to my father and to my grandfather. Now he ministers to me as well.

“Zechariah, I hereby appoint you as the king’s prophet. You shall go to the high priest, or go to YHWH in prayer, and obtain the Word of YHWH, and you shall bring it to me. I grant you total access to my presence anytime day or night, at any place whether I am on the throne or in battle, with any person whether I am talking with the Pharaoh of Egypt or with my own wife. I may not always agree, but I will always hear you and accept YHWH’s Word through you as long as you remain faithful to Him.”

More cheers; everyone loved Zechariah. Then the great hall quieted down, hoping for Zechariah to speak.

“O King, live forever!” Zechariah bowed low, in the traditional greeting of respect. “I accept your offer, with humble gratitude. YHWH has a Word of commendation for you, O King. He is pleased at your commitment to get rid of the idols and cleanse the land of the pagan priests. But He is even more pleased that you guard your heart. You honor your father, but keep yourself free of his idolatry. Thus shall your kingdom be firmly established.”

The applause was deafening. Uzziah finally had to raise his arms for silence. “Thank you Zechariah. I will never allow the idols of Edom or any other idols in our land as long as I am king. But tell me, what...”

“I was not talking about the idols in our land, O King. I was talking about the idols in the heart. King Amaziah carried idols in his heart even after his father cleansed the idols from the pagan temple. His chief idol was self; he had to look good before the people; when he was humbled he got angry and bitter. That is just another form of pride, and is why he never recovered. But you have rejected his idols. You have humbled yourself. Thus you have kept yourself available for YHWH to guide and bless. YHWH loves that in you, and He is very pleased.”

“Thank you, Zechariah. All I want to know is, what would YHWH have me do now? Right now?”

For a long minute, there was silence in the hall. This is where the rubber meets the road. It is rare for a king to bow to the word of a prophet, or anyone, for that matter. Kings usually want to run things. Everyone was thinking, *Will Uzziah just do whatever Zechariah says? Is Zechariah the de-facto king around here?* It sounded like King Uzziah was giving Zechariah a blank check to order him around! Unthinkable! Some held their breath.

Zechariah didn’t take the bait. He had this big grin on his face, but he shook his head. “YHWH wants you to rule. He made you the king, here, not me. If He gives me some special Word of guidance, I will surely let you know. But as long as you remain humble and attentive to Him, He will direct your paths. Then I will only need to watch over you and pray for you, for you will learn to know His voice yourself. His wisdom is available for all who humbly seek.”

Uzziah didn’t give up that easily. “I know that YHWH has a special word of guidance through you, in honor of my coronation. Please, friend Zechariah. Just ask Him.”

Zechariah bowed. The stillness lengthened. After a few minutes he looked back at the king and smiled. “You are correct, O King. YHWH has a Word of guidance for you now, to celebrate this occasion.” He paused.

“Well? I am eager to hear and obey His Word.”

“He wants you to take a wife. It is not right for a king to be a bachelor. Set a good example in Judah for families all across the land, by taking a godly wife and by remaining faithful to her and to your children.”

Again, applause broke out, along with titters and squeals from the young ladies of the court who'd been hoping for a long time that somebody would have the guts to tell him that. Most kings in those days married at 18 or 20, or as soon as they became king. Uzziah was already 26 and had been co-regent for ten years!

King Uzziah never missed a beat. Raising his hand for silence, he said firmly. "Okay. But my father is no longer alive to arrange my marriage. Therefore I appoint you, friend Zechariah, to find me a godly wife. Pray to find God's perfect choice for me."

Scattered laughter, then eager silence fell across the great hall. The people felt like they were being treated to a fine tennis match. The ball was now in Zechariah's court. He nodded and chuckled, conceding the point. "That is a difficult task, O King. Give me time, I pray. Many lovely ladies in the land would make you a fine queen if you should choose them. But if you want God's perfect choice, I must spend much time in prayer."

So the celebrated search began. It was the talk of the nation. Gossip flies pretty fast, anyhow, but this was the biggest news of their generation. Fathers all across the land brought their daughters in to find Zechariah. He was kept busy interviewing and praying about each one.

King Uzziah stayed out of it. If anyone approached him about it, he would just send them to Zechariah. He focused on all the things kings are supposed to do. He got rid of the idols and pagan priests. He supported the Levitical priests, especially the current high priest, Pedaiah. He rebuilt and strengthened the walls of Jerusalem. He erected towers at all the corners and gates, in case they were ever again besieged. He appointed royal gardeners and vinedressers on the hills around the city, for he loved the soil. He dug wells in the fields. He built watchtowers across the land to warn of approaching enemies. He reorganized his army by appointing 2600 captains throughout the land, each with 100 to 150 local soldiers reporting to him. He made sure every man in his militia was properly armed and ready for battle. He developed a new system of communication, so that his orders would reach his captains within the hour, even if Jerusalem was besieged. He would not be trapped inside like Hazael had trapped his grandfather Joash!

Every month or two, Zechariah would come to the king with something like: "I have it narrowed down to the finest 50 (or 20, or 10) ladies in the land, but I believe YHWH wants you choose one of them." There were so many that seemed perfect to him.

Uzziah would answer, "No, I assigned that choice to you. Let me know when you find God's perfect choice."

A whole year passed. The hundreds of eligible ladies turned into thousands. Zechariah kept finding excellent possibilities, but Logos would not grant him a definite answer on any of them. It was getting a bit frustrating.

Uzziah was not anxious. It wasn't that he didn't love female companionship. Oh no. It was more that he loved everyone. He'd often lay aside his royal robes, put on a plain white tunic, and travel the land visiting his people. He didn't try to disguise himself. Everyone knew him. He just loved his people. He would listen to their concerns, help the poor, praise and encourage their achievements, and ensure they got justice from their elders and judges.

One thing he would not do, is discuss their daughters, who of course all wanted to become his queen. He would just smile at her father and say, "Thank you. I am honored by her affection. But Zechariah is handling that part of my affairs. Please feel free to contact him."

A second year passed. The inevitable happened. King Uzziah was visiting **Zadok**, a Levite in the line of Eleazar (though not currently in line to be high priest). It was a good visit, for Uzziah strongly supported and loved the Levitical priesthood, and they all loved him in return. But as he prepared to leave, Uzziah was startled by the thought that for the first time in months, he had completed a visit without being asked about some gal who wanted to be his queen. In fact, even though he knew that Zadok had some lovely eligible daughters, he had never bugged him.

Normally Uzziah would keep his mouth shut. That was Zechariah's job. But now, before he could stop himself, he blurted out, "I am amazed at you, friend Zadok! Not once have you attempted to convince me to take one of your daughters as my queen. Are they not interested? If that is so, they are the only daughters in Judah who are not."

Zadok raised one eyebrow. "Their interest is not the issue, my lord the king. I thought we all wanted YHWH to reveal His one perfect choice for you."

Uzziah laughed, trying to hide the fact that he was ashamed for even mentioning it. He hugged his friend and said his good-byes, while breathing a fervent prayer of repentance for his little blunder. But just as he turned to go, his eyes caught the briefest glimpse of a young lady behind her father. He didn't see much; just a pretty, rounded face with a quizzical 'Mona Lisa' smile, framed by lovely waist-length light brown hair. All the rest of the day, and all the way back to the palace, that face haunted him. He just couldn't get her out of his mind.

As he lay in bed that night, he argued with himself. *I've seen a million pretty faces. Why does that one stick in my mind? Zechariah is capable of choosing a wife for me. I won't let a pretty face cloud my judgment. But what was that smile she wore? What was she thinking? Was it a hopeful smile? Or was she laughing at me? No. I've got to stop these fruitless thoughts. It is none of my business what she was thinking. Hey! I don't even care what she was thinking!*

He angrily turned over in his bed and tried to force the picture of her face out of his mind. *I've got a busy day tomorrow. I've got to get some sleep!*

But as soon as he relaxed, his mind drifted back to that quizzical Mona Lisa smile. He finally gave in, to fall asleep with the picture of her face floating before him. The next morning it was still there. Uzziah got busy with his day, pushing the image aside. Surely it would evaporate in the busyness of the day. But it didn't. Nor the next. He found that it was easier to sleep at night, when he allowed that lovely face to float across his mind as he drifted off. He stopped trying to convince himself that he didn't care who she was or what she had been thinking when he had visited Zadok. He cared. And he knew he would be paying his old friend another visit, soon. *But no!* He checked himself. He dare not allow himself to be sucked into some romantic relationship with one of Zadok's daughters. He had given Zechariah the task of... wait. *What had he told Zechariah, anyway? Is there any way out of it? Oh nuts.* Early the next morning he called for Zechariah.

"My lord the king? You want to talk to me?"

"Yes, my friend. It's been two years. I'm trying not to be anxious, but you said that YHWH wants me to take a wife. Are you still working on the task I assigned you?"

"No, O King. I finished that task a year ago."

"What? Finished? Why didn't you tell me?"

"YHWH told me not to tell you until you asked."

Uzziah was a little indignant. "Well! Okay my friend. Now I have asked. So who is she? Let's plan the wedding, for I am ready, indeed even eager, to be married."

"Are you still willing to accept YHWH's choice?"

"Of course. Who is she? Stop beating around the..."

"Is there anyone you have in mind? Are you quite sure that YHWH's choice will not disappoint you?"

Uzziah had to pause and search his heart. He could not lie to his faithful friend. "Well, Zechariah, now that you ask, I did catch a quick glimpse of someone recently, and a picture of her face seems to be stuck in my mind. That's why I called you. I determined to reject her and accept only God's choice, for that will be for my best, I know."

"Stuck in your mind, eh?" Zechariah chuckled. "Have trouble sleeping? Heart palpitations? Angrily try to think of other things? Argue with yourself? Wish you'd never given the task to me? Wonder if she cares?"

Uzziah gasped. How did Zechariah know what he had been struggling with? "It matters not, my friend. All that will pass when I have YHWH's perfect choice."

Zechariah put his hands together up to his lips, and studied the king's face. "I'll make you a deal, O King. I'll go to get YHWH's perfect choice for you, but at the same time, you must send one of your servants for this lady whose face 'stuck in your mind'. When they're both here, we shall see what YHWH says and which one you will really choose."

That sounded fair enough to Uzziah. He called his most trusted servant and described the pretty face with the Mona Lisa smile he had seen at the house of Zadok. Less than an hour later, Zechariah was already back, but he had no young lady with him. Uzziah was trying hard not to be impatient. "Where is she, my friend?"

"Be anxious not, my lord. She's in the powder room preparing herself. Where is the one you told me about?"

"I sent for her. She only lives 20 minutes away..." Uzziah began, but then his servant entered. "I have found her just as you asked, O King. She is Jerusha, Zadok's youngest daughter. She is freshening up in the powder room. She will be here very soon."

Now, you and I, dear Reader, both know that the term 'very soon' has a totally different meaning to an impatient king than to a young woman preparing to see a suitor for the first time. The time passed slowly for Uzziah. He tried not to be anxious, but he couldn't help imagining. *What if YHWH's choice was plain, or old and ugly, compared to that lovely face with the Mona Lisa smile? Would he still be able to defer to YHWH's choice? Why had Zechariah wanted both of them here, anyway? Was this a test? What if he fell to the temptation to take his own choice? What if his heart was captured by that pretty smile? What if...*

No! Uzziah sternly commanded his heart. *YHWH knows best. He knows the future. I will accept His choice, even if she is old and ugly. So I will not even look at Jerusha. I will have eyes only for the one YHWH made for me.*

A tall, veiled woman in a flowing white gown stood in the doorway. "There is the one YHWH has chosen for you, O King," Zechariah said softly, smiling.

Uzziah held out his scepter, to indicate that she should approach the throne. "Thank you, my friend Zechariah," he whispered. "I accept her as a gift from YHWH." Then he called to her. "Come close, my dear. Zechariah the Prophet tells me that YHWH has picked you to be my wife – my queen. Do you agree? Would you like that? Can you find it in your heart to love me?"

The veil bowed in a graceful curtsy and responded, "Yes, my lord the king. Yes! Yes, with all my heart!"

He smiled at her, giving a deep sigh of relief that his struggle was finally over. "I swear that you shall never regret your decision. I vow to love and care for you with all that is in me. We will plan the wedding for a month from today. Thank you for coming, my dear. Thank you for being willing to accept YHWH's choice for us."

Zechariah held up his hand. "Wait, my lord the king. You haven't yet seen her face or asked her name. Are you forgetting? What about this Jerusha of whom you spoke, the one whose face 'stuck in your mind'? Don't you want to see her and compare the two? How can you make a choice when only one is here?"

“How? I made that choice two years ago when I gave you the authority to find YHWH’s perfect choice for me. I just heard from your own lips that this is YHWH’s choice. I will accept no other, no matter how beautiful or how much her pretty face may be ‘stuck in my mind’. I don’t need to see her or know her name. I don’t need to compare her to anyone. My choice is made. You may go now, my dear. Prepare yourself for our wedding. I will see your face and learn your name the day you take my name.”

Then King Uzziah called his trusted servant over. “Thank you for bringing Jerusha from Zadok’s home, but it seems I won’t need to see her after all. I have already made my choice: the woman Zechariah brought. You can send Jerusha back home. But please, be gentle with her feelings. She is an exceedingly lovely girl. She will have no trouble finding a good husband.”

The lady before him gave a light and musical laugh, as if she were relieved to have no more competition. It was a sweet laugh, warming the king’s heart. *This was the one YHWH had chosen for him! He would remember that lovely laugh. It would replace the image that haunted him.* He sent her away with gifts to help her prepare. The court began getting ready for the big wedding.

A thousand times in the next month, Jerusha’s face with that lovely Mona Lisa smile came back to King Uzziah. It was driving him crazy. But he would not give in. “As soon as I see my new queen’s beautiful face,” he kept telling himself, “her picture will replace that one that is haunting me, and it will trouble me no more.” He wondered that such a brief glimpse should have caused him so much grief. He kept trying to remember only the lovely laugh of his bride-to-be, but now the Mona Lisa smile returned with that laugh! He almost wished that his servant had not said her name, for now that the face had a name it was even more persistent. He simply could not get to sleep at night without Jerusha’s Mona Lisa smile floating above him in his mind.

The day of the wedding finally came. It seemed that everyone in the land had come to celebrate with him, for the anticipation had grown over the two-year search. *Ahh... good! His old friend Zadok the priest was conducting the ceremony.* Uzziah beamed with joy.

Finally he will see his bride, and the picture of her lovely face will replace the one that had been troubling him. Without even thinking, Uzziah began to scan the crowd for Zadok’s daughters. He spotted some of them up front by Zadok’s wife. *But where was Jerusha?* King Uzziah was suddenly filled with deep longing for one last glimpse of her sweet Mona Lisa smile before she was gone from his life forever. He yanked himself back to reality, swearing silently, *God in heaven, help me! That haunting face shall not spoil my wedding day!* So He forced himself to look only at the long flowing white robe and veil slowly approaching the throne.

Finally the ceremony ended. Zadok pronounced the glad tidings that they were officially husband and wife, the king and his queen. They stood hand in hand underneath the graceful high canopy, while Zadok intoned the final words, “You may now lift the veil to see and kiss your wife – for the very first time.”

King Uzziah slowly lifted the veil, and gasped! It was Jerusha, with that same quizzical Mona Lisa smile! Her laugh confirmed her identity. It was Zadok’s youngest daughter all along! Uzziah was overwhelmed. Tears came to his eyes. *God is so good! It was He who had put the desire in his heart, and her picture in his mind.* He bent regally over to give her the traditional kiss on the forehead, while the crowd erupted in applause.

That night as Uzziah was getting acquainted with his new wife, his analytical mind just had to know the sequence. “When did Zechariah find you, Jerusha?”

“A year ago, my lord. Zechariah had interviewed my older sisters long before, but he’d skipped me, as I’m the youngest. The older sisters always marry first. But YHWH told him to come again. Right away He confirmed that I am the one. So Zechariah anointed me and told me to prepare myself to be your queen, but to say nothing to anyone. That was really hard, especially when you came visiting my father. That last visit, I couldn’t resist peeking out at you as you left. I’m sorry. I should not have done that.”

“Yes, you should not have done that! You have no idea how much grief it caused me!”

Jerusha was horrified. “Grief, my lord?”

Uzziah laughed. “Your lovely face haunted me day and night! I couldn’t sleep. I simply could not get your sweet smile out of my mind. I didn’t know you were YHWH’s choice. I thought you were a powerful temptation to keep me from accepting YHWH’s choice. I had to fight that temptation from the minute I first saw your face to the minute I lifted your veil. That was the hardest...”

“But my lord, if you had not seen my face and desired me, you would not have asked Zechariah. YHWH was waiting for you to ask for me.”

“Huh? Zechariah told you that?”

“Yes, a year ago, when he first anointed me. He said that although YHWH had chosen me, yet He would not allow me to marry you until you had chosen me too.”

“Did he say why? I was trying hard not to look at any of the ladies. I almost missed you.”

“Later, when I began getting impatient, he explained that even in the best of marriages, there are difficulties, disagreements, for we don’t always think alike. If I were YHWH’s choice, but not your choice, you might blame God when you got upset at me. But if I am also your choice, that takes away your temptation to blame God.”

“Sounds like Zechariah spent a lot of time with you.”

“Oh, he was at our house every week. He taught me, prepared me; he was wonderful. I’d never have survived the year without him. I’d have snuck over to the palace and done things I’m sure we’d both regret. You’ve no idea how hard it was waiting for you to find me!”

Uzziah shook his head in awe. “So you have loved me for a whole year, and I never knew...”

“Not just one year, my lord. I’ve loved you all my life. From when you first sat on the throne beside your father. You were 16. I was six, and even then I knew that someday I would be your queen. All this time I’ve kept myself pure for you. Every waking moment... I rejected three suitors. I prepared myself. I developed my talents for you...”

“Did Zadok know? He never said a word.”

“Of course he knew. But like Zechariah, he insisted that you must choose me. As I got older, he even kept me away from your palace, for fear that I might try to ‘capture you with my eyelashes’ or something.”

“No wonder. I don’t even remember ever seeing you at the palace. I knew Zadok had some lovely daughters, but whenever I visited him, he would shoo them away.”

“My father always said that if I am really YHWH’s choice for you, then you will find me even if he kept me hidden at the farthest corners of the kingdom.”

“He sure did keep you hidden!” They both laughed.

“Jerusha? When you came to the palace hidden in your veil, you really had me fooled. I still can’t figure out how you managed to pull that off. Until today, I was sure there were two of you in the palace powder room.”

“Yes. Wasn’t that a good joke?” Jerusha laughed again, the laugh that Uzziah had come to love. “Zechariah and your servant planned it on my way to the palace. Zechariah wanted to test you one last time, to see if you would accept YHWH’s choice, or demand to see me and choose the ‘pretty face’.”

Uzziah nodded. “That was the hardest thing I’ve ever done, choosing to submit to YHWH’s choice without even seeing you or knowing your name, and with your lovely smile (which I was so sure belonged to someone else) dancing in back of my mind.”

“When I laughed – remember, right after you told your servant to ‘send Jerusha home’ – I almost gave it away.”

“No, no. That laugh saved my life! I had something to hang on to that I knew was really you, really the one YHWH chose for me. I memorized your laugh, and replayed it in my mind a thousand times since that day. Today under the wedding canopy, when I saw the lovely face I had come to believe was my own choice, my great temptation, your laugh convinced me it was really you.”

“They lived happily ever after” doesn’t apply to most marriages, but it fit this one, with one exception. As their marriage had begun committed to YHWH’s choice, so their marriage was committed to raising up children for YHWH. They conceived within a month, and the next year bore a son, whom they named Jehoshua. He was a strong and beautiful child. The land rejoiced, for their king now had an heir to carry on the royal line of David. But then in 776 BC, when Jehoshua was not yet two, he suddenly took sick and died. It was a terrible blow to Uzziah and Jerusha; and doubly so because they didn’t know anything they had done to incur YHWH’s wrath. They called Zechariah.

“Why are you in mourning, my lord the king? Did you not commit this child to YHWH from even before he was conceived? Did you not vow to give Him to YHWH? YHWH has shown that He is pleased with you! He has accepted your gift, your vow. He has taken Jehoshua to be with Him forever. But I swear that the next child you bear shall be yours, YHWH’s love-gift back to you. Stop your weeping. Rejoice in your love for each other. Conceive a child who will be king in your place when you have grown old, and who will bless you, and all the land of Judah, all his days. That is God’s gift to you.”

It was hard. The pain of losing a child is beyond the understanding of anyone except the grieving parents. But Zechariah’s encouragement got them through it, and by the end of 775 BC they were again rejoicing in the birth another beautiful baby boy. They named him Prince **Jotham**: “YHWH is Righteous.”

Through it all, Uzziah discovered the benefit of having God’s perfect choice for a wife. Jerusha was a constant source of strength and support, even through their grief. Now the whole land of Judah shared their joy of a perfect heir to the throne. Judah prospered and was at peace.

By then, Amaziah had turned up. He had not drowned himself in the Western Sea. He had merely hidden away in a brothel and spent his days and nights in profligate living. But though he was very rich, he had only had a limited amount of money with him. After that had run out, he was thrown out of the brothel. He took a day job tending pigs in Philistia, and wasted his evenings drinking his sorrows away. False pride can be a strange and deadly thing.

A Judean merchant found King Amaziah in Gaza, and brought him back to Jerusalem. Uzziah, Queen Jerusha, and Jecoliah his wife, all welcomed him back and tried to restore him to his throne. But he refused to wear his crown or royal robes. He kept saying, “I’m just a worthless fool. Leave me alone to my misery.” Something in his mind had snapped. He never recovered. Though he never worshiped idols again, now it seemed he couldn’t worship at all. He claimed to be unworthy to even enter Solomon’s temple. About the only thing he did as king was to insist that the annual tribute payments he had sworn to send Jehoash, continue being sent to Israel’s new king, Jeroboam II.

It had taken Egypt years to recover from the great flood of 780 BC. Amenemopet turned out to be a foolish ruler, so in 769 BC Amenemnisu (son of Herihor and Nodjmet) came to Tanis in the Delta, resulting in two competing Pharaohs for four years. Psusennes II took over for five years as the acting Pharaoh at Thebes. Menkheperre was still high priest of Amun. Alara rebelled against Egypt to began the 25th 'Nubian' Dynasty; he ruled for 20 years at Napata. Corruption and intrigue weakened the land. Priests, Pharaohs, and nobles bickered for supremacy. Israel now controlled all of Egypt's interests in the Levant.

King Jeroboam II was ruling pretty well in Israel. God fulfilled His Word through Jonah, to give Jeroboam good success enlarging his borders, from the entrance of Hamath in the north, to the Red Sea south of the Arabah.

As I said, Ben-Hadad III never recovered from that series of humiliating defeats. He went insane, and died in 770 BC. His fifteen-year-old son Rezin took his place. In his early years, Rezin remained subject to Israel, paying his tribute. Syria was a vassal state ruled by Israel.

Jeroboam kept a firm hand on Damascus. It was 'his' city; the first to fall to Israel under his own command. He was proud of that. Israel honored him for it, too. His father had given him a precious gift, in allowing him to be leading the army during that third victory over Syria. Though Jehoash had directed the battles, it was Jeroboam II who had driven his chariot victoriously into Damascus when it had fallen to Israel. That thrill never left him. He knew the victory had been granted to them by YHWH, so whenever he went into battle he would pray the same prayer: "O YHWH God of Israel! Remember Jehoash my father and the victory You gave us at Damascus! Continue to protect Your people Israel through me, just as You did my father." Jeroboam fought humbly, and gave glory to YHWH for the victories he achieved. Thus during the first half of his reign, he never lost a battle.

His idols still remained locked up under his bed. Buelah bugged him about them every now and then, but tried not to nag. It appeared that without help, her husband would never destroy them. But at least he had never bowed to them. He felt sure that their grip on him was weakening as he slowly learned to really trust in YHWH.

As a result, Israel prospered greatly during this time. By 768 BC, all of the nations surrounding Israel were either vassals or allies. Egypt remained too weak to protect its interests in the Levant. Assyria made no raids at all under Shalmaneser IV. Even under Ashur-dan III, it took years for Assyria to recover enough to campaign in the Levant. Moab, Ammon, and Edom were still under Jeroboam's thumb. The Arabs brought tribute. No longer protected by Egypt, Philistia was subject to Jeroboam. Phoenicia. Hamath, Tyre, and Sidon, previously Syrian vassals, now gave their tribute to Jeroboam, the famed conqueror of Damascus. Even Amaziah continued to pay him tribute.

Sadly, the result was predictable. With universal peace, a steady flow of tribute, and unprecedented prosperity, Jeroboam became proud. The people lived in luxury and ease—they no longer needed God. Immorality and idolatry again reared their ugly heads in Israel. How many times have we seen this cycle? You would think mankind would learn! But no. It seems that every generation is doomed to repeat it. YHWH cannot continue to bless those sons who abandon the faith of their fathers.

However, the downfall of Israel first became evident in 766 BC in Judah. After falling prey to the idols of Edom, Amaziah had fled his throne after the earthquake had destroyed his wall in 780 BC. He had returned after four years, but though he had given up the idols and repented, he had not turned back to YHWH. Instead, he had become bitter, angry, sullen, and a bit delusional. Jecoliah and Uzziah had tried to reach him, but the pattern set by the sins of his youth now bound him more tightly than steel chains. He had given himself to prostitutes, gamblers, and drunkards. Co-regent Uzziah was ashamed to be called his son, but he would not speak against him or confront him.

So by 766 BC Amaziah, at the age of 57, was a broken, drunken, wasted man. His half-brother Amoz finally could take no more. He gathered some guards and notified King Uzziah. "Your father has brought great shame on you and on Judah, and on the holy name of YHWH, while you do nothing. Even now he is playing the fool at a brothel. Therefore I shall take these guards and slay him myself."

Uzziah sent a warning to his father! Amaziah was sober enough to flee to Lachish, but Amoz caught up with him and slew him there. All Judah breathed a collective sigh of relief. Even Uzziah had to admit that Amoz was right. He comforted the queen mother Jecoliah and swore to her that he would never treat his wife Jerusha like Amaziah had treated her.

So again Uzziah became the sole ruler of Judah. He sent out an edict that Judah would mourn thirty days for his father. He only spoke of him with honor and respect, and buried him with the kings of Judah in Jerusalem. Some didn't want to mourn for him; they wanted to celebrate! But he forbade it. He brought Amoz and his guards to trial and punished them. However, their sentence was light, for Amaziah had certainly given them all occasion.

After the time of mourning was past, Uzziah wrote a letter to Jeroboam II. "Your father rightfully humbled my father, for he had bowed to the idols of Edom. It was YHWH our God who allowed him to defeat Judah and to break down the walls of Jerusalem. I submitted to Israel for a long time on my father's account. But I shall no longer submit, for Amaziah is dead. I have destroyed his idols, slain all his pagan priests, and rebuilt Jerusalem's walls. Therefore, you have no further occasion against us. Though I seek no quarrel with you, yet I will not continue paying the tribute your father demanded.

“I will work to cleanse and rebuild Judah, strengthen our army, and build peaceful trade with our neighbors, including Israel. We are brothers. We should not be asking tribute of each other, but rather we should be supporting each other. Be at peace. Sincerely, Uzziah.”

It was a kind and forthright letter, and it should not have caused offense. But Jeroboam was miffed, just the same. As I said, he had gotten proud. He really liked having tribute flowing in from all his neighbors. In his anger, he passed a fateful law to seal the border between Israel and Judah, so that no trade could pass between them and no one in Israel could go down to Jerusalem to worship.

That was hard for King Uzziah, for he really wanted trade between the two nations. But it was good for Judah, because of what happened next. To stop his people from going to Jerusalem to worship, Jeroboam II did exactly what his namesake had done; he got out those golden calves and set them up at Bethel and Dan again! He had sworn he wouldn't. He had even locked them up and given his wife Buelah the key. But times had changed. With renewed peace and prosperity, they had forgotten YHWH. They now traded freely with their pagan neighbors, even in such wicked places as Hamath and Damascus. With free trade, all the temptations from those who served Astarte and the Baals flooded in too.

Buelah would not give her husband the key. In his anger, Jeroboam no longer cared. He had his servants break open the strongbox. Within only a few years, the idolatry and immorality throughout the land of Israel got even worse than it had been during the days of Jeroboam I. It continued downhill from there. Uzziah should have been glad that Jeroboam II had sealed up their borders!

766 BC thus marked the beginning of the end for the northern kingdom. Logos had already given Israel many warnings and examples. He had blessed them when they were faithful and had punished them when they became unfaithful, as He had promised in the Law of Moses. *But with the amazing victories of Jehoash and Jeroboam II, and the incredible peace and prosperity which followed, so soon and with such slight provocation, to fall into such gross idolatry and immorality was the last straw.*

Logos called Satan into His presence. He wasted no words. “You have prevailed over King Jeroboam and the kingdom of Israel. I grant you permission to harm them as you will, only according to My Law.” He turned His back and began to weep. For a long time nothing could be heard in the heavenlies but muffled sobbing, the only outward evidence of His intense agony of Spirit. Satan was stunned. The depths of Logos' anguish had touched something deep within him that he didn't even know was there. He flew down into Israel to celebrate his great victory with a little torment, but his heart wasn't in it. For a long time, he seemed morose, distant, even losing the joy of drinking the blood of his subjects. Israel remained prosperous.

In Assyria, the new King Ashur-dan III had become unspeakably cruel. It is not that cruelty wasn't the norm in the land of Assyria, but rather that now there was a godly influence in the land: the church, under the apostleship of Jonah. The cries of God's people living there reached His throne. So He allowed judgment to sweep across the land. A great plague fell upon Assyria in 765 BC. Strangely, it didn't affect the poor peasants very much; but it devastated the army and the nobility. It got so bad that Ashur-dan had to cancel his annual military campaign entirely in 764 BC. He had planned to move into Syria and the Levant, and next year to take Judah as well. You never heard about that because it never happened. More catastrophes followed. In 763 BC his people got so fed up with him that a revolt broke out, which kept him occupied for years.

Thus the Levant continued to prosper abundantly, at peace on all sides. Much tribute, trade, and idolatry flowed into the land from the surrounding pagan nations. Only Judah, whose border with Israel was tightly sealed, was protected. Satan was furious! Now that he had free reign in Israel was he satisfied? No. He wanted Judah as well. But as hard as he tried, he could not get that border unsealed. Jeroboam got stubborn about it, as he knew that Uzziah wanted free trade. Jeroboam never noticed that Judah prospered fine without Israel's tarnished merchandise.

Egypt remained chaotic. In 765 BC the two competing Pharaohs at Tanis killed each other off, so Osorkon II left his father Takelot I at Bubastis again and rushed to Tanis to restore Libyan rule. Also, Psusennes II rushed down from Thebes to try to restore native Egyptian rule, making two new competing Pharaohs at Tanis. Then Takelot I saw his opportunity and sent his brother-in-law Shoshenk II up to take control of Thebes for the 22nd 'Libyan' Dynasty. In 762 BC he was assassinated; his son Harsiese became the acting Pharaoh. In 760 BC old Takelot I died, so Takelot II took over for his grandfather at Bubastis, where he ruled for 24 years. I'm just giving you a brief condensation. In reality, many Pharaoh wannabe's and ruling high priests bickered for control of Egypt during this chaotic time. No one could keep them straight back then, and even more so today. Egypt needed a strong Pharaoh to pull it together.

Assyria was nearly as chaotic. Ashur-dan III blamed the Yawists (his term for the church which prospered under the preaching of Jonah) for the nation's troubles. He swore the nation suffered because they had forsaken the ancient gods. He began a horrible persecution of the Yawists. Many were slain. The survivors were driven into hiding. Those whose convictions about YHWH were superficial renounced their faith and swore allegiance to the king and his gods. Logos was grieved that they should so soon forget their great deliverance. Satan had occasion to torment Assyria, and in 759 BC a second terrible plague swept over the land, this time affecting peasant and royalty alike. Ashur-dan did not repent, but those who had rebelled against his reign were subdued.

Driven underground in Assyria, the true faith was tested and purified. It grew strong. As Logos had hoped, prayers multiplied. Satan did everything he could to make those prayers cease, as now for the first time he could sense in them his ultimate defeat. But the more he raged through his slave Ashur-dan III, the more fervent the prayers. Prayer began to cover the hidden Yawists, so even Satan couldn't find them. *He began to panic.*

In 760 BC old Osorkon II passed away. So in 758 BC Takelot II of the 22nd 'Libyan' Dynasty at Bubastis placed Shoshenk III (his first son) on the throne at Tanis, in competition with 21st Dynasty Pharaoh Psusennes II still there. The Libyan dynasty Pharaohs also thought they had control over the high priests of Amun in Thebes. After all, they were now of Libyan descent as well! (Harsiese, the Libyan high priest of Amun, was the son of Shoshenk II, son of Shoshenk I, the founder of the dynasty at Bubastis.) But in 753 BC Pedubast I (son of Harsiese) got ambitious. We call it the 23rd 'Libyan Anarchy' dynasty. With his father's support, he rebelled and proclaimed himself 'the' Pharaoh of Egypt. Then he tried to take over the country – Abydos, Lycopolis, Herakleopolis... This turned out to be a catastrophe for the Libyan Dynasty, and the beginning of a protracted civil war. Takelot II in lower Egypt could not ignore the defiance. In 750 BC he sent his second son Osorkon III to straighten out his relatives in Thebes. We shall leave him sailing up river toward Thebes with a small army, for something serious occurred before he got there.

In Assyria, General Shamshi-Ilu was furious with King Ashur-dan III. Satan's panic was affecting them both. The general came to his king in 754 BC, and laid his sword at his feet. "O King, live forever. Though I swear my loyalty to you and to Assyria, I must confront you where I see you bringing harm to our great empire. I helped you come to power when I saw your brother's weakness. But you swore to be strong! To fight Assyria's battles and strengthen the empire! Instead, you have wasted your time and energy in internal squabbles, fighting against petty rebels and the Yawists – *against our own people*. I urge you to leave them alone! Work to strengthen the empire! I swear, when you have restored the glory of Assyria, when you are victorious in battle, then the internal squabbles will cease, and all of Assyria, even the Yawists, will admire and serve you."

Ashur-dan III was not impressed with that argument, for he feared the wise old general. Having become a bit paranoid (justifiably), he did not take counsel very well. But Shamshi-Ilu suspected that might be his response and was prepared. Over the years he'd gotten very good at this. His plot was in place and his co-conspirators were ready. He assassinated Ashur-dan III and got Assur-nirari V crowned in his place. As the youngest of the brothers, the old general was sure he'd be pretty easy to control. Finally Assyria will be great once again! But King Assur-nirari V was only a figurehead. The real power in Assyria was now General Shamshi-Ilu (and Satan who inspired him).

Israel and Judah continued to prosper abundantly. Though Satan had free reign in Israel through the sin of Jeroboam II, yet he often does not torment his subjects at first; he likes to toy with them awhile, to see how wicked they will become. He has learned over the years that he can get very little satisfaction tormenting people who are merely ignorant and self-centered. But if he can first plunge them into the depths of depravity, their inevitable torment is multiplied, giving him exquisite pleasure as he crushes them and drinks their blood. Thus the downfall of Israel worked slowly, like a deep ocean undercurrent. The people blithely partied, trusting not in YHWH, but in their king and his army to protect and provide for them (just as we see in America today). Nevertheless, there were some indications that all was not right in the expansive empire of Jeroboam II. It started with a Philistine rebellion. They wouldn't pay their tribute. They were the first to notice that Jeroboam and his army had gotten fat and lazy.

But, if you look at a map, Philistia is west of Judah, and hardly even borders Israel. King Jeroboam didn't feel like gathering his army to fight the Philistines. Their tribute didn't amount to much anyway. Jeroboam was so filthy rich by this time he didn't even care. So he wrote a letter to King Uzziah in Judah. It was caustic and spiteful, telling Uzziah that if he's not going to pay his tribute, he will have no trade with Israel, *and will get no protection from Israel, either*. "The Philistines have rebelled. They're mobilizing for war. I had been keeping them properly subdued for you, you know, but now they're your problem!"

Uzziah never saw that as a problem. He got the approval of Zechariah, mobilized his army, and attacked. The rebel Philistines fell before him. He broke down the walls of Ekron, Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod, and built his own strongholds in the area to keep them under control. From then on, their tribute flowed into Judah instead of Israel. Yes, 761 BC was a very good year for King Uzziah.

Uzziah also dealt with some rebellious Arabians and Meunites. He then reconquered Moab and Edom. Judah's borders now extended over the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. He became respected and feared among the nations of the Levant. But when Uzziah again asked Jeroboam to open their borders for free trade, he refused, "... until you start paying me the tribute your father promised my father,"

Uzziah was mystified. *Surely peace and free trade would be beneficial to both nations? Judah was strong enough now; he could simply break down the barriers on the border. But no; he really wanted peace with Israel, not war.* He wrote another letter to Jeroboam. But the more he pursued peace with Israel, the more stubborn Jeroboam got. It was silly, as the tribute he wanted from Judah was small compared to what he had just lost from Philistia, Moab, and Edom.

So the empire of Jeroboam began to crumble, while good King Uzziah and the kingdom of Judah grew very strong, for Logos prospered him.

CHAPTER 37 – JOTHAM, SON OF UZZIAH, AMOS

The crown prince Jotham, oldest living son of Uzziah and Jerusha, was the darling of the kingdom of Judah. After the high-profile fairy-tale romance of his parents, the whole nation was eagerly watching him grow to manhood. Now don't get me wrong; Jotham was a good boy, with honor and integrity worthy of a prince. He was generally obedient and respectful to his parents. Old Zechariah's prophecy that he would be 'God's gift' to them and would become a blessing to them and all Judah, was certainly coming to pass. But early on he made a foolish mistake which could cost him later.

Though he was only 19, the entire kingdom was already speculating (dare I say, gossiping) on who would become his wife. They remembered YHWH's word to Zechariah, who told King Uzziah that a king must have a wife, and then found Jerusha, 'God's perfect choice' for him. So when Jerusha and Uzziah decided that Jotham needed a wife, they wanted the same for him. In mid 756 BC they told him they had commissioned **Isaiah** the son of Amoz the prophet, to find God's perfect choice for his wife.

But Jotham had already made up his mind. He did not want some prophet finding him a wife! There were lots of lovely girls in Judah. Jotham was in no hurry. He was at that age when girls were fascinating and fun but a bit scary. Frankly he loved all the attention. He could sense every young lady in the kingdom gaze longingly at him when he passed. His popularity had rather gone to his head, and he was playing it for all he was worth. He told his parents, "Thanks, but no thanks. Isaiah can pray about it too, but I'll choose my own wife." Thus Jotham began interviewing eligible ladies, making lists and charts, inviting them to palace balls and dances, comparing them on his note-pad, and cultivating female friendships by the score. Frankly, he really got into it.

About this time, Isaiah (who was only 24 himself) came to him. "O Prince, live forever!"

"You may speak, Isaiah. I am grateful for the kindness of your father Amoz to my father the king. And I am glad to have you as my friend."

"You're welcome." Isaiah smiled. "I come at YHWH's word. He loves you, you know, as He loves your father. He wants to protect you. If you were older and more mature you might be able to choose your own wife without getting emotionally swept off your feet. But you're still young, and YHWH knows the temptations that surround you. Every young lady in the kingdom wants to capture you with her eyelashes! Thus your own choice might be some cute young flirt trying to entrap you with her charms. YHWH wants to deliver you from such temptations."

"Now, Isaiah. I don't want someone else picking a wife for me. That is so... so... 70s! Just because my father let Zechariah pick my mom doesn't mean..."

"Don't you think Zechariah made a good choice?"

"Well, of course. My mom is the best woman in the world. I shall find a wife just like her."

"There is no other woman on the face of the earth just like her. Only YHWH knows who He made for you. If you will allow me to begin the search, I will find her for you. But it will take time. You must swear to wait on YHWH's choice, and not fall to temptation. It may take years, but you're in no hurry. You must be patient."

Jotham, in his youthful self-confidence, did not understand the power of temptation. "Oh, don't worry about me, Isaiah. You can start looking for a wife for me if you want, but I'll be looking too! I won't fall to their temptations. I'm not that naïve. I swear, if I find someone, I'll check with you before I marry her." Tragically, Jotham was mistaken. He was indeed that naïve. He fell head over heels to temptation with the first flirt Satan sent to entrap him.

Her name was Baal-ko'ach (Baal is powerful). She was the oldest daughter of Buzz, the high priest of Baal, who secretly worshiped on the Mount of Olives. Remember that Uzziah had ordered the idolatry be cleansed from the land, but he had never really enforced it. The Baal worship had gone on, right under his own nose. Almost from the time prince Jotham was born the priests of Baal had begun plotting to seduce him, so he would let them keep their worship centers open on the high places.

Buzz encouraged his daughter Baal-ko'ach to play at the palace, and to befriend Jotham. But he pulled a sly one. He renamed her Jeko'ach (YHWH is mighty) at an early age, and made everyone call her that. She thought that was really her name. Then he trained her in all the right words to say, so those in the palace would never know that she was a daughter of the high priest of Baal.

While Jotham was growing up, Jeko'ach was just a friend – a playmate. He would no more think of her as a potential wife than he would his own sister. She wasn't even on his lists! But when Buzz heard the gossip that Uzziah had already contracted with Isaiah to find a wife for Jotham, he knew he had to act fast, or all his plotting would be for nothing. He brought Jeko'ach into his bedroom and sat her on his lap. "My dear, you are growing up. You are a young lady now. As your father, I want the best for you. But I am also a great prophet in Judah. That is why they made me a high priest in Jerusalem. I hear the voice of YHWH, and see visions from Him. YHWH told me that He made you to be the wife of the king in Jerusalem. That is your destiny – the only way you will ever be happy. Prince Jotham will soon be king. He is already 19. YHWH wants you to go to him now. Soon you will become his queen."

Yes, I know there was a lot of malarkey in that speech, but Buzz had carefully prepared Jeko'ach for it all her life, and she fell for it. "Jotham?" Her eyes grew very large. "He's my friend, but... but..."

“Yes, you were made to be his wife. We must get you ready. You must go down to the palace and tell him what I’ve told you. I know you’re barely sixteen, but it has to be now. There are many other young ladies who want him. But you are the only one YHWH made for him.”

So they dolled Jeko’ach up like a French whore, sloshed her with perfumes, painted her face, glued on false eyelashes, and sent her off to the palace court. She waited in back of the hall while the citizens of the land were granted their audience with King Uzziah. Jotham was sitting next to him, learning how to be a king. Jeko’ach saw the other girls all batting their eyelashes at him, wearing plastic smiles and whispering the latest gossip. *Her dad was right!*

When the others had all gone at the end of the day, Jeko’ach ran to meet Jotham as he was leaving the hall. She bowed before him with a graceful curtsy, as she had seen others bow to the king. “My lord, the prince...”

“Yes, my dear? You may speak.”

“Jotham! Don’t you recognize me? It’s Jeko’ach!”

“Oh my God! What have they done to you?”

She fluttered her eyelids demurely and smiled. “Is that how you greet your childhood friend?”

Jotham gave her an awkward hug. “I’m sorry. I didn’t recognize you.” He tried to say more, but was overcome by her nearness and the sweet smell of her perfume.

Jeko’ach was well prepared. “You didn’t recognize me because I’ve changed. I was just your girlfriend. But now I’m to be your wife. YHWH has told my father – he is a great prophet of YHWH in Jerusalem – that it is time for you to take a wife, and I am the one He made for you.” She batted her eyelids again, suddenly leaned forward to give him a quick kiss on the nose (exposing herself briefly), and did the other little things that whores do to attract a customer, just as she had been taught.

Jotham was overwhelmed. This was not the little girl he had grown up with. Even though he hadn’t agreed to let Isaiah pick his wife, he almost sent her to talk to him about it. But she had said all the right words. He fell for it. In no time at all, she was hiding in his bedroom and cuddling with him, while his body grew inflamed with passions well beyond his control.

When Jotham was called to dinner, Jeko’ach stayed in his bedroom. After dinner he brought her some food. They nibbled on it together and cuddled some more. Then she undressed and pulled him into bed with her. Jotham was in a daze, unable to refuse her. It wasn’t until the next morning, returning to the great hall, that he remembered his promise to Isaiah and sent for him.

When Isaiah came, Jotham took him aside. “I said I would tell you if I found the one YHWH made to be my wife,” he began. Jeko’ach stood smiling by his side.

“And I assure you,” Isaiah interrupted, glaring at her, “That this is not the one. She is the one I warned you about, the flirt who entraps you with her eyelashes. Send her away this instant, never to return!”

“Isaiah! Don’t you remember her? This is Jeko’ach. The daughter of a great prophet of YHWH in Jerusalem. She’s been my friend most of my life. I love her. YHWH just told me that He created her to be my wife, and she confirmed it. I want to marry her as soon as possible.”

Isaiah was stunned. It had all happened so fast. She had grown up under his nose, but he’d never given her a second look. Suddenly he saw who she was. “Jotham, I swear to you by YHWH God of the Universe this is not Jeko’ach! The power in her is not the power of YHWH, it is the power of the adversary. Send her away!”

Jotham couldn’t do it. He was trapped, just like Isaiah had warned. He could not see any evil in her; only his childhood playmate who had suddenly become a woman. Jotham mistook her sensuality for love, and married her anyway. His parents, Uzziah and Jerusha, were happy for the newlyweds. Sweet Jeko’ach had fooled them, too.

That month Jeko’ach got pregnant with their first child. Early next year, 755 BC, prince **Ahaz** was born. Jotham was just 20. Uzziah invited the nobles, priests, and elders of the land to come to the dedication of the new prince. During the party, Jotham discovered that he had been snookered. Isaiah was right. Jeko’ach was not really Jeko’ach at all. She was Baal-ko’ach, the daughter of Buzz, the high priest of Baal. Jotham called Isaiah over, trying to figure out how to justify himself. He prayed about it. In a sudden inspiration he decided to just come clean. “Isaiah, this is Buzz, my father-in-law. He’s the high priest of Baal on the Mount of Olives.”

Isaiah was disgusted. “You told me Jeko’ach’s father was a great prophet of YHWH in Jerusalem.”

“But I am, kind sir!” Buzz interjected. “I’ve been a prophet of YHWH all my life – raised in the School of Prophets. But I’m an equal-opportunity priest – I serve both YHWH and Baal. You know how it is these days.”

“I do indeed know how it is these days. Jotham, are you going to tolerate idolatry in the land like your grandfather did? If so I shall leave. I don’t want to be here when God’s judgment falls upon you.”

There was a long pause. Finally Jotham spoke. “Please don’t leave me, Isaiah. I swear, I will deal righteously with the idolatry. Buzz has even promised to help me.”

“Oh. I see. So you’ve made a deal with the devil?”

“No, really, Isaiah. Don’t always be so negative. He wants the best for his daughter just like I do.”

“Sorry, Jotham. I should not prejudge you. Forgive me. I hope your plan works out.” He turned to go home.

When Isaiah and most of the other guests had gone, Jotham pulled Buzz aside for a chat. “Please, father, sit down. We need to discuss our future.”

“Yes, my lord. Thank you for defending me before Isaiah. I realize that you could have me slain. I do indeed promise to help you, and remain loyal to you. You’re right, I do want the best for my daughter.”

“So do I, father. I love her. She is a wonderful wife.” His face hardened. “It was not her who deceived me, it was you, who deceived us both. But for her sake I will not have you slain if you obey me now. Take my guards up to the Mount of Olives. Break down the pagan altars, tear down and burn the Asherim, and collect and burn any idols that are there. If there is any gold, melt it down before you bring it back to the palace. Do that, and you have your life. Fail me, and your life is forfeit.”

That took Buzz’s breath away. He’d expected more of a compromise. “Please come with me, Your Highness! Show me what must be burned and what can be saved.”

“Nothing can be saved that has been used to worship idols. I will not go up there until everything is cleansed. Then... if I find even one idol, your life is forfeit.”

“And the priests? My family? All my friends?”

Jotham hesitated. They were now his family, too. “My father ordered the worship centers be cleansed from the land, and the pagan priests sent back to Israel where they came from. They violated his command, so their lives are already forfeit.” Poor Buzz was aghast. Jotham knew he was about to lose him, so he hurried on. “But I’ll show mercy on any who actively help you to destroy the idols. Any who try to stop you shall be slain.”

Jotham’s plan was moderately successful. Buzz turned out to be a big help, and actually became a loyal friend. Though he had planned to use his daughter to ensnare Jotham, it had backfired on him. His training of Jeko’ach with the right words, even his renaming her, had entered her heart. She would not go back to her original name. She would not mention Ashtoreth or the Baals. And she always told people that her father was a great prophet of YHWH in Jerusalem. She learned to really love YHWH. More than anything it was the power of her love that ultimately drew her father to love YHWH too.

Buzz knew where all the secret groves and pagan high places were. He led Jotham’s guards to them, one by one. They dismantled them, destroyed the idols, and sent the pagan priests packing. Some opposed him and were slain. But many of Buzz’s friends and family actually helped. Jotham forgave them, and kindly found them other jobs. Buzz was thankful that their lives were spared, and awed that Jotham should be so merciful.

When he asked him about it the next year, Jotham told him to gather his family and friends for a big party.

“Thank you all for coming,” Jotham stood as the party wound down and the people relaxed with their wine. “Buzz, my father-in-law here, wanted to know why I was merciful to you, when you had served the very idols that I and my father are trying to destroy. I wanted you to hear my answer. You all know the story of my grandfather King Amaziah. He never lost a battle, and all Judah was blessed, until he bowed his knee to the idols of Edom. He never won a battle after that! He repented and Dad thought he was going to be okay. And then he ran off. Even when he returned, from that day forth he was a broken, bitter man, as you well know. But do you know why? My father told me the whole story, after Grandpa was assassinated.

“As Mars approached in the 18th year of his reign, King Amaziah feared the planetary gods more than he feared YHWH. He publicly worshiped them. He reestablished your cult center on the Mount of Olives. Then during the great earthquake [780 BC], my father was waiting it out with Zechariah when they found Amaziah, on his knees, watching the wall of Jerusalem which he had so recently re-built. He was praying to Baal to spare his wall! He swore that no matter how many other things were destroyed, if Mars would only spare his wall, he would worship the Baals forever. My father heard him! So Dad shouted out, ‘YHWH, God of our fathers. Destroy that wall, to show my father Your power over the Baals!’

“Almost immediately the wall crumbled. The whole section that Amaziah had rebuilt collapsed before their eyes. Grandpa was furious, but Dad just said, ‘It’s okay. We’ll re-build it again. Now you know that YHWH is the true God, and the Baals can’t answer your prayers.’ That’s why Dad refuses to put any faith in the planetary gods. But Grandpa did. My own grandfather! That’s why he became so bitter when Mars destroyed his wall.

“I told you that story because I want you to know how I feel about you. Like Grandpa, you feared Mars and the other planets more than YHWH. If I tell my father about you, he will surely slay you all, for you directly disobeyed his command. *But my father gave my grandpa another chance, so I want to give you another chance.* Prove YHWH in this. I swear you will find Him faithful to protect you from Mars. He made the planets! Get rid of all your idols, even the little ones, and pray only to YHWH, and I swear He will protect you. You will see, in three years when Mars comes close again.”

Isaiah’s father, the old prophet Amoz (then 68) had been listening. He asked to speak. “In 810 BC, I was eleven years old. Mars came fearfully close, and the earth shook violently for a whole day and night. I will never forget it. My father Joash told me YHWH would protect us, for we had cleansed the land of idolatry. But to tell the truth, I was terrified. I secretly prayed to the planetary gods to protect us, even though my dad told me YHWH is our Protector.”

“Amoz! You?” Jotham couldn’t believe it.

“Yes, even me. I got a tiny talisman of Mars and secretly wore it around my neck. We had left Jerusalem, and were waiting just beyond the Kidron Valley. I prayed fervently to my talisman. I knelt on my bedroll, held it over my head, and sobbed out my fears the night the earthquakes began, for I could not sleep. But then in a sudden quake, I dropped the talisman and it shattered on a rock. I cried out in terror, knowing I was doomed. But my father came and tucked me back in, saying, ‘Hush, my son. It is okay. Pray only to YHWH. Then you have nothing to fear.’ He didn’t see my broken talisman. So I obeyed, and prayed to YHWH. Soon I was asleep. From then on, I was not afraid. As I grew older, YHWH taught me about Himself and His love and forgiveness. He knew I had prayed to Baal, but He showed me mercy, like Jotham is showing you mercy.”

Not surprisingly, many of the pagan priests left their false worship to accept the forgiveness and cleansing offered them through Jotham. Logos was very pleased. Though there were some who still worshiped idols in secret, and took advantage of Jotham’s mercy (as we shall see), the majority responded to Jotham’s kindness with repentance. The land of Judah prospered.

Amoz went to King Uzziah. “O King, live forever!”

Uzziah hadn’t fully forgiven Amoz for killing his father, but he respected him, as he knew it had been the right thing to do. “Speak, Amoz! Is another member of my family in need of assassination today?”

Amoz resisted the jibe. “Not at all, Your Majesty. Just the opposite. A member of your family is in need of commendation. It is your eldest son, Jotham. He has grown up under your nose, and you haven’t noticed.”

“Ha! You call that grown up? Ignoring my will, to marry that daughter of the high priest of Baal? I call that childish irresponsibility! He deceived me! He told me that she was the daughter of some ‘great prophet of YHWH in Jerusalem’! I thought Isaiah had picked her for him, like I told him to. How can I ever trust him again? How...”

“Now, now, let’s not get bitter here.” Amoz had to interrupt, for Uzziah was making himself angry. “Jotham wasn’t trying to deceive anyone; he himself was deceived. But try to cut him a little slack. He has taken a bad situation and turned it into a blessing for all of Judah. I would say he has behaved very responsibly here.”

“Okay. I’ll bite. What good has Jotham done?”

“O King, after you were crowned king following the earthquake, you faithfully cleansed the land of idolatry. That was 22 years ago. But you didn’t follow through. Many of the pagan priests and their worship centers are back, plotting to pervert Judah. They tricked Jotham into marrying Jeko’ach. They wanted to corrupt him.

“But Jotham turned the tables on them. He destroyed their groves and worship centers and burned their idols.”

“Huh? Really? What did he do with the priests?”

“Well, that is just the thing, Your Majesty. Your son has acted very wisely with the pagan priests. Buzz, his father-in-law, has become a loyal servant of YHWH. He helped Jotham get rid of all the hidden cult centers. Other pagan priests helped, too, and have forsaken their idols.” Thus Amoz helped Uzziah forgive his son and daughter-in-law, and appreciate what they had done.

All this time the kingdoms of Israel and Judah have been at peace. Though the border between them was still sealed, yet both nations prospered; Judah through internal trade and agriculture; but Israel through trade with the surrounding pagan nations. When Jeroboam had restored the golden calves to Bethel and Dan, he had opened the floodgates of evil into the kingdom of Israel. So as Uzziah and Jotham were working to keep Judah true to YHWH, Israel was becoming a cesspool of idolatry, immorality, and gross wickedness.

In 752 BC the Word of YHWH came to Isaiah, son of Amoz the Prophet in Jerusalem. He wrote it down and showed it to his father. “Yes, my son. I confirm that as the Word of YHWH to Israel. Send it to Jeroboam right away. I’m proud of you, my son. Only 28, and already you are sensitive to the voice of the Spirit of YHWH. After I’m gone, I can see you continuing my ministry – guiding the kings of Israel and Judah by the Word of YHWH.”

So they sent the message to King Jeroboam in Samaria. It read in part, “Listen, O heavens! Hear O earth! YHWH speaks! I have borne and raised My sons, but they have revolted against Me. Even an ox knows its owner and a donkey its master. But Israel does not know. My people don’t understand. Alas, sinful nation! People weighted down with iniquity. Offspring of evildoers. Sons who act wickedly. You have abandoned YHWH, and despised the Holy One of Israel. The cancer of your rebellion has spread from head to toe; nothing sound remains. Therefore I see your land desolate, your cities in flames, your walls broken down and your fields devastated or devoured by strangers. Unless YHWH of Hosts had left you a few survivors you would be obliterated, like Sodom and Gomorrah.

“So now, hear the Word of YHWH, you Sodomites, and give ear to God’s instruction, you elders of Gomorrah. What is the meaning of your multiplied sacrifices which you offer to Me at Bethel, Samaria, Dan, and on all the other high places across Israel? I’ve had quite enough of your burnt offerings, the fat of your cattle. I no longer take pleasure in the blood of your bulls, lambs, or goats. When you desire to seek My face, who is it that directs you away from My holy courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer! Your incense is an abomination to Me! Your new moon festivals and your Sabbaths, the way you keep My appointed Feasts in your own time, your own way, your own iniquity – I cannot endure them any longer. They’ve become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them.

“So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; and though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. For your hands are full of bloodshed, and your hearts are full of iniquity. The faithful city has become a harlot. She who once was filled with justice, who lived among the righteous, is now filled with murderers. Your rulers are liars, rebels, and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe, seeking dishonest gain. They don’t defend the orphan; the widow’s plea does not reach them.

“So wash yourselves! Make yourselves clean! Remove evil deeds from My sight. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan. Plead the case of the widow. Then I will restore your judges and counselors. You’ll be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.

“‘Come now, let us reason together,’ entreats YHWH. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool. If you consent and obey, you shall eat of the best of the land. But if you refuse and rebel you shall be devoured by the sword of YHWH. Truly the mouth of YHWH has spoken.”

Also in 752 BC, Logos sent another prophet, named **Amos**, a shepherd of Tekoa. He had been prophesying against Israel’s enemies, like Moab, Ammon, Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, and Edom. He had even prophesied against Judah when King Amaziah had worshiped the idols of Edom, warning him that he would be defeated in battle and that the walls of Jerusalem would be breached. But with Israel’s descent into idolatry, Amos moved north to Israel. Every few months he’d send another prophecy to King Jeroboam in Samaria. These were later compiled into the book of **Amos**. I’ll mention a few.

“You sell the righteous for money, and the needy for a pair of sandals... You force Nazirites to drink wine, hire priests from among the pagans, and command prophets to no longer prophesy... Call for the Philistines and the Egyptians; assemble on the mountains of Samaria, and see the tumults and oppressions in her midst. For they don’t even know how to do right; they hoard violence and destruction; they oppress the poor and crush the needy; they spend their lives in drunkenness and dissipation. Go ahead up to Bethel or Dan to worship your idols; or go to Gilgal to pervert My prophets. Bring your sacrifices, your tithes, and your freewill offerings, and boast about them. YHWH Adonai has sworn by His holiness that days are coming upon you when you will be dragged away by meat hooks, and the least of you by fish hooks.

“I sent you famine; I withheld the rain; I blasted you with scorching wind; mildew; caterpillars. I sent plague after plague among you, as I did on Egypt. I slew your strong young men, and overthrew you as Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet you have not returned to Me. So prepare to meet your God, O Israel! Seek Me, that you may live! Do not resort to Bethel or Dan, or go down to Gilgal, or flee away past Beersheba. Seek YHWH, that you may live!

“You hate the one who reproves with wisdom in the gate, and abhor him who speaks with integrity. You mock the righteous, accept bribes, and despise the poor. Woe to you who are at ease in Zion and to those who feel secure in Samaria! You lie on beds of ivory, recline on couches of linen, eat young lambs and fatling calves, compose songs and improvise to the sound of the harp, drink from crystal goblets, and anoint yourselves with perfumed oils – I gave you great wealth and luxury! Yet you would not grieve over the wickedness and ruin of Joseph. So I set up a plumb bob over My people Israel. I will spare you no longer. Your high places will fall; your worship centers will be laid waste. You will go into exile beyond Damascus, says YHWH, God of Hosts.”

Amos also went to Bethel and prophesied against its Baal worship. Amaziah, the high priest there, was furious. He sent word to Jeroboam accusing Amos of conspiracy against the king. Then he told Amos he’d better hurry home. Amos responded by telling Amaziah exactly what would happen to him and his family as Israel was being conquered and exiled. When Jeroboam got Amaziah’s message, he summoned Amos and demanded. “Why do you prophesy against me and against Israel?”

“Not so, O King, I’m just an uneducated shepherd. I do not prophesy against you, or against Israel.”

“Then what is this?” he showed him a copy of the latest prophecy, the worst one yet. In it, he read, “Hear this, you wealthy merchants who trample the needy, to do away with the humble... YHWH has sworn, ‘Behold, I will not forgive their evil deeds. Because of them, the land will quake and everyone will mourn. It will rise up and be tossed about, like what Egypt suffered during the flood of the Nile thirty years ago. I shall make the sun go down at noon, so the land grows dark in mid-day. This will be a time of mourning, ending like a bitter day. Behold, days are coming when I will send a famine upon the land – not a famine for bread or water, but a famine for hearing the Word of YHWH! My people will stagger from sea to sea, from the far north to the eastern desert; they’ll search for the Word of YHWH, but they won’t find it.’ As for those who trust in the Asherim of Samaria and those who swear by the golden calves of Bethel and Dan – they shall fall to never rise again.”

He handed it to Amos. “Did you not write that?”

“I cannot write. I am unlearned. Yet I confess, those words did come from my lips. Yet not I, but YHWH, for He puts the visions in my head. Then I tell them to my friend, who writes them down.”

“So you lied. You do prophesy against me, and against Israel, even though you said you did not!”

“No, sir! Not against you. The words I speak are for you and for Israel. They are to help you! Yet if you do not heed the Word of YHWH, you and Israel will be destroyed.”

“You are twisting words! How is your prophecy not against me and against Israel? If you are for me, then prophesy now, something good for Israel.”

Amos bowed his head, seeking the face of YHWH. The Word of YHWH came to him in a vision, which he repeated to Jeroboam while a scribe wrote it down. “I am YHWH, God of Hosts! You are precious to me! I want to deliver you as I delivered the Israelites from Egypt, the Ethiopians, the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians. But the eyes of YHWH are on each sinful kingdom, which I will destroy from the face of the earth. Yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob, but I will shake you among the nations, as grain is shaken in a sieve, yet not a kernel will fall to the ground. All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, especially those who insist, ‘We are all YHWH’s people! The tribulation will not overtake us! He will snatch us up before it touches us!’ They lie! For Israel will surely go from its land into exile. Then in the last days I’ll restore the tabernacle of David, and rebuild it as in days of old. They will possess the surviving remnants of the surrounding nations who are called by My name. Then I will restore the captives of My people Israel. They will rebuild the ruined cities, and live in them. They will tend gardens and eat the fruit, and plant vineyards and drink the wine. I will guard them, and they will never again be rooted from the good land which I have given them, says YHWH your God.”

“Wait.” Jeroboam was mystified. “I said to prophesy something good for Israel. But that’s as bad as Isaiah. You said Israel will go into exile to be destroyed, and only be restored in the last days. Right?” he demanded.

“Yes. That’s what YHWH said. Unless you repent and cleanse the land, unless you let justice roll like waters and righteousness like a rushing stream, you will die. There will be a big earthquake. After that Israel will be conquered and taken into exile. Then finally, YHWH will restore the house of Jacob for His name’s sake...”

“When will this all come to pass?” the king interrupted.

“It is even now begun, O King. Nothing can stop it except deep repentance, seeking YHWH’s face.”

Never before had the Word of YHWH been spoken so clearly to Jeroboam. Now he had a choice. He had heard the truth – and the consequences. He pondered.

All the devils of hell and all the angels in heaven held their breath awaiting his decision. But Logos seemed to be in a surprisingly jovial mood for such a solemn occasion. He praised Amos to his archangels, “Look at that! Amos has done it! Even without any training or education, and even standing before the king of Israel who holds life or death in his hand, yet he has spoken all that I gave him – with boldness and clarity! What a treasure! What a jewel for My crown! Look at that perfect combination of love and fear of Me! It has taken away all fear of the king. Oh how I love him!”

So Michael and Gavriel began smiling too. Surely this persuasive and pure young shepherd would prevail over the king’s bent toward wickedness, and he would truly repent. Some of the angels began to laugh, and to sing praises of joy for the incredible victory.

Then the king’s scepter banged down on the dais. “I’ve heard enough! This man is guilty of treason! Of conspiring against the king and against the great and prosperous land of Israel. I pass judgment against him. Take him out of my sight and hang him by the neck until he is dead. Then cut off his head and bring it to me to verify his death. He shall trouble Israel no more.”

A shout of victory arose from the throats of Satan and his demons, who had been screaming in Jeroboam’s ears. But the cry of agony from the gathered angels, and from the throat of Logos Himself, was even louder. For many hours, nothing was heard in the heavenlies but sobbing, as of a father who had just lost his only son.

Then suddenly, as if it was turned off with a switch, the sobbing stopped. Logos’ face lit up like a light bulb, and he beckoned his angels, “Come with Me, to welcome My precious son to his reward.” He moved swiftly to Sheol, stretching out His arms in joyous welcome as the soul of Amos flew up from the earth. “Amos, My beloved! Enter into the joy of your King! You have served Me well in small things; now you shall be entrusted with the great things of My Kingdom. For you were tested unto death, yet you remained faithful unto life eternal.” He enveloped him in a big bear hug. “How I love you! How I have longed for this moment! Now you are mine, and I am yours, and we shall never be parted again.”

The celebration went on for days, as Amos met his departed loved ones and was introduced to the saints of previous ages. During that time, Michael asked Logos a question that had been bugging him for many years. “Lord? How is it that You are so joyful one minute, and so distraught and grieving the next, and so joyful the next? Were you surprised? Didn’t You see what was coming?”

“My Father in eternity is always in perfect peace and joy. He sees all things throughout all time as right now, from before time began to after it ends. In His perspective all is complete, I have My perfect Bride, and all things have worked out exactly according to the plan We had before time began. But when I stepped into this space-time realm, I laid aside that infinite, all-encompassing vision. I dwell only in this present moment. I do not dwell in the past, to bemoan what happened, for I cannot change the past any more than you can. I do not dwell in the future, for the future depends upon choices and I do not force your choices. My only knowledge of the future is what Spirit tells Me at the moment. My joy or My grief springs from My love for you, when at this moment you do what is right or what is wrong. For I know the consequences of each choice, good or bad, according to My Law.”

CHAPTER 38 – THE DOWNFALL OF ISRAEL

With Amos slain, all hell broke loose in northern Israel. The land was wicked before, as Amos had been warning, but now all restraint was gone. It got so bad, I refuse to describe the details. And the evil was not just in the cities and palaces. Jeroboam was a great hero in the eyes of the people. He had taken Damascus in an amazing battle. He had either conquered or allied with all the surrounding nations, and was receiving a wealth of tribute from them. He had gained success in everything he did. Prosperity abounded! Everyone in Israel loved him and his son, the crown prince Zachariah, *and now, their wickedness*. Never had a nation seen such wholehearted love of evil, no, not even the Canaanites who had been displaced before them.

But Logos had one last warning waiting in the wings. He came into the king's court with his wife and children on the day after Amos was slain. He bowed low before King Jeroboam, "O King, live forever. I plead with you, slay me now, for I have sinned this grievous evil in the sight of God and men." He waved a hand at his family.

"Huh? What evil is that? Looks like you have a very nice family. Why should I slay you?"

"Alas! I have taken Gomer, this temple prostitute, as my wife. These our children were born of my harlotry."

"So? We all enjoy temple prostitutes. And that is very big of you to take Gomer and care for her and her children. Sounds like you are a fine upstanding citizen. I will not slay you. Instead, I commend you. Your children are beautiful. What are their names?"

"My eldest son is Jezreel, *for I'm about to visit on the house of Jehu the same death sentence he gave the house of Ahab at Jezreel. The strength of Israel will thus be broken in the Valley of Jezreel.* My daughter is Lo-ruhamah, *for Logos has turned His back on the house of Israel, lest He forgive them or have compassion upon them.* My youngest son is Lo-ammi, *for you people of northern Israel are no longer YHWH's people, and He is no longer your God.*"

Jeroboam's face blanched white. He realized he had another prophet on his hands, one even bolder than Amos. "I see... So... is there a silver lining in this anywhere?"

"Yes!" The young prophet smiled and his eyes blazed with light. "My name is **Hosea**, 'Salvation'. Gomer fled from me after the birth of these my three children. She returned to the temple and to her prostitution, and would not come home. The priests kept me from her, claiming I owed them back pay for all the years I had her. So I gave them the money and bought her back, just as one would buy a slave. I locked her in her room, alone. I gave her food and drink, but did not go in to her. For many months her heart remained hard toward me..."

"So how is that a silver lining?" The king was getting rather impatient with the long story.

"Even so, *Israel shall be taken into exile as slaves, and shall remain many days without a king or prince, without sacrifice or altar, without ephod or teraphim.* But behold, O King." Hosea put his arm around Gomer, who smiled and returned his hug. "She has forsaken her harlotry, and has again become my wife. She has learned her lesson. She is now faithful to me and to our children. *Even so shall the sons of Israel return, and seek YHWH their God and David their king. In the last days they shall be restored, and come trembling to YHWH, grateful for His goodness.*"

"Damnation! I reject that prophecy! Taken into exile indeed! I already had one prophet slain for bringing a word like that. Do you want me to slay you as well?"

"Yes thank you, my lord. That is what I asked."

"Oh yes. So you did. Double damnation! Then I won't. Take your weird family out of my court and never see my face again, or I swear I shall... uh..."

"... slay me, just as I asked. Thank you, my lord the king, for your kind promise. But no, I fear it shall be as you command. I shall never see your face again. I go, head bowed, to face a world of toil and trouble, burdened down by wickedness all around, condemned by you to a life of sorrow and woe, a tragic example to all who pass of God's judgment upon you and upon your kingdom."

Hosea turned to go, then after the first step away, he turned back, tears streaming down his face. "I cannot bear it, my king!" he cried. "It is too heavy for me! Here, you take the scroll!" From under his robes he pulled forth a small scroll and held it up to the king.

The guards raised their swords, for he could have been drawing a dagger. But Jeroboam waved them off, a bit relieved himself. "Okay, okay. I'll take it. Now get out."

Hosea took his family and left. Jeroboam almost just threw the scroll in the fire, but he was curious. So he ordered his scribe to read it to the court. It began, "Hear the Word of YHWH, O sons of Israel! For YHWH has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness, kindness, or knowledge of God in the land. Instead, I see lies, stealing, cursing, adultery, and murder. They employ violence – unceasing bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns. All your people contend with the priests; you both stumble together by day, and then your prophets stumble with you at night. So My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I have rejected your priests. Because you have forgotten the Law of your God, I also will forget your children. I will turn your glory into shame. Harlotry, wine, and gluttony have blocked your understanding. You consult your wooden idols, wave your magic wands, and offer sacrifices on high places, while your daughters play the harlot. Even brides commit adultery, while men worship shamelessly with temple prostitutes. Your rulers dearly love shame. Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God."

Jeroboam had heard all that before – too many times. “Stop! Enough of the condemnation! Skip ahead. See if you can find a silver lining in there anywhere.”

The scribe skimmed on ahead. “Yes, ‘heal us,’ ‘raise us up on the third day...’ He backed up a bit. “I will carry into exile, and there will be none to deliver. I will turn My back, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face. Then in their affliction, they will earnestly seek Me. ‘Come!’ they’ll say. ‘Let us return to YHWH!’ For He has torn us, but He will bandage us. He has wounded us, but He will heal us. He will revive us after two days, and raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know YHWH. His going forth is as the dawn. The Redeemer of Israel comes to us like the rains, first the latter rains of spring, then the former rains of fall.”

“Stop!” Jeroboam interrupted again. “The good stuff is always ‘after the exile’, just like Isaiah and Amos. Skip to the end. See if there is anything good for me now.”

The scribe skipped to the last panel of the scroll. “Return, O Israel, to YHWH your God! You have stumbled because of your iniquity. Repent of it and return to YHWH according to His promises. Ask Him to take away your iniquity, and grant you grace and mercy. Then present to Him the worship of your lips. Assyria will not save you. The strength of horses will not save you. Calling out, ‘Our god!’ to the work of your hands will not save you. But in YHWH even the fatherless finds mercy! Then I will heal your apostasy. I will love you freely. My anger has turned away. I will be like the morning dew to Israel, who will blossom like the lily and take root like the cedar. Her beauty shall be like the olive tree, and her fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. Those who lived in darkness will again raise grain; they shall blossom like the vine, to become famous like the vintage wines of Lebanon. Oh, Ephraim My son! What more do you have to do with idols? It is I who looks after you! From Me comes your fruit. Whoever is wise, let him understand. For the ways of YHWH are right, and the righteous will walk in them. But those who love wickedness will stumble over them.”

“It’s all the same,” Jeroboam complained bitterly, “... exile, destruction, and repentance before restoration and blessing. Take that scroll out of my sight. Burn it!”

But the scribe was one of the few righteous left in the land. The words of the scroll had touched him deeply. He made copies to send to other godly families. He and all who believed the words of Hosea and Amos packed up and fled to Judah. That was the beginning of the end for Israel, for it left the people without any testimony or prayer covering. Wickedness does have consequences, both individually and nationally. The day after he killed Amos, Jeroboam II caught a virulent venereal disease from a temple prostitute at his now thoroughly pagan worship center at Bethel. He died in agony five months later, in the winter of 752 BC. His son **Zachariah** reigned in his place, at the age of 36.

Zachariah had also loved the sensual ‘worship’ with temple prostitutes, but now he was afraid. He moved his court from Samaria up to Ahab’s ivory summer palace in Jezreel. But rather than shutting down the lewd pagan worship at Bethel and Dan, he gave orders to inspect all the temple prostitutes and execute any found with signs of venereal diseases. Jabesh, the chief priest in charge of all the temple prostitutes, was tried in Zachariah’s court in Jezreel, accused of being an accessory to Jeroboam’s death.

There was a lengthy, bitter trial, in which the pagan priests first tried to defend Jabesh and his prostitutes, then realized the precariousness of their own position and tried to distance themselves from him. A sharp, analytically-minded lawyer gathered the statistics and calculated the probabilities of catching venereal disease in each of the worship centers. He came up with some scary numbers – at Bethel during Jeroboam’s reign, the chances of catching a venereal disease had climbed from 25% to nearly 90%! That did it for Zachariah! He executed Jabesh, along with other leaders of the pagan temples, and assigned his own three sons to run the operation. He also made sweeping laws, requiring a years’ temple service from every virgin daughter of Israel when she turned fourteen, annual inspections at each worship center, and the death penalty for any temple prostitute found with a venereal disease.

Shallum, the son of Jabesh, was appalled! Under King Jeroboam II, he and his father had prospered, and had been well-appreciated for their ‘service’. Now suddenly his father was dead, he was out of a job, and his own precious daughter was just about to turn fourteen! He and his friends conspired against the new king.

With the temple prostitute problem ‘solved’ and his power solidified, King Zachariah moved back to Samaria. On the six-month anniversary of his coronation he called everyone together for a big speech, to convince the people that his reforms had solved the ugly problem of venereal disease so that everyone could now freely enjoy the pagan worship centers at Bethel and Dan. He thought they’d love it, but Shallum correctly sensed the mood of the people.

Now was his opportunity. His co-conspirators were in place. He made his way to the balcony of the palace. The guards allowed him entrance, for they all knew him as a leader in the temple worship. When the king had finished his speech, he came out beside him and put one arm around him. “King Zachariah has given you a great gift!” he began. “He has given you the freedom to worship in the temples without fear of diseases. *But he will steal all your fourteen-year-old daughters to do it!*” he screamed as he thrust a dagger deep into the king’s side.

“I have a fourteen-year-old daughter. How many of you have fourteen-year-old daughters, or daughters who will be fourteen some day? Do you want them taken from you, forced into temple service, and then executed when they become diseased?” He paused. The crowd was with him.

“No? Neither do I. That is why I have slain your king. Thus ends the dynasty of Jehu in the fourth generation, according to the word of the prophet Elisha!” His direct and powerful speech won the hearts of the people. His supporters in the crowd were loud with their applause. Before the gathering dispersed they had crowned him king in Zachariah’s place. It was the spring of 751 BC.

Menahem, Jeroboam’s general, who was at the army barracks in the old capital city of Tirzah at the time, was unimpressed. Shallum was not royalty; he was just a priest of Baal! Menahem sent word to his captains to muster Israel’s army. One division refused to come: the men from Tiphseh (now called Tappuah, just west of Shiloh). For two weeks he tried to convince them to join him, but they sided with Shallum. “Our daughters are young, and many of our wives are pregnant. Shallum did what was needed! We don’t want our daughters forced into prostitution.”

So Menahem took the army to Samaria without them. He easily overwhelmed the palace, for Shallum was a fool. He struck down the usurper with his own sword. Then he established himself as king of Israel in his place. Shallum had ‘reigned’ for only one month.

But frankly, Menahem was no better than those before him. His first official act after he solidified his power in Samaria was to send Israel’s army back to Tiphseh. There he slew the entire population, in a vile massacre to make the stoutest of hearts falter. He started with the virgin daughters of fourteen or below, slaying them in front of their own fathers. Then he ripped open the pregnant wives before their husbands’ horrified eyes. Finally he executed all the rest in cold blood. Satan laughed himself silly. He had recovered from his earlier pain at the anguish of Logos, and now he was enjoying his freedom in Israel to the fullest. Torment upon gory torment, Satan imagined himself growing stronger day by day as he gorged himself on their blood. But when he came to heckle Logos, he got no audience. Logos would not respond to Satan’s jeers or taunts. His back was still turned.

This was a Jubilee year, but nobody really kept the laws of Jubilee anymore. Instead, they trusted in Venus to save them from the wrath of Mars. The next year, 750 BC, was on the 30 year cycle of terrible catastrophes. But many, especially in Israel, trusted in the Jubilee to nullify the catastrophe as before. Satan laughed at them. He had been working ever since 780 BC to cancel the beneficial effects of Venus at the Jubilee. He certainly had occasion against Israel. And Logos’ permission!

Satan did not have occasion against Judah. Uzziah, with the help of his son Jotham, his old tutor Zechariah, his godly wife Jerusha, and the queen mother Jecoliah, had been keeping Judah pretty free of idolatry. But you know how it is shortly before a close Mars flyby. People recall past disasters. There are always a few who succumb to fear and privately pray to pacify the planetary gods.

Satan determined to take advantage of those fears. He wasn’t satisfied with Israel; he wanted Judah too. He sent demons across the land, working to feed the people’s fear and convince them to pray to Astarte and the Baals. More than a few in Judah fell to the temptation.

It was the old prophet Zechariah who first realized what was happening. He went to King Uzziah’s quarters, where he was privately dining with Jerusha and Jecoliah. “Your Majesty. I’m sorry to interrupt, but this is urgent. Some people are bowing and praying to the pagan gods of the nations. They fear that Mars and Venus will bring catastrophe upon them if they refuse to bow to them. But YHWH says that the adversary will gain an occasion to devastate Judah if they do bow to them! Your kingdom is in grave danger, my lord the king. What shall I do?”

“Oh! Thank you for coming, my old friend. You, of all people, need have no fear of interrupting my dinner. It is indeed urgent! Call the elders, governors, and judges of the people together this evening. I will speak to them.”

Uzziah had been king for 39 years. He knew how to make a good speech. He got old Zechariah up there with him, and laid it all out. “You all know my good friend Zechariah the Prophet. He sees visions. He hears the voice of YHWH. He knows YHWH’s Word. He has been my tutor since I was a child, and I have never known him to be wrong. YHWH has shown him that the coming close pass of Mars will devastate the whole land, including Judah. Walls will crumble. Towers will fall. The roofs on your homes will collapse upon you. Horrid cracks in the earth will destroy your gardens and vineyards. Conflagrations will sweep your cities. Thousands in Judah will perish. Hardly a family will survive without at least one dead.”

King Uzziah had them right where he wanted them. He leaned forward into a dramatic pause, searching their faces, which were white with fear. “Do you want all that? Then pray!” he urged intensely. “Pray to the Baals and the Asherim, and all that will come upon you. For when you pray to the gods of the nations – the planetary gods – then YHWH our true Protector turns His back on you.”

It took a minute, but Uzziah could see the light bulbs turning on over people’s heads. Finally he continued. “But if you want deliverance from the earthquakes, storms, and lightning, if you want to be safe and secure in your homes, then put your trust only in YHWH, God of our Fathers. Pray only to Him. Obey Him. Keep His law. Fear only Him. Repent of any times you feared the gods of the nations. Burn any idols you have. Then YHWH will save you. He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the heavenly host.” Old Zechariah was beaming. Uzziah concluded, “Go home. This is the Year of Jubilee. Keep it as YHWH commanded, cleansing the land, restoring it to its rightful owners, and letting it rest. If any of your brothers has fallen into bondage, set him free. Then YHWH will protect you from Mars.”

October 24th 750 BC, is a date still remembered in infamy all around the globe, for this was the date of 'the Earthquake' with a capital 'E'. Jupiter was in Leo; Saturn was in Aquarius; and Satan was working his tail off to create the perfect storm. The prophet Zechariah tells us that at the end of the age, "you will flee as you fled before the Earthquake in the days of Uzziah" (Zech 14:5). Entire cities were leveled, some never to be rebuilt. For those that were rebuilt, little could be salvaged; the new was simply built on top of the old (which is why archaeologists now find 'tells'). Valleys filled in; mountains came down; rivers changed courses. We who live in a well-ordered solar system have no comprehension of such total devastation.

In western Italy lived a fiercely independent tribe of Cimmerians (descended from Gomer). They called themselves Rasna. Latins called them Etrusci, 'the builders of towers'. We know them as Etruscans. Their cities were built on rocky hills, with strong high walls. They were a powerful people, successfully defending their territories against Latins, Vandals, and Gauls. They dominated the Italian peninsula. Their culture was rich and their lands were prosperous. And yes, like all the pagan nations, they worshiped the planetary gods: Usil and Cautha (the sun god and goddess), Losna (the moon), Turan (Venus), Semia (Earth), Laran (Mars), Tinia (Jupiter), Tionia (Saturn), Nethuns (Neptune), Lenith (Pluto), Charontes (Charon) – and many other gods as well, such as Fufluns (their soldiers who protected them from the Latins). In their pantheistic system nearly everything was a god of some sort. About the only God they did not worship was the true God, YHWH, the God who is Spirit.

Thus Satan had occasion. He had toyed with them long enough. It was time for the kill. Yes, their hilltop cities were devastated, but not as much as you might think, for they were built on solid rock. The Rasna were a smart and ancient people. They had learned how to withstand the earthquakes! And like all civilized lands in those days, they had places prepared to wait out the pass of Mars in relative safety. Usually, few were slain by the earthquakes. But Mars then had three moons, Deimos, Phobos, and Eris (Terror, Fear, and Strife). In 750 BC the third moon struck central Italy in a high velocity ball of fire, forming a crater now called Lake Bolsena, 60 miles north of Rome.

Eris did what earthquakes could not. It hit the center of the Rasna Empire, taking out their capital city, their king, their standing army, all their great libraries and historical works, their greatest artistic achievements, architecture, the sciences, music, observatories, great universities – all gone without a trace. Eighty percent of their population was snuffed out in an instant. Many of the surrounding cities survived, but the Rasna living there were broken in spirit. Without leader or king; without goal or destiny. *Their gods had failed them.* In three years (747 BC) Latins began taking over the peninsula. The surviving Rasna eventually assimilated into the Latin culture.

Assyria was also devastated. Assur-nirari V had now grown strong with the help of old general Shamshi-Ilum. He had stopped the persecution of the Yawists. Instead, he had gone out on modestly successful military campaigns in the previous two years. But the Earthquake of 750 BC put a sudden end to that. Shamshi-Ilum, the real power behind his throne, was killed. Many Assyrian cities were leveled. All their vassal states stopped sending tribute. The empire was torn by strife and rebellion. This paved the way for Pul, Shamshi-Ilum's commander, to end the royal line of Shalmaneser IV by assassinating Assur-nirari and taking the throne for himself in 745 BC. We know him as Tiglath-pileser III, the most aggressive, wicked, and cruel of all the emperors of Assyria. He rebuilt Nineveh. He set out immediately to restore the power and glory of Assyria. He reconquered all the nations west of the Euphrates to restore the flow of tribute. He also ruthlessly cleansed the land of the Yawist cult and its foreign influence.

During the persecution under Ashur-dan III, Jonah and the Yawists had gone into hiding, where they had grown strong. After Assur-nirari had stopped the persecution, they'd come out of hiding to settle down in peace and multiply throughout the land. They were not harmed by the Earthquake. But when Tiglath-pileser III came to power, Jonah warned them to flee the land. Most of them obeyed his prophecy. Those who did not were rounded up and slain by the new king of Assyria. Satan ground his teeth in bitter satisfaction. The missionary work of Jonah had troubled his city for too long. Now Nineveh grew strong once again!

Logos called Satan into His presence. "Your city is restored to you, as I promised. None are left in Nineveh belonging to Me. Not one. Are you happy?"

"Happy" is not a word Satan understands. He angrily retorted, "Of course I'm happy, You... You thief! It's a delight to get back what You stole. *Once again, I win, and You lose.* All your efforts with Jonah were wasted."

"Not so, My beloved adversary. The ministry of Jonah shall last forever. Look where the Yawists have fled; Syria, Hamath, Anatolia and Cimmeria, across the Aegean to the Baltic States and on into Latium, and even east to Media, Persia, Elam, and beyond. Numerous nations now have a witness to My truth and wisdom which were dark before. My one missionary, Jonah, has multiplied to a thousand. The work of true faith in love always bears abundant good fruit." Satan fled, stunned. *He thought he had gotten them all in Nineveh. How had they gotten away? Who had warned them? It wasn't fair!*

Egypt had also been hit hard by the Earthquake. Their major works endured, for they of all people knew how to survive a Mars flyby (though pieces broke off most of the stone statues, and the nose fell from the fabled Sphinx). But many lesser works and homes collapsed. The chaos of the Third Intermediate Period (TIP) increased.

Nubia was hard hit by the Earthquake, too. Arrogant King Alara laughed off the danger – until his palace roof collapsed and killed him. His son Kashta Maatre took his throne, to rule at Napata for thirty years. Egypt lost control of Nubia and never got a dime of tribute from Kashta.

Remember, we left Libyan Prince Osorkon III sailing up the Nile toward Thebes to talk sense into his rebellious relatives. That was in 750 BC. *The Earthquake struck while he was on the river.* He didn't feel it; he was napping in his bunk to the gentle rocking of the boat. His men did realize it was happening, but they had no idea the magnitude of it.

The rebels at Thebes were devastated. Their gods had failed them! They knew how to protect themselves, but they also knew that Prince Osorkon was on his way with warriors. They had planned to slay him and his men, and they had the force to do it, too! But the Earthquake left them discombobulated. As their homes and fortresses fell, they lost their focus. When Prince Osorkon came ashore, they laid down their arms after the briefest of struggles.

Prince Osorkon III was generous, all things considered. He was truly sorry for the devastation of the city. He did have the instigators of the rebellion slain and their bodies burned, so they could not awaken and be redeemed in the afterlife. But his nephew and grand-nephew, Harsiese and Pedubast, seemed repentant. He graciously forgave them – provided that he take charge as the high priest of Amun.

But Harsiese and Pedubast were not willing to give up their power so easily. In the end, Prince Osorkon accepted the office of high priest of Amun at Karnak (just across the Nile), while Harsiese retained the priesthood at Thebes, and Pedubast retained his crown as Pharaoh of the region. *Now, that was pretty stupid, as I'm sure you know. Osorkon thought he was being kind, but he had basically given away the farm, underestimating Pedubast's evil ambitions.*

So within 4 years the rebellion began again, this time in earnest. Prince Osorkon could do nothing about it. His father Takelot II sent troops, then more troops, all to no avail. The civil war went on for ten years. Just when they thought they had it settled, war broke out again.

Old Takelot II traveled up to personally negotiate with Pedubast I in 736 BC. But that was a big mistake. He was slain, and Prince Osorkon III had to flee for his life. He first returned to his older brother Shoshenk III at Tanis. But now with the death of their father, the position as the Pharaoh / high priest of Amun at Bubastis was empty. Shoshenk III didn't want to move, so Osorkon III took it.

In 728 BC, evil Pedubast I was assassinated by his own people. His father Harsiese had died a few years before. Though the Libyan Dynasty had conquered the native Egyptian 20th and 21st Dynasties, they had treated them pretty well, and had even intermarried with them. Thus with the death of Pedubast, the 20th 'Rameside' Dynasty, which had begun 135 years before, died as well.

The anarchy continued for eight years, led by a Libyan warlord named Sheshonq. Finally in 720 BC Osorkon III took an army to Thebes, slew him, and ended the anarchy. He became the 22nd Dynasty ruling high priest of Amun, for the rest of his life. His brother Shoshenk III then ruled at Bubastis as well as Tanis. But their peace did not last for long, as they had to address the growing Nubian threat.

As bad as the Earthquake was for Egypt, it was worse for Israel. Satan pulled no punches. Menahem was stunned at the carnage. *Everyone knew how to protect himself from earthquakes in those days, for heaven's sake! They knew the timing, down to the day and hour. They were prepared. They had safe places to go. Didn't they? There was no need for all this panic, this fleeing in terror. Why so many deaths? Why so many injured, crushed, suffering people all across the land?* King Menahem just couldn't figure it out.

While in Judah next door – the same earthquakes, buildings collapsing, walls crumbling, towers falling – but no panic; no deaths; no injuries. People merely returned to their homes and cities to calmly go about the routine job of rebuilding, as they did every 30 years.

King Uzziah was pretty smug. He heard the news of the horrible carnage in Israel, but Judah hadn't lost a man. YHWH was taking good care of them!

Amoz, son of Joash, visited King Uzziah. Although he had never fully forgiven Amoz for killing his father (Amaziah), yet Uzziah held a grudging respect for the old prophet, now 70 years old. He had gained a reputation as a straight shooter, and had never been wrong in any of his prophecies. Uzziah held out his scepter.

"O King, live forever! Judah is blessed because of your faithfulness to heed and obey the Word of YHWH through your old tutor, Zechariah. But now he is on his deathbed. What will you do after he is gone? Will you become proud, and follow your own wisdom? Or will you submit to the Word of YHWH through me, and through my son Isaiah when I am gone? If you do, you will have many more years of prosperity and peace in Judah. If you do not, your later days may be filled with disaster, sickness, and shame."

King Uzziah was stunned. "Zechariah son of Mahli? On his deathbed? Are you sure?"

"Go visit him. He calls for you. He loves you dearly, and yearns for you to continue what is right in YHWH's sight, so YHWH can continue to bless and protect you."

"He will get better! I'll get the best physicians..."

"Zechariah was an old man when you accepted him as the king's prophet – forty years ago! He is now 110. He will get better, but not by your physicians, O King. He has been summoned by the Great Physician to that bright realm where there is no more sickness or pain. After you have said your final good-byes, I am ready to take his place as king's prophet to Judah."

Uzziah hurried to visit his old friend, angry that Amoz should be so arrogant as to offer to take his place even before he had died. Seeing Zechariah, Uzziah was shocked at how old and frail he was. How fast the years had flown by! Uzziah knelt by old Zechariah's bedside as the tears began to flow. Zechariah's voice was very weak. "O my king, live forever! Why should my lord the king kneel and weep before your servant's bedside?"

"Servant? Not on your life! You are my friend, my trusted advisor, my spiritual counsel, my father, my..." Uzziah bowed his head down on the bed and sobbed. "I don't want you to go. What will I do without you?"

"Faith, my lord the king, have faith. YHWH loves you. He will not leave you helpless. He will send another to take my place. Do not weep at my passing. Rejoice with me! Finally I will see YHWH's beautiful face. Now He beckons me. In His outstretched hand is a reward for me."

"How can I but mourn your passing? I love you!"

"Then show your love by rejoicing that I finally shall achieve my deepest longing – *and by heeding the prophet whom YHWH sends to take my place.*"

Less than a year after the Earthquake, old Zechariah son of Mahli died. Everyone mourned his passing, for he was deeply loved by all. They buried him in great honor in Jerusalem beside the kings of Judah. After the time of mourning was past, Amoz again came before King Uzziah. "O King, live forever! I am ready to serve you now, as YHWH instructs me. He has an urgent Word for you..."

But King Uzziah was still angry with him. "Who appointed you king's prophet? You killed my father. And you could never replace old Zechariah!"

"Just the same I will give you the Word of YHWH. What you do with it is your choice. YHWH says, 'Do not be proud that you survived the Earthquake. I had mercy upon Judah because of the intent of your heart in ordering your people to abolish the idolatry and keep My laws of Jubilee. But you failed to follow through. You did not verify that the bondsmen were set free, the idols burned, the pagan priests gone, and their worship centers torn down. Yet your son Jotham did what you as king should have done. Therefore I ask you now to honor your son Jotham for the good he has done in Judah, by giving him full authority as co-regent with you.'"

"Thank you, Amoz. Now, get out. And don't come again unless I call you. I shall choose a prophet to replace old Zechariah, but it probably won't be you."

"Though you are king, yet YHWH picks His own prophets. That choice is not left to you." Uzziah shooed him out, and made a list of the available prophets. He even prayed about each one. But the ones he picked turned out to be 'yes men'. The Word of YHWH through Amoz was forgotten. Uzziah deliberately pushed it out of his mind.

Amoz tried again. He came, unbidden, into the court of King Uzziah. While he waited in line with the others, the king spotted him. "Amoz. Who called for you? I have all my prophets, wise men, and counselors."

"But I have the Word of YHWH for you, O King."

"I've already heard what you had to say..."

"Please, O King, for Judah's sake! You heard, but you have not followed through. Now the Word of YHWH has been lost from the land. He said that He is pleased with your efforts to cleanse the land of idolatry and to celebrate the Year of Jubilee in truth. But again some are beginning to worship idols on the pagan high places. Some have reneged on their promises to return the land to its original owners and set free their brothers from bondage. You must enforce what you command, O King. YHWH has offered you a way to do that. Your son Jotham has already proven himself able. Remember the prophecy Zechariah gave you, that your son would bless you and all Judah? This is how. *Crown him now as your co-regent and give him authority.* He will carry out all that is in your heart."

"You killed my dad. Why should I listen to you?"

"Because I have the Word of YHWH for you, O King. I truly am sorry about your father. He was my brother! But he had to die. He was dragging you and all Judah into his sin. You did nothing to stop him. Your toleration of his evil had opened the door to the adversary! I was the only one with the courage to end it. You should thank me."

"Thank you?" Uzziah became enraged. He stood up and grabbed his spear, screaming, "I demand vengeance for my father's death!" He didn't really want to kill him. Though he was miffed at his pestering, he still held a grudging respect for him, and his young son Isaiah was a delight around the palace. Deep down, he knew Amoz was right. But rage does awful things to a man's brain. In a flash of anger, Uzziah felt this sudden urgent need to avenge his father's death in accord with the law. He let the spear fly. Amoz fell dead, the spear piercing through his heart.

Even before the spear found its mark, Uzziah felt a pang of regret. But real life has no 'undo' button. He glanced around the court and saw horror on a hundred faces. Everyone in the city knew and loved old Amoz. Never was there a gentler, kinder, more faithful and true man. Every eye in the palace was upon the king, judging him, and condemning him! Uzziah searched the crowd in vain for a little sympathy for his terrible deed.

"Father! My father!" Isaiah came running up, to throw himself down on his father's body. Now Uzziah felt like a heel. *How could he have done this to Isaiah? It was a hundred times worse than what Amoz had done to him.* "I'm sorry, Isaiah!" Uzziah blubbered. "I'm sorry! Forgive me! I acted rashly! Your father is a good man. He didn't deserve that!"

Isaiah, now thirty years old, slowly stood tall, tears still streaming down his face. Sadly, but without any trace of bitterness in his voice, he addressed the king. “YHWH gave me a prophecy for Israel some years ago. It has come to pass. At that time my father prophesied over me, that after he died I would become a prophet to Judah as well. Now that too, has come to pass. Therefore, as YHWH lives, I forgive you for my father’s death. I take my place beside you, to serve you the rest of your life as king’s prophet in Judah.” He bowed to the king.

But now Uzziah was feeling horrible pangs of guilt and shame, doubly so because he had been forgiven by Isaiah so quickly, while he had never fully forgiven Amoz. He could not stand the accusing, condemning eyes of the court. But even more he could not stand the tear-filled, forgiving eyes of young Isaiah. He ran from the great hall, crying out, “I have sinned a terrible sin! I must go to the temple and make my atonement!”

“Don’t do that, O King. I’ve forgiven you. Azariah the high priest will make atonement for you.” But in his panic King Uzziah closed his ears and wouldn’t hear.

Isaiah, still standing over his father’s dead body, took charge. “Go quickly!” he commanded Uzziah’s servants. “Notify Azariah. Tell him he must not let King Uzziah into the temple or YHWH might slay him!”

Sadly, Azariah was not at his post. By the time they found him, King Uzziah already had a censer of burning coals from the altar and a handful of incense, and was entering the holy place. The high priest ran after him, with eighty other priests in hot pursuit. “No, O King! It’s not for you to burn incense to YHWH, but only for the priests consecrated for the task. Get out of the temple! YHWH won’t honor your request. He will punish your arrogance in thinking you can make yourself a priest!”

Uzziah went in to the altar, ready to offer the incense and make his prayers of repentance. But how could he continue with the high priest shouting at him like that? His anger flared again. “I am king, here!” he thundered, peeking his head out at Azariah. “How dare you order me out like a common peasant? Just ten minutes...”

But Azariah pointed to Uzziah’s face in horror. “O King! Your forehead! It is already leprous! YHWH has struck you with leprosy for your pride! Hurry! Get out of the holy place quickly, or you will surely die!”

Suddenly his anger was replaced with terror. Uzziah carefully gave the censor to Azariah and hurried from the temple. “Please make atonement to YHWH for me!” he wailed as he ran back to his palace. There his physicians confirmed that he had indeed contracted leprosy. He was quarantined in a separate apartment and kept isolated from his relatives, his people, and his throne, for the rest of his days. *Finally, just a little bit late, Uzziah ordered that Jotham be crowned as his co-regent.*

So at the age of 25 **Jotham** became the de-facto king. Uzziah ruled only by giving messages to his son. Jotham sat on Uzziah’s throne judging the people of Judah who came to the king’s court. Finally Jotham fully fulfilled the prophecy given his parents by Zechariah before his birth. He did indeed carry out the desires of his father, to enforce the commands of YHWH, and to keep the idolaters from again sweeping across the land.

So, who do you suppose ministered to Uzziah during his enforced solitude? It was Isaiah, the son of Amoz. His forgiveness was not just in words, but in daily deeds of kindness. When Satan came to Logos to crow about his easy victory over the godly Uzziah, Logos shut him up with just a word about the power of true forgiveness and self-giving love, as demonstrated by young Isaiah.

Two years passed. Some nations and cultures began to recover from the Earthquake. Some took advantage of the weakness of their neighbors to change their boundaries or governments. Not the least of these is in central Italy, known as Latium, which had been ruled by the Rasna (Etruscans). They had been devastated by the impact of Eris. As the dust settled, a pair of ambitious twins saw their opportunity. Romulus and Remus left their home in Alba Longa, where their father had formed a Latin coalition as protection against the expansion of the Rasna. The twins saw that the Rasna were no longer a threat. In 747 BC, they moved deep into Rasna territory to build a new city. They invited poor and cast-off fugitives, exiles, runaway slaves, Yawist and Hittite refugees, and any others they found who wanted to begin a new life.

Sadly, the two brothers couldn’t agree on a location for their new city. Romulus wanted to build it on the Palatine Hill. Remus wanted to build it on the strategic and more easily fortified Aventine Hill. The squabble ended with Remus dead and Romulus making himself king of his new city, which he named Rome after himself.

Romulus actually made a pretty good king. He formed fighting men into ‘legions’, organized by ability. He called noble men ‘patricians’, and gathered them into the Roman ‘senate’ to represent the weak and poor as their ‘clientela’, like fathers care for their sons. He spread the reputation of Rome as a haven and asylum for all the downtrodden of the earth. The exiles and refugees flooded into Rome.

The city grew rapidly. However, most of the refugees were male. In an infamous move, Romulus invited some neighboring Sabine clans to his ‘Consualia’ festival. When they were all drunk he captured 700 of their daughters at swordpoint. The Sabines could not attack, for fear their own daughters would be killed. To settle the spat, the daughters agreed to marry Rome’s leading citizens – only on condition that the Sabines would participate in a joint rule of Rome. Ultimately the three primary tribes in the area, the Latins, the Sabines, and the surviving Rasna, ruled together in a republican senate ‘tribunal’.

But there were remnants of the Rasna in Latium who would not submit to the Latins. Romulus waged war against them. Without a king or military leader, they were unable to resist him. He conquered all their remaining territories: Tuscany, Umbria, and Abruzzo, thus founding the Roman Republic. When King Numitor of Alba Longa died, the people of the city offered Romulus the crown. Thus he ruled much of Latium for nearly 39 years.

The period between 750 to 690 BC was called the 'Era of Nabonassar' in Babylon, the 'Times of Confusion' in China, the 'Time of Reordering' in Egypt, and other similar names elsewhere. Every close flyby of Mars affected the planetary orbits. That was simply expected. But always before, within one or two orbits the resonant system was restored and everything settled down. However, after the Earthquake in 750 BC, the solar system didn't settle down. The ancients were terrified!

Let's review the planetary orbits, so I can explain how Satan caused 'the Earthquake'. Until 780 BC, the planets had been locked in orbital resonance. This kept the timing of the close passes of Mars and Venus very precise. Mars crossed to the sun side of Earth before noon over Israel on October 24th each even numbered year, returning to cross back the next March 21st, before noon over the Americas. It did not come close enough to Earth to cause the terrible catastrophes unless its elliptical orbit was tightened by Jupiter and Saturn, the planetary giants, in Aquarius or Leo. Jupiter, on its 12 year orbit, aligned every six years. Saturn, on its 30 year orbit, aligned with Jupiter only in Aquarius. Saturn thus controlled the timing of the major catastrophes, so it is known as 'Chronos the Timekeeper'.

Describing the orbit of the Venus / Mercury binary is not as simple. It had locked into resonance with Earth in March 1451 BC, during Israel's Exodus from Egypt. Venus circled 8 orbits to every 5 of Earth's. It came within 4 to 10 million miles every five years, and closer every fifty years. These were slow passes. Venus was inside Earth's orbit and going about the same speed. So Venus remained near Earth for up to five months as it passed.

Though Venus could cause wild weather and high tides, it never came close enough to cause catastrophes. In fact, each fifty years when it was closest and lined up just right with Mars, its effect was beneficial. Venus pulled Mars away from Earth, temporarily circularizing its orbit. That reduced or prevented disaster at the next Mars flyby. So that fiftieth year was called the 'Year of Jubilee'.

Venus had a lopsided elliptical orbit, flattening as it paralleled Earth. The lengthy time under Earth's influence caused its orbit to wobble back and forth, so that its close passes occurred at different times of the year. Since both Venus and Mars were locked into resonance with Earth, the 50 year Jubilee cycle of Venus combined with the 30 year catastrophe cycle of Mars. This resulted in a Venus Jubilee cycle that exactly repeated only every 150 years.

This 150 year cycle involved 3 types of Jubilees. The **First Jubilee**, Venus flew close to Earth from January through March, barely coinciding with the March pass of Mars (as in the Exodus in 1451 BC). It usually pulled the orbit of Mars a little farther from Earth to minimize the damage, though Venus could cause frightful tides and weather even before Mars passed. On the **Second Jubilee**, Venus lined up with Earth for five months, rounding out its orbit a bit, but Venus never came anywhere near Mars. Then on the **Third Jubilee**, Venus flew close to Earth beginning in mid September of the prior year, two years before the normally deadly October 24 flyby. For four months it pulled Mars farther from Earth. The dreaded flyby two years later became joyfully harmless, since it took Mars four years to recover to its resonant orbit.

So two years after each 'Third Jubilee' (beginning in 1352 BC) there was no catastrophe at all. The otherwise disastrous passes of Mars in 1350, 1200, 1050, and 900 BC were benign. The Year of Jubilee was a deliverance! By 750 BC, many saw the Jubilee only as salvation from Mars and neglected God's Law of Jubilee. All Jubilees gave some relief, but they especially counted on that 'Third Jubilee' to save them from the wrath of Mars.

But wait. 750 BC follows a 'Third Jubilee'! Israel expected Venus to pull Mars farther from Earth before that October flyby. That is why there were so many deaths in Israel – they were complacent, expecting Venus to save them from the catastrophe. Thus they blissfully partied as Mars drew near. They had put their trust in Venus instead of keeping the Law of Jubilee as YHWH commanded. What happened?

What happened in 750 BC began with the preaching of Jonah way back in 780 BC. Mars was aligned to rake across Nineveh, leveling the city and blasting Assyria back to the Stone Age. But to everyone's amazement, the Assyrian's actually repented. Satan was caught napping.

Mars and Venus are pretty big. Although Satan is able to adjust their orbits a bit in accord with God's Law (that was his job), yet he and his demons can alter them no more than a percent or two. The interlocking resonance of the planets assured they would return to their proper orbits within a few years. But God's angelic host can also adjust planetary orbits. When He finds true repentance and prayer, *as happened at the repentance of Nineveh*, God may authorize His angels to move the planets aside a bit to protect His people. At His direction, they pushed Mars so it arrived a bit further south and a few minutes late, aimed to pass harmlessly over the Mediterranean.

Satan and his host then moved it farther south and even later, so it would rake across Egypt. Thus at the March 21st 779 BC pass (when orbital modifications are reversed), Mars was 9° north and nearly ten minutes early. That may not sound like much to you, but its orbit was stretched the farthest it had ever been beyond the resonant point.

An especially bad October pass meant that Mars would be farther from Earth on its March return, which it was in 779 BC. But Mars was now at its slowest and farthest north ever and Satan determined to make the most of it. As I said, slight deviations in planetary orbits always recovered within a few years due to the tightly resonant system. But Satan resolved that this time, it would not! He was willing to give up his March pass for an ever-closer October pass. He kept his demons at it, pushing, pulling, oscillating back and forth across its normal resonant orbit (orbit of least resistance). He fought that resonant system with all he had, so that this time, for the first time, it did not recover.

The climax came October 30, 752 BC, when Venus crossed Mars' orbit. Mars had three moons left, Deimos, Phobos, and Eris. Venus had one large moon left, which we now call Mercury. (Remember, they had formed the 'Rod of Asclepius', back in the 1400s BC when they both had tails, though by now their tails had evaporated.) Mercury was orbiting about a million miles out from Venus. On October 30 Mercury swung around at the wrong time and got hooked by the pull of Mars, which fought Venus for ownership. Venus won, but Mercury was pulled into a distant and very elliptical orbit around it.

Eris was also nearly pulled away from Mars, into an extremely elliptical and dangerous orbit which would impact Earth on the next pass. Worse, little Mars gained energy and speed by the pull of the nearly eight times more massive Venus. All this set the stage for the catastrophe known as 'the Earthquake' two years later, in 750 BC.

This began to unravel the planetary resonant system. Nobody then knew for sure, but the battle over Mercury and the energy lost to Mars seemed to knock Venus out of resonance. The slight increase in the orbital velocity of Mars seemed to tear it out of resonance, too. Thus the 'Era of Nabonassar' was a period of fear among astrologers the world over. They studied the planets anxiously, charting the Venus risings and settings and frantically plotting Mars biannual passes. The Earthquake of 750 BC could be the beginning of the end of life as we know it on planet Earth! The resonant system was doomed.

We who live in a benign solar system simply have no comprehension of the terror that faced the ancients. They had darkened 'sun mirrors' to look into the sun to actually see those fateful interplanetary interactions, so they knew the timing of the planets was way off. But they could not calculate what might happen next.

In March 779 BC Mars passed far ahead of Earth, ten minutes early. But it didn't recover. In October 750 BC it was an hour early resulting in the terrible Earthquake. In the battle of Venus with Mars, Earth was caught in the crossfire! The collision of Eris in Italy threw Earth into a tiny wobble, making the calculations even more difficult and frightening. Prophets everywhere talked of the end of the age and the downfall of kingdoms.

Israel, in their devastation after the Earthquake, had lost control of her vassal states. Her much-vaunted power and prosperity were gone. Her people were starving. The Ammonites took advantage of it to ruthlessly attack their former masters, nearly penetrating to the king's palace of Samaria in the fall of 746 BC. King Menahem had no army left to speak of; those who had survived the quake were rebuilding their homes and would not respond to his call. So he sent an urgent message to King Uzziah for help.

Uzziah called for Jotham. "My son, YHWH is with you. You have cleansed the land better than I ever did. Go now. Command the army of Judah. Deal righteously with the Ammonites. Save YHWH's people in Israel. Though they are wicked, perhaps they will respond to the mercy of God like your father-in-law did."

Jotham was successful against the Ammonites. Each year for three years they paid him tribute: \$200,000, plus 20,000 sacks of wheat or barley. Jotham kindly gave all the grain to the starving Israelites on his way back to Judah. King Menahem was grateful. He finally opened the border that Jeroboam II had sealed, to allow free trade with Judah.

I don't even want to talk about the wickedness going on in Israel. Ever since Jeroboam II had begun to worship the golden calves and rejected the clear warnings of Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea, Logos had turned His back to give Satan free reign. By now, the full depths of degradation and despair that inevitably come with Satan's rule was evident. It makes my skin crawl, and I refuse to say another word.

Tiglath-pileser III had reconquered Syria, Hamath, Phoenicia, and much of Anatolia. Vast quantities of tribute now flowed into Assyrian coffers. In 743 BC, he decided to expand his powerful empire farther south. He conquered Philistia, then headed into the hills to Samaria.

Menahem, among many other well-developed negative qualities, was a coward. Israel had lost all the nations that had sent tribute to Jeroboam II, and Menahem didn't even try to defend Israel's borders. Instead, he levied a stiff tax on all the rich men of the land, \$2000 from each family, and bought off the Assyrian king for the huge sum (in those days) of two million dollars. Tiglath-pileser III (Pul) took his money and assurance of fealty, and headed down to Jerusalem. King Uzziah, however, was confident and proud of Judah's strength, and refused to pay him tribute. Pul laughed at him, but gave him three years to change his mind or be destroyed. Pul went north via Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. There was not enough money in the entire area to buy him off, so he captured them and carried them away into exile, populating their territories with some exiles he had brought from Media (which he had conquered the year before). Ammon also had no tribute for him (they had given it all to Jotham) so he carried them off into exile as well, thus ending the annual tribute which had been flowing down to Jotham for three years. Assyria was now supreme in the Middle East, except Judah.

Tiglath-pileser III continued his campaign of world conquest. After leaving the Levant in 743 BC, he took his invincible forces north of Aleppo. Seven Hittite kings (of Tubal, Gurgum, Melid, Sam'al, Que, Calneh, and Arpad) had been gathering refugees from all over the land in a futile effort to restore the Hittite Empire around Arpad. Pul laid siege to the area. But the king of Calneh, Calno, freaked out at the Assyrian forces and fled to Kullania. Still, it took the Assyrians three years to conquer Arpad.

King Uzziah, through the eyes of his son Jotham, finally realized the threat of the Assyrian war machine. They were not conscripted 'summer soldiers'; they were a year-round professional army! He frantically began to prepare for Pul's return. He worked to hang together an alliance among the kings of Hamath, Phoenicia, Sidon, Philistia, Syria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Israel, if you can imagine such bitter enemies ever all getting together. But this threat was real, and they all had to admit it.

But try as he might, King Uzziah couldn't get Isaiah's blessing on his efforts. Isaiah only shook his head, "Just submit, O King. Pay the tribute Pul asks. It's not too much. You'll save yourself a lot of grief."

But being a bit proud at this point, and believing he had the blessing of YHWH on Judah ever since his son cleansed the idols from the land, Uzziah refused to heed Isaiah. He, too, had eyes that were dim, ears dull, and mind clouded against the Word of YHWH through Isaiah. Pride does that, you know.

In 741 BC the powerful coalition of nine kings under Uzziah was prepared for the return of the Assyrians. But then King Menahem suffered a massive heart attack and died. His son **Pekahiah** was a royal jerk, a fool playing 'king' games. He tried to take control of Uzziah's coalition, which then fell apart in angry bickering. So in 740 BC, when King Uzziah learned of King Pul's great victory over all the Hittite kings, he quickly sent the Assyrians a nice present with all the tribute Pul had demanded. Getting it, King Pul laughed heartily. *Only the fifth year of his reign, and already all the nations of the Levant are scared spitless of him!* He divided his conquered area around Arpad into three Assyrian provinces. Then in 738 BC he went down to deal with Calno, who had fled to Kullania. It was an easy conquest. He executed Calno and made Kullania another Assyrian state. As always, he exiled their leading citizens to other conquered states, and installed a loyal governor – a eunuch, so he couldn't start a royal dynasty.

740 BC, the year he sent the tribute to the king of Assyria, was a low point in Uzziah's life. The effects of the leprosy had ravaged his body, and now he was tormented in his mind as well. For two years he struggled with thoughts of suicide. But day by day Isaiah came to him and encouraged him. "You paid Pul's ransom in obedience to YHWH! So He will bless you!" And YHWH did, especially through his friend Isaiah.

King Uzziah realized he had gotten proud. He humbled himself, and praised YHWH for the gift of such a friend as Isaiah. It was beyond his comprehension that Isaiah could have forgiven him so completely for slaying his father Amoz. Uzziah tried to think of something he could give Isaiah in return. His 40th birthday was near. But Isaiah had everything he needed. He was content. Nothing seemed right. Uzziah began praying about it. Logos responded, "Give him a wife." Now that got his attention! All his life he had been blessed by Jerusha, God's perfect choice, whom Zechariah had found him. But it had never occurred to him that the prophet Isaiah might need help in finding God's perfect choice!

That night, Uzziah had a dream. In it, Jerusha knelt at a window, her face and hands lifted in worship, her auburn hair draped over the windowsill in front of her, and that exquisite Mona Lisa smile brightening her face. The early morning sun was streaming in. Jerusha's face glowed in its rays. Her hair rippled and glistened like liquid gold. It was a compelling vision. But where? It was a rough window like none in the palace, open to the dawn. Uzziah awoke, filled with the glory of it. His wife was awaking, so they cuddled for a bit as he told his dream.

Jerusha was a jewel. She has chosen to risk her own death from leprosy rather than be separated from her beloved. So far she had not caught it, but though she bathed twice a day, she still refused to protect herself if it meant keeping away from her husband. She picked up on the dream right away. "My lord, you prayed for a gift for Isaiah. YHWH said to find him a wife. I believe your dream is the answer. Just find that window. God's perfect choice for Isaiah will be there in worship."

"But how will I find that window? There are none even remotely like that in the palace."

"Isaiah is a prophet. He was raised in the School of Prophets. There is another building nearby for the School of Prophetesses. It may have a window like that. I'll go find out. You pray for me, that I'll find her." So Jerusha bathed carefully to make sure she was not carrying leprosy with her, and paid a visit to the School of Prophetesses.

Sure enough, she found an eastern window to match Uzziah's description. But nobody was at the window. They were all gathered in the worship hall. Jerusha joined them. Realizing this could take some time, she relaxed to enjoy the worship. Soon she was swept away by it all. For a day and a night she prayed, prophesied, and worshiped with the others, totally forgetting her mission and oblivious to anything in the outside world.

Dawn was near. The group finally broke up to get a few hours sleep before the day's chores. But Jerusha had no chores there. She did not want to leave the holy Presence. She went to that eastern window.

There she knelt, leaned forward into the dawn, and lifted her hands in worship. Jerusha had always loved to worship, ever since she was little. Her eyes, glistening with tears of joy, rose to the heavens. Her heart was so overcome by the holy Presence, nothing else mattered. She sang softly to YHWH in the voice of an angel, with words only angels can understand. They joined her, in larger and larger ever-ascending rings above her, lifting their hands up to carry the pure worship of this frail woman of earth into the throne room of the Almighty. An hour passed. Then she felt a gentle touch on her shoulder, and a soft voice reached her ear, "My dear, your worship is so sweet—I hate to interrupt, but I fear for you. You mustn't stare into the sun like that. You could go blind."

Jerusha sensed a young woman beside her. Without turning to look, she reached out a hand and called, "Come! Join me! Kneel with me before the King. He is here!" Jerusha pulled the woman down beside her and put an arm around her. "See! It is YHWH upon his throne, high and exalted above all His Creation. The angels circle 'round Him. The train of His robe fills the temple. The angels cry, 'Holy, holy, holy is YHWH King of Hosts. The whole universe is filled with His glory!' The heavens and the earth tremble in awe, as His temple fills with fragrant smoke from the incense on His altar!"

"But your eyes," the woman repeated. "You could go blind!" She reached up to shield Jerusha's eyes.

"Is anything else worth seeing? I have seen the King! YHWH of Hosts! I am dead to all else. Forget my eyes. Come meet the King, the one who made my eyes!" So the lady joined her. Together they came up before the King of kings to prostrate themselves before His throne.

Almost immediately Jerusha heard a wail of anguish, as her new friend cried out, "Woe is me! I am ruined! Because I am a woman of unclean lips, dwelling among a people of unclean lips, yet mine eyes have beheld the King, the Lord of Hosts, in the majesty of His holiness!"

A mighty seraph, who looked like he had done this many times, took a pair of tongs and brought a live coal from the altar, touching it to the woman's lips. "There. This has cleansed your lips. Your iniquity is taken away. Now you may worship before the King if you wish."

Who knows how many minutes, or days, or years, or eons, passed? Time runs differently in the holy Presence. The women worshiped there, content to continue forever. But then the voice of Logos rolled forth with a thunder like the sound of many waters. "Whom shall I send? Who will go for Me to be a servant to My servant Isaiah?"

Before Jerusha could respond, her new friend leapt up, arms outstretched to Logos. "Here am I! Send me!" she cried. "For You formed me from my mother's womb to be a servant to Your servants. There is no one on earth I would rather serve than Isaiah the Prophet!"

For a moment, the heavenly scene froze, as a smile broadened across the face of the Holy One of Israel. Then a chuckle was heard, and soon, laughter began from the throne and spread to the surrounding host.

Jerusha and her new friend didn't share the laughter. But as it grew louder, Jerusha suddenly remembered her mission and realized that this lady beside her had just volunteered to fulfill it. Jerusha was indignant that her offer should be laughed at like that. "O my Lord the King!" she ventured. "Can You not at least consider her offer? I assure you, Sir, it is made in the sincerity of her heart."

"My dear Jerusha! Thank you for interceding for her, and for bringing her with you into My presence. Of course I accept Alysa's offer! For so I created her and so I have commissioned her. But this is such a joy, such a delight to Me — *how can I not laugh?*" Then He turned to the young lady, still standing with arms outstretched. "Alysa, my dear. Know that your service to Isaiah will be hard. You will share his joys, but you will also share his persecution, his betrayal, all the hateful things that godless people throw at my servants the prophets, even unto death. Are you still willing to serve My servant?"

"My Lord the King!" Alysa bowed to the ground. "Let it be unto me according to Your Plan of the Ages. I cannot but be faithful to Your call. That is who I am. Only grant me grace to be faithful unto death."

"Go, Alysa My beloved. I grant you grace. Fear not to take Isaiah as your husband, and bear his children unto Me. I shall never leave you." His smile beamed down upon her like a thousand suns. As the vision faded, His laughter continued. The two ladies knelt there by the window for a long time, arm in arm, bowed in worship.

But finally Alysa stood. "I must get ready, Jerusha. He said to go. I must obey." She turned to leave, then turned back. "Jerusha? My lady the queen! I did not recognize you! I thought you were just a prophetess here. I'm sorry. You served me, yet I should be serving you."

Jerusha pushed her back. "No, Alysa. You go get ready. I'd like to worship some more as I wait here for you. Isaiah is probably at the palace, so I'll go back with you."

After bathing and wrapping some personal items to bring, Alysa returned. "Okay, I'm ready to go. C'mon! I'm eager to find what Isaiah thinks about all this. I hope YHWH has already spoken to him about me. I don't want to just... just push myself on him or anything..."

But Jerusha remained kneeling by the window. "Alysa?" She lifted her hand hesitantly. "Will you let me take your arm? I am blind."

"Oh my God!" Alysa gasped. "I was afraid of that. You stared at the sun too long. We'll get everyone together. We'll get the prophets, too. Everybody will pray for you. Surely God will heal you."

“No.” Jerusha stood up, a bit unsteadily, and reached out her arm toward the sound. “Mine eyes have seen such glory as few have ever encountered. I refuse to ever again pollute them with scenes of earth. Only let me take your arm, and lead me back...”

“But my lady the queen! Your husband the king? Shall you never see his face again?”

“I have seen his beautiful face all my life. Now I am old, yet the picture of his loveliness still fills my mind. His body is now ravaged by leprosy. It has marred the beauty of his face. Now I shall see him only with the eyes of my heart, and thus never lose the vision I carry of his youthful beauty. I would rather give up my eyes than ever to see something ugly on my dear husband’s face and despise him in my heart.” Alysa was still young. She could not understand such love. But she never forgot this moment. *Someday she will understand.* With Jerusha’s arm locked into hers, they went to the palace together.

They first went to Uzziah’s apartment. Alysa knew to keep her distance, but she had not seen her king for a long time. She felt she must bring Jerusha and apologize to him for her blindness. But when she saw him, she was shocked at how the leprosy had disfigured his face. “Oh, my lord the king!” she exclaimed, at a loss for words.

But Jerusha was not. “We found her, my lord. It was just as in your dream. I was the one worshipping at the window. YHWH brought her to me. Her name is Alysa. YHWH Himself met us, and confirmed to us that...”

With a startled gasp, Uzziah interrupted. “Jerusha! Is she your sister? A relative? Just look at her face!”

Jerusha closed her eyes and bowed, realizing for the first time that she didn’t even know what Alysa looked like. She had only seen her in the vision, and even then the glory of the King had so overwhelmed her senses that she had never really looked into Alysa’s face. “Alas, my lord! I’ve never seen her face. I cannot, for I am blind.”

“She looks...” Uzziah was almost breathless. “She looks exactly like you when I first glimpsed you behind your father forty years ago!” He was so excited he jumped up and down clapping his hands.

But suddenly he stopped. “Wait. What did you say? You’re blind? Oh no! What... How did that happen?”

So they told him their whole story. Uzziah was most impressed with the vision, and he assured Jerusha, “Isaiah will be so pleased with our gift – I’m sure he will pray for YHWH to heal your eyes.”

“But I don’t want them healed, my lord! I want to keep that matchless vision of YHWH foremost in my mind, forever untarnished by worldly things.”

“But Jerusha! I’m imprisoned here in this apartment. Without eyes, you cannot even help me.”

“Then we shall ask Isaiah to pray for YHWH to heal you, my lord. Is it not just as easy for YHWH to heal leprosy as blindness? That’s what I’m praying.”

Isaiah himself had just entered Uzziah’s apartment. He loved to visit Uzziah after his day’s teaching, writing, or prophesying was done. But he usually came in with a cheerful and encouraging smile. This time, his face was forlorn and his back seemed bowed low with anguish. “Yes, Jerusha my dear. It is time for YHWH to heal Uzziah’s leprosy. That’s why He sent me here today.”

“Isaiah!” Uzziah called. “That’s good news! But why do you look so glum? Shall you not rejoice with me?”

A tear trickled down Isaiah’s cheek. “I’m sad because I love you, my king. I’m going to miss you greatly. YHWH will heal you by taking you to Himself, to live forever with Him in that bright land where there is no sickness or pain. He sent me to ask you to get your affairs in order and say your final good-byes, for you shall die within the month.” He threw his arms around Uzziah and began to sob.

“Hush, hush, my friend.” Uzziah pushed him away. “I’m more than ready to leave this miserable body and go to meet my King, for I long to see His face! How can you weep? Rejoice that I’m going to receive my reward. But I do have a couple things to ask of you before I go.”

“Yes, my lord the king. I know. YHWH told me today that I would hear two requests from you, and He assured me that both requests have already been granted.”

“He did? They are?” That did not make sense to Uzziah. “So what are they, if you know so much?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I haven’t a clue. He just said they were already granted. He told me not to worry.”

“Well, right now my first request is to ask you to pray for my wife’s eyes. I just learned that she is blind.”

Now it was Isaiah’s turn to be mystified. “Blind? No. That can’t be. My dear, may I touch your head?” He put his hands over Jerusha’s forehead, closed his eyes, and began to pray silently. Then his eyes popped open and his jaw dropped. He yanked his hands back and fell to his knees before Uzziah. “No, my friend! Jerusha is not blind! Indeed I have never met, no, never even imagined, any woman who had such clarity, such purity of vision! She sees things I’ve never even hoped to see, things that the ancients have longed to see since the beginning of time. Would to God that I had such a woman for my wife!” He bowed and wept, quivering with the emotion of it all. “Indeed, my friend, your request is already granted.”

Uzziah was not so sure. “Okaaaaay... Let’s see if my next request is also already granted. That woman standing next to Jerusha – Alysa – is she already your wife?”

“What?!!” Isaiah leapt to his feet, jumping back so fast that he left his sandals behind on the floor.

Uzziah tried not to laugh, but the expression of sheer horror on Isaiah's face was just too much. And those two sandals where Isaiah's feet had been! He couldn't help himself. Soon he was laughing so hard that he fell on his bed, holding his sides. With Uzziah obviously solid gone, Jerusha took over. "Isaiah, I'm sorry I didn't introduce you. Meet Alysa. She's a true worshiper from the School of Prophetesses. I think you'll like her."

Alysa curtsied gracefully, a rather embarrassed smile on her face. "It's good to finally meet you, my lord. How may I serve you? I've long known you as a faithful servant of YHWH... He made me to be a servant to His servants." She curtsied again, her cheeks blushing slightly.

Isaiah looked at her, really for the first time, and then glanced back and forth between the two women. The color drained from his face. But Uzziah had begun to recover his composure. "So. What do you think, my friend?" he called in between guffaws. "How long have you been married?" He mimicked Isaiah, "Indeed, my friend, your request is already granted!" More chuckles. Then Uzziah took a deep breath. "I prayed that God would help us find you a wife, and my request for you was that you would accept our gift." He tried to wipe the impish grin from his face. "So you've got to take her now, Isaiah."

Isaiah just ignored him. His face was deadly serious, without a flicker of humor. Uzziah's laugh finally froze, and silence reigned. Jerusha, still holding Alysa's arm, fervently wished that she could see Isaiah's face. "What's happening, Alysa? I can't see!" she whispered in her ear, but Alysa just poked her in the ribs with her elbow. So she relaxed her grip and bowed to spend the time in prayer for her friend. But when she started to pray, she remembered what Isaiah had just said about her. *Isaiah just said she could see. More clearly than any woman he'd ever met. So who is she to argue with the great prophet? She had better start making use of her new gift of sight.* She lifted her head again and opened her blind eyes toward the heavenlies. Instantly she was again in the spirit, kneeling before the throne of the Almighty.

Logos smiled at her. "You've chosen well, My beloved. Welcome into My presence."

"Thank You, my Lord. I love You, being here with You. But what about Alysa? What can I do for her?"

Logos laughed affably. "Alysa is in My hands. Fret not. Just follow Me. I have called your husband home. But if you are still willing to serve Me, I would be honored for you to take your place at the School of Prophetesses, so you can escort others like Alysa into My holy presence."

Knowing that her beloved husband would soon pass from this life, there was suddenly nothing in the world Jerusha would rather do than spend the rest of her days in the School of Prophetesses. She would find her lack of physical sight to be a huge benefit in her new calling.

Her vision quickly faded, for Isaiah was talking. "I'm sorry, Alysa. I know I'm behaving poorly here, but I was so utterly shocked at your resemblance to Jerusha that... that I... Oh nuts. I'm just making excuses. The truth is, that I am caught utterly blind here. Blind, deaf, and dumb. I'm not used to being blind. 'Surely, YHWH does nothing but what He first reveals it to His prophets.' But YHWH has not given me the slightest warning that I would be standing face to face with the two loveliest ladies in the universe, with my king telling me that I am... er, that you are my... Oh nuts. I can't even talk straight."

"O Isaiah, it's okay. I know you. You don't have to prove yourself to me. I've heard you speak many times. I've read everything you've ever written. And I have appreciated – and admired – you for many years."

"But who are you? Why don't I know you? I just prayed about you, and I got no answers. In fact it seemed like YHWH was just laughing at me, even more than Uzziah was. I feel like a fool, an ignoramus..."

Uzziah, now over his laughing spell, butted in, "I'm sorry I laughed at you, Isaiah. But you said my request was already granted. So I just assumed... Well, I was wrong to laugh at you, my friend. Please forgive me."

Jerusha spoke up. "Isaiah, what did you say when you put your hands on my forehead? 'Would to God that I had such a woman for my wife'? Well, you said Alysa looks like me. Maybe she really is 'such a woman'. Why not put your hands on her forehead and find out?"

"Would you mind, Alysa? I discern people with my hands. Like I just did with Jerusha. Would you, uh... mind if I put my hands... ah... touch your forehead, just to see, to d-d-discern, your spirit? Your spiritual character?" Isaiah could hardly get the words out.

Alysa disentangled herself from Jerusha's arm and knelt in front of Isaiah. "No, no. You don't have to kneel. I'm not like... God or anything!" But she was already down. She gently took Isaiah's hands and placed them on her forehead, holding them firmly with her own.

A shy smile brightened her face as she peeked up between the two sets of arms. Isaiah made the mistake of looking down before shutting his eyes. Big mistake! It was that famous Mona Lisa smile! Identical to when Jerusha was young. Now he understood how the image of Jerusha's face had captured Uzziah's heart with just a glance. He tried to pray, to discern her spirit. But all he could see was the image of her lovely face floating before his eyes. He fiercely pushed it aside, struggling to peer into Alysa's soul so he could see her from YHWH's perspective. As a prophet, this should be easy for him. But no. All he saw was that quizzical smile. All he heard was that infernal laughter. *So why is everyone laughing at me, anyway?* "Lord YHWH? Is that You laughing at me? What am I missing here? Show me what to do."

The heavenly laughter paused. “What should you do? That should be obvious, My friend. I told you that Uzziah’s requests were already granted, in My realm. *But you still must accept the gift to bring it down into your realm, as you well know.*” A few more chuckles. “Jerusha has already accepted My gift of sight in her realm.” The laughter began again, louder than ever.

Opening his eyes, Isaiah gently moved his hands back toward his side. But Alysa continued hanging on. She slowly stood to face him, very close, not letting go. Isaiah had never known a woman so forward with him. And still she wore that quizzical smile. *What was she thinking? He simply could not discern it. Was she just being affectionate? Or was she, too, laughing at him? Playing him for a sucker? Trying to tempt him? Or seduce him?* Isaiah pulled back. Alysa quickly dropped his hands and stepped back herself. “I’m sorry, my lord! I really thought that you would see... that YHWH would... I’m sorry.”

Isaiah shook his head, trying to clear it, then realized that it looked to Alysa like he was shaking it at her. He still felt like a bumbling idiot. But he had taught many times in the School of Prophets (often the prophetesses would listen in too – that was how she knew him) that “*the eyes of the flesh must see to believe, but the eyes of the spirit must believe first, in order to see.*” Similarly, “*the mind set on the flesh must understand before it will obey, but the mind set on God will obey, even when it does not understand.*” Thus the will ruled by the flesh can never accept the things of God, but the will which is ruled by the Spirit always walks by faith, regardless what is seen or understood in the physical realm. All that came back to him in a flash. He suddenly knew what to do.

Isaiah turned to Uzziah. Jerusha had somehow found him, and was now hanging on his arm. “My beloved friends,” he began, but then stopped at their worried expressions. He realized he was too formal and serious, as if he was addressing the School of Prophets. He put his hands over his eyes and began to laugh at himself. That finally broke the ice. “I’m sorry I’ve been so slow, but I think I’m finally catching up. Uzziah, Jerusha, I accept your gift, with a grateful heart.”

He then turned back to Alysa and held both hands out to her. She quickly stepped up to take them, smiling into his eyes. “I believe YHWH wants me to marry you,” he said, “even though I do not know or understand you and cannot discern your spirit. But Jerusha sees! She knows! She dwells on high with the Almighty. I know, for I saw her there, exalted, yes higher even than the angels, blazing with the heavenly light of the holy Presence. If Jerusha says you are God’s gift to me, then by faith I choose to accept you, if you will have me.” She gladly agreed.

So the matter was settled. Isaiah and Alysa married within three weeks, on the day of Isaiah’s 40th birthday, 738 BC. The kingdom of Judah rejoiced.

However, for Israel this had been a sad, tragic period. Remember that King Menahem had died in 741 BC, and had been succeeded by his son **Pekahiah**, who was even worse than his father. He had all of his father’s vices, but none of his intelligence. After an utterly vile two years, his army captain, **Pekah** son of Remaliah, could take no more. Having spent a lifetime in the military, he saw more clearly than anyone the importance of Uzziah’s coalition against the Assyrians, and the utter folly of Pekahiah in driving away their allies by his arrogant arguing. Pekah wisely feared Tiglath-pileser III. He brought his loyal men into the palace and duked it out with Pekahiah’s personal guard: fifty mighty men of Gilead including their captains, Argob and Arieah. Pekah was victorious. He slew Pekahiah and made himself king in 739 BC, the 52nd year of King Uzziah and the year before Isaiah’s marriage to Alysa.

But when King Pekah came to Uzziah to resurrect his coalition, Uzziah confided that he had already paid the tribute to Assyria! With the pressure off, the other nations no longer wanted to get together. They all hated each other. Only King Rezin of Syria and King Zoba of Hamath would ally with him. Pekah knew how short-sighted that was. In only a few years, Assyria would be back. Pekah was furious that Uzziah had capitulated. He vowed to destroy Judah after he got stronger. He could have been a good king, but his anger became a permanent root of bitterness.

Pekah ruled with an iron hand for 20 years. Though he had hated the depravity of Menahem and Pekahiah, his own ruthless cruelty was little better. There was no mercy, no love, no goodness in the land. Israel groaned under the weight of her sins. She had no witness, no Word of Truth, *and no one left to intercede.* Logos’ back was still turned. He would not hear their desperate cries.

In 738 BC, the year after Pekah usurped the throne of Israel, King Uzziah passed away quietly in his sleep, his body rotting away from leprosy. It was just five days after the wedding, so Isaiah and Alysa were still on their honeymoon. Uzziah was 68 and had ruled for 52 years, mostly in wisdom and godliness. His son **Jotham**, at the age of 37, was crowned the new king of Judah in his place. Queen Jeko’ach and the queen mother Jerusha stood to his right and faithful Buzz to his left. Isaiah and Alysa could not be found to offer the traditional coronation blessing.

Then, just as the ceremony was winding down, they showed up. Everyone cheered as they slowly made their way through the crowds to the front of the great hall. King Jotham was glad to see them. “I thought you were on your honeymoon. You didn’t have to come back for this.”

Isaiah held up his arms for silence. “Thank you, my friends. Even my honeymoon must pause to honor such a king as Uzziah. Truly he was a great man, for he served God, and Judah, wholeheartedly. He and Jerusha even served me, with the gift of this my precious wife.” That gossip had made the rounds. The crowd broke into cheers.

When they settled down, Isaiah went on. “Uzziah has ascended to his fathers, and to His Maker. I know, for I saw him go. He was humbled, purified through the suffering and the leprosy, and was ready to be exalted. Jotham went through it all with him, waiting on him, learning from him. He will make you a fine king, for his heart is already pure toward YHWH. But I warn you. *One fine king does not a prosperous kingdom make.* Some of you have tolerated idolatry and wickedness in your midst. Do not expect YHWH’s continued blessings upon the land just because you have a good king. Pray for him, love him, obey him, but also obey YHWH’s law and work to keep the land pure. Look at Israel, and be forewarned. Do not allow their evil to come across those open borders you wanted so much.”

The people swore allegiance to King Jotham and to YHWH. Isaiah returned to enjoy his honeymoon with Alysa, who remained a delightful mystery to him. The queen mother Jerusha said her good-byes and retired to serve YHWH in the School of Prophetesses.

King Jotham never realized how close Judah had come to being another notch in King Pul’s belt. Uzziah had finally listened to Isaiah and had paid the ransom for Judah’s waywardness before his death. But he was so ashamed and humbled that he never told his son what he had done. King Pul headed east, to attack the Urartu at Ulliba west of Lake Van, leaving Judah in peace.

Buzz had gained the full confidence of King Jotham. He became a loyal and trusted advisor and friend – perhaps too trusted. Jotham put him in charge of keeping Judah free of idolatry. But with the opening of the borders with Israel in 746 BC, and the resulting flood of trade, had come new temptations. Buzz still held weaknesses from his days as high priest of Baal, and was a little too tolerant. By the year of Uzziah’s death, the wickedness of Israel had already begun spilling over into Judah.

It was hidden, although Isaiah had warned about it for a long time. At first, he had warned both Israel and Judah:

“Come, house of Jacob! Walk by the light of YHWH! For He has abandoned His people, because the house of Jacob is filled with influences from the East. They are soothsayers like the Philistines. They strike bargains with the sons of foreigners. Their land is tarnished with silver and gold. There is no end to their treasures. Their land is filled with horses, with no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols. They worship the work of their hands. I cannot forgive them. You must enter the rock! Hide in the dust, from the terror of YHWH and the splendor of His majesty. The arrogance of man will be abased; the loftiness of man will be humbled. YHWH alone will be exalted on that day. Yes, YHWH of Hosts will have a day of reckoning, against everyone who is proud. Against their carved trees, their high places, their mountain groves, their towers, fortified walls, and even their ships. The pride of man will be humbled. YHWH alone will be exalted in that day.

“In that day your idols will be gone. You will go into the caves in the rocks, and into holes in the ground, before the terror of YHWH and before the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble. In that day you will toss your idols of silver and gold, the idols you made to worship, to the moles and bats. Finally you will cease to elevate man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils. You will understand the vanity, the futility of the pride of man. In the last days, the holy mountain in Zion, the dwelling of YHWH, will be established as chief of the mountains. The nations will stream to it. Many cultures will gather and say, ‘Come! Let us go to the house of YHWH, the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways so we can walk in His paths!’ And the Law will go forth from Zion; the Word of YHWH from Jerusalem. He will judge between nations to render decisions for many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn the art of war.”

But after Menahem unsealed the border between Israel and Judah in late 746 BC, the flood of foreign traders, with their idols, poured through the open borders into Judah. Yes, the people rejected the idolatry at first. But they loved the wealth that foreign trade brought. So over the years, they began to tolerate the wickedness that came with it. By 738 BC, the year of King Uzziah’s death, Isaiah gave up on Israel as hopeless, and focused on warning Judah:

“Behold. YHWH Elohim, God of Hosts, is going to remove supply and support from Jerusalem and Judah. He will take away their bread and water. He will take away mighty man and warrior, judge and prophet, diviner and enchanter, counselor and craftsman, elder and statesman, captain and noble. The youth will storm against the elder, and the inferior will rage against the noble. People will be oppressed each by his own neighbor. For Jerusalem has stumbled; Judah has fallen. They have turned against YHWH, to rebel against His glorious holy presence. They display their sin like Sodom; they don’t even try to conceal it. Therefore, woe unto them. They have brought this great evil upon themselves. *Their oppressors are children. He will make mere lads their princes. Foolish and capricious children will take power over them. Women rule over them!* Alas, my people! Your guides lead you astray and confuse your paths. Thus YHWH arises to contend with them.”

He even wrote a song, set to the music of strings and flutes. “My beloved has a vineyard, on a fertile hill. He plants the finest vines; with walls around and a wine vat in its midst. He expects a harvest of good grapes, but no – only worthless ones come forth. O men of Jerusalem and Judah! Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more could I have done for My precious vineyard? I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed. I will break down its walls; the fertile ground will be trampled down. I will lay it waste. It will not be pruned or hoed. Briars and thorns will come up. No rain shall fall.

“My Vineyard is the house of Israel, says YHWH of Hosts. The men of Judah are My grapevines, says the God of Jacob. When I sought My harvest of holiness, behold – their fruit was immorality. I looked for justice; but behold – I saw bloodshed. I hoped for goodness; but behold – I got a cry of distress. I longed for faithfulness; but behold – deceit. I searched for gratefulness; but behold – I found violence. I expected righteousness; but behold – idolatry.

“Therefore six woes I’ve proclaimed upon the house of Judah, yea, seven upon the beautiful city Jerusalem. **Woe** to those who pack houses close together in cities, for you shall live alone, lonely in the midst of the great throng, until your fine houses become desolate and empty. **Woe** to those who join field to field until there is no more woodland, for ten acres of land will not yield ten gallons of wine, and ten bushels of seed will not yield a bushel of grain. **Woe** to those who rise early to get money for strong drink, and then stay up late until the wine inflames them. Thus they cannot see the deeds of YHWH, nor recognize the works of His hands. **Woe** to those who drag their iniquity with cords of lies, and their sin with harness rope. For they say, ‘Let the Holy One of Israel draw near to finish His work. When I see it, *then* I will believe!’ **Woe** to those who call evil good, and good evil, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, who think their darkness is light, but reject their light as darkness. **Woe** to those who are heroes in drinking wine, who are valiant to mix strong drink. For they justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of men who have integrity. **Woe** to those who are wise in their own eyes, who trust in their own knowledge. For they despise the wisdom of the Holy One, and hate knowledge from the God of Israel. **Therefore** My people go into exile for lack of knowledge. For they have rejected the Law of YHWH of Hosts, and have despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel. On account of this YHWH’s anger burns against them. He has stretched out His hand to strike them down. The mountains quaked; their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. For all this, His anger is not spent; His hand is still stretched out. He will raise a banner to summon a nation from afar; He will whistle for it from the ends of the earth. It will come swiftly, prepared for battle. It will roar like a lioness as it carries off its prey. There will be none to deliver. YHWH of Hosts will thus be exalted in His righteous judgment.”

But even though Isaiah specifically addressed these writings to Judah and Jerusalem, King Jotham wouldn’t take them seriously. “Look at that! That is for Israel, not Judah! See, all that is happening in Israel. They allowed the idolatry. They are even now falling under the power of Assyria. But we are still prosperous, blessed by YHWH. That can’t apply to us. Why would Isaiah send this to me? It is Israel who has stumbled, and Samaria that has fallen. Send Isaiah’s poems to that wicked King Pekah!”

So six months after King Uzziah’s death, Isaiah showed up at King Jotham’s court (late 738 BC).

“O King, live forever! I sent messages from YHWH; have you received and heeded them?”

“Hello, Isaiah! Welcome! Yeah, I got them. They were very good. I sent them on to Pekah king of Israel, for I’m sure you meant to write them to him. Did you have a good honeymoon? Is Alysa here?”

“No, Your Majesty. They were written for you. And don’t try to change the subject.”

“But... none of that is true! None of what you wrote has happened here in Judah. But everything you wrote applies to Israel! I figured you just made a mistake.”

“O King, I have bad news for you. I see visions of the future. *YHWH has already given up on Israel and turned His back on her.* There is no longer any hope of her repentance; her exile and destruction are sure.

“But Judah still has hope! All these things I wrote – if Judah repents and stops the flood of wickedness in the land, if Judah cleanses the land of its idolatry and restores the Law of God, then none of this need happen here. But if not, all these things will come to pass here in Judah, here in Jerusalem, exactly as I have written.”

“O Isaiah, it’s not all that bad. C’mon! I’ve worked hard to keep the idols out of Judah. Buzz has too. You’ve gotta admit, Isaiah, you were wrong about him! He is a loyal and faithful servant of YHWH, one of my most trusted friends. And my wife! You were certainly wrong about Jeko’ach! She is wonderful. I couldn’t hope for anyone better. She is faithful and true to me, to YHWH, and even to you. Has Alysa been giving you a bad time, my friend? You seem to be a bit grumpy today. Marriage is tough, especially when you don’t know your wife very well. Mom said you were having trouble discerning her spirit. Maybe you’d better get alone with God for a while.”

Isaiah couldn’t deny that. He began doubting his own prophecies. *Maybe they weren’t meant for Judah. Maybe he had made a mistake. Maybe he assumed they were for Judah because he lives here. Should he move to Israel? Jotham sure hit the nail on the head with Alysa! She was still a mystery. Maybe he lost his prophetic gift. He had better get alone with God!* He went off to pray.

A servant girl, Kate, came in with news of dinner time. Isaiah waved her off. “No, my dear. Please don’t tempt me with food or drink again until I’ve heard the voice of YHWH. All my prophecies – indeed my entire life hangs in the balance! I have got to hear from Him.” He went back into fervent prayer.

Kate was impressed with his urgency. She put a notice on the door of his apartment in the palace, right under the ‘king’s prophet’ sign. It read, “ISAIAH IS PRAYING. DO NOT DISTURB!” Then she told Jotham’s other servants, and soon the news spread all over the palace. Those who knew how to pray began to intercede for Isaiah.

A week went by. Still the notice remained on the door. The weather turned hot, so Kate slipped a full water bottle just inside Isaiah's apartment. But the next day, the bottle was still untouched. Isaiah had fainted. Without water, his body's fluid levels had dropped dangerously low. He was dying, his prayer unanswered, the life-saving water only a few yards from his hand.

Early next morning, Kate checked the water bottle again. Still untouched. She knew he had no other water in his apartment. She looked up at her sign, "... DO NOT DISTURB!" She tried to rationalize the urgent thoughts in her head. *Isaiah told me not to tempt him with food or drink. He said that his life hangs in the balance!* But as with most servant girls, Kate had a good deal of common sense. She pushed open the door and entered Isaiah's apartment. There she saw him lying on the floor beside his bed, pale and barely breathing, sweat dried on his brow. She quickly sat him up, cooled him with a wet washcloth, and began to dribble water into his mouth.

But as she held him there propped up beside the bed, he took one last, deep shuddering breath, exhaled, and was gone. Kate checked his pulse. Nothing. She laid him back and ran screaming for the physicians.

They came running, followed by nearly everyone else in the palace. But they could do nothing. Isaiah was already dead. They mournfully carried his body from the apartment and laid it out on a table in front of the throne. There they arranged flowers around it while word spread like a wildfire throughout Jerusalem.

The great hall was packed by the time the king gave his memorial speech. Jotham was crushed, heartbroken. He couldn't get through it, and cut it short, sobbing. Only six months earlier, he had lost his father. And now, his best friend and counselor!

Alysa, Isaiah's widow, arrived from their country home and was asked to speak. She declined, saying only, "I reject what my eyes see. I stand firm on the promises of God." The blind queen mother Jerusha shouted, "Amen!" and wouldn't say another word. So others came forward to relate how much Isaiah meant to them. Everyone loved him dearly and wanted to tell their stories. To hear them say it, Isaiah was second only to God Himself, and he didn't miss that by very much.

So just imagine the shock and awe that swept through the crowd when Isaiah propped himself up on one elbow and called out, "I thank you all for your kind words, but this rumor of my death seems to be a bit exaggerated, don't you think?" He grinned like a kid who'd just pulled off a wicked prank.

The crowd seemed paralyzed by fear, so Isaiah slowly sat himself up on the table. "Is there any among my many admirers here who would be so kind as to get me a cup of cool water in YHWH's name?" he asked.

That broke the spell. Soon, a half a dozen cups of water were thrust toward him. He drank several, as whispering washed back and forth over the hall in waves. "I'm sure you're wondering ..." he began, but he was still too weak to continue. King Jotham kindly brought him to his own throne and bade him sit down there to gather his strength. Alysa and Jerusha came and stood beside him, too.

Another cup of water, and he was ready to begin. King Jotham stood to his right, his arm around his friend. He held up his hand for silence and asked, "Please, Isaiah, tell us what happened. We're all, er... dying to know! If you'll pardon the pun."

Isaiah didn't laugh. A faraway look came over him, as a holy hush fell across the court. "I saw YHWH Himself, sitting on His throne, lofty and exalted! The train of His robe filled the temple! Seven twelve-foot tall seraphim stood around Him. I looked at one; he had six wings. With two he covered his face in reverence. With two he covered his feet in humility. With the last two he flew to obey YHWH's commands. He cried out to his fellow seraphim, 'Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of Hosts! The whole universe is filled with His glory!' The temple's foundations trembled with the echo of His voice and the incense on the altar filled the temple with fragrant smoke. The seven seraphim bowed down in worship.

"I was overcome with awe. I fell on my face before the throne, crying out, *'Woe is me. For I am undone. Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, YHWH Lord of Hosts, in the majesty of His holiness!'*

"So the seraph whom I had studied went to the altar of incense. He took a burning coal with a pair of tongs and brought it to me. He gently lifted me up, for I had no strength left in me. Then he touched my mouth with the burning coal, saying, 'Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away. Your sin is forgiven.'

"Some of you may be aware that I had been fasting and praying to hear the voice of YHWH. I had been filled with doubts about the prophecies He had given me, for everyone seemed to think they didn't apply to Judah, only to Israel. I was not sure about the visions I've had, or the word pictures that YHWH has been putting in my head. I was full of doubts – about myself, my ministry, even my wife! I wanted to actually hear His voice – to know for sure it was really Him talking to me. I had prayed for a week to hear His voice, audibly, even as you hear me now. *Now I heard the voice of YHWH.* It rolled forth like the thunder of many waterfalls. The full power of the universe was behind it!" Isaiah paused, his body shaking with the memory.

Jotham urged him to continue. "Well, tell us! What did YHWH say?" Tears trickled down his cheeks.

"He said, *'Whom Shall I Send? And who Will Go For Us?'* I was stunned. He was looking right at me!

"I wanted to fall on my face again, but the seraph held me up. Now all the heavenly host were looking right at me. I wanted to crawl in a hole and die. But the heavens seemed paused in suspension, waiting for me to answer. Finally, I barely managed to squeak, *'Here am I, Lord. Send me.'*"

A broad smile broke across His face, beaming like a thousand suns. 'Yes!' The mighty voice thundered. 'Surely I have chosen you. Never again shall you doubt Me. Never again shall you doubt the visions I give you, or the words I put in your mouth, or the messages I give you to pen. For you are My friend. Your lips are Mine; your tongue is Mine; your pen is Mine; your heart is Mine. *Not one Word of Mine shall fall to the ground!*'

"Then His awesome face grew serious. He told me, 'That is why I commissioned you as My prophet. Go. Tell Judah My people, "Keep on listening, even though you will not perceive. Keep on looking, even though you will not understand!" You will render the hearts of My people insensitive, their ears dull, their eyes dim; lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and repent, and be healed!'"

"He paused, so I asked, 'How long, O Lord?'"

"He answered me sternly, yet sadly, 'Until cities are devastated, without inhabitant. Until houses lie empty and the land utterly desolate. Until I have exiled My people far away, so forsaken places multiply in the land. *Yet I will leave the tenth still alive, like the stump remains after the great terebinth is felled. Though men try to burn it out, yet the holy seed shall remain in the stump.*'"

"He stopped. I was filled with questions, but I had no strength left to ask them. He understood, for He filled me with His peace. He sent me back to earth, and filled me with understanding that all my questions would be answered as I had need. The whole exchange took only a few minutes. I was back here with you even before King Jotham gave his speech. My soul was floating, up there, right near the ceiling, the whole time.

"I heard everything you all said. It was so touching... I hardly wanted to interrupt. But then my soul floated down to return into my body. When my body began to breathe again, I figured I'd better speak up, or someone would see me breathing and get all spooked out."

Isaiah gave a little laugh, for the great room had become way too serious. But as he looked around, he realized that everyone in the room, except the king and himself, was on his knees. He hadn't been noticing; they must have fallen to their knees one by one as he was talking. Even King Jotham was hanging on to him for dear life, as if his strength had failed him. A sense of awe filled the room. YHWH was here. Isaiah slipped down off the throne to kneel in front of it. King Jotham plopped down beside him. For a long time nobody said a word. The whole assembly just knelt and worshiped.

The sun set. An evening breeze blew through the court. An infant cried, breaking the spell. Jotham stood, finally realizing it was up to him to respond to Isaiah's fantastic vision. "Isaiah, thank you for sharing. I will never forget. You told me that it was too late for Israel, and that your prophecies of destruction and exile will come upon Judah as well – if we don't repent. But if Judah repents... if Judah cleanses the land of its idolatry and restores the Law of God... you said none of it will happen here." Jotham looked out at the kneeling crowd. He took a deep breath and spoke loudly, with fire in his eyes, "I swear – I swear by YHWH God of Hosts, that Judah will not go the way of Israel! I, and Buzz my father-in-law, will do whatever God demands, anything, to end the judgments and obtain His blessings here!"

So then and there, King Jotham began to pray, arms uplifted to the heavens. It was the most heartfelt prayer he had ever uttered. He started by repenting of everything he had ever done, and of everything he had not done that he should have. He especially repented of not being more careful to keep the evil and idolatry from Israel out of Judah. He asked YHWH for wisdom in keeping Judah pure, and in guarding Judah against Isaiah's prophesied judgments. Then he publicly vowed to do whatever God wanted, as directed through Isaiah His prophet.

When he was finished, others stood up and prayed too, humbling themselves, and agreeing with the king. It was a regular revival meeting. Then someone began to sing a psalm, and the musicians joined in. Soon, even though it was quite late, the hall was filled with joyous, singing, dancing people. Once it began, nobody wanted to leave. Many stayed to dance and worship 'til dawn! But Isaiah was beat. He turned to King Jotham. "It's been wonderful. A meeting with God is always good. Tomorrow, we have some business to do, don't we. But right now I'm all done in. I'll see you in the morning."

"Wait, Isaiah. Before you go I want to publicly show my obedience to YHWH, here and now, before this gathering disperses. Pray for me, please. *What one thing would YHWH have me do right now?*"

Isaiah paused, praying. Then he jerked, startled by the revelation. He shook his head and bowed again. Finally he looked at Jotham, "Uh... YHWH said He wants you to depose your father-in-law, Buzz. Give his job to another."

In the stunned silence the color slowly drained out of Jotham's face. He risked a glance at Buzz, his most trusted officer and counselor, standing beside him as the second authority in the kingdom, in charge of all the trade and all the protection of Judah from pagan influences. Buzz was already looking at him, with an expression of shock and sadness on his face. Their eyes met. In them Jotham could read his questions: *Why? What have I done? I've been loyal, faithful, and true. What more could I possibly have done to serve you, to serve Judah, and to serve YHWH our God?*

Jotham looked back to Isaiah and shook his head. “No, no, friend Isaiah! Don’t joke with me like that! You’re exhausted, I’m sure. It’s been a tough day. Dying can’t be easy! Take a few days off to rest up. After you recover, come back to me with the Word of YHWH.” He shoed Isaiah and Alysa off to their ‘king’s prophet’ apartment.

Isaiah reached up to remove Kate’s ‘Isaiah is praying. Do not disturb’ sign, but Alysa touched his hand to stop him. “It’s okay, my love. We’ll be praying too. I have some things to share and I’d rather not be disturbed.” They went in to sit on the couch by the window.

“I was praying for you, the entire week, you know.” Alysa was finally able to open up what had been on her heart since they married. “I knew YHWH was dealing with you, and I knew better than to interrupt, but I was with you in spirit the whole time.” Then she shared, for the first time, her entire experience with Jerusha at the throne of the Almighty, and how she was commissioned by YHWH to ‘serve His servant Isaiah’ in an experience that matched Isaiah’s almost exactly – even to the seraph touching her lips with the hot coal.

“Why didn’t you tell me? I had no idea! You’ve been a mystery to me ever since I first saw you!”

“How could I tell you, my lord? I am called to be your servant – not your leader. Until you also had met the King, I had to keep silent. I surely didn’t want to tempt you to look up to me instead of to YHWH!”

Slowly, for he was still very weak, Isaiah lifted his hands and placed them on his wife’s forehead. She put her hands on his and smiled at him with sparkling eyes, but this time it didn’t distract him. Together they heard laughter. They were again at the heavenly throne. They fell to their faces before the King in heartfelt worship. Again time touched eternity. Finally Logos interrupted. “Isaiah-Alysa, you are My prophet to Judah and to the nations. I am with you always. I made you to know and understand each other, to support each other, and to be truly one, as none on earth before you. Delight in each other as I delight in you.”

The vision faded. Alysa put Isaiah to bed and nursed him lovingly back to health. Finally he had the wife, the prophetess, he had hoped and prayed for. From that day forth their unity, their harmony, became legendary. It set the gold standard for marriage all across the land.

Jotham couldn’t do it. His heart was right; he really wanted to do all that YHWH commanded. He loved and trusted Isaiah, and faithfully heard and obeyed all that YHWH said through him. Except on that one thing. He simply could not depose Buzz. *His eyes were dim, his ears dull, his mind clouded so that he could not see that as a command from YHWH.* Every time Isaiah brought it up, Jotham would shake his head and say, “Oh no, Isaiah! Not that again! That was just a bad dream you had while you were dead. It’s not a word from YHWH.”

Satan came boasting to Michael in Jerusalem. “You still trying to protect that so-called Bride? Don’t you know you’ve already lost? Your Boss knows! He’s given up on Israel. Now I have Judah as well. Soon His people will all be slain or exiled and the land will be left desolate. Haven’t you been listening to Isaiah’s prophecies?” He puffed out his chest. “*I am commissioned to fulfill them!*”

“Logos rebuke you, Satan! You glory in your shame. So I will not listen...” But at that moment Logos appeared.

He nodded sadly. “I have indeed so commissioned him, Michael. Satan has My permission to bring terrible harm, even death, to My precious ones, however he chooses. He has occasion to devastate My Beautiful Land and My Holy City. I am very grateful, My beloved adversary, that you are willing to fulfill My prophecies, even at the awful price in pain that it will cost you.”

“Cost me? Ha! It is Your Bride who will suffer. You’ve never even imagined the agony I will spawn. Your stomach will turn – Your knees will become water – Your strength will flee – when You see the torment I will visit upon...”

Logos interrupted. “Never mind the details. I’m just grateful. Normally you don’t like to fulfill My prophecies. I only ask that you show mercy to the exiles just as I show you mercy in blocking the judgments you have earned.”

“Blocking the judgments...? As if You were capable of judging me! And now You are pleading for mercy? *I am the adversary!* Just as I warned, You’ve grown sick and weak with love, while I’ve grown strong drinking the blood of Your so-called ‘precious ones’. You can’t even conceive of how strong I’ll be when I’ve drunk the last drop of blood from the last member of Your Bride!”

“The tenth. You heard Isaiah’s prophecy. You’ve got to leave the tenth alive. Remember all that I’ve taught you about working within My Word, My Law, or the universe itself will conspire against you...”

“Still pleading for mercy, You love-sick wimp? Worry not. Ha! ‘Fret not Yourself because of evildoers!’ *I’ll take good care of Your tenth.* I know how it all works. You forget that I’m the expert in affliction. Everyone who sins is my lawful prey, to torture as I will and slay whenever I’m thirsty. And they all eventually fall. Sure, I’ll keep alive that pitiful tenth who still hold some measure of faith in Your blood sacrifice. I’ll keep them alive – just until I crush their faith by the devastations and by the horrors I shall bring! Then I shall have them, too!”

Logos nodded to Michael. This interview was over. They left Satan to his gleeful scheming and returned to the throne room. “Why, Logos? Why?”

“He has occasion. The real question is, when will My precious Bride ever learn? She could not learn through pleasure, though I filled the entire land with blessings. *Now will she learn through pain?*”

THE END OF VOLUME THREE

This volume is preceded by *Volume One – The Feasts of Israel, God’s Plan of the Ages*, which presents the theological and historical background necessary to understand the story of God’s Plan of the Ages.

This volume is also preceded by *Volume Two – The Beginning of Time through Moses*. Volume Two begins the historical fiction story of God’s Plan of the Ages.

This historical fiction story is continued in:

Volume Four – King Ahaz to Messiah

Volume Five – Messiah through the End of Time

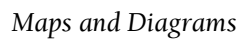
Date BC	Timeline for Volume 3
1410	Joshua. Israel enters Canaan. Jericho falls
1409	Long day of Joshua; battle of 5 kings; battle at Merom
1403	Boaz born to Salmon and Rahab
1401	Second Jubilee. Land has rest from war
1383/2	Joshua dies at age 110. Caleb dies at age 107
1376	Joshua's generation dead. Apostasy #1 (Jud 2:10)
1374	Israel enslaved to Cushan-Rishathaim (Syria) 8 yrs
1366	1st Judge - Othniel age 74; over Israel 40 yrs
1326	Othniel dies age 104. Apostasy #2 (Jud 3:12)
1325	Israel enslaved by Eglon king of Moab 18 yrs
1307	2nd judge. Ehud kills Eglon. Israel defeats Moab
	Land has rest from Moab in West Bank 80 years
1297	Israel again forgets YHWH. Apostasy #3 (Jud 3:31)
1296	3rd judge. Shamgar kills 600 Philistines w/oxgoad
	Land has rest from Philistines in the East coast
1289	Ehud dies. No judge in Israel. Apostasy #4 (Jud 4:1)
1280	Jabin king of Canaan subdues N. Israel, 20 yrs
1275	4th judge. Deborah judges Israel (Jud 4:4-5)
1260	Barak and Deborah defeat Sisera, peace 40 yrs
1234	Ahmoose finally drives Amalekites out of Egypt
	Beginning of Egypt's Early New Kingdom
1224	Barak and Deborah dead. Apostasy #5 (Jud 6:1)
	Israel oppressed by Midian and Amalek 7 yrs
1217	5th judge. Gideon defeats Midianites. Peace 40 yrs
1177	Israel worships the Baals. Apostasy #6 (Jud 8:33)
1176	Abimelech kills sons of Gideon, Oppresses Israel
1174	He is slain. 6th judge. Tola judges w/Israel 23 yrs
1173	7th judge Jair judges eastern Israel in Gilead 22 yrs
1151	Tola & Jair slain. Israel's Apostasy #7 (Jud 10:6-8)
	Israel oppressed by Philistines / Ammonites 18 yrs
1133	8th judge. Jephthah subdues Ammon, judges 6 yrs
1127	9th judge. Ibzan of Bethlehem judges Israel 7 yrs
1123	Eli becomes high priest at Shiloh, 40 yrs
1120	Ibzan dies. Apostasy #8 (Jud 13:1)
	10th judge. Elon the Zebulunite judges Israel 10 yrs
	Philistines (under Egypt) oppress Israel 40 yrs
1118	Pharaoh Amenhotep II conquers all of the Levant
1112	Samuel age 10 gets word from God for Eli age 70
1110	11th judge. Abdon son of Hillel judges Israel 8 yrs
1102	Abdon dies. 12th judge Samson age 20 - 20 yrs
1090	Samuel age 32 confirmed as prophet at Shiloh
1083	Ark is captured by Philistines. Eli dies age 98
1082	Samson dies. 70 men of Bethshemesh struck down
	Ark remains at Kiriath-Jearim for 70 years
	Samuel age 40 is 13th judge at Ramah for 57 yrs
1079	Philistines subdued at Mizpah. Peace w/Amorites
1076	Thutmose IV Pharaoh. This is Israel's Golden Age
1062	Amenhotep III Pharaoh. Egypt at height of power
1061	Samuel's sons judges. Israel asks for king (1 Sam 8)
	Israel yearns to be like other nations. Apostasy #9
	Saul anointed king age 20. Ishbosheth conceived
1041	Saul age 40 delivers Jabesh-Gilead. King in Gilgal
1038	Saul sacrifice at Gilgal; Samuel prophesies his end
	Jonathan age 20 smites Philistines at Michmash
1036	Saul defeats Amalekites but spares Agag
1034	Saul subdues Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites
	Samuel age 87 anoints David age 17 future king
1032	David age 19 victory w/Goliath. Philistines defeated
1029	Saul enslaves Gezer; massacres Gibeonites; Rizpah
1028	David defeats Philistines. Saul almost kills him

1027	David goes to Nob. Doeg slays Ahimelech, 85 priests
	David flees to Gath; feigns madness; escape to cave
1026	David delivers Keilah from Philistines. Abiathar
	David spares Saul's life. Marries Ahinoam
1025	Samuel dies age 97. David marries Abigail. Amnon
1024	David spares Saul again; goes to Gath; given Ziklag
1021	Witch of Endor. Saul age 60 and sons killed by the
	Philistines at Mt. Gilboa. David king in Hebron
1020	Abner made king in Gibeon of Saul. Takes Rizpah
1015	Ishbosheth returns Michal from Palti-El to David
1014	David age 37 becomes king in Jerusalem
1013	David moves Ark from Kiriath-Jearim; Obed-edom
1012	David allies with Midian
1011	David conquers Edom and allies with Moab
1010	David expands kingdom north to Euphrates river
1009	David allies w/Hiram of Tyre. Expands Jerusalem
1008	Second battle with Hadadezer, who is defeated
1007	Rest on every side. David may not build temple
	2nd battle with Ammonites. David stays home
	David age 44 takes Bathsheba; has a child by her
1006	Akhenaten dies, Amarna "Atonist heresy" over
	8 yr old boy king Tutankhaton / Tutankhamen
1002	Solomon born of David (49) and Bathsheba
1000	Amnon age 25 rapes Tamar. David does nothing
999	Tutankhamen's 8th yr. Horemheb captures Gezer
998	Absalom murders Amnon. Ahinoam suicide
	Tutankhamen age 17 dies suspiciously. Ay Pharaoh
995	Absalom plots to take kingdom from David
990	David's census, plague. David picks temple location
	Horemheb co-regent with Ay in Egypt for 3 yrs
989	Absalom proclaims himself king at Hebron
	He is defeated and slain by Joab at Gilead
988	Sheba's revolt. 3 years of famine - gets very severe
987	Ay dies. Horemheb Pharaoh of Egypt
986	David gives the Gibeonites revenge against Saul
	David spares Mephibosheth son of Jonathan
984	War w/Philistines. David age 67 gets tired
983	David gathers material for temple. Solomon is 19
982	Solomon age 20 goes to Egypt for 2 yrs.
980	Solomon age 22 marries Horemheb's daughter,
	allies w/Egypt. Returns. Adonijah's rebellion.
	Solomon co-regent w/David age 71
979	Solomon works on "foundation" of temple 6 years
974	Solomon "crowned a second time" (1 Chron 29:22)
973	Solomon marries Naamah the Ammonitess age 19
972	David dies age 80. Rehoboam born of Naamah
	Abiathar sent home. Zadok made high priest
	Solomon celebrates Sukkot. God gives wisdom
971	Solomon begins temple assembly in holiness
970	Solomon's kingdom established. His wisdom,
	justice, & strength become legendary
964	Solomon's temple finished in 7.5 years
	Feast of Sukkot. Solomon's famous prayer
	Solomon starts building his own palace
962	Horemheb dies. Rameses I Pharaoh. New Kingdom
960	Rameses I dies. Seti is Pharaoh.
959	Hittites & Mitanni massed at Kadesh. Peace treaty
958	Solomon & Seti defeat Hittites / Mitanni at Kadesh
953	Solomon begins a palace for his Egyptian wife
951	Egyptian palace finished, just outside Jerusalem
	Solomon's palace finished 13 yrs. Worldwide fame

948	Solomon's Egyptian wife dies
947	Queen Nikulis of Sheba arrives at Solomon's court
946	Makeda, Queen of Ethiopia, comes to visit Solomon
945	Menelik is born of Makeda, Queen of Ethiopia
943	Seti I dies. Shishak (Rameses II) reigns in Egypt
939	Shishak captures Hittite vassal state of Amurru
938	Battle of Kadesh. Solomon helps Shishak
937	Menelik age 8 returns to Solomon for training
	Rezon attacks Hazor & burns Solomon's fort
936	Solomon gets Shishak's help in taking back Hazor
935	Naamah age 57 dies. Solomon goes berserk
934	Ahijah anoints Jeroboam king. He flees to Egypt
931	Solomon dies age 71. His kingdom is divided
	Israel = northern kingdom. Judah = southern kingdom
	Jeroboam rules Israel. Rehoboam rules Judah
926	Rehoboam kills Azariah, other priests at Jerusalem
	Shishak invades the Levant in 5th yr of Rehoboam
	takes treasures of Solomon and the temple
913	Rehoboam dies. Abijah age 36 reigns in Judah
	Abijah defeats Jeroboam, who never recovers
911	Abijah dies. Asa age 18 reigns in Judah
	Asa is a good king. Judah undisturbed 10 yrs
910	Jeroboam dies. Nadab age 31 reigns in Israel
909	Baasha age 34 kills Nadab and reigns in Israel
	Baasha kills all the household of Jeroboam
901	Rameses' General Zerah battles Asa at Mareshah
900	"Third Jubilee" - Venus & Mars close. No casualties
	Baasha jealous of Judah's prosperity; battles Asa
896	Asa's Sukkot celebration - renews covenant w/God
888	Tabrimmon dies. Ben-Hadad rules Syria 47 yrs
	Asa makes treaty with Ben-Hadad against Baasha
886	Baasha's final war w/Asa; Baasha dies
	His son Elah age 38 reigns in Israel < two years
885	Zimri kills Baasha's family; rules Israel 7 days
	Israel ruled by Tibne in north and Omri in south
881	Tibne slain by Ben-Hadad. Omri sole ruler in Israel
880	Hittites battle Sea Peoples off Cyprus coast
877	Sea Peoples take Cyprus. Hittites weakened
	Sea Peoples overrun Ugarit, driving out the Hittites
874	Last great Hittite ruler Supiluliuma II dies. Hattusa
	pillaged & razed, Hittite empire never recovers
	Omri dies. Ahab age 27 reign in Israel w/Jezebel
873	Jehoshaphat age 32 co-regent w/Asa in Judah
	Elijah prophesies to Ahab, 'no rain but by my word'
872	Asa diseased in feet. Seeks physicians, not the Lord
870	Asa dies; Jehoshaphat age 35 reigns 25 yrs Judah
	Elijah confronts prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel
869	Elijah anoints Hazael king Syria, Jehu king Israel
	Greeks attack Troy - 10 years of fruitless attacks
865	Jehoram marries Athaliah, Ahab & Jezebel's daughter
863	Ahaziah born of Jehoram age 22 and Athaliah
	Setnakht reunites Egypt; Rameses III co-regent
	Rameses III "The Great" begins 32 yr reign
859	Greeks defeat Troy w/Trojan horse
858	Ashurnasirpal II dies. Shalmaneser III rules Assyria
857	Hittites flee the Sea Peoples. Many go to Egypt
	Ben-Hadad II of Syria invades Israel to Samaria
856	Ben-Hadad invades again; Ahab wins at Aphek
	Peace treaty. Ben-Hadad's life is spared by Ahab
	Sea Peoples invade Egypt in Rameses III's yr 8
855	Ahab takes Naboth's vineyard. Elijah's prophecy

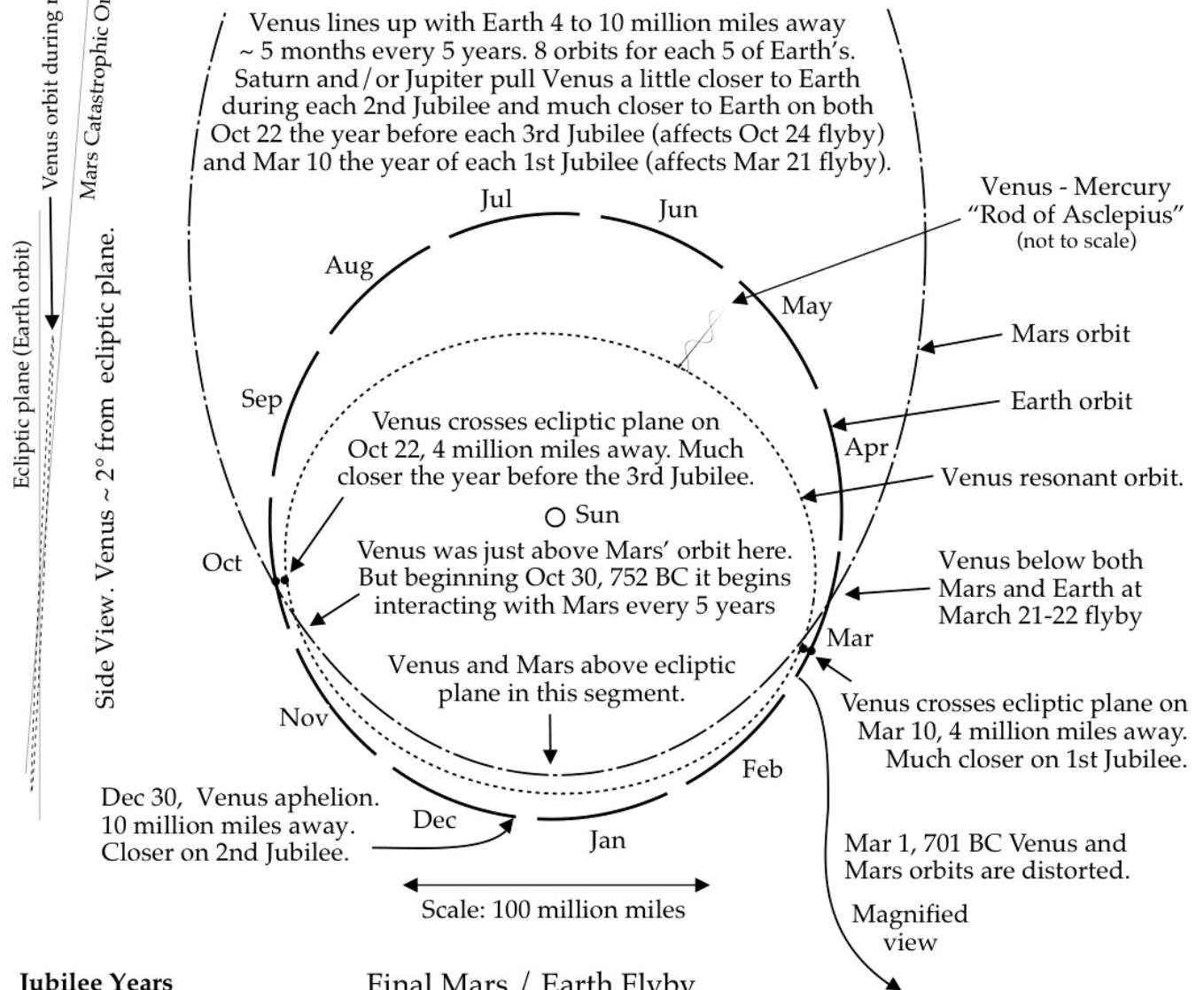
853	Ahab dies. Ahaziah age 35 reigns in Israel
	Jehoram age 32 co-regent w/Jehoshaphat in Judah
	Moab rebels against Israel. Judah allies w/Ahaziah
	Judah's ships at Ezion Geber are destroyed
	Battle of Qarqar. Shalmaneser III claims victory but
	Assyrian advance is blocked by Ben-Hadad & Ahab
	Two 50s of Ahaziah's soldiers slain by fire w/Elijah
852	Ahaziah dies. Joram age 35 reigns in Israel
	Elijah is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind
	Sea Peoples 3rd invasion of Egypt, Rameses III yr 12
	Elisha prophesies to Jehoshaphat. Moab subdued
850	Syria attacks Elisha at Dothan; struck blind
	Moabites attack. Jehoshaphat wins by singing
849	Naaman captain of Syrian army cured of leprosy
848	Jehoshaphat dies. Jehoram age 37 reigns in Judah
844	Jehoram's family slain except Ahaziah & Athaliah
842	Jehoram sick. Ahaziah age 21 reigns in Judah
	Samaria delivered from Syrian army & famine
841	Joram wounded at Ramoth-Gilead. Dies in Naboth's
	vineyard. Ahaziah slain by Jehu. Jehu age 36
	reigns in Israel. Athaliah age 44 reigns in Judah
	Ben-Hadad slain. Hazael rules in Syria
835	Athaliah killed. Joash age 7 reigns in Judah
814/13	Jehu dies. Jehoahaz age 41 reigns in Israel
808	Jehoiada dies age 130; Joash turns away from YHWH
804	Joash stones Jehoiada's son Zechariah
803	Hazael invades Judah. Joash gives him temple gold
	Hazael goes north, conquering much of Israel
802	Shoshenk drives out the Syrians from the Levant
801	Hazael dies. Ben-Hadad III king of Syria
799	Jehoahaz is ill. Jehoash age 32 reigns in Israel
798	Amaziah age 25 co-regent w/Joash 3 yrs in Judah
796	Joash assassinated. Amaziah age 27 reigns Judah
794	Jehoash removes golden calves. Elisha promises he
	will be victorious over Syria. Elisha dies age 100
792	Jehoash wins battle w/Syria/Ben-Hadad at Aphek
	Jeroboam II conquers Damascus in famous battle
	Jeroboam II age 18 co-regent w/Jehoash in Israel
790	Uzziah age 16 co-regent w/Amaziah in Judah
786	Amaziah conquers Edom; loses to Jehoash of Israel
783	Jehoash dies. Jeroboam II age 27 reigns in Israel
782	Jonah prophesies restoration of borders of Israel
780	Flood of Egypt (Amos 8). Jonah warns Nineveh
	Amaziah flees. Uzziah is crowned king in his place
776	Amaziah returns to throne after being gone 4 yrs
770	Ben-Hadad III dies; son Rezin age 15 king of Syria
766	Amaziah dies. Azariah (Uzziah) age 40 reigns Judah
752	Jeroboam II dies. Zachariah age 36 reigns in Israel
	Amos' prophecy. Isaiah age 28 begins his ministry
751	Zachariah slain. Shallum, Menahem reign in Israel
750	The Great Earthquake (Amos 1:1), Mars flyby
	Uzziah becomes a leper. Jotham age 25 co-regent
747	Rome founded. Era of Nabonassar in Babylon
745	Assur-nirari V dies. Tiglath-pileser III king of Assyria
744	Tiglath-pileser frees Babylonia. Conquers Medes
743	Tiglath-pileser conquers Levant, except Judah
741	Menahem dies. Pekahiah age 35 reigns in Israel
740	Judah (Uzziah) pays tribute to Tiglath-pileser
739	Pekahiah murdered, Pekah age 36 rules in Israel
738	Uzziah dies. Jotham age 37 reigns in Judah
	Isaiah's glorious vision of heaven (Isaiah 6)

Western (Great) Sea
(Mediterranean Sea)





Mars / Earth and Venus Catastrophic Orbits 751 through 701 BC

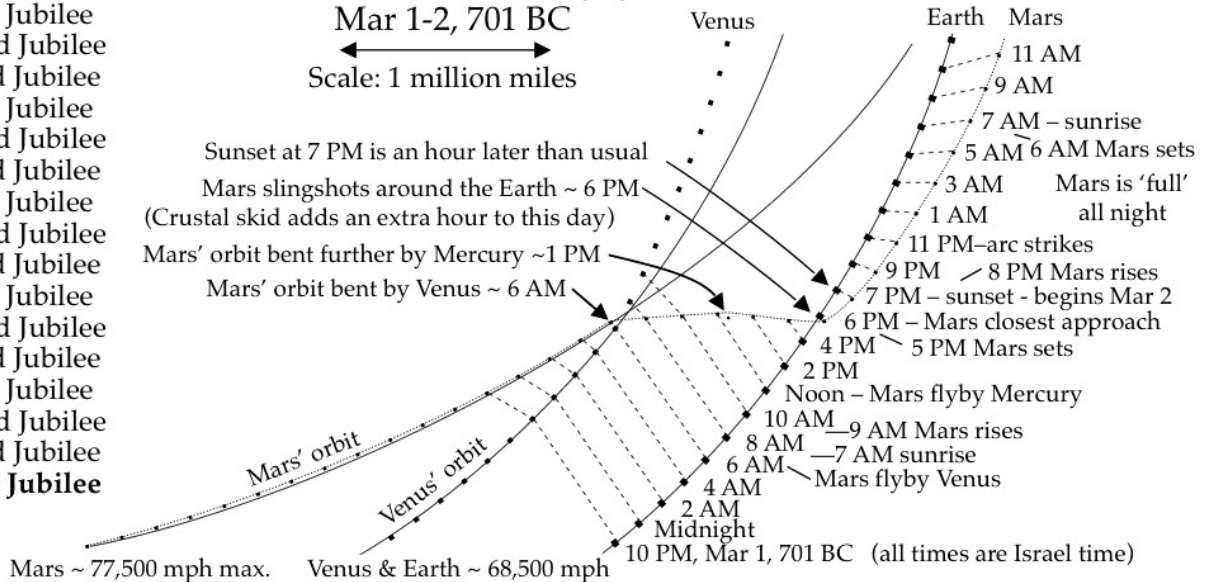


Jubilee Years

1451 BC	1st Jubilee
1401 BC	2nd Jubilee
1351 BC	3rd Jubilee
1301 BC	1st Jubilee
1251 BC	2nd Jubilee
1201 BC	3rd Jubilee
1151 BC	1st Jubilee
1101 BC	2nd Jubilee
1051 BC	3rd Jubilee
1001 BC	1st Jubilee
951 BC	2nd Jubilee
901 BC	3rd Jubilee
851 BC	1st Jubilee
801 BC	2nd Jubilee
751 BC	3rd Jubilee
701 BC	1st Jubilee

Final Mars / Earth Flyby Mar 1-2, 701 BC

Scale: 1 million miles





ENDNOTE. Egypt's Third Intermediate Period

822 BC (Page 245) begins the most confusing time in Egyptian history. The chaos of Egypt's Third Intermediate Period is bad enough, but when Libyan warlords began to take advantage of Egypt's weakness, it becomes literally impossible to keep it all straight. There are simply too many rulers in too many different places and not enough hard evidence or historical records available. In addition, the rulers sometimes killed each other off, hyper-inflated their own achievements, erased each other's records, changed names, intermarried with a different dynasty, and/or ruled at different places at different times. It's nuts!

David Rohl is a British Egyptologist who has spent a good deal of his life studying Egypt's Third Intermediate Period. I believe he understands it better than anyone alive and certainly far better than myself. I have used his work extensively, and am deeply grateful to be able to apply his findings to my story, especially regarding the chronology.

However, please bear in mind that my work is fiction! If you want the full skinny on the subject, go to David Rohl's works. I am deliberately simplifying – greatly! – to try to protect my dear Readers from going off the deep end in the details. I have left out dozens of (mostly minor) rulers, as they did not seem consequential to my story line.

I have kept the major rulers and their relationships. It is very important to me to give my dear Readers a sense of the historical settings of the Scriptures, and Egypt is one of the most critical nations in telling the Bible story. So you will always see interspersed in my story little paragraphs here and there telling what's going on in Egypt. I have decided to write a little 'headline' summary in this endnote of the things I have included for this confusing period.

1. The renowned 20th 'Rameside' Dynasty was strong until about 855 BC, when Mycenaean Sea People began to over-run the country during the reign of Ramesses III. His administration was also plagued with economic failures, labor strikes, famines, and corruption in high places. This led to the infamous, chaotic Third Intermediate Period, which began with Ramesses XI. During his reign, upper Egypt declared itself independent from lower Egypt, and Egypt broke apart into bickering factions and 'city-states'.

2. The Libyans coveted Egypt, particularly the rich farmlands of the Nile Delta. They attacked Ramesses III in 859 BC, and again in 853 BC, further weakening Egypt.

3. The 21st Dynasty Pharaohs were all pretty weak and inept. Remember that all Egyptian Pharaohs were from one royal family, which was somewhat inbred.

4. A strong Libyan warlord named Shoshenk realized the weakness of Egypt. He built an army in the Nile Delta in 822 BC at Bubastis, which Egyptians of Libyan descent used as their 'home base' to extend the influence of their 22nd 'Libyan' or 'Bubastite' Dynasty across the land.

5. As the Libyans took control of Egypt from the weak native-Egyptian Pharaohs of the 20th and 21st Dynasties, they actually helped Egypt recover from the chaos of the Third Intermediate Period. The Libyans were not inbred. They provided the strong leadership that Egypt needed.

6. Though there was contention between the Libyans and the native Egyptians, it was not as much as you might think. They had lived in Egypt a long time, and considered themselves Egyptian, too. In most places, the Libyans let the native Egyptian 'local Pharaohs' rule their own cities or districts – as long as they submitted to the Libyan Pharaoh in Bubastis. In many cases it became more of an alliance between all the local Egyptian Pharaohs, with the Libyan Pharaoh in charge of the alliance. The Libyans usually honored Egyptian customs, took Egyptian names, and worshiped Egyptian gods. They even intermarried with the Egyptian royal family a few times, making sorting out the dynastic relationships even more impossible.

7. However, all was not sweetness and light with those Libyan Pharaohs. In 788 BC, Takelot I married a daughter of Shoshenk I and took the throne at Bubastis. Takelot was cruel and careless. The 'alliance' began to fall apart. Now the contention increased, not only between Libyans and native Egyptians, but even among Libyans themselves. Pharaohs began competing – even killing each other off – and rushing about to take over other districts and increase their power. The confusion factor went through the roof.

8. The worst came in 765 BC. Shoshenk II took over Thebes from weak 21st Dynasty high priest of Amun, Psusennes II, to establish the 22nd Dynasty there. They were strong and ambitious. In 753 BC Pedubast I, son of Harsiese son of Shoshenk II, rebelled against the Libyans down north and tried to take over all Egypt for himself, starting a protracted civil war. We call it the 23rd 'Libyan Anarchy' Dynasty, fighting against their own relatives in the 22nd Dynasty. The country descended right back into the chaos of the Third Intermediate Period.

9. The Earthquake of 750 BC further devastated Egypt and created more chaos. Nubia declared independence, and began to prepare for war against Egypt.

10. In 714 BC the Nubians invaded Egypt under Piye, forcing the Libyan and native Egyptian Pharaohs to unite against them. The 25th 'Nubian' Dynasty eventually took over upper Egypt and much of lower Egypt as well. However, they later united against the Assyrian threat.

11. A strong native Egyptian Pharaoh, Tefnakht, began the 24th and 26th 'Saite' Dynasties at Sais in 716 BC. At first they were in competition with both the Libyans and the Nubians for the rule of Egypt, though ultimately they allied with the Libyan Pharaohs to defeat the Nubians. Finally, with the kind assistance of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria, Psamtik I of the 26th 'Saite' Dynasty united Egypt and ended the Third Intermediate Period in 664 BC.

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