

**Ezra:**

Kings and Prophets. Sounds dramatic enough. Prophets, especially. Mysterious, to say the least. Everyone loves a good mystery no matter what time period you live in, I suppose. But a lot of Christians hardly bother to crack those prophetic books.

**Paul:**

Reading about the kings and prophets of the Old Testament is a daunting task for modern people. It is very difficult for you to keep names and countries straight. It is difficult for you to deal with prophecies and figurative language.

**Ezra:**

To understand the subject of the kings and prophets, you must go back to an ancient agreement. The entire history of the Jewish people hinges on the agreement they made with God at Mount Sinai during the Exodus. An agreement they made with God.

I am one of the most renowned scholars of Scripture. In my time, the Scriptures meant solely the books of *Genesis* through *Deuteronomy*. Most of the other books of the Old Testament were written, but they had not yet attained the status of Scripture.

One reason many people of your time don't understand the Old Testament is much of it is not presented in chronological order. When the Old Testament was written, we were quite familiar with the chronology but were most interested in its message. On its most basic level, the Old Testament is the history of the ancient Jewish people and the revealing of God through them.

The history of the Jewish people in the Old Testament can be separated into three phases: from the creation of mankind to the Jews' exile in Egypt; leaving Egypt through conquering the land of Canaan; and the era of the kings and prophets.

The books of *Ruth* to *Malachi* primarily tell of the last era - that of the kings and prophets. They tell about the establishment and existence of the kingdom of Israel; the exile of the Jews in Babylon; and the return of the Jews to Israel.

On mount Sinai the Jewish people agreed to be God's people and obey him completely, while God agreed to protect and defend them.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the Old Testament is about the Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 19:5-8

people keeping or not keeping their side of the agreement, and God keeping his side, based upon the actions of the Jewish people and his innate nature of love and justice.

Much of the history of the ancient Jewish people can be explained by knowing the first of the Ten Commandments. "You shall have no other gods before me."<sup>2</sup> It is this one commandment that continually trips them up.

In this era, the Jewish people choose to follow kings instead of God. The kings lead the people to worship other gods despite the warnings of the prophets. God lets the enemies of the Jews defeat them and take the survivors into exile for seventy years. This ends the era of the kings. Over the time period of a century, the Jews return to Israel in three waves. God is in control all the time.

The prophets were often uncomfortable with the idea that God used their enemies to discipline them. That idea may be uncomfortable for you, too, but it is a fact that God states over and over through his prophets. So, it is impossible to understand the stories of the kings and prophets without knowing the enemies that the nation of Israel faced at a particular point of time.

The initial enemies of Israel were the indigenous people of the land of Canaan, the Canaanites. The Israelites did not eradicate them, so the Canaanites plagued them for centuries, introducing them to false gods.

The peripheral enemies of the Israelites were the peoples of the nations surrounding Israel. They first encountered these peoples while on the exodus from Egypt. Going counterclockwise on the map from the west, these were the Philistines, Amalekites, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Arameans. Although these enemies also worshiped false gods, their physical proximity and warlike natures were their major threats through the centuries.

From time to time, giant empires arose that threatened to overwhelm the Israelites, and did overwhelm them when God allowed it. The empires that mattered during the times of the kings and prophets were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia.

Why did a tiny country like Israel have so many enemies? It did not have a lot of natural resources or farming land that other countries coveted. They did not have strategic ports or big cities. One reason they had so many enemies is simply because it is in the nature of countries to want to expand to surrounding areas to have more farm land to grow food for expanding populations.

Located between empires, it was a natural target from all directions. More importantly, in the era of kings and prophets, the ships were tiny and unreliable, so most trade was done over land.

---

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 20:3

Israel's location caused a very important trade route to cut across it. This trade route would become known as the Via Maris connecting Egypt and Damascus. That may not sound like much to you, but it connected world trade from Asia to Africa to Europe.

Another important trade route in the area stretched from the Red Sea to Damascus, the King's Highway. It connected Asia to Europe and Africa. Anyone controlling both the King's Highway and the Via Maris at the same time would have been powerful indeed. King David and King Solomon controlled both of those trade routes and became fabulously wealthy.

Joshua and the twelve tribes of Jews never completely conquered the land of Canaan as God instructed them to do. Thus opening a door to a people known as the Philistines to settle on the Mediterranean Coast and the western side of Israel. They became bitter enemies.

Eventually the Philistines were so troublesome that the Jews demanded God give them a physical king to lead them in battle. This was a direct rejection of God's leadership. The result of their demand was that Saul was chosen as the first king. He began uniting the twelve tribes into the nation of Israel and fought the Philistines for forty years.

His successor, David, further united the tribes into one nation and conquered all the surrounding countries. This was the height of Israel's glory. David turned that vast kingdom over to Solomon. The nation was rich, and was united in worshiping God. Regaining this Davidic kingdom became forevermore the dream of the Jews. It was a short-lived time period of time, far less than a century.

Under Solomon's son, the kingdom split into the Northern Kingdom, also known as Israel or Samaria; and the Southern Kingdom, also known as Judah. The worship of false gods proliferated, and both kingdoms degenerated into petty, tiny countries. This period is very confusing to read about in the Bible because its narrative often alternates between the two kingdoms.

Eventually, the Northern Kingdom degenerated so badly that God let it be destroyed completely. The Southern Kingdom was eventually defeated by Babylon. Babylon deported the Jews to Babylon for about seventy years, and then allowed them to return to their devastated country.

Sporadically, God sent prophets who tried to give messages from God to the people about reforming their ways. One theme running throughout the stories of the kings and prophets is that the Israelites wanted to follow false gods, and God wanted them to follow him as they had promised to do. Doesn't sound too mysterious when you put it that way, does it?

**Paul:**

As a young man, I could have told you everything the Jews knew about the Old Testament. There were centuries of intense study handed down from scholar to scholar. We knew everything about everything as far as God and his laws were concerned. The best Jewish scholars of my time were able to clearly define the laws of God and how they should be followed. If it could be figured out, we had figured it out. That was the problem. We thought we understood the Old Testament and all of its possible meanings. To us, there was no mystery involved.

What we could not know was this – we were involved in the world’s greatest mystery and we only had a few clues. This wasn’t because we were uneducated. It wasn’t because we didn’t try hard enough. It was an unfathomable mystery because God made it one. How were we to overcome God’s intention?

I talk about this in several of the letters I wrote that are included in your New Testament.<sup>3</sup> The only way my contemporaries found out about the mystery was because God revealed it to us in the person of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

One part of the mystery? The Old Testament scriptures point to Jesus. You cannot really understand the Old Testament, from a Christian point of view, without having the New Testament. It is only through the words and life of Jesus, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, through the writings of the New Testament that you can understand many Old Testament passages.

Jesus tried to explain that several times during his life, but it wasn’t until his resurrection that his explanations started to make sense. Only a few hours after his resurrection, Jesus was somewhat disguised when he met two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. After listening to them for a while, this is what happened: beginning with Moses and all of the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning him.<sup>5</sup>

A few hours later, Jesus met with his apostles. He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures!<sup>6</sup> He said that everything must be fulfilled that is written about him in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> The apostles had lived with Jesus for three years, but he had to open their minds so they could finally see this mystery.

Why am I telling you all of this?

Simply understanding the prophets and kings at an historical level is a tremendous task. But as you do that, you will start seeing Jesus in many passages of the Old Testament. It should be

---

<sup>3</sup> Romans 11:25, Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 1:9, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:9, 3:3

<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:27

<sup>6</sup> Luke 24:44-45

<sup>7</sup> Luke 24:44 The Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms are essentially the Old Testament

reassuring to you, as it was to the early Christians, that God's mysterious plans were being fulfilled throughout history.

Permit me to tell you three reasons why the stories of the kings and prophets are relevant to your life. First, knowing about the kings and prophets helps you understand the New Testament. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament believed in the prophets and often quoted them. Many of the Old Testament prophecies are critical to understanding the authority and nature of Jesus. Even though Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, they are still relevant to understanding the New Testament.

Second, the situations portrayed in the kings and prophets often reflect your society, your family, and your life. The problems are clearly described and God's solutions are given to benefit you. You also get to see the difference in following God's solutions and other solutions that might occur to you.

The third, and my most favorite, reason the kings and prophets are important to you is that God reveals many of his characteristics there. You find that God desperately wants to have a deep, loving relationship with you. You learn that you are blessed by being obedient to God. You are awestruck by the fact that the God of the Universe wants the best for you. He does not want to punish you unless it is for your own benefit. You learn that the purpose of your life is to glorify God by loving him and all people. You learn that God is in control.

With all those things being true, as you start to read about the kings and prophets, I hope you will say with me, "Lord, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Psalms 119:18

**Samuel:**

My mother was drunk. In front of a priest. My mother was drunk in front of *Levi* the priest. At least she seemed to be. She was just mouthing words and the priest assumed she was drunk. But she was mouthing words of prayer. And when my mama prayed hard, she hardly let out a sound and she couldn't stand still. So, the priest had good reason to assume she was drunk.

My mother prayed especially hard that day. She was childless, and growing old. She desperately wanted a child. The priest heard her story, blessed her, my parents made love, God answered her prayers, and voila, I came along nine months later. In her desperation to get pregnant, my mother had made a vow to God, she dedicated my life to him. That is how I came to have two mothers and two fathers.

My birth father was named, Elkanah. He had two wives Peninnah and Hannah, who was my birth mother. Peninnah bullied Hannah because she was childless. My birth forced Peninnah to behave better. My mother's vow to dedicate my life to God was enacted when I was only a few years old. She took me to Eli to be raised as a man of God. Yes, *that* Eli, the priest who accused my mother of being drunk, and yes, that Eli is the man who became my second father.

Every year, my mother would bring me a little robe, and every year Eli would bless her. She went on to have three sons and two daughters! But I never knew my siblings well because they lived in the hill country of Ephraim while I lived in Shiloh with the Eli.

Remember the town of Shiloh? It was located about twenty miles north of Jerusalem. About three centuries before my time, when Joshua led the Israelites into the Canaan, they gave the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant a permanent home in Shiloh.<sup>1</sup> Both remained in Shiloh until my time.

Remember that Joshua and the Israelites were instructed by God to completely dominate Canaan and destroy all of the peoples living there? Unfortunately, they chose not to do so. As a result of their disobedience, the Israelites would be led into idol worship, and would be at war with the surviving people groups.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joshua 18:1

I grew in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people. In fact, all of Israel began to recognize me as a prophet. The Lord revealed himself to me through his word.<sup>2</sup> He even warned me what would happen to the house of Eli. Eli's two sons were priests, but they were very evil. Eli would not discipline them. In fact, they became so evil that a man came to Eli and prophesied to him that his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, would die on the same day, and that God would raise up a faithful priest to take their place.

While Eli was still alive, the Israelite soldiers went to fight against the Philistines out near Ebenezer. The Philistines prevailed and killed about four thousand Israelites. In their desperation, the Israelites asked that the Ark of the Covenant be brought from Shiloh so the Lord would lead them to victory. Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's sons, brought the Ark. When they arrived in the Israelite camp, the Israelites shouted with joy. This put great fear into the hearts of the Philistines.

Unfortunately, their fear was short-lived. The Philistines routed the Israelites, killing thirty-thousand foot-soldiers, and captured the Ark. Hophni and Phinehas died that day, just as prophesied. Eli heard the news about the Ark and his sons, and he fell out of his chair backwards and broke his neck. That day, I lost my father...but... I became the undisputed leader of Israel.

The Philistines were overjoyed to capture the Ark of the Covenant because they thought they now had control of Israel's powerful God. Instead, God plagued whichever Philistine city contained the Ark. After about seven months, the Philistines had the good sense to return the Ark to the Israelites, along with some golden treasures. After a short detour in the town of Beth Shemesh, the Ark was moved to Kiriath Jearim, where it would stay for twenty years.

Remember what was originally placed in the Ark of the Covenant by Moses? Manna in a golden jar, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone copies of the Ten Commandments. Maybe you are curious as to what was in the Ark of the Covenant after it was returned to the Israelites by the Philistines. So were seventy inhabitants of Beth Shemesh. They looked inside the Ark. They weren't authorized to do so. They were struck dead immediately. By God.

After the Ark was returned to Israel, the Israelites decided to turn back to the Lord, and away from worship of idols. Immediately, we Israelites defeated the Philistines in a battle at Mizpah. After that, Israel was at peace for nearly the remainder of my life. I say "nearly," because it turned out that my own two sons chose to be evil, and the Israelites refused to accept them as my successors. Instead, the Israelites insisted that I appoint a king over the country, so they could be like the kingdoms around them.

I found this more than a little distressing. I turned to the Lord as I had always done. He correctly assessed that the people were not rejecting me, but were rejecting him just as they had done since the time of Moses. Rather than punishing them, God had me warn them of the many

---

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. 3:19-21

disadvantages of having an earthly king instead of a heavenly king. No matter that it was a horrible choice, the people continued to insist on an earthly king. God granted their request.

Under God's direction, I anointed an unknown farm boy as the first king. Other than being tall, he wasn't much to start with, but he must have been the best choice that God had. And he did turn out to be a powerful warrior, and a builder of the kingdom of the united tribes of Israel. I will let him tell his own story, but I do want to describe the beginning of his downfall, as it concludes my own story.

The Amalekites were Israel's long-time enemy. These people had tormented Israel when they left Egypt. At that time, God vowed to erase any memory of them from the face of the earth. God ordered Saul to completely destroy *all* of the Amalekites and *all* of their animals. King Saul chose to *almost* wipe them out. He spared the king and all of the choice animals. When I found out that Saul had willingly disobeyed God, he made all kinds of excuses, and I prophesied the end of Saul's kingship. Because of Saul's disobedience, the Amalekites continued to torment the Israelites for hundreds of years until the time of Haman, the enemy of Queen Esther. Perhaps King Agag of the Amalekites, can be seen as a symbol of sin in our own lives. We are instructed to completely eliminate it, not make excuses for it, not let it keep on existing to torment us and our families. Rather than be like Saul, who let the symbol of sin live, maybe do what I did. I hacked Agag to pieces.

God searched for a man after his own heart, and found a shepherd boy, I anointed him as the next king many years before he actually became king.

### King Saul:

Nearly every young person fantasizes about being a king or queen. But I did not. I was quite content to be a farmer. However, when God called me to be king, I followed his command.

My first job was to unite the twelve tribes of Israel under my command. This was a bigger task than you would imagine. For hundreds of years, each tribe ruled itself. Each tribe relied upon its elders to set the rules, enact justice, and train farmers to act as soldiers. Overcoming and replacing these traditional tribal leaders was an immense task.

My second job was to prepare the Israelites to withstand the Philistines, and then to defeat the Philistines. I spent my entire kingship fighting the Philistines and other enemies of the Israelites. That probably sounds like a trivial order, but you have no idea of some of the underlying factors involved.

One of my biggest challenges was that the Israelites had been under the dominion of the Philistines long enough that the Philistines completely controlled the iron making. Israelites had virtually no iron weapons, and even depended on the Philistines for iron plow tips. And, our people were used to being farmers, not soldiers. However, we overcame all of that and became formidable enemies.



You've heard of my debacle with the Amalekites. I finally confessed to my disobedience, but God could see that my heart was hard. Through Samuel, God went ahead and chose my successor. Much to my dismay, my successor was not going to be my own son, but a shepherd, named David.

God completely blessed David. He became my most valuable soldier. Under his leadership, my soldiers started turning the tide against the Philistines. The more successful David was, the more jealous I became. My jealousy got so bad, it possessed me, literally — a violent evil spirit entered me. So violent. And David was my sole target.

Jonathan, my son, became best friends with David. Ironic twist? David married my daughter after he and his men were able to defeat the Philistines. Ironic twist, again. My daughter and my son helped David escape my murderous attempts. This allowed him to go to the countryside and amass a band of renegade soldiers. I chased him. Relentlessly. Didn't matter, he always escaped. God, my countrymen, and my family conspired to end my potential dynasty.

I had been king for forty years, it was clear to me that I needed to try to defeat the Philistines once and for all. Please notice that I said it was clear to me. Because of my debacle with the Amalekites, Samuel had refused to communicate with me before his death. I could not rely on his direction from God, so I felt like I had to rely on my own decisions.

I amassed the entire nation of Israel and prepared to fight the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. I was certain that Israel was finally strong enough to defeat our enemies. I even chose the terrain so that the Philistines could not take advantage of using chariots, which we did not have. I thought I had everything under control.

The army of Israel was slaughtered. I was killed. Three of my sons were killed. It was certain that my family would not continue as a dynasty. David did not take away the dynasty from my family. I did it myself.

I did not try to amass great wealth, I did not lead my people into idolatry, I did not tax my people unfairly. I believe I did a good job of fighting our country's enemies. I unified the tribes of Israel so that the next king would have a good base to build his kingdom. Was I a good king or a bad king, what do you think?

I did all this with very little direction from Samuel. If he had spent more time mentoring me or teaching me to make godly decisions, perhaps I would have done better. Unfortunately, I did disobey God from time to time. However, I did not lead anybody into worship of any false god. I was insanely jealous of David, my anointed successor, but no harm really ever came to him because of it.

I never wanted to be king. I didn't ask for it. I was a farmer. A good one. But a good king or a bad king? Who's to say?

**David:**

Starry night sky, early spring chill in the air, the sound of lambs in search of their mothers in the pitch black darkness of the mountains. I'm a shepherd.

My father, Jesse, had dozens of sheep and as a child I took care of them. At first, I just went out with our hired hand to learn his ways. By the time I was nine, I was taking care of the sheep on my own.

Countless hours alone with my harp and my sling. Countless hours to compose poems and songs. Countless hours to worship the Lord,

Some people think of me as a warrior, or a king, or the richest man who ever lived. I am a shepherd.

My childhood is a continuum of days and nights taking care of sheep, but there are three distinguishing events. The first, killing wild animals with my bare hands. Lion, bear, didn't matter. With my sling and my staff, I was going to do my job. God always gave me the necessary skills and strength to do what it took to protect those sheep. My father's sheep.

The second key event: one of my father's servants came rushing to find me. Nobody ever seemed to care where I was or what I was doing, so I remember this clearly. I bolted for the house, washed at the well, and went inside hoping that my parents and siblings were all okay. There were my seven brothers huddled in one corner, and my father and an old man huddled in another corner. The old man saw me, he came straight for me and poured oil on my head... anointed me. My family agreed to keep the anointing secret, but the Spirit of the Lord came over me in a powerful way from that day forward.

My brothers were serving in the army under King Saul. My father sent me to take food to them.

I arrive in their camp, and I hear some Philistine soldier insult my God, insult my king, and I feel the Spirit of the Lord stir in me. I kill that Philistine... with my sling, I cut off his head with his own sword. I keep his sword and his massive armor, and take his head to Jerusalem. As you can imagine, the armor never fits me like it fit the giant, Goliath. But his sword will be important to me a few years later.

I was a young man, a young warrior in my mind. I left my father's house to serve King Saul both as a soldier and a musician. I still played the harp. Really though, I started thinking of myself

as a soldier under God's command. God always blessed my efforts, and no matter the level of the danger, he kept me safe. I was more successful as a soldier than King Saul, I married King Saul's daughter, and became best friends with King Saul's son, Jonathan.

King Saul became insanely jealous of me. Rather than trusting in my loyalty to him and trusting in God, he tried to kill me. I avoided death on two separate occasions before I left his household to hide in the countryside. King Saul treated me like an outlaw who must be hunted down and killed. I suspect he learned of my anointing and believed me to be a threat to his dynasty.

My first stop as an outlaw soldier-of-fortune was the town of Nob. I visited Ahimelech the priest. I deceived the priest into thinking that I was on a mission for King Saul, and he had no reason to doubt my story. He not only gave me and my men some consecrated holy bread to stem our hunger, but also the sword of Goliath that I had left there for safe keeping. Mistakenly, I thought no harm would come to the innocent Ahimelech, but I was wrong. Doeg the Edomite saw what I had done.

When King Saul came looking for me, Doeg told Saul what Ahimelech had done, but he spun it in a very negative way. King Saul had Doeg kill the entire family of Ahimelech on the basis that he gave me aid. The entire family died that day except for one son who escaped, Abiathar. He would play a big role in my future.

I had nowhere to turn. I fled to Gath, a city of Israelite enemies, the Philistines, and hoped they would help me because I appeared to be an enemy of King Saul, and because I appeared harmlessly insane. "Any enemy of my enemy is my friend," our region already lived by the rule. The stop in Gath appeared useless in my life, but I did learn a lot about how the Philistines thought and fought, and made friends with many of them. Outlaw thinking, maybe.

From Gath, I went to the cave of Adullam which was near the border of the Israelites and Philistines. Four hundred men showed up there to be under my command. I was completely shocked. Granted, these men were in distress or debt, but many of them were great warriors. I began to understand that many Israelites were unhappy with King Saul, even willing to oppose him.

I then made a trip to another of Israel's enemies, the country of Moab. Seems like a very odd move, until you remember that my great-grandmother, Ruth, was from Moab.<sup>1</sup> I entrusted my parents to the king of Moab for safekeeping while I was on the run from King Saul. For the next few years, King Saul chased me and I eluded him. Every time. Eventually, I got the news that King Saul and Jonathan were defeated by the Philistines... killed. I mourned, for them both.

I battled Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth for a few years, and emerged victorious. I took my place as the rightfully anointed king of Israel. I started thinking of myself as a king, but had to learn to be a godly leader, too.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:5-6

I learned to trust and depend on God in every aspect of my life. Remember the surviving priest of Nob, Abiathar? While I was on the run from King Saul, I learned to consult God through this priest whenever there was an important decision to be made. Under God's direction, I conquered every country and enemy that surrounded Israel. The Philistines, Amalekites, Edomites, and Moabites fell under my leadership. We conquered and plundered all of them.

Many people are horrified when they read the accounts of how many people I killed, and the devastation I brought upon my enemies. It was almost beyond imagining. By being merciless, I fulfilled several goals. First, I wanted to weaken those countries, eliminating all Israel's enemies for many generations. Second, I wanted to subjugate them so they would pay tribute to Israel. Third, I wanted everyone to know that Israel's God was the most powerful, and that all gods of other countries were weak and useless to their followers. History would prove that my goals were successful...until my policies were reversed by my son and grandson.

I amassed huge amounts of treasure. Which brings me to a scripture you might never have noticed. Hundreds of years before Israel ever considered having a king, Moses prophesied that the Israelites would ask for one. This eventually came to pass in the time of the prophet Samuel when King Saul was chosen. Moses' command was that when this finally happened, the king must not acquire a great number of horses, especially from Egypt; he must not take many wives or his heart will be led astray; and he must not accumulate large amounts of silver or gold.<sup>2</sup>

King Saul did a wonderful job of following those orders. He did not have a great number of horses, didn't accumulate large amounts of silver or gold, one wife. For all of his faults, King Saul followed those commandments.

I, on the other hand, accumulated many horses and vast amounts of gold and silver. I told myself, and everyone else, that the gold and silver was to build God's temple, but my wealth began to turn my head away from God.

Spring. Spring was the time of year when kings went to war, and I loved the first signs of spring because I knew that it was time to be victorious in whatever God chose for me to do.

But one spring was different. I had promised my men not to endanger myself again<sup>3</sup>, I was tired, and I was making choices without consulting God. I decided to stay in my palace and send my armies to war under my faithful commanders.<sup>4</sup> We were close to defeating the last unconquered country that bordered Israel. Victory was sure. Nothing could possibly go wrong.

I couldn't sleep, one night, so I went up on the roof of my palace. It was located near the highest point of the City of David, I could look down over the entire city and area that

---

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 17:14-17

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 21:17

<sup>4</sup> 2 Samuel 11:1

surrounded it. As I stared eastward toward my faraway armies, my attention was drawn to a beautiful woman bathing on a roof. I was king and could have anything I wanted, so I sent someone to find out about her.

It turned out that she was the wife of one of my most faithful fighting men, Uriah the Hittite, who was, at that moment, away fighting in the battle without me. My lust raged. I sent someone to bring her to me, and I slept with her. I believed my tryst with Bathsheba would stay secret, but then she sent me news that she was pregnant with my baby. Uriah was away fighting. It was obviously my baby.

I had to cover. I brought Uriah back from the battle so he could sleep with his wife, but he refused while the war raged. I got desperate. I sent him back to the battle front and arranged for his death. My decisions were getting crazier and crazier. Uriah was killed, Bathsheba became one of my wives. She had a healthy baby boy. The Lord was furious with me.

### **Nathan:**

God told me to confront David in the matter concerning Uriah, so I rushed to the palace to do so. I told David a story about a poor man who had only one little lamb, whose family loved and treasured the lamb. Unfortunately, there was a rich man who lived nearby, who had many cattle and sheep, and he had to entertain a stranger. Rather than sharing out of his excess, he took the poor man's one little lamb. David was a shepherd, I knew his anger would burn, and it did. He threatened death on the rich man and required harsh repayment.

"You are that rich man. I pointed at David and shouted "Uriah is the poor man, and you have passed God's own judgment upon yourself." I went on to give God's judgement of how someone near to him would take his wives, and that Bathsheba's baby would die. David repented, but God enacted the punishments.

The matter of Uriah happened midway through David's reign. He had so thoroughly conquered the surrounding countries that he never had more trouble with them. But the consequences of the Uriah matter and David's other bad choices would haunt him for the rest of his life.

He immensely expanded his country's borders, and gained peace and prosperity for his country. He worshiped only God and served his people. However, he was a man of war, an awful father, set the example for the king to have many wives, murdered Uriah and committed adultery with Bathsheba. So, what do you think? Was David a better king or a worse king than Saul? Based on their actions, it's hard to tell, even for a prophet like me.

However, here is the overwhelmingly big difference between the two. Saul's heart was hard, while David had the very heart of God.

**Tamar:**

Maybe the first time you've heard of the House of David was in the birth story of Jesus. Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to register for the census because he was of the House of David, and David's home was Bethlehem.

You can see in the genealogies provided by Matthew and Luke, Jesus was of the House of David.<sup>1</sup>

I can talk about the House of David. I am *of* the House of David... I lived in David's house.

If you look at the men and women of Jesus' genealogies, you will see that it is not necessarily that awesome to be related to many of those people. In fact, David is not that awesome if you look at the many aspects of his life.

However, David and the House of David stood for something that was awesome, in the truest sense of the word. And you see what that was if you consider David's kingdom not long after his affair with Bathsheba.

Peace and money. What could be better? Only one thing! He possessed more land than Israel had ever had. It would not be far off to say he possessed all of the land God promised to Abraham. For the first, and last time.

Prosperity, peace, and possession of the land. That is what the House of David stood for. And peace not only with all nations, but with God. Prosperity, peace and possession.

That became the ideal state of being for the ancient Jews. That is what the promised Messiah would bring back to the Jews. No matter how bad things got, the Jews expected God would provide a Messiah that would bring back prosperity, peace and possession of the land.

For three thousand years, that's what most Jewish people have thought of when they thought of the House of David: prosperity, peace and possession of the land...and the promised Messiah.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:31-32

My father was the famous King David of Israel. His first wife was Michal, the daughter of King Saul. Saul took her away from David while he was an outlaw and married her to someone else. At the time David was married to Bathsheba, he was mid-way through his forty year reign, he had conquered all the countries surrounding Israel, and no large empires threatened Israel. Money was pouring into the country. David was amassing huge amounts of wealth. I think of a more literal house of David... the house that I lived in.

Later, David got Michal back, but when she disrespected him, he declared that they would not have any children. Whether it was God's will or David's abstinence, Michal did not have any children.

While David was an outlaw, he married Ahinoam, who gave him his firstborn son, Amnon. While married to Ahinoam, he also married Abigail, the widow of Nabal. That seemed pretty good to him, so he married, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah. He had other wives and many concubines as well. Many of his wives and concubines had children.

Remember that David was the second kind of Israel, so there weren't any laws about how many wives a king should have. Moses indicated that men should only have one wife, but he also said that kings should not take many wives, which left room for kings to have more than one.<sup>2</sup> However my father justified having more than one wife, it was not a wise thing to do.

I grew up in a boiling cauldron of scheming wives, and competitive brothers and sisters, half-brothers and half-sisters, and other siblings that had no official status. Our family was a train wreck. And that would come back to haunt David and the country for the last part of David's reign and for the next several centuries.

At the top of the sibling heap was David's oldest son, Amnon, my half-brother. Spoiled, spiteful and dangerous. I completely misunderstood how awful he was. He tricked me into bringing him some food...and...he raped me. Then in a fit of anger, he threw me out of his presence, which was a double dose of disrespect.<sup>3</sup>

What did my father do? My wonderful, highly-respected, after-God's-own-heart father? Nothing. Nothing. Oh, he heard about it, and he was angry, but he did nothing.

My full-brother, Absalom, was not so timid. He took me into his house to care for me, and bided his time. Two years later, after getting Amnon drunk, my full-brother Absalom killed him.

Absalom had to live in exile for three years, but then he returned to the kingdom, full of himself, and full of hatred for David.

---

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 17:17

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 13:1-9

Once again, Absalom bided his time. He built up favor with the people, and then launched a conspiracy against David. Seeing that he would be overwhelmed, and not wanting to launch a battle unprepared, David left Jerusalem with his dedicated followers.

Absalom was in such a strong position that there was seemingly no way he could keep from destroying David and his army. But through his inexperience, and taking bad advice, Absalom turned certain victory into horrific defeat. And, in the process, was killed by Joab, the commander of David's army.

You can imagine that after Absalom's death, my position became even more tenuous. The Bible doesn't say what happened to me, but you can expect that I lived out my life as a member of the royal harem. Now, do you see why I am not so impressed with the House of David. Instead of being safe in David's house, I was destroyed by it.

Am I bitter? Confused? Why did the Lord God of Israel love my father so very much? Why did God consider David's heart to have been so perfect? Why didn't God punish my father for ignoring how his son destroyed my life? Did the writer of Chronicles give him a great spin in the historical records? Listen to what the writer of the book of *First Kings* said about him... "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."<sup>4</sup> What about me?

#### **Nathan:**

Amnon, David's oldest son was dead. Absalom, the third-oldest son was dead. The Bible does not say what happened to the second-oldest son, Kileab, or Daniel.

As David aged, his fourth-oldest son, Adonijah, set himself up to be the next king.<sup>5</sup> He had no chance to be the next king, but Adonijah didn't know it yet.

Now, the first child of David and Bathsheba died as a punishment for David's actions in committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband. David and Bathsheba got married, and had another son, Solomon. This son was way down in the birth order, and had no obvious way of becoming king.

However, Bathsheba was as clever as she was beautiful. She decided to short-cut the process by having David promise her that Solomon would be the successor to David. With her intelligence and feminine wiles, David had no alternative but to give in to her demand.

Adonijah gave it a big effort, but he lost the game, and eventually lost his life. I was personally involved in anointing Solomon to be David's successor, so I am very aware of how close

---

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 15:3-5

<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 3:4



Adonijah came to succeeding David as king. However, while he was alive, David turned the kingship over to Solomon.<sup>6</sup>

David died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth, and honor. I should know, because I wrote the records of his reign and power and circumstances that surrounded him.<sup>7</sup>

The entire time I wrote the record of David's kingdom, I kept asking myself one question...Was David a good king or a bad king? He immensely expanded his country's borders, and gained peace and prosperity for his country. He worshiped only God, and had God's own heart, and served his people. However, he was a man of war, was an awful father, set the example for the king to have many wives, murdered Uriah and committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Just when I want to pronounce judgement on him, I remember the look on his face when he repented of his affair with Bathsheba, his killing off Uriah. I remember his prayers and fasting and nights in sackcloth when his innocent child was dying because of David's own sins. What can be said? What can I say? He was a man after God's own heart.

---

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 1

<sup>7</sup> 1 Chronicles 29:29-30

Moab. That's a country you don't think of very often, but it was my home. You know my coming from Moab was important, because in the Bible I am continually called Ruth the Moabite.

I lived little more than half a decade before David became king of Israel, in the last days of the Judges of Israel. I was the great-grandmother of King David! Moab and I were very important to his story.

Moab had very few natural resources and little strategic military value, so it was left to itself most of the time. The one valuable thing we had was a portion of The King's Highway, the most important trade route in the area.

Moab was a small country east of the Dead Sea. The Sea protected the region to the west, and the desert protected the region to the east. The small country of Edom bordered to the south, and we were typically at peace with that country. To the north lay Ammon and Israel. In my time, we were typically at peace with those two countries, primarily because they had their hands full with the Philistines.

It seems that the Israelite men have always had a thing for Moabite women. As far back as the time of Moses, the Israelite men indulged in sexual immorality and idol worship with the Moabite women.<sup>1</sup> That caused the Lord to kill 24,000 Israelites, and led him to command the Israelites to treat the Moabites as enemies.

Yes, Moab and I were important to the story of David. When King Saul was hunting David, David chose to take his parents to Moab. He asked the king of Moab to protect them.<sup>2</sup> Wouldn't you guess that David had influence in Moab in part because of me? Apparently, he had no other ties to Moab. The Bible never mentions David's parents again, so what happened to them? The answer to that question might have a bearing on this next piece of information.

Years after leaving his parents in Moab, David became king of Israel. Some years after he became king, David attacked Moab and completely destroyed it. By one account, he executed two-thirds of the fighting men in Moab, and he made the country pay a stiff tribute to Israel.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Numbers 25:1-2

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 22:3-4

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 8:2

Why the change in his relationship with Moab? Could it have had to do with the treatment his parents received in Moab years earlier? The Bible doesn't answer these questions.

That's not the end of the story. Moab got its revenge soon thereafter. David's son, Solomon, married wives from Moab. They enticed Solomon to worship false gods, which he willingly did, and in turn, led him down the path to destroy himself and the country of Israel. In a few decades, Moab regained enough strength to rebel against Israel, quit paying tribute, and become its mortal enemy. In fact, God even used the Moabites to punish later Israelite kings for being unfaithful to him.<sup>4</sup> That wasn't the end of Moab's revenge. Even to the time of Ezra the Priest, hundreds of years after my life, the Moabites plagued the Israelites by intermarrying with them, and enticing them to worship false gods.

In my lifetime, Israel was in a transition. The judges still ruled the land, but the prophets and kings would soon come into the picture. There was a famine in the land of Israel, and the people had few options as they slowly starved to death. Let me tell you about one Israelite who refused to starve.

Elimelek was a good Israelite, but he wanted to save his family from starving to death. He left his home in Bethlehem, and took his wife and two sons to Moab, hoping just to survive. His hometown of Bethlehem was where David and Jesus would both be born. Not too bad for a tiny country town in Israel.

While in Moab, Elimelek died, and left his wife with two sons. Since they were in Moab, the sons married Moabite women, even though that was prohibited for Jewish men to do. After ten years, both sons died. This left the Israelite mother and the two Moabite wives to fend for themselves, something that would be nearly impossible to do.

The mother heard that the famine in Israel had ended, so she decided to return to Israel and seek aid from the families of her and her husband. She chose to leave the two daughters-in-law behind so they could remarry Moabite men and have blessed lives. One daughter-in-law stayed in Moab. The other refused to be separated from her mother-in-law. So begins my story as the one who went with her.

I'll never forget the day Naomi started walking back to Israel. My mother-in-law was an aged widow, she had virtually no chance of leading a pleasant life in our society. She even changed her name to "Mora" to signify that the Lord had made her life bitter and empty. The only thing that gave her a little hope was that the barley harvest was just beginning, and the news for a favorable harvest in Israel was spreading.

She tried to make me stay in Moab, but I answered her with some words that have become famous. "Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God." When you want to understand the heart of David, think of him

---

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 24:2

inheriting it from me.

Weeks and weeks of walking. Finally, on the verge of starvation, Naomi and I stumbled into Bethlehem. We looked so bad that the people even wondered if my mother-in-law could even be Naomi! Our hope still remained in God...and a favorable barley harvest. *And* the law of Moses.

The law of Moses had many protections for the poor. One protection was that those reaping a harvest could only reap the field one time, and had to leave the leftovers, fallen grain, and edges behind for the poor to gather.<sup>5</sup> In a year of good harvest, the poor people would not starve, because the reapers would leave plenty behind.

The Lord led me to a field, and I began to follow the harvesters. Hours later, the owner of the field arrived and greeted the harvesters. Seeing me, he asked the overseer who I was. The overseer correctly described me and my hard work.

Did I mention the Israelite men have a thing for Moabite women? Well, the owner called me aside and told me to only harvest in his field, and that he would make sure the men did not bother me and that I could drink from the water jars the men had filled, which saved me immense time and work. He very clearly wanted to keep a close eye on me. A very close eye.

When I bowed to thank him, he continued with some lame discussion about how faithful I had been to Naomi. He was right, of course, but I could tell he just wanted to talk to me. By dinner, Boaz fed me all I could eat. When I got up to gather more, he instructed his harvesters to make sure I had plenty of grain when I left. Did I mention that Israelite men have a thing for Moabite women?

That night, I showed Naomi all of my rich harvest. She could not believe her eyes, and blessed whoever had been so generous. When I told her the man's name was Boaz, she mumbled about some custom... kinsman-redeemer. Didn't seem important to me at the time, but I did make sure I stayed in the fields of Boaz until the harvests were through. Boaz kept a close eye on me the entire time. He learned that I was diligent in providing for my family, just as David was diligent in providing for the nation of Israel. Boaz acted as a man of God by giving me protection, provision, and dignity.

Like a good mother-in-law, Naomi schemed for me to end up with my man. She told me to follow her instructions about invoking a commitment from Boaz. The kinsman-redeemer customs — a relative who redeems an indigent family member. I followed her instructions, but Boaz said he could not be my kinsman-redeemer because someone else was legally in front of him, meaning a closer relative. But he did commend me for choosing him instead of a younger man. I was wise in choosing my protector and provider, just as David was wise in choosing God as his protector and provider. Boaz was rich in mercy and love, just as David was rich in mercy and love.

---

<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 19:9

The next morning, Boaz went to the town gate and sat with the town elders as the other kinsman-redeemer arrived. Boaz was wise in leading the other man to give up his right. In front of everyone, Boaz invoked his new right to purchase all of the land of Naomi's former husband and sons, and concurrently invoked his right to marry me, so that we could pass along the name of my first husband. The entire community acted as witnesses, and gave us their blessing to have many children. Boaz was wise in the ways of the world, just as David was wise in the ways of the world. Boaz acted with honor in front of the entire community, just as David (often) acted with honor. Boaz was the only person who could save me, and he did because of his unconditional love for me, just as one of my descendants would later do for the entire world.

The Lord enabled me to conceive quickly. Our baby was a son, whom we named Obed. The women of the town were more excited for Naomi than they were for me. They kept saying blessings over her and asked the Lord to make my husband, Boaz famous throughout Israel! They were so excited that Naomi had a new son and grandson!

Our son, Obed, was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David. That is how David came to be my great-grandson. Who would have ever guessed that Ruth the Moabite would be a distant relative of Jesus, too!

About a thousand years after David, the Apostle Paul wrote that God testified about David. Imagine that! The Lord God of Israel testified about my great-grandson. God said, "I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my own heart. He will do *everything* I want him to do."<sup>6</sup>

My life was a story of a big God working with small people. It doesn't talk about any miracles or religious rites, just people acting as God's representatives. But mostly, remember me as an outsider who was saved by grace. God loves outsiders.

I think my story got included in the Bible because it is a story of how David came to do everything God wanted him to do, and how he became a man after God's own heart. Through the lives of Boaz and me; Obed, Jesse and their lives; and the power of God's Spirit, David came to be a man who was faithful, diligent in providing for his people, trusting in the Lord God, acting with honor, and rich in mercy and love.

Do you want to know more about the heart of God? Read the story of Boaz and me in your Bible. You know it as the book of *Ruth*.

---

<sup>6</sup> Acts 13:22

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star” What do you sing to your babies? Twinkle Twinkle Little Star? Rock-A-Bye baby? What do you read to your babies? The Three Bears or The Three Little Pigs? Nursery rhymes, maybe sing some Christian songs? We didn’t have any of those things.

Even before my son was born, I would read and sing the Psalms to him. All 150 of them. Imagine me... with baby Jesus, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters.”<sup>1</sup> A very special person wrote that.

Jesus knew the Psalms before he could walk. He could recite all 150 Psalms by heart as an older child. I know, I know...you’re probably thinking he had a pretty big advantage since he was Jesus, but, at least half of the Psalms were written by his ancestor, King David. Jesus absolutely loved the Psalms.

Besides, you probably know 150 songs by heart yourself, and our memories were much better than yours. We did the same things you do to memorize better...put words to music, used rhymes, alliterations, acrostics.

Many people today consider Psalms to be poetry, filled with flowery language and symbolisms, but not very useful for specific theological issues. Jesus did not feel that way.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus quoted from the Psalms. His mastery of them allowed him to confound the religious experts about the most important topic of the time, the subject of the Messiah. Jesus asked them, “Whose son is the Messiah?” Now, the experts didn’t know everything about the Messiah, but they were sure of one thing...the Messiah would be from the house of David, one of his descendants.

Jesus took their answer and completely crushed them. First, he told them that David was speaking by the Spirit when he wrote. Next, he quoted from Psalm 110: verse 1, “The Lord said unto my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” Jesus looked at them and said, “If David called him Lord, how can he be his son?”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 23:1-2

<sup>2</sup> Luke 20:41

From that encounter, the religious experts should have started learning from Jesus who the Messiah really was. Instead they continued to follow their own inaccurate perceptions....and that would lead to Jesus' physical death...and their spiritual death.

David wrote psalms throughout his life, regardless of his circumstances. He wrote whether he was being treated as an outlaw by King Saul or he was king himself. He wrote whether he was happy or sad, rich or poor, safe or in grave danger. He wrote songs of praise to God, but also complained to God. He wrote about whatever was important to him. That's one reason so many people have always related to what he wrote.

So whether you are happy or sad, prosperous or poor, safe or in danger, you will find Psalms to comfort and encourage you...or maybe accompany you as you suffer through a situation. No matter how much you think you know about God and his ways, the Psalms can shine light on new facets of God. Just think of how the world would change if everyone followed the first few lines of the First Psalm: "Blessed is the person who doesn't walk with the wicked or stand with sinners or sit with those who scorn, but who delights in the law of the Lord and who meditates on it day and night."<sup>3</sup>

"Meditate on it day and night." Where do you suppose that line might have come from? Go back in time to when Joshua first took over from Moses. He was about to take leadership over multitudes of people, to be a general over a vast army. Rather than a thick book of instructions, here is what God told Joshua to do...take the book of the law and meditate on it day and night!<sup>4</sup> Oh, and guess what! Jesus is the English name for... Joshua!

More important than King David's feelings, was his faithfulness to God. His writings portray a man completely devoted to God. He knew that God was God, and he was not. He completely understood that he was God's servant.

God himself testified that King David was a man after God's own heart.<sup>5</sup> What do you think that means, "a man after God's own heart?" If you read the Psalms, there are many things you will learn about God's heart.

God wants to be recognized for being who he is. One definition of the word "glorify" is to recognize the true worth of something. When David stops to think about who God is, he drops to his knees in awe and wonder. David recognizes that the whole world of nature stands in awe at the glory of God. As he wrote in Psalm 96,<sup>6</sup> "Give to the Lord the glory due to his name...let the earth be glad, let the sea roar... let the fields and everything in them be joyful, let all the trees of the forest sing for joy."

---

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 1:1-2

<sup>4</sup> Joshua 1:8

<sup>5</sup> Acts 13:22

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 96:8-12 The psalm is not attributed to David in the Bible, but many scholars believe he wrote it.

People sometimes ask me what was Jesus' favorite scripture. Makes me smile...it's like asking a parent which is their favorite child. Jesus absolutely treasured every verse of Scripture, because it is all God's words. Buuuuut, if I was forced to pick one verse from *Psalms* that he loved, I would choose, "Open my eyes that I may understand wondrous things in your law." Psalm 119: verse 18.

Jesus knew that to truly understand God's Word, you have to read it, meditate on it, discuss it with others, and have God open your eyes. He was willing to do that because he treasured every word from God.

What might it do for your understanding if you quoted that verse every time you started to read the Bible... "Open my eyes that I may understand wondrous things in your law."<sup>7</sup>

One of the many benefits of *Psalms* is how it was used to bind the Jewish community together. The Hallel is a Jewish prayer which is the recitation of Psalms 113-118. It's recited on such joyous occasions as Passover, Hanukkah and Rosh Chodesh.

Another example of a binding use of the Psalms is the way we used the fifteen songs found in Psalm 120-134. These had various names such as the Song of Ascents, Song of Steps, or Pilgrim songs. Four of these are linked to David, and one to Solomon. Among other things, these were sung or recited by the Jewish pilgrims as they traveled to Jerusalem for the three pilgrim festivals.<sup>8</sup>

Imagine twenty families ascending the hills toward Jerusalem, chanting those psalms in unison, over and over. The ecstasy and rapture they would have on their faces when they finally reached the Southern Steps of the Temple, and recited one psalm, taking one step, reciting another, taking another step...until they finished all fifteen psalms!

God is merciful and loving. God is just. God is compassionate. God is patient. The list goes on and on and on. If you want to know the heart of God, read the Psalms.

You cannot read any of Psalms without seeing that David was as close to God as to any human being. David talked to God like he would to any person. God wants to have a close relationship with his people. Do you want to know God? Read the Psalms! Many were written by a man who had the heart of God.

Is it important to know God? It is so important that Jesus addressed the topic with some of his last words. Not long before Jesus was betrayed and killed, he prayed to God. Here is what my

---

<sup>7</sup> John Barnett is one of the finest Bible students in America. He says he does say this prayer before every study session.

<sup>8</sup> Deut. 16:16



son said ... “This is eternal life, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”<sup>9</sup> Eternal life is knowing God and Jesus! I know them both. Do you?

---

<sup>9</sup> John 17:3

Jerusalem. My city. Have you been there? I call it my city because I once owned it. All of it. Well, it actually belonged to God, and he called it his city, too. You cannot truly understand the stories of the kings and prophets unless you know Jerusalem.

Perhaps the first mention of Jerusalem in the Bible is when Abraham met the mysterious priest, Melchizedek. At that time, the city was named “Salem,” as in Jeru-Salem. Abraham returned from defeating the kings who had kidnapped his nephew, Lot,<sup>1</sup> and Melchizedek brought out bread and wine, and blessed Abraham. The first communion ceremony. Since Melchizedek was a priest of God, Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

The second mention of my city was during the conquering of the Promised Land by Joshua. God commanded the Israelites to conquer the land and destroy the peoples who lived there. Joshua conquered most of the country but was not able to conquer my city.<sup>2</sup> At that time, the city was named “Jebus.”

The next important mention of my city is a lesser-known passage about my battle with the giant, Goliath. After I defeated Goliath, I cut off his head and took it to Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> There is no record in the Bible about why I did that, or what I did with the head after I got there. Some people believe I placed it on a hill outside of the city because of the hill’s name, “Golgotha,” which means “the place of the skull.” Some of those people think the “Gol” part of Golgotha comes from “Goliath.”

Can’t you just imagine what it might have looked like for a skinny shepherd boy to plant a spear in the ground, and then place a giant’s head on it. Can’t you just imagine how defiantly that young boy might have stared at the magnificent city and hurled insults and threats at it. I can imagine it, because I grew up only five miles south of Jebus in a small village named Bethlehem. I’ve loved Jebus since I was a kid, and it always infuriated me that Jebus had defied Joshua and the Israelites, and that it continued to exist independently until my time. The city seemed impenetrable...steep ravines and three sides and a huge wall on the north side. It especially made me angry that it was my tribe, the tribe of Judah, that was supposed to have

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 14:18-20

<sup>2</sup> Joshua 15:63

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 17:54

conquered Jebus.<sup>4</sup> Every time I tended my sheep and saw the city lights in the distance, it made me furious. I promised myself that, with God's help, I would someday change that forever.

The next important passage about Jerusalem explains why it is called the City of David. After the death of King Saul, God said I should move to Hebron, where I controlled the lands of the tribe of Judah. From Hebron, I was at war for several years with King Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth. After the death of Ish-Bosheth, I was proclaimed king of all Israel.

This did not mean the twelve tribes were automatically united and ruled by me. Each tribe had elders that I had to mollify, while forming a united nation of the twelve tribes. It seemed a good idea to move the capital of the country to a new location and have a new start. I thought about choosing my hometown of Bethlehem, but it did not have a good enough water supply and was not in a good strategic location from either a military or trade point of view.

I knew that Jebus would be a great location to start my new kingship. All I had to do was conquer it. If I could do so with little warfare, I would have a ready-made, walled city that was located perfectly to unite the twelve tribes of Israel. Have you seen those walls? I love that city.

My men and I marched straight up to it. We looked at the impenetrable walls and the steep hillside. The people of Jebus stood on the walls... and made fun of us. They felt so secure with their position, they said even the lame and blind could defend their city. Seemed to me that they might be right.

In my exasperation, I turned to my men and said, "Whoever leads a successful attack will become commander-in-chief of my army. We will not be successful attacking the walls, so come up with another plan."

My nephew, Joab, never told me how he got the job done with so little damage to the city, but I've always assumed he did it by using some sneaky plan... Joab was crafty and mean. I've heard that he captured a Jebusite shepherd and tortured him into telling him all about the city. He learned that the city was vulnerable through a watershaft, so he and his men climbed up the shaft. Then, he opened the city gates and the rest of my men rushed in to defeat it. Just a rumor, of course, but he did find a way to get in, and he earned the right to be my commander-in-chief, which he remained until my death.

At long last, I owned the former city of Jebus. After our victory, I renamed it: Jerusalem. It was also known as Zion or the City of David.

The original City of David was only about a dozen acres located on a very steep hill. Steep ravines on the east, south, and west. The north side was its weakest point, as it would continue to be for the rest of the city's history. To the north was a shallow depression which led to Mount Moriah.

---

<sup>4</sup> Joshua 15:63

Maybe you remember Mount Moriah. It was the location where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac.<sup>5</sup> During my time, it was the location of the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. I bought the land of Araunah to build an altar to God. He offered the land and sacrifice materials to me for free. I could not sacrifice anything to God that cost me nothing, and I told him that.

After my death, my son, Solomon, built the Temple on that threshing floor.<sup>6</sup> As you can imagine, with the Temple located outside of the city gates, the city started growing to the north, in the areas surrounding the Temple. It also started growing to the northwest, on the hill known as Zion. It could not grow very much in the other directions because of the steep ravines.

Over the next few hundred years, the city would expand its walls as the city grew. Eventually, the small hill of the original City of David would be a tiny part of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was located in the land of the tribe of Benjamin, near the border of the tribe of Judah. That is one reason that when Israel later split into two countries, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin stayed together as the Southern Kingdom. My family members ruled as kings of that Southern Kingdom until 582 BC when the Babylonians completely defeated the Israelites and took them into exile. My family had ruled more than four centuries.

When the Israelites left Jerusalem in exile, the entire city and its walls fell into disrepair. Decades later, the Jews started returning. They rebuilt the city and Temple, but only as a shadow of its former self. My beloved city. Many of the people cried when they remembered Jerusalem and the Temple in the glory years.

So that's the geography and political importance of Jerusalem, but I have not adequately explained why Jerusalem was not an ordinary capital of a country. The story starts more than four hundred years before my time, with Moses and the Israelites in the Wilderness.

While in the Wilderness, the Israelites built the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was the place that functioned as God's home on Earth. He "lived" in the area of the Holy of Holies that housed the Ark of the Covenant. Imagine that, the God of the Universe living in a tent amongst a bunch of wandering Jews!

When Joshua and the Israelites conquered Israel, the Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant were left in the town of Shiloh. Although the priests continued to sacrifice in Shiloh, it does not appear that God still lived in the Tabernacle. It was just an empty tent with a bunch of golden artifacts.

---

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 22:2, 2 Chronicles 3:3

<sup>6</sup> 2 Chronicles 3:3

A few decades before I became king, the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, but returned it to a new location. After I became king, I took 30,000 able young men of Israel to bring the Ark to the City of David. The entire country celebrated with me as the Ark was moved under the direction of God's priests. The oxen stumbled, the ark slipped. Uzzah instinctively reached out to steady it, and was struck dead by God because of his irreverence in touching it. I was so scared that we took the Ark to the nearby house of Obed-Edom.

After three months, I dared to try to move the Ark again, and took extraordinary pains to do it reverently. Whenever those carrying the Ark had walked six steps, I sacrificed a bull and fattened calf. I was thrilled! I danced before the Lord with all my might. I couldn't contain myself. When we reached the City of David, I placed the Ark of the Covenant in a special tent, and there it remained for many years.

When Israel eventually gained peace, Nathan the Prophet gave me permission to build the Temple, a building dedicated to the worship of God. However, God rescinded that permission and promised me that my descendant would build the Temple. I was devastated, but I completely understood. So, I started gathering the materials that my son would need.

Toward the end of my life, I gave Solomon detailed instructions about ruling the country, including building the Temple and I provided most of the materials he would need. It took him seven years to build it. After it was built, he furnished it and placed my dedications in it.

In an amazing ceremony, Solomon moved the Ark of the Covenant from the City of David into the Temple. In the ceremony, they sacrificed so many sheep and cattle that they could not be counted. The priests placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. There was nothing in the Ark at that time except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it.<sup>7</sup> The manna and staff of Aaron that Moses had put in it no longer existed.

When the priests withdrew from the Holy of Holies, a cloud filled the Temple. God had come to live with his people again! Jerusalem became God's City. Jerusalem and the Temple became the focus of life for the Israelites.

That day was the highlight of the Jews, the chosen people of God! God had fulfilled his covenant with Abraham by giving us the land of Israel. He was our God, and we were his people. We built him a Temple, and he lived with us. That day was the day we had all longed for.

Jerusalem was the home of God. Nothing could be more precious than that. However, the stories of the all of the kings and prophets is the shameful record of the Israelites refusing to consistently worship and serve God, and the penalties they paid for being unfaithful. Jerusalem was where their faithfulness or unfaithfulness was often demonstrated. It is no wonder that my city, Jerusalem, the City of God became the City Where God Once Lived.

---

<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 8:9

When I started, I was the best king of Israel. By the time I finished, I was the worst king of Israel. Every Jew who has ever lived should spit in disgust at the sound of my name. My name is King Solomon, and I'm sure you have heard a lot about me.

One of the most dangerous things any monarchy can do is make it unclear as to who will succeed its leaders upon their death. You are probably used to thinking that a king's firstborn son is always the successor. In my time, no such rule had been established, so the position was up for grabs as King David aged...and there were a lot of people interested in the final results.

My father, King David, had at least twenty sons by his many wives and concubines. His firstborn son, Amnon, was murdered by his third son, Absalom. Absalom was killed during his rebellion against King David. There is little record of the second son, so it is presumed that he died at a young age. That left the fourth son, Adonijah, in line by age. Although Adonijah tried to claim the throne, King David put an end to his efforts and named me as his successor.

I am the second son of David by his wife, Bathsheba. Bathsheba's first son died as a young infant as God's punishment for David's committing adultery with her, and for murdering her first husband, Uriah.

Although David had promised Bathsheba that I would succeed him, it is unclear whether that was God's preferred choice or my mother using her good looks and charm. However, I did succeed David when he crowned me as king shortly before he passed away after ruling Israel for forty years.

There was the proverbial good news and bad news awaiting me as king. I had to deal harshly with three people. The pretender-to-the-throne, my half-brother, Adonijah, was given leniency by me, but broke the rules and I executed him. The commander of David's army, Joab, conspired with Adonijah and had to be punished for his past crimes, so I had him put to death. Shimei, who had insulted my father while he was fleeing from Absalom, also chose to disregard the rules of his probation, and I had him put to death.

Overall, the good news was that my father had thoroughly subjugated the enemies of Israel and all of the surrounding countries. Our country was at peace, and tributes and treasures flowed into our country so we were very, very wealthy.

Another outstanding piece of good news was that my father had amassed a huge amount of treasure that would easily allow me to build a fabulous temple for God, and an extravagant palace for myself. It took me seven years to build the temple, but almost twice as long to build my palace.

My kingship started out on a very good foundation. In a dream, God told me that I could have anything I wanted. I asked only for wisdom in governing God's people. God was so pleased with this unselfish request that he granted me great wisdom *and* great riches.

I finished building the temple and palace, and the Lord appeared to me a second time. He told me that he had consecrated the temple, and that his name, eyes, and heart would be there forever. That promise was conditional. God also told me that if I walked before him with integrity and obedience, that my line would be established forever. If, I or my descendants chose to turn from God and not be obedient, he would cut off the Israelites from the land and reject the temple.

Simple, right? All my descendants and I had to do was walk with integrity and obedience to God. I started doing so with the best of intentions.

My wisdom became the stuff of legends. I was the wisest person in the world, and was capable of talking about any subject. People from all nations came to listen to my wisdom. Most people know the story of me finding the true mother of a baby by threatening to cut it in half. Most people know that I had more knowledge than any other man of my time. People from all over the world came to listen to me, including the Queen of Sheba.

But even my wisdom was not enough to protect me from my riches. My first use of riches was to build God's temple and all its furnishings. God was very happy with the results of building his house. He might not have been quite so happy that I spent so much on my own house. After that, I just kept amassing wealth as it flowed in.

Hundreds of years before my time, Moses had commanded that when Israel had a king, he must not acquire a great number of horses, especially from Egypt; not take many wives or his heart will be led astray; and, not accumulate large amounts of silver or gold.<sup>1</sup>

I clearly violated the third of those commands by accumulating large amounts of silver and gold. In fact, silver was so common under my command that it was considered a common stone.<sup>2</sup> That excess of wealth might have been excused because God had granted it to me as a blessing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 17:14-17

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 10:27

But, one of my first uses for my wealth was to accumulate a great number of horses, especially the really fine horses from Egypt.<sup>3</sup> I had twelve thousand horses. So many that I created special cities in which to house them and my chariots.<sup>4</sup> As you can guess, this not only cost a huge amount of money to upkeep, but also started turning my trust from God to trusting in my own army.

I should have known better. My father, David, did that same thing when he ordered a census to count his fighting men,<sup>5</sup> and God got so angry that he sent a plague to Israel that killed 70,000 people. I made God even more angry than my father, but God did not react as quickly.

Worse than any of those things, though, I started accumulating many wives. How many? My father, David, had at least eight wives. I had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines. My wives and concubines came from many countries and worshiped many gods. Through them, my heart was turned from the true God to many false gods.<sup>6</sup>

Since my wives were of royal birth, they were obviously from different countries and different races. This violated God's decree that we Jews not intermarry with other races.<sup>7</sup> So why? Why did I marry so many wives of royal birth? In my wisdom, I was sure that marrying them was a diplomatic way of having peace treaties with all of those countries. Rather than follow my father's example of trusting God and having a powerful army, I decided to trust in my diplomatic skills. This would turn out to be disastrous for Israel.

My wives influenced me greatly, and I was the one who chose to turn my heart away from the true God. I didn't just *barely* turn away from God, but I did it with fervor. I followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians. I followed Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. On a hill east of Jerusalem, I even built a high place for Molek and for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab who required detestable types of sacrifices. I did these sorts of things for all of my wives, though against what I knew was right. My heart completely turned from God.

This is why I was the worst king of Israel; I introduced worship of false gods to the Israelites so powerfully that they never fully recovered. I violated the terms of the deal I had made with God in my second vision.

Because I turned away from God, he punished me and my people as he said he would. He was intent that we would turn from our wicked ways and become his people. I knew that drill. As I

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 10:28

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 9:19

<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 24

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 11:1-13

<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 11:2



once wrote, “Don’t fail to discipline your child. Punish your child with a rod and he will not die.”<sup>8</sup>

God determined that the kingdom would be partially torn away from the line of my family, and he raised up adversaries to my rule, both internally and externally.

One of those adversaries was Hadad the Edomite. He and his raiders were a constant torment to my rule from Edom. Another adversary was Rezon. From Damascus, he and his men were a constant menace to my rule in the country of Aram.

It sounds like Hadad and Rezon were not that big of a deal. They only controlled a small portion of the land in my empire. However, the portion that they controlled was over parts of the important trade routes known as the King’s Highway and the Via Maris. So, they had the capability to disrupt trade and keep my military busy. However, they were not my biggest problem.

I had massive public works projects as I tried to fortify and grow my kingdom.. In order to accomplish those projects, I made slaves of many foreigners and conscripted Israelites. One of the young men who helped manage a project was Jeroboam. He was so diligent that I put him in charge of the whole labor force of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

One day, as Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, he was met by Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh. Shiloh had lost its importance because it no longer housed the Ark of the Covenant, but it continued to be the home of prophets and priests. Ahijah told Jeroboam that God was going to split Israel into two pieces. One piece would have ten tribes and be led by Jeroboam, while the other piece would only have one tribe and would be led by my descendants. The tribe of Levi, the priests, would be split between the two. The split was to occur after my death. Like me, Jeroboam was instructed to be faithful to God and follow his commandments, or Jeroboam and his descendants would lose their kingdom, too.

When I found out about Ahijah’s prophecy, I tried to kill Jeroboam. But, he fled to Egypt and stayed out of my reach. However, he was a constant reminder that my days were numbered, and that God was going to punish me and my descendants for my unfaithfulness.

You may have noticed that there is no prophet associated with my story. I did not have a prophet to help keep me in line. I thought I was so wise that I could guide myself. “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their own perversity.”<sup>9</sup>I did not listen to my own proverb.

Many people consider my rule to be the Golden Age of Israel. We dominated the countries around us, there were no major empires that threatened us, and we were at peace. We had a

---

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 23:14

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 11:3

new, fabulous temple that was finer than anything that any other country had for their gods. My palace was extravagant beyond belief. Our country was in an economic boom and we had massive public works projects that would make life much better for the Israelites. The whole world envied Israel and me.

However, we were a house built on sand. The high costs of my excessive lifestyle led to higher and higher taxes, and to my forcing people into virtual slavery. Some of the enemies that my father had dominated were growing in strength. Many Israelites were led by me into idolatry, and no longer worshiped God.

When I became king, Israel was at its zenith. When I died, after forty years of rule, the kingdom was falling off a precipice to its destruction because of my many mistakes. King Solomon. That is why all Jews who ever lived should spit at the sound of my name.

Who are the most famous poets of all time? A brief look at the Internet suggests Shakespeare, Yeats, Homer, Dante, and Frost would make the list. Edgar Allen Poe, Maya Angelou, William Blake, certainly. King David, who lived more than three thousand years ago, is more widely read than all of those poets put together, but he seldom makes any famous poets list. Maybe if instead of Psalms he had called his works “poems” things would have turned out differently.

King David is famous for his psalms. My brothers and I are not so famous, though we wrote at least eleven psalms, some of which you will likely recognize. One of our best lines? Psalm 42, verse 1, “As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants for you, O God.”

My brothers and I are the Sons of Korah. A good student of the Bible would instantly be wary of that statement. One of our distant grandfathers was Korah, a priest who led a rebellion against Moses. In punishment, God had the earth swallow Korah and all those associated with him.<sup>1</sup> It seems obvious from that account that Korah’s family would have died, too, and there would have been no descendants.

However, the Bible specifically states later that Korah’s sons did not die.<sup>2</sup> Seven generations later, the prophet Samuel arose from the line of Korah. Our clan were doorkeepers and custodians for the tabernacle, we were expert warriors under King David, and we became leaders of choral and orchestral music in the tabernacle. We were also important in the ceremonial services when the tabernacle was brought to Jerusalem by King David. We are living proof that you can overcome the misdeeds of your ancestors.

We were expert musicians, psalmists, and poets. It was only natural that we continued to be in charge of all things having to do with music, psalms, and poetry under King David’s successor, Solomon.

Solomon was a pretty good poet, he actually makes a few of the Internet’s best poet lists. He did not dedicate his poems to God like his father did. One of his longer poems is in the Bible and is often titled *The Song of Songs* or *The Song of Solomon*. It is a love poem between a man and a woman who are not yet married. Solomon wrote many love poems, but this is the only one that survived through the centuries. My brothers and I joke that he had to write a lot of love poems... he had 700 wives and 300 concubines!

---

<sup>1</sup> Numbers 16:28-35

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 26:9-11

In a way, that poem reflects the life of Solomon as he aged. The poem has nothing to do with God or his covenant with Israel, nor is it concerned about wisdom. Instead, it celebrates a sexually-charged relationship between two lovers.

Frankly, that love poem is nothing special, but many people have found analogies in it. Some see an allegory between God and Israel. Others see in it an analogy of Christ and his “bride,” the church.

Another of Solomon’s poems is also found in the Bible. It is usually entitled *Ecclesiastes*, which means “Teacher” or “Preacher.” He wrote this long poem when he was old, and a bit cranky. Solomon realized too late how poorly he had lived, and felt like life was futile. Well, it is futile when you disobey God to the extent he did.

When Solomon wrote the poem, he could barely remember what it was to be wise, but he still recognized God’s power.

There is a lot of wisdom in *Ecclesiastes*, but be careful in applying some of it to your life. Remember that he wasn’t the wisest man in the world when he wrote it. Be aware that there are... musings. Use wisdom with musings such as, “Everything is meaningless,” or the conclusion that the wise and the foolish both meet the same end...death.

Although there is no clear structure to the poem, it explores such themes as figuring out what is good for people to do while they live, what meaning...if any...is there in life, and what comes after life.

*Ecclesiastes* does provide modern people with a paradox. It does try to explore some of the deeper thoughts of life, In opposition to that, modern life often consists of asking a voice controlled computer intelligence to provide facts for shallow questions.

Just jump to the end of the poem and read, “Here is my conclusion about everything: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of all. For God will judge every word and deed, including the things that appear to be hidden, to see if it is good or evil.”<sup>3</sup>

A decent poet, yes, but that wasn’t Solomon’s best literary tool. Solomon was the best ever at proverbs! Proverbs are short words of wisdom type sayings that are clearly applicable to everyday life. He spoke three thousand proverbs, although only a fraction of those are recorded in the Bible. People loved his proverbs and wisdom. They came from all over the world to hear him speak them.<sup>4</sup>

The book of *Proverbs* contains proverbs from Solomon and other wise people.

---

<sup>3</sup> Eccl. 12:13-14

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 4:32-34

One of the best things about the book of *Proverbs* is you can find a proverb that fits nearly every situation. What parent or preacher doesn't have the need to quote, "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but whoever hates to be corrected is stupid."<sup>5</sup> You can't read even a few proverbs at random before you find something that applies to your life...or something you want to text to one of your friends.

Another thing about *Proverbs* that many people like is that Solomon didn't pull any punches, or avoid any subjects in order to be politically correct or be sensitive to people's feelings. After all, he was king and could do or say anything he wanted, and he was smarter than anybody else so who was going to challenge him. He talked about the dangers of adultery, the value of wisdom, how to discipline children, the silliness of drunkenness, and the waste of ignorance and immorality.

The book opens with its purpose. It is to be read to gain wisdom and understanding, to learn how to behave prudently and to do what is right, just, and fair. It is for the wise, and the foolish who wish to be wise. Its opening concludes with this famous line: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."<sup>6</sup>

Here are a few proverbs that might not go over so well in your society today...but they are still on point: trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't count on your own understanding,<sup>7</sup> you destroy yourself if you commit adultery,<sup>8</sup> laziness causes poverty,<sup>9</sup> and whoever trusts in riches will fall.<sup>10</sup>

We sons of Korah were very sensitive to being wise or foolish. After all, our family is famous for our foolish ancestors. Through the generations, we have overcome that reputation, but we know we are only one or two decisions away from losing that reputation. Even if King Solomon chooses not to follow his own words, we will search them, weigh them, and do our best to act wisely.

Solomon's proverbs are not commandments from the Lord, but they are time-tested to be excellent guidelines for living a godly and productive life. If he had followed his own proverbs, he and his people would have been much better off.

How much better off are you? Let's see, I'll give you some famous lines, and you tell me if they are in the Psalms or Proverbs:

---

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 12:1

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 1:7

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 3:5

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 6:32

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 10:4

<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 11:28

“Moderation in all things.” Nope, Aristotle promoted that.

“A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.” Nope, Shakespeare wrote that.

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Jesus said that, but it is not in the Psalms or Proverbs.

“Spare the rod and spoil the child.” No, but Solomon wrote some things close to that.

“To thine own self be true.” No, Shakespeare again...in *Hamlet*.

“The Lord works in mysterious ways.” Comes from an old hymn, but not in the Bible.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul; he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.” Yes, yes indeed. The Internet’s unrecognized poet, King David, wrote that.

**Rehoboam:**

I was the fourth king of Israel. For a few days, anyway.

I don't want to sound like a whiner, but from birth I never really had a chance. My father was King Solomon. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. There is no record of how many children he fathered. There was no big argument about who was to succeed him upon his death. It was me.

My mother was of the royal family of another country, as were most of King Solomon's other wives. I grew up in a lavish palace, and was as spoiled as anybody could be. Like a lot of rich kids, I attracted a group of friends that were not mature or wise. We just wanted to have a good time. My father didn't have any time to for me. In fact, I barely knew him. He certainly didn't take the time to train me up in the way I should go or pass any special wisdom to me.

The one thing he did give to me was the inclination to marry many women. I had 18 wives and 60 concubines, who gave me 28 sons and 60 daughters. Talk about a high-estrogen house.

After reigning over Israel for forty years, my father died. We should been a little apprehensive the year before he died, because his father, David, had reigned for about forty years, as did his predecessor, Saul.<sup>1</sup> Oh well. After a lavish burial, I succeeded Solomon as king.

The who's who of Israel gathered in Shechem to crown me as king. I'm thinking, it's going to be a simple coronation, boy, was I wrong. The surprise of my life. Enter a rough looking man, looked like he had been traveling for days. I asked about him, and I found that he was none other than the enemy of my father, Jeroboam, who had fled to Egypt. I couldn't quite remember what had caused him to flee, and nobody seemed eager to remind me, so I just let it go.

I stood in front of the people, expecting to be crowned king by an enthusiastic crowd. I got no such thing. Instead, Jeroboam and the people asked for their burden to be lightened from the harsh labor and heavy obligations my father had put on them. They said if I did so, they would serve me. They didn't say what they would do if I didn't. I stood in shock. I didn't know what to say, so I told them that I would give them my answer in three days.

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts 13:21

A day of feasting became a day of panic. I turned to the elders who had served my father and asked their advice. They replied that I should serve the people by lightening their burden, and that they would be my life-long servants if I did so. I didn't like their answer. I didn't want to reduce my lifestyle or stop the building projects, so I rejected them and their advice.

I turned to my friends and asked their advice. Why I did that is still a mystery to me. My friends had never made good decisions in their lives. They were only interested in continuing their lavish lifestyles like me. They insisted that I reject the people's request and threaten to make their burdens even heavier. I did not want to look weak in my friends' eyes, so I took their advice.

After three days, I delivered my verdict. I told the people that I was going to make their burden heavier, not lighter. It never dawned on me that I was only king because they consented for me to be king. The entire country of Israel listened, and then a huge majority declared that they no longer considered me their king. They packed up and they went home. In an instant, I was the acknowledged king of only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

On my way back to Jerusalem, I determined to regain my father's entire kingdom. I didn't bother to ask God what I should do, I knew he had already decreed that this split would happen. I had all the authority I needed to declare war. I gathered all of the young men of Judah and Benjamin to go to war and regain my kingdom. But one man changed my mind.

Shemaiah spoke to me and my people with the authority of the Lord. He said that we should not fight against our brothers, and that we should go home because God had decreed the split of the kingdom. So it was official, I was only the king of the tiny Southern Kingdom, consisting of the lands of Judah and Benjamin, including the city of Jerusalem, also referred to as the Kingdom of Judah. Rehoboam, King of Judah...doesn't have the same ring to it as King of Israel.

#### **Jeroboam:**

Many years before Solomon died, the prophet Ahijah was sent by God to promise me a kingdom consisting of ten tribes of Israel. I had complete trust in that promise. I patiently bided my time in Egypt where I'd fled to escape Solomon's threats.

I heard rumors that Solomon was dying, so I returned to Israel and prepared to claim the kingdom God had promised me. My old friends and supporters were thrilled that I was back. When Solomon died, I was ready to claim the kingdom God had promised me.

I remember with pleasure the look on Rehoboam's face when the people rebelled. They weren't about to follow him. They could clearly see that he was foolish, and he was too foolish to recognize that. He went absolutely crazy when he found they had voluntarily crowned me as the king of the new Northern Kingdom, also known as the Kingdom of Samaria.



What I recognized, but Rehoboam did not, was that Israel had only been unified for decades, several decades. But still, that's not very long. Their natural inclination was not to be a unified nation. Rehoboam gave them a reason to rebel, and they took it.

Unfortunately, it was only a short time before I, too, neglected to follow God. I paid no attention to the fact that God said I, along with my line of descendants, would lose the kingdom if I did not obey him. But I feared losing the loyalty of my subjects. What would happen if they returned to Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple? I would lose them. My solution was simple.

I decided to make it easier for my subjects to worship in my kingdom than go all the way to Jerusalem. People are driven by convenience and ease, true today, but true then. I built two golden calves and placed them in cities much closer than Jerusalem for many of my subjects. I took many of God's requirements and changed them for my own purposes. I built many places to worship, appointed non-Levites as priests, promoted worship of false gods, and did many other detestable things. They quickly chose to follow my ways — I made it easier and cheaper for the people to worship my way than God's way.

A man of God came to warn me to change my ways. I kept appointing priests and leading my people to worship false gods. Sowing the seeds for my destruction. I ruled over the Northern Kingdom for twenty-two years, but watched the male heirs of my family die one after the other.

So, now the question: good king or a bad king? I was a horrible king because I led the people even deeper into idolatry.

#### Rehoboam:

The more I understood my new situation, the more furious I got. The Northern Kingdom of Jeroboam was not much bigger in size than my Southern Kingdom, but that is where the similarities ended.

The Northern Kingdom had better farming land than we did, it controlled the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River plus it also controlled the countries of Aram, Ammon and Moab that King David had conquered. The vast amount of tribute from these countries would support the Northern Kingdom for many years.

The Northern Kingdom would also control the northern portion of Philistia, so it would control a large part of the coastal plain and ports along the sea. This also meant that the Northern Kingdom would control a large part of the lucrative Via Maris trade route.

My kingdom, the Southern Kingdom, was full of desert, hills, and rocks. I owned the wilderness and the Dead Sea. My land was far inferior to that of the Northern Kingdom. I did control the vassal nation of Edom, but King David had devastated that country so badly that it was not capable of giving me much tribute.

I did control the southern part of Philistia, so I did own part of the coastal plain and some sea ports. If it had not been for this area, my people would have suffered greatly.

What I misjudged was the countries of Aram, Ammon, Moab and Edom. As both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms declined in power, these countries would find it useful to rebel and to become our enemies. The tributes that flowed into our coffers would soon hemorrhage into a devastating military defense cost.

I did control Jerusalem with its fabulous Temple full of wealth. That control was a mixed blessing, however. I felt like I could live off the wealth of the Temple for decades, but the worship of God was a huge distraction to my people, I wanted them to worship Baal and other false gods. Like so many other things, I vastly misjudged the situation concerning the Temple.

I was forty-one years old when I began to reign over the Southern Kingdom, and I stayed in power for seventeen years. I surpassed my rival, Jeroboam, in leading my people to worship idols. We were more pagan than all the pagans who lived in Israel before Joshua drove them out.

My fifth year in power, Pharaoh of Egypt victoriously attacked Jerusalem. God allowed it to happen. Pharaoh carried off all of the treasures of the Temple and my palace. It is hard to even imagine the amount of wealth that was taken. My power was diminished. I was now a king in name only.

Throughout my reign, my kingdom continually fought against Jeroboam and the Northern Kingdom. By doing so, we were disobedient to God. We weakened each other without benefit to anyone. Good king or a bad king? Like Jeroboam, I was a horrible king. I led the people so deep into idolatry that they could never fully recover.

Jeroboam and I set the stage for all of the future kings and prophets of Israel. The battleground was the hearts of the people, and we had turned their hearts from God. In his desire for his people to return to him, God disciplined his people in various ways, including using our country's enemies. But...his discipline didn't provide a long-term change in their hearts.

In less than twenty years after Solomon's death, Israel was split into two kingdoms, both kingdoms had been decimated of wealth and people, and both kingdoms were steeped in idolatry. What a swift, incredible decline from Israel's Golden Age. And I was the leading cause. Bad king, indeed.

**Ahab:**

Jeroboam was the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, also known as the Kingdom of Samaria. He worshipped idols. Jeroboam's successor was his son, Nabab who was known only for leading our people into idolatry. Nabab was killed and succeeded by Baasha.

Baasha was known for killing all of the relatives of Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom. Unfortunately, Baasha ended up in the same detestable, idolatrous practices of Jeroboam.

Am I going too fast? I'm only getting started.

Where was I? Oh, Baasha. Baasha's son, Elah, succeeded him as king. He was killed while drunk by his successor Zimri. Zimri destroyed all of the male relatives of Baasha because they, too, were idolators.

Zimri was king for only seven days before the army rebelled against him. Zimri set the palace on fire and committed suicide. He also was an idolator.

The sixth king of the Northern Kingdom was Omri. He is known for buying the hill of Samaria and building a city, also named Samaria, on it. He also led the people into idolatry.

Those are the first six kings of the Northern Kingdom, and all of them were evil in the Lord's sight because of their idolatrous ways. The seventh king was worse than any of them, and I should know. I am Ahab, that seventh king.

About a half-century after the death of Solomon, I took what you call "evil" to a new level in the Northern Kingdom. I not only committed the same sins as the first six kings, but I married the evil Jezebel, I began to serve and worship Baal, and I built a temple to Baal. I also built an Asherah pole.

My reign was close to a century after David had completely dominated the countries surrounding Israel, including Aram. During the weakness of Israel since then, Aram had recovered in strength. Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram allied himself with thirty-two other kings and attacked the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Although I was ready to partially surrender, he wanted total surrender. God and the people urged me not to do so. Eventually, God led my country to defeat Aram twice. However, when I made peace with Aram against God's direction, my destruction was assured.

## Elijah:

Three things: a maniacal King Ahab had been searching furiously for me in all the nations and kingdoms. His psychopath queen was killing the prophets of the Lord as fast as she could find them. And, a servant of the Lord, who had been hiding a hundred prophets in caves, giving them food and water, was stressed. Hanging on a thread of his last nerve! Good times.

I may be the person most people think of when they think of the *first* prophet in the era of the kings. Samuel and Nathan were prophets. Great prophets. But I am usually the classic, “prophet zero” guy for people today. Maybe, because I was with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Cool.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is because the Lord endowed me with such power. Again, cool. Or because I am one of the few people who never died. Very cool, when you really think about it.

The first time I am referred to in the Bible was in the time of the aforementioned King Ahab, when I announced a multi-year drought. This made me so unpopular that the Lord told me to go and hide in the Kerith Ravine east of the Jordan River a few miles. It was in the region of my hometown of Tishbe, I knew exactly where to hide. Every morning and every evening, I drank from the brook, and ravens brought me bread and meat to eat. It was awesome.

The brook eventually dried up due to the drought, so the Lord sent me north of the Northern Kingdom to Sidon. I met a widow and her son there. So very poor. They took their very last bit of flour and oil, and fed me. Such a sacrifice! What an honor to God. Because of their kindness, the Lord moved. Miraculously moved; their jar of flour and their jug of oil remained full until the drought was over. Never ran out! What a miracle for her, and for her neighbors to see! Then, one day, her son died. The Lord was gracious. Both to her, and to me. I brought the boy back to life. The Lord allowed me to bring the boy back to life. This gave me a good reputation, and it helped me understand the power of God. The words of the widow, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from you is true.” I couldn’t help it. Everything I said from the Lord was true.

Moving on. More than two years of drought went by, Ahab and his chief administrator, Obadiah, were scouring the land looking for grass to keep their animals alive. God told me to go to King Ahab to inform him that God would break the drought and send rain. I came upon Obadiah, and he bowed down to me... he recognized me. This is where I learned those three things about the maniacal king, his psycho wife, and Obadiah’s prophets.

Crazy King Ahab combing the entire region for me. I suppose he thought he could coerce me into breaking the drought. Queen Jezebel murdering prophets. And, Obadiah, Ahab’s man, who happened to be a servant of the Lord. You could see why he was stressed out. His God and his boss didn’t really see eye to eye. Probably some of you know what that’s like. And the stress was getting to him, it was obvious, but when I told him to go to King Ahab and tell him that I would appear in person, I didn’t expect him to snap. No, didn’t expect it. At all.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mat. 17:1-4

Obadiah went ballistic. He worried that as soon as he told Ahab that I would appear, I would disappear again. If that happened, Obadiah knew he would 100% be put to death. In fact, he might even be put to death just for telling Ahab that I would appear. Ahab, erratic is an understatement. However, Obadiah did tell Ahab, and Ahab did come to meet me.

We met. Ahab accused me of causing trouble for Israel. I accused him of the same thing. I told him that he had deeply troubled Israel by abandoning the Lord and leading the people into worshiping false gods. I commanded him to bring the people of Israel to Mount Carmel, along with Jezebel's 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. So, Ahab assembled the people and prophets, and met me on Mount Carmel. He was desperate for the drought to be broken, if I do say so myself.

I challenged the people to make a choice. "If the Lord is God, follow him." I said, "If Baal is God, follow him." I threw down a challenge. The one who met the challenge by fire is the true God. The people agreed to the challenge and outcome. The future of Israel hung in the balance, but I knew which way the balance would tip.

I had the people bring two bulls, of which I let the prophets of Baal choose one. The prophets of Baal cut up their bull and put it on a pile of wood. They didn't set fire to the wood — that was the job of their god.

The prophets of Baal shouted to Baal from morning until noon. Shouted and shouted and danced around the altar. No answer. I taunted them, "Shout louder in case your god is asleep or traveling." They shouted louder, danced harder, slashed themselves with swords, bleeding. They went on like this until evening but silence. That was all they got. My turn.

The people came to me, and I repaired the altar of the Lord that had twelve stones, one for each tribe. I dug a large trench around the altar, arranged the wood on the altar, and placed the pieces of the bull on it. I had the people fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and wood. I had them do it again. And a third time. The wood was soaked. The trench was filled with water.

At this point you might not think the people were too engaged, but if so, you have forgotten that we were on top of a mountain, and there had been a drought for more than two years. Three times they had to carry the four massive stone jars down the mountain, travel to any water they could find, travel back, and climb up the mountain carrying those four massive stone jars.

All is in place. Challenge set. Here we go. I pray to the God of Israel, loud enough that all the people hear. I'm a prophet. I'm loud. I ask him to send fire so that everyone knows he is the one true God, and that I am his servant. Fire falls from heaven and totally burns up the sacrifice, wood, stones, soil... and water in the trench. God responds immediately When the people see this, they cry, "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!"

I command the people to seize the false prophets, and they take them to the Kishon valley and slaughter them. I tell Ahab to eat and drink because "I hear the sound of rain." The sky? Still dry and clear as it has been for over two years. I pray to God. A small cloud appears in the west toward the Mediterranean Sea. I tell my servant to warn Ahab to start riding in his chariot to Jezreel before the rain stops him.

Ahab is skeptical. The sky is clear! But, he is still in awe of my power, so he does as I command. The sky turns dark. A heavy rain begins to fall. The power of the Lord comes over me, and I tuck my cloak in my belt and run ahead of Ahab the fifteen miles to Jezreel. 15 miles. That was a long way then, too. Awaiting us in Jezreel is the nefarious Queen Jezebel, who is sure to be furious that her false prophets are dead, And her gods have lost all stature. It happens.

The minute Ahab told Jezebel what had happened, she sent a messenger to me saying that she would kill me within twenty-four hours. Hah! After what had happened at Carmel you can bet that I reacted with righteous anger and full of trust in God. But if you made that bet, you would be sorely disappointed. Your psychologists today might even diagnose me as schizophrenic. I freaked out. Scared witless, I ran for my life. I went over one hundred miles to Beersheba, and another day past there into the bleak wilderness. I laid down under a juniper bush and prayed to die. Afraid, exhausted, and frustrated.

God answered me by sending an angel to feed me and give me water. The angel did this again, and I was refreshed enough to begin a forty-day journey to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. When I arrived there, I entered a cave, spent the night, and the word of God came to me. I told God all about how zealous I had been for him, that the Israelites were killing the prophets and I was the only one left. I was a real whiner. God told me to get out of the cave and be ready to be in his presence.

A violent wind came. No Lord. An earthquake came. No Lord. A fire came. Still, no Lord. Then, a whisper. A gentle whisper came, and the Lord was in it. The Lord informed me that he had reserved seven thousand in Israel for himself, and I was to anoint Jehu as the next king of Israel, and Elisha as my successor. So, my life ended with three things.

I anointed King Jehu, I trained Elisha and continued to be the most powerful prophet in Israel. And the third, at the end of my days, I didn't die a normal death, and maybe, instead the Lord was gracious and in truly unforgettable prophet style. He took me, Elijah, to heaven in a whirlwind.

#### Ahab:

Elijah declared that because Queen Jezebel and I continued to do evil deeds and lead the people into idolatry, we would both be destroyed. That dogs would lick up her blood.

I was killed in war. Jezebel wasn't so lucky. Some of her eunuchs betrayed her and hurled her to her death from the palace window. While they waited to decide what to do next, dogs

devoured her body, except for her skull, hands and feet. Grisly. There was no possibility to bury her in such a way as to honor her. Once again, Elijah's prophecies came true.

I was the seventh king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and all seven of us were evil because we continued to lead the people of Israel further and further into the worship of other gods, and away from the worship of the true God. The great prophet of God, Elijah, his time was over. Was there anyone who could take his place and lead the people back to God?

**King Jehu:**

I was the tenth king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. I was in no way related to my two predecessors, Ahaziah and Joram, the sons of Ahab. They continued to lead the people of the Northern Kingdom into worship of false gods, until God finally had enough.

God ordered me to completely wipe out the house of Ahab. I had a reputation for driving my chariot like a wild man, so I rushed to do what God wanted. I quickly killed Joram, seventy royal princes, other members and close friends of the house of Ahab. I completely obeyed God in this matter.

I followed up that episode by rounding up the prophets of the false god, Baal, and having all of them killed. I completely followed God in that matter. It would have been an easy thing for me to end the worship of false gods in the Northern Kingdom, but I chose not to. Instead, I kept the golden calves and other items for the people to worship. In that matter, I followed the previous kings of the Northern Kingdom, and did not follow God.

As my punishment, God did not give my family an everlasting kingship, and he started reducing the size of the Northern Kingdom. About one and a half centuries before me, King David had completely conquered almost all of the countries surrounding Israel. Those countries were forced to pay tribute to Israel. That was a big reason that David and his son, Solomon, became so wealthy. By my time, those countries had regained strength, and had started rebelling against Israel.

We not only lost their monetary tribute, but we were forced to pay the huge costs of protecting ourselves against them. By the time I became king, the Northern Kingdom was a weak, small country. God would let us survive for another hundred years, but it was clear that our days were numbered because he had withdrawn his blessings and protection.

God doesn't want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.<sup>1</sup> So, God kept sending prophets to get the Northern Kingdom back on the right track. First, Elijah. Then another powerful prophet, Elisha.

**Elisha:**

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3:9



I've been bald since I was young. Baldness was often viewed as a sign of weakness. In fact, my baldness and my quick temper made for a story that made me famous, or more accurately, infamous. I am the prophet with the worst nickname. Guess what it has to do with. I'm a little sensitive about it, so, a little mercy I'm begging you.

I was God's prophet. The way I saw it was if you disrespect me, you disrespect God. One day, I was walking down the road, and here comes an enormous mob of boys from the town. "Get out of here, you old bald man!" "Beat it, Baldy!" I lost my temper. I called down a curse upon them, not realizing how powerful of a prophet I had become. Out of the woods came two bears that mauled forty-two of the boys. Not a story I am proud of, but it did demonstrate God intended his prophets to be viewed as powerful, not weak.

I started out as a farmer, and had no intention of doing anything else. One day, I was plowing with a pair of oxen alongside eleven other drivers, and the great prophet Elijah came up to me and threw his cloak around me. This signified that he was transferring his authority and power to me. I sacrificed my oxen as a thanks offering, burned my yoke as a symbol of complete commitment, then devoted myself to being the apprentice of Elijah.

When Elijah was taken to heaven in a whirlwind, I was there to watch. It allowed me to inherit his power and ministry. Immediately, I demonstrated that power in a story that has some interesting overtones. There was a company of over fifty prophets in Jericho who were in dire straits because the water there was bad. Undrinkable. They asked that I help. Symbolically, I threw some salt in the water and said a blessing over it. From then on, the water was fit to drink.

There are two subtle aspects of that story to understand. I was very careful to say that the Lord transformed the water, I did not take credit for doing so. Also, this incident was tied to a famous curse on Jericho: "At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest, he will set up its gates." Joshua had put the destroyed city of Jericho under this curse.<sup>2</sup> Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho, a few years before my time, and lost his firstborn and youngest son in fulfillment of the curse.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the land had stayed in a cursed state until my water incident.

King Jehu told how King David conquered the neighboring nations, and how they had rebounded in power and rebelled against Israel. One of those countries was Moab. Moab's tribute payment to Israel was one hundred thousand lambs and the wool from one hundred thousand rams. A lot of lambs, a lot of wool. If they successfully rebelled, this would affect both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. A lot less lambs, a lot less wool. So, the kingdoms joined together to keep the rebellion from being successful.

---

<sup>2</sup> Joshua 6:26

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 16:34

They marched on Moab, but ran out of water for themselves and their animals. As usual, when people make stupid mistakes, they turn to God to help them get out of trouble. Am I right? In this case, the kings turned to me to solve the problem. I prayed, I prophesied, and God filled the land with water. When sunrise came, and the rays hit the water, the rivers looked filled with blood. Rivers of blood. Which encouraged the Moabites to attack. Much to their surprise, the Israelites destroyed the Moabite army and completely devastated the land of Moab. That protected the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, but now the Moabites weren't able to pay tribute.

### Slave girl:

Raiders came. They captured us. Captured Jewish people, including me. In a split second, I went from a carefree village girl protected by my father to a girl sold into slavery.

King David had conquered Aram and completely dominated it. Then, during my lifetime, the country of Aram was a bitter enemy of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Aram was located in an area you know as Syria. But over the following decades Aram rebounded and became more powerful than the Northern Kingdom.

One day, a band of raiders left Aram and entered the Northern Kingdom, where I lived. They devastated the countryside wherever they wanted. The men killed, the women and children taken into slavery.

My new master was the wife of the commander of the army of Aram. The abuse I took while I learned their language and learned my duties was... was... I was owned by Naaman, the most powerful man in the region, except for the king of Aram. *But* all of Naaman's power could not overcome the fact that he had leprosy.

Risking of more beatings, or death even, I told my mistress that if Naaman would go see the man of God known as Elisha, he could be healed of his leprosy. Nobody in the world had ever been healed of leprosy before, and I didn't know if Elisha would be willing to do the healing even if he could. It was a tremendous risk. My mistress convinced Naaman to listen to me. My belief in God and his mercy must have been obvious to them both.

In distress, Naaman got the king of Aram to send a letter to the king of the Northern Kingdom ordering him to cure him of his leprosy. Naaman took the letter and great riches, and went to the king of the Northern Kingdom.

The king of the Northern Kingdom was distraught when he got the letter. He knew he could not heal Naaman, and knew that retribution would soon be coming his way. He tore his robes in distress and wailed at his misfortune. Elisha heard the story and was disgusted with the king because of his lack of faith. He said to send Naaman to him so that Naaman would know there was still a powerful prophet of God left in Israel.

Naaman arrived at the prophet's house. Elisha did not even bother to see Naaman in person. He just sent a messenger out to tell Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River and he would be completely healed.

Naaman was furious. He went away, insulted that Elisha wouldn't use a fancy healing or use a powerful river like the rivers of Damascus. Naaman's servants were wise enough to calm him down, and point out that he was just pouting. Naaman did as Elisha told him, and he was healed. Returning in repentance, Naaman gave glory to God and acknowledged him as the one true God. He swore never to bow to false gods again. He also tried to pay Elisha great riches, but Elisha wouldn't take anything from him. I changed the course of history...a slave....a girl...God's girl.

### **Elisha:**

Such great faith! A little slave girl changed the relationship between Aram and the Northern Kingdom, altered the course of history! That's what she did. Someone so small with such great faith. She is an example of many people in the Bible who are barely mentioned, but are faithful...and change the world. Maybe, just maybe, you one of those kinds of people.

The Arameans were a constant distress to the Northern Kingdom. During one military campaign, I was a source of information to the Northern Kingdom. To the king himself. Every time the Arameans set up camp, I would tell our king where they were so he could avoid them or defend against them.

The king of Aram finally got so frustrated that he accused his officers of betrayal, there was a traitor in their midst. They knew the truth. They knew I was informing the king of the Northern Kingdom, telling him the very words that the king of Aram said, even in his own bedroom. Furious, the king of Aram ordered his men to track me down and destroy me. He knew that if I died, he could more easily win the war.

When the report came that I was located in Dothan, the king of Aram sent a force of horses and chariots to surround the city. When my servant got up the next morning, he saw the entire army spread out around us, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" he cried.

I would imagine this scenario is familiar to you: surrounded and besieged by problems... or people. Unlikely to survive a situation? Depressed or held in the grips of hopelessness. Only able to see the physical problems that are so obvious to everyone anyway? If so, try to remember the rest of this story.

"Don't be afraid," I answered my servant simply. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then I prayed for the Lord to open my servant's eyes. He did. And he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around us. Just a tiny portion of God's army sent to protect me.

The Arameans attacked the city, I prayed that they be struck with blindness, and they were. In their helplessness, I led them into the capital city of the Northern Kingdom where they were taken prisoner. All of them. The king of the Northern Kingdom asked if he should kill his new prisoners, but I told him "Feed them" instead. He prepared a feast for them, and they returned home. It was this event that stopped the raiding from Aram, for a while.

I felt it was important that Israel start showing mercy to its enemies because I knew it would not be too long before Israel herself would be begging for mercy.

**Jonah:**

A giant fish eating me is a minor part of my story, but it is the part that gets the most press. My story arguably, sounds like a big fish tale, unless I give you some historical context.

Gomer Pyle. Does that name ring a bell? He was a famous television character of the 1960s. Bumbling and innocent, a very faithful friend. Everybody loved Gomer, his name became descriptive for someone who is naïve. Well, not me. I am also named Gomer, and I am anything but naïve. One very popular translation of the Bible calls me “a wife of whoredoms.”

The country of Israel reached its maximum glory under King David who conquered almost all of Israel’s surrounding countries. After the reign of his son, King Solomon, the country split into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. From that point on, the Northern Kingdom went into financial, military, and spiritual decline.

I came on the scene, preaching, about two centuries after the glory days of King David when the Northern Kingdom was just a shell of its former self. While the Northern Kingdom declined, the dominant empire of the region was to the north. The Assyrians. They were a cruel people. Showed little mercy to their enemies. It was clear to me that Israel was fast becoming their target. It was also clear to me that the Assyrians worshiped false gods and would severely punish the Israelites who worshiped the one true God.

Fear. No, trepidation. No, fear and trepidation. God commanded me to go and preach in Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. At best, I would be captured, tortured, and killed. At worst, the Ninevites would repent and God would not destroy them. I wanted them gone. Wiped out. Seemed the safest option. In my mind, anyway. Still neither option was... good. I decided to run from God. “I’ll go to a foreign country,” I thought. A country far from Assyria.

At Joppa, the main port on the coast of Israel, I boarded a ship headed for distant Tarshish. A little sea air, a cruise, if you will. Good plan. Until a squall blew in. God sent a horrendous storm to stop my ship. To appease God’s anger and avert a complete disaster, the sailors threw me overboard. God sent help. To save me from certain drowning, I was swallowed whole by a great fish. I prayed in the belly of the fish for three days and nights, and then it vomited me on the seashore. Dry land. Terre firma. The Lord commanded me to go to Nineveh again. This time...I went.

The Assyrian city of Nineveh was enormous. I walked it for a full day, and I had only covered a third of the city. I started preaching. In the name of God, I proclaimed that in forty days

Nineveh would be overthrown. All of the Ninevites believed me, believed it was God's words. They began to fast, and to pray. And so, as it happened, you know where I'm going with this, my nightmare came true. God forgave all one hundred and twenty thousand of my Assyrian enemies. He saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, and he did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.<sup>1</sup> Mad. No furious. No, mad and furious, *and* I pouted.

I did not know it, but God had placed me at of the great crossroads of history for a purpose. I failed my mission by pouting instead of preaching. Yes, I brought Nineveh to repentance, but I did not stay to bring them to long-term belief in God. If I had done so, they surely would have shown more mercy to the Israelites several decades later when they completely destroyed the Northern Kingdom. My attitude, my pathetic attitude and selfishness cost my fellow Israelites immense suffering and countless lives.

Instead of being known as the runaway coward swallowed by a giant fish, I could have been the example Jesus would point to in the far distant future when he would say, "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you."<sup>2</sup>

#### Gomer:

Amos and Hosea were prophets who preached in one of the rare times in the history of the Northern Kingdom when there was economic growth and prosperity. Under King Jeroboam the Second, the Northern Kingdom had temporarily recaptured Syria, Moab and Ammon. The Northern Kingdom was in a brief time of peace and prosperity. Seemingly, things were going well, and few people pay attention to prophets when things are going well.

Amos and Hosea were the last two prophets who preached to the Northern Kingdom. God chose for them to give their messages in distinctly different ways, though both prophesied the destruction of the Northern Kingdom if its people did not turn away from its false gods and back to the one true God.

However, as often happens in such prosperous times, social corruption and oppression of the poor and helpless were growing. Those who were economically prosperous were turning their attention to immoral entertainments and were neglecting God. In addition, the Assyrians were on the verge of expanding their empire and the Northern Kingdom was square in its sights.

As the people turned to Jeroboam and his government for their security, God sent them Amos. Amos was not a prophet by profession. He was a simple shepherd and fig farmer from the Southern Kingdom, but he preached to Northern Kingdom, and its two major cities, Samaria and Bethel.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jonah 3:10

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:44

Amos gave them the message that the prosperous kingdom of Jeroboam II would soon end. Amos taught that security came through trusting God, not trusting in a government. He reminded the people that God rules the affairs of mankind.

Amos told the people God wanted them to act with true moral and economic justice, not just offer up empty religious sacrifices. He reminded them that their agreement with God included righteous lives and lifestyles, not just empty religious rituals. God wanted his people to worship him, and him only. Amos also said, in no uncertain terms, that if the people of the Northern Kingdom did not repent and behave, God would react quickly and violently.

God saw that the people of the Northern Kingdom did not respond to clear and pointed messages, so he chose another way, a way very different than a preaching Amos. Symbolism. God commanded Hosea to act in symbolic ways. Every name, every action, every response in his life seemed to have symbolic meaning.

Hosea was my husband. He didn't want to be a prophet. He wasn't trained to be a prophet. But when God started speaking through him, he obeyed completely. God ordered him to marry me. Well, not me by name, just somebody like me. Hosea was commanded to marry a promiscuous woman, someone who would be adulterous. And he chose the right person. My father was overjoyed to marry off a daughter with such an awful reputation as mine.

Our marriage was to represent the fact that the people of the Northern Kingdom were engaged in flagrant whoring with false gods. [smirking] I can still see Hosea trying to explain that symbolism to his parents and his friends. They begged him not to marry me, that his life would be miserable, but Hosea obeyed God, and married me anyway. Gomer. Everybody in town knew about me. Truly, a wife of whoredoms.

God commanded Hosea to have children. They were to be named according to messages God wanted to send to the people of the Northern Kingdom. These were to be images used by God to describe Israel. We had three children. Jezreel, my first son's name. God sent the message that he was going to destroy the Northern Kingdom.

Lo-Ruhamah, "Not Loved", was my first daughter's name. This sent the message that God would no longer show love to the people of the Northern Kingdom, but he would have pity on the Southern Kingdom. God was going to show incredible mercy to the Southern Kingdom. I should have moved to the Southern Kingdom when I got that message!

My last child was Lo-Ammi, "not my people". My baby's name sent the message that God would no longer have pity on the Northern Kingdom, that he had disinherited the Northern Kingdom. God no longer wanted to be known as their God. Can you imagine God telling you that he no longer wants to be known as your God? That message took even me to my knees.

Three precious children and a fine man for a husband. Hosea. The chances of someone like me ending up with the life I had was a miracle. Really. But I wanted freedom. I wanted to feel...

alive, I had...needs. I resented all the restrictions of married life. At first, I would sneak off. Finally, I left home altogether and lived with another man. Maybe you think I didn't love Hosea, and maybe I didn't, I was just part of an experiment. And to walk out on three children...what kind of calloused heart?

That is when God used me to describe the faithlessness of the Israelites to him. The first part of Hosea Chapter Two is like a description of my life. God was through with the Northern Kingdom. He desperately wanted his people to love him, but they wouldn't have it, they wouldn't commit, they were incredibly faithless and void of all love. Like me. Trading what is priceless for that which is worthless. It's sickening. Endless love and grace, spurned.

Then, unbelievably, Hosea turned up on my doorstep. He bought me away from the man I lived with for fifteen shekels of silver and some barley. No doubt, he paid too much for somebody so worthless. He redeemed me. Not only that, he loved me again, despite my...all my...Hosea loved me! I agreed to be faithful. We agreed to be faithful to each other.

But true to the symbolism of my marriage representing the Northern Kingdom, you can guess that maybe I didn't stay faithful. The Northern Kingdom entirely ignored my husband's symbolic messages, just like it ignored the verbal prophecies he gave. They continued to ignore the one true God who loved them and instead worship false gods. God's patience finally ran out for the Northern Kingdom after two centuries of its existence.

The Assyrians were victorious over the Northern Kingdom and annexed much of its territory. After a three-year siege, the Assyrians captured the Northern Kingdom's capital city of Samaria and completed their conquest of the Northern Kingdom. They deported most of the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom into many small and scattered communities throughout the Assyrian empire. Over a very short period of time, this effectively eliminated the common identity of these people. They resettled Assyrians into the lands of the Northern Kingdom. These Assyrians quickly adopted and integrated the habits and religion of the former inhabitants, and intermarried with them. Over time, many of these people became known as Samaritans.

Why did the Lord allow the Northern Kingdom to be completely destroyed? The Bible specifically says this happened because the people sinned against God.<sup>3</sup>

"He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief."<sup>4</sup> Those are the words of Peter in the New Testament. But, they seem written with me in mind, and the Northern Kingdom, and, maybe...you.

God was patient. But God finally had enough. Enough of unfaithful hearts.

---

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings 17:7

<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 9-10





**Jehoiada:**

I murdered a queen. The queen of the Southern Kingdom. Yes, you heard me correctly, Jews had a queen who ruled over us. I was not a prophet, but I was the priest who killed the only queen of the Southern Kingdom.

**King Joash:**

One morning I'm in the temple, hiding out, as I've done every day of my life for as long as I can remember. Jehoiada, my friend and teacher, takes me outside. In the bright sunlight, unlike I typically was allowed. He places a crown on my head, anoints me, and proclaims me king.

**Jehoiada:**

The Northern and Southern kingdoms split in the year 930 BC. The first two kings of the Southern Kingdom were Rehoboam and his son, Abijah. They intensified the worship of false gods that was introduced by Solomon. Within only a couple of decades under their rule, the people of Israel were dedicated to worshipping false gods. However, for the sake of his promises to David, God allowed the Southern Kingdom to continue to exist, although it was greatly impoverished because he allowed the Pharaoh of Egypt to plunder the country.

The next two kings of the Southern Kingdom were Asa and Jehoshaphat. They made progress in ridding the Southern Kingdom of idols and false gods, but they did not completely eliminate the practice. They were considered good kings for reducing idol worship, and they did enrich the country by defeating many of its enemies. With the country having regained its commitment to God, and being on an economic upswing, you would think that the people would stay the course.

Entered Jehoram. He was the fifth king of the Southern Kingdom, and reigned only eight years. He did immense damage to the morality of the Southern Kingdom. He was an evil king. He made the monstrous mistake of marrying the daughter of Ahab. King Ahab, the most evil king of the Northern Empire. After the marriage, Jehoram reintroduced the worship of false gods and idols to the people of the Southern Kingdom. This was tragic because the people were on course for their land to be completely cleansed of false gods.

Although the Lord continued to let the Southern Kingdom exist, for the sake of David, he allowed a country that David had conquered to revolt...Edom. From that point on, the Southern Kingdom no longer received tribute from Edom, but was forced to incur the costs of armies to defend against Edom. This was a huge financial blow to the Southern Kingdom.

That blow was compounded when the Lord aroused the fury of other enemies who attacked the Southern Kingdom, completely looted it. They took everything, including all of the goods in the palace, and all of the king's wives and children except the youngest, Ahaziah.

Just when the evil King Jehoram thought things could not get worse, the Lord inflicted him with an incurable disease of the bowels. His bowels came out of his body, and he died in great pain. The people did not mourn the death of the evil king. Unfortunately, Jehoram had already caused incurable destruction.

Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, was the sixth king of the Southern Kingdom. Twenty-two years-old when he became king. Young and stupid. By allying with an evil king of the Northern Kingdom, and making an ill-advised war against Aram, Ahaziah was dead within a year. Here is where the story starts to get exciting.

Ahaziah's mother was Athaliah. You need to remember her name, Athaliah. She was the daughter of a king of the Northern Kingdom. An evil king. She was of the house of Ahab, and Athaliah was exceeded in her wickedness by no woman, except possibly Jezebel.

Upon hearing of the death of her son, Athaliah decided to eliminate any competition to the throne of the Southern Kingdom by murdering all of the relatives of the king. Many of those relatives were her own sons and grandsons. Admittedly they were mostly evil, too, but that was still an extraordinary thing to do, because it would have potentially ended the House of David.<sup>1</sup>

Believing she had killed off all of her competition, Queen Athaliah ruled the Southern Kingdom for the next six years. You can't imagine the evil she brought into the land during those six years.

Let me say again, Queen Athaliah *believed* she had killed all her competition. The Bible does not say, but here is one theory about what happened next. Queen Athaliah had a step-daughter who seemed to be more of a partner, than competition. The stepdaughter agreed to marry the main priest and keep him in line. This would eliminate the priests of God as one source of protest against her evil actions. What the Queen didn't know was that the step-daughter and the priest were running a scam on her, a scam on the Queen. That's some pretty inside information. How would I know? I married the step-daughter. I am the Temple's main priest. I am Johoiada.

My wife and I hid one of the Queen's grandsons at the Temple during her murderous purge. Of course, the Queen never came to the Temple, so hiding him was simple. When the young boy was seven years old, I could wait no longer because the Queen's evil deeds were destroying our country.

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chronicles 24:7

I called together the commanders of the army and showed them the young prince. I received their commitment to put him on the throne and end the rule of the evil queen. Hidden in the temple were the spears and shields of none other than King David. I armed the commanders and their men and put my plan into motion.

I stood the young prince in front of the people, put a crown on his head and a copy of the Scriptures in his hand, and anointed him king over the Southern Kingdom. The people shouted for joy and blew trumpets to signify their happiness.

Only a few hundred yards from her palace, Queen Athaliah heard the commotion and came to the Temple grounds. She saw the entire scene. She tore her robes, "Treason, treason!" she shouted. I'm sure she expected her commanders to protect her and keep her in power.

Instead, I ordered them to seize her and drag her away from the sacred Temple. They obliged me, of course, and dragged her to the entrance of the palace. They put her to death immediately. That is not the best part.

Taking advantage of the people's reaction, I made a covenant with the Lord, the king, and the people that they would rededicate themselves to being the Lord's people. I also had the people rededicate themselves to the young king. Still, not the best part.

Here is the best part. We smashed the altars and idols to pieces, and killed the priest of Baal in front of the altars. This was the beginning of a purge of idols and false gods from the Southern Kingdom.

All of us were delirious with joy! We took the young king to the palace and installed him as king over the Southern Kingdom. As a priest of the Lord God, I did not think I could be happier. But I was to find out that my happiness would depend on the future actions of a seven-year-old king named Joash.

Hiding was all I ever knew, I never really knew why, but suddenly to be in the sunlight, crowned, anointed... everything was happening so fast, and that was just the start of it.

A few minutes later, an old lady appears with guards, interrupting the party screaming! The commanders around me grab her, drag her away, and kill her. I don't find out until later — she was my grandmother!

The crowd rushes to a large building nearby, the temple of Baal, and they begin to smash it... the building. Then they kill the white-robed man who came outside to protect it. It seemed like only a few minutes longer, and I was in the palace being crowned as king. From the shadows of the temple to the throne of the Southern Kingdom in a few hours max.

What would you have done? Perhaps you would have been wise enough to do what I did. Continue to take the advice and direction of the man I had always trusted, the priest Jehoiada. The man who was also my uncle.

I reigned for forty years, and Jehoiada was my counselor for many of those years. He died at the age of one hundred and thirty, and was buried with the kings in the City of David because of the good he had done for Israel, for God, and for the Temple. I say all of this because of the ominous verse in the Bible that says I did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, *during all the years of Jehoiada the priest.*<sup>2</sup>

One century into its existence, I became King of the Southern Kingdom. During most of that time, the people had worshiped false gods and idols. The Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem had become shabby and neglected.

I concocted a plan to repair the Temple by specifying the use of various offerings and vows to be used solely for that purpose. Unfortunately, I put the priests of the Temple in charge of the money. After many years of this going on, and the Temple not being repaired, I called for a change. After consulting Jehoiada and the other priests, I put the royal secretary in charge of the money expenditures. He paid the workmen directly, and the repairs soon got done.

The priests had been using much of the money to make sacred objects for the Temple, not repair the building, so it's a good thing I made the change. Years later, the king of Aram threatened Jerusalem, and I had to buy him off by giving him all of the treasures in the Temple and palace. Any of the objects the priests would have made, would have been lost anyway. That may just be rationalization on my part, though.

I did a good job of slowing the worship of idols, I was not able to keep all the people from returning to it. When Jehoiada died, many leaders of the people flocked to me. They convinced me to abandon my devotion to the Temple and allow the people to worship Asherah poles and idols. It was crazy, but I did. When Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, came to prophesy against my actions, I did not repent.

I allowed the people's anger to get to me, pressure me... I ordered the death of Zechariah, the son of my precious mentor and uncle. He laid there, dying, and he called upon the Lord to repay my wickedness. Jesus referenced my despicable actions in a rant against the Jewish leaders of his time.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of the year, the army of Aram invaded the Southern Kingdom. They killed all of the leaders of the people and severely wounded me. The last thing I saw was the Aramean's carrying off all of our treasures to Damascus. Then, my own officials murdered me in my bed.

---

<sup>2</sup> 2 Chronicles 24:2

<sup>3</sup> Luke 11:51

I was a pretty good king in the beginning, but failed miserably at the end. Why? Probably because I was the same way as my son. The Bible described him as, “He did right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly.”<sup>4</sup> A shame, really... “not wholeheartedly.” After all I’d been through, all I’d seen. Be sure those words are never said about you.

---

<sup>4</sup> 2 Chronicles 25:2

**King Hezekiah:**

The eleventh king of the Southern Kingdom found it simple to lead the people into worship of false gods. He even sacrificed his own son to a detestable false god. He caused the people to be subject to Assyria, and to receive Assyrian protection, he turned over the treasures of the Southern Kingdom. In a last act of desecration, he destroyed portions of the Temple and remodeled it to worship the gods of Assyria. This king was the most evil king the Southern Kingdom had until that time. King eleven, King Ahaz. He was my father.

**Isaiah:**

I knew King Ahaz. And he was evil even by evil standards. But his son, he was different. At least, that is what I hoped.

**King Hezekiah:**

Secrets fester and grow, the same with anything evil. Evil secrets, double the power. The seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth kings of Judah were almost good kings. More accurately, they had their ups and down. All of them kept the people from worshipping false gods in obvious public places. But, none of them tore down the secret high places where people worshipped out of sight, so none of them completely eliminated the worship of false gods. By not completely destroying the worship of false gods, these kings set the stage for my Father's evil reign.

Seven years before I became king, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed. With no Northern Kingdom, the Southern Kingdom came to be more commonly called the Kingdom of Judah, or just Judah. Because most of our land came from the original tribe of Judah. We were the only people left of the original Israelites, and so we became known as either Jews or Israelites.

From the time I was nine years-old, I watched my father lead the Southern Kingdom into vile worship practices. When I turned twenty-five, I became king, and I vowed to return Judah, to the sole worship of the One True God.

The Bible says this about me, "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, before or after him. He clung to the Lord and did not quit following him, but kept his commandments."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 18:5-6

You may have already learned what I quickly learned. Following the Lord does not mean life will be trouble-free. When I took over the kingdom, I had to deal with the fact that my father had become subject to the king of Assyria. Any act of rebellion on my part would be dealt with harshly. I knew that because I saw the Northern Kingdom destroyed by Assyrians.

I tried to appease Assyria with treasure from my kingdom. But do you know what I found to be a better strategy? Rebel against them and trust in God to protect his people.

Instead of immediately assaulting our walls with his army, the Assyrian commander stood outside the city walls. He called for my representatives. You know, to come talk. He stood there and used calming language to threaten our sure doom. He spoke in Hebrew. All of the people could hear his threats. To their credit, my people kept quiet and did not show their panic, just as I had instructed them to do. When my representatives returned, and were out of sight of the enemy, they tore their clothes in distress. This is what we did when we were overwhelmed and out of options. I sent for the Lord's prophet, Isaiah.

#### Isaiah:

On my doorstep, dressed in sackcloth to show their distress and disgrace, King Hezekiah's representative appeared. They relayed the threats of the Assyrian commander and Hezekiah's request for my prayers. I heard them out. "Do not be afraid," I immediately told them, because God will surely make the Assyrian commander return to his own country where he will be killed. There was no reason to be afraid.

While King Hezekiah's men were still with me, the Assyrian commander learned that the Egyptian army might be headed his way. He quickly wrote a very threatening letter to Hezekiah hoping to get him to capitulate immediately. The letter was thoroughly disrespectful of God. Hezekiah prayed to God for his deliverance.

Meanwhile, I composed a message to Hezekiah. I told him that God had heard his prayers, and would surely defend His Holy City against the Assyrians. God said he would do that for his sake and for the sake of his ancestor, David.

That night, the Angel of the Lord went out among the camp and killed 180,000 Assyrian men. When the commander of the Assyrians awoke, dead bodies were everywhere. He wisely withdrew and went back to Assyria. Later, he was assassinated by his own sons.

Times of peaceful reign followed. King Hezekiah got older. Then he became ill to the point of death. The Lord told me to go to him and tell him to get his affairs in order because he was going to die.

#### Hezekiah:

Isaiah told me I was going to die. I was distressed to no end. I prayed fervently to God. I asked him to spare my life as a reward for my faithfulness to him. Isaiah hadn't even left the courtyard before God told him to return and tell me that not only would he spare my life, but



he would add fifteen years to it. As a verifying sign of Isaiah's prophecy, God made the shadow of my stairway go backwards ten steps. He did this by miraculously moving the sun backwards in the sky! Isaiah prepared a poultice, and I went to the Temple. I was healed.

While I was sick, however, the king of Babylon heard of my plight. At the time, Babylon was not a threat to my kingdom. The king had his representatives deliver letters and gifts to console me and show his respect. I welcomed them and very foolishly showed the Babylonian representatives all of my treasures, and I do mean all of my treasures. Old age pride, I guess.

When Isaiah heard about the Babylonian representatives, he came to warn me about them. I told him that I had already shown all of my treasures to them. He prophesied to me. He told me that the day would come when the Babylonians would come to carry off all my treasures and the people of my kingdom. In another fit of old-age pride, "That's fine. There will be peace and security in my life time."

Have you ever wanted someone to live longer than they did? God knows better than we do about how long people should live. My story should give you consolation of that. Solely because I asked him to, God granted my request to let me live fifteen years longer. I'm not sure I wish he had granted my wish.

Isaiah was correct. My prideful showing of my treasure probably had something to do with Judah being attacked by the Babylonians years later. Eventually they would destroy Judah and take my people into captivity.

Worse, during the fifteen years longer that I lived, I fathered a son named Manasseh. While I was the best king of Judah, he was the most evil. Because of him, Judah would eventually be destroyed by God.

#### Isaiah:

The prophet Micah and I prophesied during the kingships of Hezekiah and of his father, King Ahaz. Ahaz was as evil and unfaithful to God, as Hezekiah was good and faithful.

While Micah and I prophesied in Judah, Amos and Hosea prophesied in the Northern Kingdom. All four of us had the same message: Worship the Lord God and him only, and live your life in accordance with that worship.

I knew the people of Judah would only sporadically be faithful to God, and I knew God's patience would run out as with the Northern Kingdom. God's people did not want to behave like God's people...until it was too late. I preached from a sense of doom.

In your time, I am often called a "major" prophet. This is not because I am personally so special or my message was so different, but because my writing is so long. In your modern Bibles, my book has sixty-six chapters, the sixth longest book in the entire Bible. Some people perceive it is the longest because it is so hard and boring for them to read.

I had three major themes in my book. The first theme was that God is holy and just, and by his very nature is obligated to punish those who are rebellious. However, after punishing them, he wants to have compassion on them and redeem them to be his. This theme was obviously applicable to Judah because they would never quit worshiping false gods and idols. This theme was also applicable to other countries who worshiped false gods in ignorance of the True God. He wanted to redeem them as well.

My second major theme was that God is sovereign over all. He is a divine ruler characterized by justice, righteousness, and holiness. He calls his people to be the same way, especially by doing the right thing and seeking justice. God wants his people to protect the poor and helpless.

My third major theme concerned the Suffering Servant. I described the Suffering Servant as bringing justice and salvation for the Jews...and for all other peoples. I never identify the Suffering Servant by name, so some think I was referring to a Messiah, some think the nation of Israel, some the prophets. The New Testament identifies this Suffering Servant to be Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

As you read the New Testament, you will find out that I am quoted. Often. I longed to see the Messiah and know him. God seemed to give me only glimpses of him.

Through the centuries, different people have become partial to different parts of my book. I want to point out two verses that could possibly be favorites of mine, found in Isaiah chapter 9 versus 6-7: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of his kingdom and peace there will be no end. He will reign as David over his kingdom, with judgement and justice and righteousness from that time to forever."

I knew three kings of Judah, and none of them were that type of king. I longed for that day so that my people would long to be God's people.

Micah and I would be the last prophets to Judah for several decades. Under King Hezekiah, the people returned to worship their God. Under his son, the people will descend to depths of depravity that I could not have imagined.

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 12:18-21, Luke 4:20-21

**Jeremiah:**

The Assyrian Empire was near its zenith when I began to prophesy. The capital of Assyria, Ninevah, is in modern day Mosul, Iraq. Yes, Ninevah was the city Jonah had saved through his preaching and their repentance...but that was a century and a half in the past.

**King Josiah:**

I hear that you can't work your way to Heaven, but if you can work your way to Hell, my grandfather surely succeeded. King Manasseh rebuilt alters and Asherah poles that his father had destroyed. He engaged in every kind of worship of false gods that he could think of, and led the people to do the same. He built altars to false gods in the Temple of God, he practiced all kinds of sorcery and divination, and even sacrificed his own son in fire.

My grandfather was so evil that the Bible specifically says he provoked God to anger, and he led the people to behavior that was more evil than the people Israel destroyed when they moved into Canaan. He shed so much innocent blood that it filled Jerusalem from end to end. My grandfather was so bad that God promised to bring so much retribution on Jerusalem and Judah, that it would hurt the ears of anybody who heard about it. My grandfather led the people into evil of such magnitude that God promised to destroy them. And his reign lasted fifty-five despicable years.

My father followed in my grandfather's footsteps. He was assassinated by his officers and this made me king. I was only eight years-old. Me? I chose to walk in the ways of the Lord like my great-grandfather, Hezekiah. King Hezekiah. Just, good, humble. My grandfather, King Manasseh. Evil, evil, evil. My father, King Amon as well. I bucked the going trend, King Hezekiah was who I aspired to be.

The Book of the Law is what you call the first five books of your Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It was assumed that all of the scrolls of the Book of the Law had been destroyed by my grandfather and father.

When I was twenty-six, I pushed for the repair of the Temple of God. I sent a messenger to the high priest with my plan. Hilkiah, the high priest, had found the Book of the Law in the Temple.

He sent the copy of the Law back with my messenger. I demanded that he immediately read it to me. I heard the words of the Lord. I tore my robe in distress. The anger of the Lord was burning against my people because we were not following his commands. What?! I thought. I immediately asked to find out the Lord's will.

The priests went straight to the prophetess, Huldah. Yes, a prophetess. She told them that the Lord was going to bring disaster upon the people of Judah because of their disobedience, because of their worshipping other gods. She said that since I had been responsive and had humbled myself, that the disaster would not happen in my lifetime.

I wept about this news of my people and their future. Then I remembered something. Something my hated enemies, the Ninevites, had done a century and a half before when Jonah preached to them. They repented! And God did not bring disaster on them as he had promised.<sup>1</sup>

I gathered all the elders, priests, prophets and people of Judah to the Temple. I read the words of the Book of the Law to them. It was exciting to hear my words echo, and then repeated through the multitudes. I finished. And then I renewed the words of the covenant that was in the law, I agreed to follow the Lord and all his commandments. And the people? They pledged to keep the covenant, too.

On my command, the priests and officials went throughout the land and destroyed all altars, shrines to false gods, and high places where pagan worship took place. We thoroughly cleansed the land and made it clean for the first time since King David. Never before or after me had a king done such a thing. Certainly, my choice to be like my great grandfather instead of my father and grandfather would pay off. I served the Lord with all of my heart, soul, and strength as commanded in the Law.

It was not enough. The Lord's patience had ended. He knew that the land would be defiled soon enough. He would not relent. The sure destruction of Jerusalem and Judah was not to be changed. I heard the words I hoped I'd never hear. The most heartbreaking words possible for God to say. "It is too late."

### Jeremiah:

The walls of Ninevah were eight miles long and surrounded an area of nearly three square miles. The palace, gardens, and parks were known world-wide for their luxury and extravagance. The Assyrians dominated nearly the whole region, including Judah. And Ninevah was a city of violence and all the countries it dominated hated it.

A few decades before my time, the prophet Nahum started prophesying against Ninevah. He prophesied that God would judge the city, and Judah would eventually prevail over it. He prophesied about its siege, desolation, and its coming doom. Nahum would be proved right, but Ninevah would just be replaced by the Babylonians.

About 10 years before me, Zephaniah prophesied about the coming judgment of the Lord against Judah and many other nations. He promised God's judgment, but also promised

---

<sup>1</sup> Jonah 3:10

redemption. Perhaps he was a little optimistic about the lasting effects of the reforms of King Josiah.

I started prophesying in the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah and continued my ministry until shortly after the destruction of Judah in 586 BC. My career spanned the last five kings of Judah, and a year or so after its fall. You know my writings as the book of *Jeremiah* and the book of *Lamentations*.

The prophet Jonah, without even wanting to, got the entire city of Ninevah to repent and change their ways. I preached for forty years and didn't convert a single person. Maybe that is one reason I was known as the "Weeping Prophet."

But God called me to be faithful to him, not to convert people. He even told me that no one would listen to what I had to say. And I would be in pain while giving my messages. And people would try to kill me. No wonder I never had a happy day in my life.

Reading my messages today, it may seem like the ravings of a demented prophet. I go on and on and on. To the people of my day, the ravings were abundantly clear, but not welcome. Let me try to simplify my message in the book of Jeremiah for you.

I called for my people to turn their hearts to God. I told them that if they would repent with sincerity, God would exchange their hard hearts for hearts that yearned to please him. Without this change of heart, it would be impossible to please God.

As their hearts changed, they needed to repent of their deeds and change their ways. Their disobedience stemmed from their worship of false gods. They absolutely had to quit worshipping false gods and turn back to the one true God.

As their hearts changed, and their worship turned to God, they needed to change their evil ways. They had to quit acting like the evil nations around them, and act like God's people.

All of those admonitions led to this conclusion: if they didn't change their hearts and actions, God was surely going to destroy Judah and the other evil nations. The people would forfeit their right to have God's protection.

God did not want to destroy Judah. He yearned for his people to turn back to him. He wanted it so badly that human words cannot describe it. My heart hurt desperately for my people and for God. When I was talking to God, I defended my people. When I spoke to my people, I defended God. For forty years my heart broke as the people refused to turn to God and obey him. The people had been so accustomed to God being patient that they had no sense of urgency about repenting. I knew it was a time of emergency. We were an instant away from a cataclysmic disaster. And apparently so was I.

They threw me in a well. The people and officials were so tired of me, they threw me in a well to die of starvation. Fortunately for me, an Ethiopian eunuch saved my life.

I was not the only prophet sounding the emergency alarm. God revealed events to the prophet Habakkuk. He declared the Babylonians would be used to end the existence of Judah. Habakkuk's communication with God revolved around God's justice and patience, and his use of the Babylonians. Habakkuk knew that the evil behavior of his people would end in their destruction.

The prophet Ezekiel's basic message was the same as Habakkuk's and mine, but also included encouragement for the people while in captivity of the Babylonians. Ezekiel started his ministry before Judah ended, and extended for many years afterward. He had a flare for drama, and a very high pain threshold. For instance, as a symbol of bearing the people's sins, he laid on his left side for 390 days, then his right side for 40 days.<sup>2</sup>

Since the people of the Southern Kingdom chose to ignore me, and the rest of God's prophets, Judah was destroyed. Its people deported to Babylon in 586 BC. My lament over the city of Jerusalem is the book of *Lamentations*. The city that was once God's city was deserted by God. The Temple that was once God's home was destroyed and defiled. The people that were once God's people were hauled off to a foreign land as slaves. The kingdom of David meant to be everlasting...it...it came to an end.

As far as we knew, the Jews would be assimilated by the Babylonians. The people had broken their covenant with God, and it appeared like God had ended their existence. My heart was broken, and I wept an ocean of tears. I was sure the Jews, as a people, would disappear forever.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 4:4-6

### The Isaiah:

Prophecies. Prophets. Confusing words in the modern world, but well accepted in the world of the ancient Jews.

Prophets gave prophecies. There were true prophets whose prophecies came true, and false prophets whose prophecies did not come true. There were prophets of God, and prophets of the many false gods. There were solo prophets, and groups of prophets.<sup>1</sup> At times, there were hundreds of prophets.<sup>2</sup> Most of the prophets named in the Bible were men, but there were women prophets as well. True prophets of God led dangerous lives. Many of them were killed, and many more were persecuted by people who did not like what they had to say. So, really, nothing to be confused about, prophets simply gave prophecies.

There are major prophets and minor prophets who wrote books in the Old Testament. The major prophets wrote longer books or gave more complex prophecies. The major prophets are Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and me...Isaiah. There are prophets in the Old Testament, and prophets in the New Testament.

What does it mean for a prophet to prophesy or to give a prophecy?

One type of a prophecy is simply telling the truth of a matter. These might include general statements such as, "If you continue to worship idols, God will punish you." Jeremiah was thrown into a well and left for dead because people did not want to hear him tell the truth.<sup>3</sup>

Other prophecies are more specific in nature, and may have a time frame involved. These prophecies are sometimes easier to determine whether they are true or false. One scripture in Deuteronomy says that if what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place, that message is not from the Lord. That false prophet is to be put to death.<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Peter said that false prophets bring destruction upon themselves.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> i.e. 1 Samuel 19:20

<sup>2</sup> i.e. 1 Kings 22:6

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 38

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 18:20-22

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 2:1

Another type of prophecy involves something that will happen in the far distant future. Some prophecies are very literal, while some are symbolic. And, some prophecies may qualify under several of these categories.

As you can guess, it can be very challenging for a reader of the Bible to recognize a prophecy, and then to determine what it means. So, I suppose there is room for confusion in the modern world. You have many books and writings just on how to interpret the book of *Revelation* alone.

We prophets didn't even understand the many facets of the prophecies we made, nor could we make them come true ourselves. Again, the Apostle Peter, "The prophecies of old times came not by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

### Jeremiah:

As prophets, we understood that we did not see the whole picture. But I don't think any of us really understood how little we knew. Most of the time, we could see the obvious application to the Jews, but what we did not...and could not...know was how many of our prophecies were pointing directly toward Jesus and the new life he was to bring.

Jesus pointed out many of the prophetic Scriptures while he was on earth, but really delved into the matter after his resurrection. Many of his teachings and observations were repeated by Matthew and Paul in their writings.

Some of the Old Testament prophecies predicted how God would make a new deal with his people to replace the deal he made with the Jews. Part of the new deal was that people would be given new hearts. God says, "I will give them one heart and put a new spirit in them; I will take their stony hearts and give them a heart of flesh. They will walk in my statutes and keep my commands, and they will be my people and I will be their God."<sup>6</sup>

An interesting question that Paul answers in his book of *Romans* is "What did the Old Testament prophets promise?" It's a great question. The Answer? The Gospel regarding Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

Samuel and Micah said that a shepherd-king would come from Bethlehem. That is where Jesus was born.<sup>8</sup>

Malachi spoke of the one who would prepare the way for Jesus. That one was John the Baptist.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel 11:19-20

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:2

<sup>8</sup> 2 Sam. 5:2, Micah 5:2

<sup>9</sup> Malachi 3:1



Isaiah spoke of the place where the primary ministry of Jesus would take place, Galilee.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, Isaiah has so much about Jesus that we don't have enough time to talk about all of them. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given."<sup>11</sup> A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son," and then the time Jesus actually unrolled the scroll and read Isaiah's prophecies about himself! The book of Isaiah is packed with them.

In Isaiah Chapter Nine, it describes Jesus and his spiritual kingdom: "the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David...for ever and ever."<sup>12</sup>

Isaiah Chapter 53 reads like a biography of Jesus written hundreds of years before he was born: despised and rejected, a man of sorrow, bore our griefs, wounded by our sins, we are healed by his stripes, he is our shepherd, the Lord laid all of our sins on him, and was with the rich in his death.

I don't mean to sound jealous of Isaiah, but the Holy Spirit seems to have really used him to prophesy about God's Son.

#### Isaiah:

I am a little jealous of Ezekiel, such a great prophet. God named him Son of Man, a favorite term that Jesus used for himself. And I'm a little jealous of Daniel, Zechariah, and Malachi. They gave such amazing prophecies about Jesus and his coming kingdom.

But as jealous as I am of the other Old Testament Prophets, who I am really jealous of is ... you! Why? Let me quote the Lord Jesus himself: "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears because they hear. I tell you most sincerely, many prophets and righteous people desired to see what you see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them."<sup>13</sup>

You have a New Testament to read. You have a story of Jesus to hear and understand. You have Paul, and Peter, and James, and John, and so many others to tell you the things that we gave our lives to hear...but didn't get to.

You can't even imagine how jealous of you I am. I can envision myself reading the New Testament over and over and over. Being with Jesus in prayer and meditation. Learning the

---

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 9:1-2

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 9:6

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 13:16-17

things that even angels didn't know. Spending hours every day with the Lord Jesus. Just like you do.

### King Nebuchadnezzar:

Dreams are strange things. Their purpose is debated. Therapy, some say — we process deep emotions in dreams. Fight or flight training is another theory. A function of memory even, but definitely dreams are out of one's control. I'm not a psychologist, I'm a king. And one night I had a dream that was beyond those purposes, and beyond my control. I first thought it was just a nightmare, but it was dream sent from God.

I was the king of Babylon, an ancient city located near modern Baghdad, Iraq. The Assyrians had been the dominant power in the region until we Babylonians defeated them in 612 BC. Twenty-six years later, we again defeated Judah and abducted all of the people... *relocated* all the people to Babylon.

Does it sound cruel to you? Essentially kidnapping an entire people group... taking them far from their homeland? We learned to do that from the Assyrians. When you remove conquered people from their homelands and traditional cultures, it almost eliminates the chance of revolt. It's crowd control. When we conquered the Assyrians, we did to them what they taught us. And they virtually ceased to exist.

As the king who conquered Judah, I removed all valuable articles from the Temple and placed them in the temple of my god, Marduk, the preeminent god over all gods.

The dream. One night I had a very troubling dream. I called for my magicians, astrologers, all my men of wisdom. They, of course, asked to hear my dream and *then* they would interpret it. "Trickery!" I shouted. They were trying to trick me! I commanded them to tell me what my dream was first and then tell me what it meant. If they could not meet my demands all of them would be executed. It quickly became apparent they could not meet my demands. No one can do this they said. I commanded the mass execution of all the wise men in Babylon.

My men came to arrest Daniel. Using his wisdom and... brilliance, quite honestly... he somehow convinced them, and *me*, to give him a little time to meet my requirements. Daniel went straight to his friends, straight into prayer to their God. That night, his God revealed the mysterious dream and its meaning to him. The next morning, Daniel came into my court. "Can you tell me my dream and what it means?" I demanded. Daniel did the strangest thing. He gave glory to his God and made sure that I knew his knowledge came from his God, not himself.

He proceeded to tell me about my dream. There was a giant statue with a head of gold, chest of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. He described a stone that destroyed the statue and then grew to be a mountain. Hearing the details of the dream

reawakened all my dread. I hadn't told a soul about the dream. His knowledge was divinely inspired, by a powerful god, and I knew it.

He then revealed that the gold head represented my government, and the other portions of the statue represented kingdoms that would follow me. I knew that his interpretation was true. I threw myself to the floor in front of Daniel. I gave his God honor and glory. I immediately placed Daniel over all of Babylon and its wise men, I made his three friends administrators over the kingdom.

My kingdom grew swiftly. I became the most powerful and wealthy man in the entire known world. It went to my head. I ordered a gold image to be made. Ninety feet high. I had it placed in the plain of Dura. It was an image of my god. I ordered all the men in positions of power in my kingdom to attend its dedication. And then, another order: when the music began, all of the men in powerful positions and all the people, regardless of their nation or language, were to fall in worship to the image. The music began. Everyone in attendance bowed. Everyone, except the three friends of Daniel.

I was furious. I summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, "If you do not bow and worship my god, I will burn you to death." They didn't blink an eye, without hesitation they defied me. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from you. But if not, you should know that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have raised." Insolence! I went berserk.

I ordered the furnace heated to seven times hotter than its normal temperature, . I ordered the three rebels to be tied up, right there, while wearing their robes, trousers, and turbans. The three rebels would be burnt to a crisp in an instance. There was no way I would miss that moment of satisfaction. My soldiers threw them into the fire. The flames were so hot, it killed the soldiers. I couldn't believe my eyes. We had only thrown three men in the furnace, I saw four figures walking around in that fire. Unbound and unharmed. A fourth person? It looked like...a...son of the gods.

I shouted for them to come out of the fire. All of my officials watched, the three men came out of the fire. No sign of burns, no singed hair, no scorched clothing, they didn't even smell of smoke. This was the work of a god. No, their God. I ordered that people throughout my kingdom respect their God, because no other god could save people in this way. I promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to very high positions.

Daniel spent virtually his entire adult life serving in the court of Babylon. He interpreted my dreams whenever I asked. He even served me faithfully during my period of insanity; I lived outside and ate grass. When my sanity was restored, he guided me to praise God and be humble.

**Daniel:**

You think the politicians in your day are petty and vicious? You should have seen my life. I was a victim in the first wave of deportations of Jews from Judah to Babylon. I lived in Babylon almost seventy years, long enough to see the Babylonians defeated by the Persians. I could not possibly have survived a day without totally trusting God. He is the one who is in control. I'm...his instrument. I trusted him, and he made sure that I survived, and thrived, though every change in government.

I served four rulers: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Belshazzar of Babylon, Darius of Persia, and Cyrus of Persia.

Darius of Persia, the third of those rulers, was the conqueror of Babylon. He appointed 120 officials to rule over his kingdom, with three men over those 120. I was one of the three, so you can imagine that I had at least 40 men gunning for my job at any one time. Through God's power, I was so good at my job that Darius wanted to promote me over everyone, second only to him. Make that 122 men trying to undermine me and most likely, do me harm.

My administration was so efficient and full of integrity that they knew they couldn't find any charge against me... unless they played the religion card. Knowing my devotion and habits, it didn't take them too long to play that card. They convinced Darius that no one should pray to any god but instead, pray to him... For thirty days... Upon pain of death. Darius, he was prideful. He loved that idea, and decreed it so. In his own mind, he had become a god, much like the Egyptian rulers believed themselves to be gods. You would think he would have asked my advice over such a matter, but he knew I would have advised against it, and he desperately wanted people praying to him. Oh, and that's not all, his decree could not be repealed, even by him. He didn't really think that through though. Pride, again?

Upon learning of the ridiculous decree, I went home and did what I always did. I opened my upstairs window, it faced the direction of Jerusalem...and I prayed...I did this three times a day, you know. From the courtyard below, I was visible. Just the proof my enemies hoped for. The 122 men sprung their trap and went straight to the king. Check mate; The king's trusted right-hand man was condemned by a royal decree there was no way to reverse. For hours, the King tried to find a work around. At sundown he was forced to declare my death, I had disobeyed his decree.

I could hear the men coming long before they got to me. They found me still dressed in royal garments complete with jeweled sandals. That finery clashed with the dirty, pitch dark that they threw me into. A huge stone was rolled over the pit's small opening. The king and officials sealed it with wax and impressed their rings. Done. Dead. In the darkness, I couldn't see the lions, I could hear them. I could feel their breath. There were many lions in the den, I knew that much, and none of them had been fed for many days.

The next morning, the stone was rolled back. A living person emerged from that certain grave, much like with Lazarus centuries later. The king, stayed up all night. Worrying. About me. It's what you do when come face to face with the fact you aren't in control, worry. He came near to

the opening. "Daniel," His voice had little hope, "Servant of the living God, has your God been able to save you from the lions?"

I waited a few seconds ...to build suspense, "God's angel shut the mouths of the lions." I called back, "I was not hurt because I was innocent in his eyes. I've never done you any wrong." The king ordered for me to be lifted out. He was overjoyed, I didn't even have a scratch. Without looking at a single one of them, the king ordered my enemies to be thrown into the den with their wives and children. The lions crushed their bones before their bodies hit the ground.

I gave a prophecy about a vision of four beasts. Like the prophetic interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, this prophecy had to do with future kingdoms. Many believe I was predicting the kingdoms Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Some believe I was also predicting the kingdoms of Jesus Christ and/or a future kingdom at the end of the ages.

I do want to talk about one more prophecy, one made by Jeremiah, not by me. I was reading the words of Jeremiah, which I considered to be Scripture, and understood that the exile of Jerusalem would last seventy years. By my calculation, that meant the exile of the Jews would soon be over!

Rather than celebrating that joyous news, I went to the Lord in prayer and petition, fasting and in sack cloth. It's what prophets did to show humility before God. I asked that we be allowed to return to our country so we could serve him in his sanctuary, in Jerusalem his Holy City. I asked not for our sakes, but for his...because we were his people and we carried his name.

My gracious God allowed me to live long enough to see the Jews begin to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. That's when I came to more fully understand my role. My friends and I had been placed in authority that lasted through Babylon's reign and into Persia's long reign. We played a large part in protecting the Jews and keeping them faithful to God. We even helped protect the articles from the Temple that the Babylonians had stolen. When the Jewish exiles left to return to Jerusalem, we sent 5,400 articles back to the Temple with them.<sup>1</sup>

We were instruments in God's hands. Our job was to stick with him, do anything he asked, even when we didn't understand it. Even when our lives were at stake. God was the one in control the entire time. Guess what, he still is.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ezra 1:11

### Zechariah:

Do you know the difference between a vision and a dream? I wouldn't pretend to know the difference for everybody. For me, visions come when I am awake. Dreams come when I sleep at night. One evening, I happened to be awake, and I had eight visions. My name is Zechariah, and God chose me to be the first prophet in fifty years to remind the Jewish people to repent and follow God, and to encourage them, because they had an important future.

I will tell you about the visions, but I have to give you some history first. The first Temple in Jerusalem was built by King Solomon. That Temple was made of stone and cedar, but was fabulously ornate and impeccably furnished. Through the following centuries, the priceless furnishings were carried off by various conquerors. The Temple destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC was a miserable remnant of what Solomon had built four centuries before.

The Babylonians took the people of Judah as prisoners back to Babylon. Almost a half-century later, the Persians conquered the Babylonians and took over their far-reaching empire. After the Persians took control, they allowed Jewish exiles who desired to do so to return to Jerusalem and build a new Temple.

After reaching Jerusalem, those former exiles immediately started working to build a new Temple.<sup>1</sup> This second Temple would be called Zerubbabel's Temple because as governor of Judah, he led the building of the it. Two years later, the foundation for that building was completed.<sup>2</sup> When only the foundation was completed, some people wept for joy, while others wept in sadness at the deficiency of it compared to the one Solomon built.

The people who had settled in Judah during the exile were enemies of the Jews, and were scared of them becoming powerful again. Hoping to get the building stopped, they made false accusations to the King of Persia. Swayed by the false accusations, the king reviewed records of Jerusalem through the centuries and concluded that the Jews had a history of being powerful and rebellious. The king ordered all work by the Jews in Jerusalem to stop. Work was halted for about fifteen years.<sup>3</sup>

At that time, the Jewish prophet Haggai, started calling for work to resume on the Temple. Through Haggai, the Lord complained that the Jews in Jerusalem had quit thinking about God's

---

<sup>1</sup> Ezra 5:13-16

<sup>2</sup> Ezra 3:8-10

<sup>3</sup> Ezra 4:1-5:24

Temple and were busy building fancy houses for themselves. The Lord told them that their lives were not being blessed because they were more worried about their comfort than for the Lord's glory.

Zerubbabel and the people feared God, so they repented and immediately resumed work on the Temple. They did this even though they did not have permission from the King of Persia to do so. In the strongest language, Haggai encouraged the people and told them that the Lord was with them. Much more important to fear the Lord than to fear the King of Persia.

So, some of the Jews had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple, but most of them were still in Babylon and Persia. They were exposed daily to foreign false gods. The children born in captivity did not know Jerusalem or the Temple. Every day was a challenge for the Jews in captivity to remain faithful to the Lord God.

My eight visions were given to me to call on the Jews everywhere to repent of their sins, and to encourage them to support rebuilding of the Temple.

In the book I wrote, named *Zechariah*, I told of these eight visions, and I emphasized the importance of Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua in God's plans for Judah.

The last half of my book concerns the future of the Jews, especially after they returned to Judah. It also addresses God's ultimate victory over all of those who thwart his will. Many Christians have related many of my prophecies to Christ's earthly ministry and his ultimate victory over evil as detailed further in John's book of *Revelation*. Like most prophets, I don't completely understand all of my prophecies, but I do know that my book addresses God's ultimate victory.

#### Queen Esther:

I was raised by my cousin. I was an orphan. Both my mom and dad died, while in exile. We had been taken so far away from our home. To Susa, the city of the Persian king. We were captives. Jewish captives. Girls had little value in those times, so it was unusual that Mordecai adopted me. I'm thankful, to my cousin. He guided me into my destiny.

King Xerxes was the king of Persia at that time. He had a falling out with his queen, and his officials advised him to search the entire empire to find beautiful virgins for his harem, and then choose one to replace the queen. So, many girls were brought in... right here, to Susa, where I lived. They were placed under the care of Hegai, the head eunuch. A few local girls, like me, were also chosen. I did not disclose the fact that I was Jewish. Mordecai warned me not to.

Six months of beauty treatments for all of us. Before we would even see the king. When it was your turn, anything you wanted to take in with you was given to you. Hegai made suggestions of what we should take, and I did exactly what he said. That kind of attitude helped me win favor throughout the whole palace. And then, with the king himself.



King Xerxes crowned me as queen. There was a great feast that followed. I was queen? It seemed impossible. But...I knew my situation was still dicey because the previous queen had been removed and been banished forever.

I need to take you back in time to King Saul, it will all make sense in a minute. Saul was instructed to wipeout all of the men, women, and children of the Amalekites as their punishment for attacking the helpless Jews during the Exodus. Saul wiped out most of them, he did not complete the job. He allowed King Agag to live. The prophet Samuel finished the job, killing Agag. But there were survivors of both the Amalekites and the household of Agag, known as Agagites. The descendants of these survivors from Saul's disobedience often tormented the Jews.

Now fast forward almost six centuries to my time, and you will find one of those descendants, Haman the Agagite. Haman was a proud man, to put it mildly but apparently skilled in politics. King Xerxes elevated him to be second in power in the kingdom. So powerful that the king commanded everyone to kneel down and pay him honor.

Mordecai refused to kneel. My cousin who raised me refused to pay honor to Haman. This infuriated Haman. He threatened to kill not only Mordecai but all Jews. And he was sure he had enough power to make that happen.

If not, there would be even more rebellion in the making. Haman accused the Jews of not assimilating into the Persian culture, breaking the law, and being very dangerous since they were dispersed throughout the kingdom. He even offered to donate money if the king would issue a decree to destroy them. The King was more than happy to give the order. An order that not even the King could rescind. It seemed Haman had found the perfect way to wipe the Jews from existence.

The news reached me that Mordecai was in mourning, so I sent a messenger to find out what was going on. Mordecai sent back a copy of the edict and begged me to ask the king to countermand the order. Here's the thing; If I called on the king unbidden, and he refused my presence, I would be put to death. I put this in a message and sent it back to Mordecai.

He adopted me, he was like a father to me, but Mordecai did not flinch at my dilemma. He sent back this timeless message, "If you don't do this, God will deliver the Jews in a different way, but you and your family will perish. And who knows...perhaps you have come to royal position for such a time as this." The timeless message.

Mordecai was right. He was right. I asked him to have all the Jews in Susa to fast and pray for three days for my success. I told him, "I will go to the king even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

I stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall in my royal robes. I wasn't sure what would happen, but I was sure that I had to do this. The king, he finally saw me, now is when I would know if I would live or die, I was prepared either way. (Mordecai's words echo in

her head )“Perhaps you have come to royal position for such a time as this.” It seemed like an eternity... he held out his gold scepter. “What is it, Queen Esther, what is your request? Up to the half kingdom, I will give to you.” I invited him for a banquet at my house, and to bring Haman. At the banquet, the king asked again, assuring me he would grant any request. Again, I asked for them to return for a second banquet, and there I would answer his question.

The evil Haman was thrilled to have been a part of the banquet, and went home to gloat to his family and friends. On the way, he was infuriated that Mordecai did not bow down to him. Haman’s family advised him to build a pole to be used to impale Mordecai. He did so during the night, intending to ask the king’s permission the next morning to kill Mordecai.

That night, the king couldn’t sleep. As people throughout time have done, he decided to read a history book to put him to sleep. As a history of his reign was read to him, he remembered that Mordecai, my cousin, had once saved his life but had not been rewarded. This oversight kept the king from going to sleep.

The King was searching for a way to honor Mordecai when Haman came into his presence. Fortunately for Haman, the king spoke first. “How should a man be honored whom the king wants to honor?” Now thinking he was the one about to be honored, Haman came up with an outrageous, over-the-top answer. The king liked the answer, and said Mordecai was to be honored in that way. Next thing you know, Haman is placing a king’s robe on Mordecai, placing him on the king’s horse, and leading the horse through the streets shouting, “This is what is done for the man whom the king wants to honor.” Poor Haman, never got to ask the king about impaling Mordecai on the pole!

Haman barely has time to change clothes before my second banquet. When it was nearing the end, the King asked “Now, what is your request?” “Spare my people!” I told him I would not have bothered him with such a petty request if my people were just going to be sold into slavery. But they we’re going to be slaughtered. Please, spare them. That humility swayed him. “Where is this man who would do such a thing?” I pointed to Haman. He was that man, and the king left the table in a rage.

Haman was terrified, and fell on my couch to beg me for a reprieve. The king returned and saw Haman on my couch. He was incensed. He ordered the immediate death of Haman in the way he had planned to kill Mordecai. He could not rescind the order to kill the Jews, but he sent another order, “Fight back,” allowing the Jews to protect themselves and to annihilate and plunder any enemy that attacked them. Mordecai wrote the order, so you can be assured that the Jews now had the upper hand. Even the royal officials helped the Jews.

In the end, the Jews killed 75,000 of their enemies throughout the Empire, as well as killing the sons of Haman. Ever since that time, the Jews have celebrated that victory as the Feast of Purim. My cousin, Mordecai, took Haman’s place as second-in-command to the King.

Perhaps God has placed you at a certain place and time, with certain skills and relationships,

just so you could do one thing that he wanted you to do. Maybe not a royal position in the government, but in God's Kingdom. When the time comes for you to act in the cause of God, don't forget, "Perhaps you have come to a royal position for such a time as this."

### The Ezra:

It could not have been worse news. I tore my robe, I ripped my tunic, I pulled hair from my head and beard. Distress? Anguish? Utter despair? Doesn't even begin to describe it. That night, I prayed to God, confessed the sins of my people to him. I fully expected him to wipe us out that night. As we rightfully deserved.

Let me back up. I am a prophet, not a king. But I knew a king. King Artaxerxes of Persia. I received favor from him, and a letter from him ordering me to sacrifice to God. Also, a directive from him... "Go back to Jerusalem and oversee the affairs of the area." So, I did. God gave me favor because I devoted myself to the study and observance of the Law, and to teaching it to others. Why did we have to go *back*? Because we Jews had been in exile in Babylon.

Jerusalem fell in 586 BC, and the Jewish leaders were captured and put in exile. Half a century later, some of the exiled Jews returned to Jerusalem under the directive of King Cyrus of Persia to rebuild the Temple. Seventy-eight years after the Temple was completed, I got my directive from King Artaxerxes to go back.

I gathered the many Jews who desired to accompany me, and loaded up the huge amount of silver and gold that was to be used for the Temple worship. Even with the danger of having so much treasure, I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers instead of trusting God. We Jews got together and prayed and fasted to receive God's protection. He heard our prayer and granted what we asked.

After inventorying the treasure, I distributed it to the Levites and priests in our group and ordered them to deliver it to the Temple. The Lord protected us from all of the bandits on the way, and all of our people and treasures arrived in Jerusalem safely. The articles of silver and gold were delivered to the Temple, and I was relieved to have accomplished our goal... until I was approached by the leaders of the Jews who had been living in Jerusalem for the last eighty years.

Again, let me back up. The destruction of the nation of Israel was caused primarily because of their worship of false gods. Solomon had introduced the worship of false gods through his marrying foreign women. The first step in the Jews falling back into the worship of false gods would most likely come through the link of false gods and intimate relationships with people who worshipped those false gods...people who were non-Jews. After years of captivity in Babylon, you would think we Jews would have learned that lesson.

That is why I was so devastated when the leaders of the Jews told me of the problem facing them in Jerusalem. Over the last eighty years, a large number of the Jewish men in Jerusalem had intermarried into other cultures. Their wives were foreign women who worshipped false gods! Many of the leaders, priests, and Levites had led the people into this detestable practice. This was the news that greeted me upon my arrival. And so there I was, in front of the temple, torn clothes, missing chunks of hair, and in utter, hopeless despair.

**Malachi:**

“Test God! Bring your whole tithe to God and see if he won’t throw open the floodgates of heaven and bless you more than you have room for!”

Quick, what’s your first reaction to that? Not to me, but to that. I know what your reaction to me most likely is. But I am a prophet. And that’s a reaction all its own. Back to the point.

Your reaction to my words, well, I hope it’s nothing like the reaction of my people.

I was the last prophet of the Old Testament, and wrote the last book of the Old Testament. I was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah living in Jerusalem after the second return of exiles from Jerusalem. The Temple had long been rebuilt, but the people of Judah had lost their hope and enthusiasm about worshiping God. They had returned to Jerusalem with hopes of reviving a Davidic kingdom that was rich and powerful, but they remained a small, powerless group of people.

Like many people throughout all ages, my people wanted earthly riches and power. They were more concerned with those things than in worshiping God. They had the opportunity to be infinitely rich in relationship with the God of the Universe, but they desired worthless, glittering baubles and petty political power. Sound familiar?

Their lack of love for God and his commandments was shown in many ways. The people sacrificed sub-standard animals, and the priests let them get away with it. The priests were neglecting their duties in other ways, so what do you expect? The priests did not honor God with their actions or their love. Worse, they caused many people to sin.

Society had lost its moral bearing. Our men were intermarrying foreign women and slowly accepting the presence of idols. By intermarrying foreign women, they were raising children who did not revere the one true God. Divorce was becoming common, and the Lord hates divorce.

There was a general lack of morality in their dealing with one another. People followed sorcerers and liars. People oppressed the poor, widows, orphans and other helpless people. God hates it when the oppressed are mistreated!

My people were cynical about their duty to follow God’s commandments. This resulted in their not being blessed, but they did not want to recognize this. I tried to encourage them in the

strongest way, but their ears could not hear. “Test God! Bring your whole tithe to God and see if he won’t throw open the floodgates of heaven and bless you more than you have room for!”<sup>1</sup> Wasted words. Wasted promise of God.

Instead of humbly accepting their role as God’s people, they said it was futile to serve God. God wanted a long-term relationship with his people where he could bless them in ways that were good for them. His people wanted a relationship where God gave them immediate financial rewards for good behavior, and immediate forgiveness when they misbehaved.

After all the punishment that my people had suffered for being disobedient to God, you would think I wouldn’t need to remind them of such things. But I end my book and the Old Testament with words of warning and encouragement. I write that the day of the Lord is coming when all the arrogant and evildoers will be destroyed. In that day the righteous will be healed.

I would like to say that I completely understood the very last thing I wrote, but I did not. Like the rest of the prophets, I longed to understand God’s ultimate plan. I wanted to know how he would bless his people even though they had hard hearts and disobeyed him. With your superior understanding of the history of the world and your knowledge of the New Testament, maybe you can understand my last words about a prophet who had been dead many years: “I will send you the prophet Elijah before the day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, or else I will curse the land.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Ezra:

A large crowd gathered around me as I prayed and confessed in front of the Temple, they finally understood the magnitude of their sin. They wept bitterly.

I had no alternative but to repent on behalf of my people, and try to correct the error by sending away all foreign wives and their children. One man in the crowd realized this. He encouraged me to lead a delegation to do it. He said the crowd would support me, and called for me to have the courage to lead the Jews.

I was hopeful, I called together all the leading priests and Levites, I put them under oath to do as was suggested. We called for a forced assembly of all of the Jewish men in Judah and Benjamin. If someone chose not to come, they would forfeit all of their property and be expelled from the Assembly of the Jews. This would be financial and social suicide for those people.

At the assembly of all of the Jewish men in Judah, we had almost unanimous agreement to send away all of the foreign wives and children of the Jewish men. You cannot imagine the

---

<sup>1</sup> Malachi 3:10

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 17:10-13

wailing and tears of both the men and women, but we knew that pain and anguish was preferable to well-deserved punishments of an angry God.

The story I have told you is found in the book of *Ezra* in your Bibles. The rest of my story is found in the book of *Nehemiah*. In centuries past, these stories have been treated as one book, and at other times as two books, sometimes called *First Ezra* and *Second Ezra*. In any event, I wrote both of the books you know as *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*.

About thirteen years after I led the second group of exiles back to Jerusalem, my friend Nehemiah led a third wave of exiles to Jerusalem. Nehemiah had been the influential cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah learned that the residents of Jerusalem were in distress because the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and they had no safety from other people groups in the area.

God gave Nehemiah favor with the king, just as God had given me favor with him. The king sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem. He sent him with some soldiers to protect him, along with official permission to get supplies, to Jerusalem. Enemies of the Jews were disturbed that Nehemiah, a powerful official, had come to promote the interests of the Jews.

Despite fierce opposition from enemies of the Jews, Nehemiah led the people into completing the building of the walls and gates. Their dedication carried through to renewed enthusiasm to make the Temple great and to worship God wholeheartedly. We celebrated the completion of the walls and gates by reading the Law of Moses to all of the people, and by teaching it to them in a way they could understand it.

Over the next several days, we celebrated God and confessed our sins to him. We expelled foreigners so that we would not be tempted to worship false gods, and we honored the Sabbath. For almost the first time in the five centuries since Solomon built the Temple, we Jews acted and believed as God's chosen people. It will be about four and a half centuries more before God sends another prophet to his people.

Four and a half centuries. A very long time for God to be silent. Such a long time that we Jews will surely go astray. And then, just when we need it most, a voice comes calling in the wilderness...a prophet named John. John the Baptist.