

*All the
stories
of the* **Bible**

as crafted and told by John Walsh

All the stories of the Bible in five books:

Beginnings

Stories 1-52

Building a Nation

Stories 53-113

Path Down to Captivity

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Building a Nation

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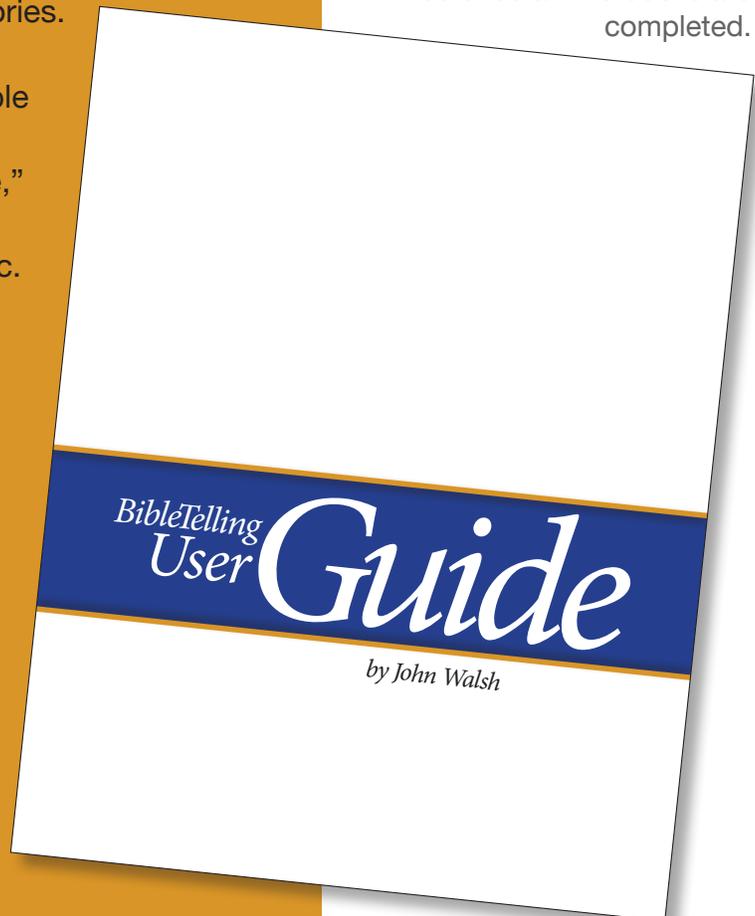
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- **50 Groupings** - All the Bible stories grouped together under such titles as “Water stories,” “Women of the Bible,” “Lies of the Bible,” etc.
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The BibleTelling User Guide greatly increases the value of All the Stories of the Bible. It will be updated free once all five books are completed.



53 Rahab

Building a Nation

Joshua 1:1 – 3:6

The Lord said to Joshua, “Moses my servant is dead. Now you will lead the people into the land I’ve promised them. I’ll be with you just like I was with Moses.

“So, be strong and full of courage. Obey the instructions I gave Moses. Don’t turn away from them in any way. If you follow those instructions, I’ll be with you in everything you do.”

With that, Joshua started organizing the people for their campaign into Canaan. He started by sending two men across the river to spy on the land. They entered the city of Jericho and stayed at the house of a prostitute named Rahab.

The king of Jericho found out that they were in the city, so he sent a message to Rahab. “Bring out those men who are staying in your house. They’re spies from the people of Israel.”

The men were on her roof, where she had hidden them under bundles of flax. She told the king, “Yes, they were here, but I didn’t know where they came from. Just before dark, they left before the city gates were closed. They didn’t tell me which way they were going, but you should be able to catch them if you hurry.” So the king sent men to chase after them.

Rahab said to the spies, “Everyone here is afraid of you because we know God has given you this land! We heard how the Lord opened up the Red Sea when you left Egypt. Your God is the God of heaven above and the earth below. He’s done great things for you.

“I protected you! Now swear by your God that you’ll show kindness to my family. Spare our lives!”

So the spies said, “We’ll spare you when the Lord gives us your city, but only if you don’t tell the king about us. Tie this scarlet cord in your window. Your family will be safe if they’re in your house. If any one leaves the house, we’re not responsible for what happens to them.”

Rahab’s house was on the city wall, so she put a rope out of her window and helped the men escape. They hid in the hills until the men of Jericho stopped looking for them.

Once it was safe, they went back across the river. They told Joshua everything that had happened. They said, “It’s true! God has given us the land. The people are afraid of us.”

So Joshua led the people toward the Jordan River, where they stayed for three days. On the third day, the leaders of Israel went throughout the camp and told the people, “Break camp tomorrow morning. Then watch the priests. They’re going to pick up the ark of God and move toward the Jordan River. Follow them, because you haven’t gone this way before.

“Tomorrow, the Lord will do amazing things for you. You’ll know that God lives with you and plans to drive out your enemies from before you.”

Joshua told them to select twelve men, one from each tribe, and send them to him. Then he told the priests what they were to do the next day.

54 Crossing Jordan

Building a Nation

Joshua 3:7 – 5:12

In the morning, God said to Joshua, “Today, I will exalt you in the eyes of the people – so they’ll know I’m with you just like I was with Moses.” Joshua told the priests, “Take the Ark of God, and go to the Jordan River.” So the priests carried the Ark of God to the river, which was at flood stage. When they came to the water’s edge, they kept going until the water covered their feet.

Suddenly the river stopped! A wall of water formed ten miles upstream. The rest of it flowed down to the sea. Seeing this, the priests walked to the middle of the riverbed and stood on dry ground. Then the people started moving across the river.

Joshua then said to the twelve men Israel had selected, “Each of you pick up a large stone from where the priests are standing. Put it on your shoulders and take it to the other side of the river.” Joshua then took another twelve stones and built a monument in the middle of the river, next to where the priests were standing.

The people looked at Joshua, and he was exalted in their eyes. They knew God was with him just like he had been with Moses.

When they had all crossed the river, Joshua said to the priests, “Come up from the middle of

the riverbed.” As soon as the priests were on the banks of the river, the waters crashed down the riverbed and returned to its flooded condition, as it had been before.

Joshua took the people to a place called Gilgal, where they set up camp. Then he had them build a memorial with the twelve stones. He said, “In the future, children will see this monument and ask, ‘why are these stones here?’ Their parents will tell them about this day, when God stopped the Jordan River so his people could cross over on dry ground. All the nations of the earth will know that the hand of God, the Lord of all the earth, is powerful.”

The people of Canaan heard how God stopped the Jordan River so the people of Israel could cross over on dry ground. Terror spread throughout the cities of the land.

Joshua told all the men of Israel they had to be circumcised. This hadn’t been done for the entire 40 years the people had been in the wilderness.

Soon after this, the people celebrated Passover. The very next day, the manna stopped appearing and it never came back. From that day on, people were to eat the food from the land of Canaan.

Joshua 5:13-6:27

While the people were still at Gilgal, Joshua looked toward Jericho and saw a man standing nearby with a sword in his hand. Joshua walked toward him and asked, "Are you for us, or for our enemies?"

The man said, "I am captain of the Lord's army. I've just arrived."

Joshua fell down and worshiped. The captain said, "Take off your shoes because you're on holy ground."

The Lord said to Joshua, "I've given you Jericho, its king, and its army." He then gave exact orders on how Jericho was to be conquered.

When the day arrived, Joshua arranged the people. He had part of the army take the lead. Behind them, he put seven priests who were to blow ram's-horn trumpets. The Ark of God was behind them. The rest of the army followed the Ark. Joshua told the people, "Don't say one word as you march around the city."

As they marched around the city, the priests blew the trumpets, but the people were silent. Once they had circled the city, they returned to their camp and spent the night.

They did the same thing the second day and the third. They repeated this march around the city for six days.

Early on the seventh day, Joshua told the people to follow the same procedure, except on this day they were to circle the city seven times. He said, "After we have marched around the city seven times, I will tell you to shout. The Lord

will then give you the city. All the people and animals in the city are to die, except Rahab and her family.

"You're to burn everything, except the gold, silver, and things made of bronze and iron. These are to be set aside for the Lord. Be careful! Don't take anything that is set aside for the Lord, or you will be set aside for destruction."

So that day the people marched quietly around the city seven times while the priests blew the trumpets. After the seventh time, everyone stopped.

Suddenly the priests blew the trumpets one more time and Joshua yelled, "Shout!" The people shouted, and the walls of the city fell down in front of them. The army of Israel marched straight into the city and destroyed it. The two spies that Rahab had protected immediately went to her house. They brought her and her family out of the city alive. Everyone else in the city was killed and everything was burned, except the gold, silver, and things made of bronze and iron.

Joshua then proclaimed a curse on the city of Jericho. He said, "Any man who rebuilds this city will lose both his firstborn son and his youngest son."

So the Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land.

Rahab and her family were put in a safe place outside of the camp of Israel. Eventually she married an Israelite from the tribe of Judah. In time, they had a son named Boaz.

Joshua 7 - 8

Before conquering Jericho, Joshua had made it clear to the people, "Be careful! Don't take anything that is set aside for the Lord, or you will be set aside for destruction."

One of the soldiers that went into Jericho that day was a man named Achan. There he saw a bag of silver coins, a bar of gold, and a beautiful coat from Babylon. He took them and hid them inside his tent. This angered the Lord.

After the victory at Jericho, Joshua sent scouts to spy out a city called Ai. They came back and said, "There are only a few people at Ai. We won't need to send our full force there, possibly only two or three thousand men."

So Joshua sent 3,000 men to conquer Ai. To their surprise, the men of the city won the battle! They killed thirty-six Israelites and chased away the rest of them.

The people were horrified at this defeat. Joshua tore his clothes. He and the elders fell down before the Ark of God with their faces to the ground. They put dust on their heads and stayed there all day.

Joshua said, "Oh Lord! Why did you bring us across the river? The Canaanites will hear about this defeat. They'll surround us and wipe us off the earth. Then what will happen to your great name?"

The Lord said, "Get off the ground and stand up! Israel lost today because there's sin in the camp. They disobeyed my command and took what was to be set apart. As long as you have those things, you'll lose every battle because I'll no longer be with you."

The next morning, Joshua had all of Israel stand before him. Each tribe passed in front of him. The Lord selected the tribe of Judah. All the clans of Judah passed in front of him. The Lord selected one of them. All the families of that clan passed in front of him. The Lord selected one of them. From that family, Achan was selected.

Joshua said to him, "Son, what have you done. Don't hide anything from me."

Achan broke down and said, "It's true. I sinned against the Lord. I saw a bag of silver coins, a bar of gold, and a beautiful coat from Babylon. I wanted them, so I took them and hid them in my tent."

Joshua sent men to Achan's tent to get the things he took. He then spread them out before the Lord and all of Israel.

The people then gathered everything that belonged to Achan; his sons and daughters, his livestock, his tent, and the things he took from Jericho. They stoned them until they were dead, and then burnt their bodies. They put a pile of stones on top of their ashes.

The Lord was no longer angry with his people. So he said to Joshua, "Take your entire army and attack Ai. I've given them to you. Once you conquer them, the people may keep whatever they find there."

Joshua sent a group of men out at night. He said, "Go behind the city and hide." He gave them exact instructions of what to do.

The next morning, he sent a troop to fight Ai. The men of the city saw them coming and went out to fight them. In the heat of battle, Israel started to run away, as they had done before. The men of Ai chased after them, leaving the city unprotected.

Once the men were away from the city, the Israelite soldiers came out of hiding and went into Ai and set it on fire. The men of Ai turned and saw their city on fire. They realized they were now between two parts of the Israelite army. They tried to escape, but couldn't. All of them were killed in the battle.

The people were allowed to keep everything they found in the city, including the livestock. Then they destroyed the city.

After all of this, the people sacrificed to the Lord. Afterwards, Joshua read the entire Law to all the people, including the men, the women and the children.

57 Sun Standing Still

Building a Nation

Joshua 9 – 10

The news of the destruction of Jericho and Ai spread throughout Canaan. Most of the cities formed alliances in order to protect themselves from Israel. But one city decided to do something different.

A group of men from the city of Gibeon dressed up in old clothes and worn-out sandals. They put old sacks on their donkeys, packed stale dry bread, and carried old wineskins.

They went to Joshua and said, “We live far away, but we heard what the Lord your God has done for you. Our elders sent us on this long journey. They said, ‘Go and make a treaty with them.’ Look, we took our bread right out of the oven. It is now dry and stale. The journey was so long that our clothes and sandals have become worn and old.”

The men of Israel looked at their provisions, but didn’t seek guidance from the Lord. So Joshua made a treaty with them. The elders of Israel vowed that the two nations would be allies.

Three days after the treaty, Israel found out that the Gibeonites lived in Canaan, close by. Joshua sent for them and said, “Why did you deceive us?”

They said, “We heard God gave you all of this land. He told Moses to kill everyone who lives here. We feared for our lives, so we deceived you. Now you can do whatever seems right to you. We will accept it.”

Joshua said, “You’ll live because of our

promise to you. We can’t touch you, but from now on, you’re our slaves. You’ll cut wood and carry water for us and you’ll serve the House of the Lord.”

The other kings of the land heard that the people of Gibeon had made peace with Israel. They joined together and marched against their city. The men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua saying, “We’re your slaves. Come quickly and help us!”

So Joshua marched his army through the night and surprised those fighting against Gibeon. They tried to fight back, but the Israelite army was too strong for them. The Lord also sent large hailstones on them, and more people were killed by hail than by the sword.

Joshua needed more time, so he looked up and said, “Sun, stand still over Gibeon!” The Lord heard his command and honored it. The sun stopped moving across the sky. Never in the past, nor since, has there been a day like that.

Five kings ran and hid in a cave, but someone told Joshua. He said, “Roll a stone across the entrance of the cave.” He then stationed men to guard it. Once Israel had sealed their victory, Joshua brought the kings out of the cave. He told his commanders to put their feet on the necks of the kings. He said, “Be strong and courageous. The Lord will do this to all your enemies.” He then executed the five kings.

Joshua led his army from city to city, and the Lord gave him victory wherever he went.

58 Joshua's Farewell

Building a Nation

Joshua 14, 23, & 24

After Joshua cleared many of the nations out of Canaan, the land was divided among the various tribes. Caleb went to Joshua and said, "I was forty years old when you and I spied out this land. We brought back an honest report, but our brothers put fear in the hearts of the people. You remember, Moses promised that we would inherit the land we saw that day.

"I am now eighty-five years old, but I'm as strong today as I was forty-five years ago. I still go into battle and do my daily chores. Now give me these hills. The Canaanites still live there, but I'll drive them out."

So Joshua gave him the region around Hebron. Caleb organized his people and drove the Canaanites out of each city. When he came to one city, he said, "Whoever conquers this city may marry my daughter."

A man took the challenge and conquered it. So Caleb sent for his daughter. As soon as she arrived, she said to her future husband, "Ask my father for that field. It has a natural spring of water."

She got off her donkey and faced her father. He said, "What do you want?"

"You gave us this city, now give us the spring of water as well." So he gave her what she wanted.

Years later, Joshua knew he was about to die, so he called the people of Israel to come to him. When they were gathered he said, "You have seen all that the Lord has done for you. You have land where your families can live because he fought for you.

"Be strong and continue to obey the Law of Moses. Don't turn away from it. Don't start worshipping the gods of the people who still live

in this land. Instead, remain true to the Lord your God. If you don't, he will take you off this land."

Joshua then reviewed the entire history of Israel. He finished by saying, "God sent hornets ahead of you and drove out the people who lived on this land. He gave you fields you didn't buy, houses you didn't build, and vineyards you didn't plant.

"Choose today who you're going to worship. You can serve the idols your fathers bowed down to. You can worship the gods of the people who live in this land. Or you can worship and serve the Lord who brought you here with his mighty hand. As for me and my family, we'll serve the Lord."

The people said, "We won't worship the gods of this land. We'll remain true to the Lord our God. We've seen his mighty works, so we too will serve the Lord."

Joshua said, "I don't believe you. You'll turn your back on the Lord, so he'll have to destroy you. How could you do that after he's been so good to you?"

The people shouted, "No! We'll worship and serve the Lord."

Joshua said, "You're witnesses to what you've said. These stones are also witnesses to what you've said. Get rid of all the stupid idols and fully trust in the Lord your God."

Soon afterwards, Joshua died at 110 years old. The people worshipped the Lord throughout the time he led them in the land. They also served the Lord throughout the lifetime of the elders who served with Joshua.

But then another generation grew up that didn't know the Lord. They hadn't seen what he had done.

59 Job's Three Friends

Book of Job

Building a Nation

Job was a great man of high integrity who feared God and stayed away from evil. He had seven sons and three daughters. He was a rich man with many servants. His livestock included a large number of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys.

One day, Satan went to the Lord when all of the angels were there. The Lord said, "So where have you been?"

"Oh, walking here and there around the earth.

The Lord said, "Have you noticed my servant Job? There is no one else on earth like him. He has high integrity and stays away from evil."

Satan said, "Well, of course he does. He's found that being righteous is a good deal. You protect him and everything he owns. You bless him and give him whatever he wants. But try taking away all his possessions. Then watch what happens. He'll curse you to your face."

The Lord said, "We'll see. I give you permission to take everything he owns, but you can't touch him personally."

Soon afterwards, a servant ran up to Job and said, "Some thugs came and took all your oxen and donkeys. They tried to kill all the servants, and only I escaped. I immediately came to tell you what happened."

While he was still talking, another servant ran up and said, "A huge storm blew in. Lightning struck and killed all your sheep and servants. Only I lived through it, so I ran here to tell you what happened."

While he was still talking, another servant ran up. "An army came and took all your camels and killed the servants. I escaped and came to tell you what happened."

While he was still talking, another servant ran up. "Your sons and daughters were eating together, when suddenly a tornado hit the house and they all died. I'm the only one to live through

it. So I came here to tell you what happened."

Job fell down with grief. He tore his clothes and shaved his head. He then bowed his head and said, "I came into this world naked. I'll leave this life naked. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Praise the name of the Lord!" In spite of all that happened, Job didn't sin or blame God.

Once again, Satan went to the Lord when all of the angels were there. The Lord said, "So where have you been?"

"Oh, walking here and there around the earth.

The Lord said, "Have you noticed my servant Job? There is no one else on earth like him. He has high integrity and stays away from evil, even after I permitted you, without any reason, to destroy all he had?"

"Oh, but you didn't allow me to touch his skin. A man will do anything to save his life. Hit his flesh and bones, and he will curse you to your face."

The Lord said, "We'll see. I give you permission to strike him, but you can't take his life."

Soon afterwards, Job was covered with boils, from head to toe. He sat down in ashes and took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself. His wife said, "How can you go through all this and still keep your integrity? Curse God and die!"

He said, "You're talking foolishness! I'm willing to accept whatever God gives me, good or bad." And so, with all of this, Job didn't sin or blame God.

Three friends of Job heard about what had happened, and went to visit him. They couldn't believe their eyes when they saw him sitting there. They yelled and threw dust in their hair. All three sat down next to Job and didn't say anything for seven days.

Finally Job cried out, "I wish I'd never been born!"

His friends then tried to help him understand

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what was happening to him. One friend explained that righteous people don't suffer like this, only sinners do. Job agreed with him, but he didn't know of anything he had done to deserve this.

His second friend was a bit more bold. He said, "Job, you're a hypocrite! You need to confess your sin, and then God will be merciful."

Job again held to his innocence. He said, "I remember seeing the righteous suffering, while evildoers were prospering."

His third friend was the most bold of all. He said, "Job, you're a liar! You're a sinful man and deserve God's judgment." Now Job became passionate about his innocence.

A young man came along with a different perspective. He wanted to encourage Job. He said "God meant this suffering to be educational.

Yes, the Lord is trying to correct your sin, but he's also restoring you to righteousness."

Suddenly, God talked to Job. He said, "My ways are far above what you can understand. My purpose for suffering is an individual matter for each person. Job, listen. I always know what is going on with you, and I'm always with you. I simply want you to come to the end of yourself and totally trust in me."

The Lord then turned to Job's friends. "I'm angry with you. All of your advice is false. Only Job spoke the truth." God told them to make a burnt sacrifice and ask Job to pray for them.

God then restored to Job double of all that he had before. He got twice as many sheep and camels. He got twice as many oxen, and donkeys. God also gave him seven more sons and three more daughters.

Job lived to be an old man. He died at the age of 140 after living a full life.

60 Othniel & Ehud

Building a Nation

! *Judges 2 – 3*

After Joshua died, people continued to serve God. But eventually, another generation grew up that didn't know the Lord, and they started worshipping Baal.

The Lord was angry with his people, so he allowed a foreign king to come and rule over them for eight years.

The people finally begged God for help, and he had mercy on them. He sent them Othniel to be their judge. The Spirit of the Lord was on him, and he was able to go into battle and kill the foreign king. God delivered his people and they lived in peace for forty years.

After Othniel died, the people of Israel once again made the Lord angry with all of their sin. This time God gave them to Eglon, the king of Moab who was extremely fat. He enlisted the help of other nations, and together they defeated Israel. Moab ruled over the people for eighteen years.

Once again they begged the Lord to have mercy and help them. This time God sent a judge named Ehud, who was left-handed.

When it was time for the people of Israel to send money to king Eglon, Ehud decided to take it to him. He made a double-edged sword that was only eighteen inches long. He strapped it under his clothes on his right side. He took several men with him and presented the money to the king.

After making their presentation to the king, they turned to leave. Ehud then told his men to

go on without him, and he returned to the court. He said, "King Eglon, I have a secret message for you."

The king was pleased so he sent his guards away and took Ehud up the stairs to an enclosed porch where it was cool. There, he sat on his throne.

Ehud said, "The message I am bringing you is from the Lord." The king stood up, and Ehud reached his left hand into his clothes and pulled the sword from his right side. He plunged it into Eglon's stomach. The king's fat closed around it, so Ehud wasn't able to pull it out. As the king fell to the ground, his stomach split open and his insides spilled out.

Ehud went out of the door and locked it behind him. When the servants came, they saw that the door was locked, so they assumed that the king had locked it so he could use the toilet.

They waited until they finally realized something was wrong. They found a key and opened the door and found their master dead on the floor.

This delay gave Ehud time to escape. He crossed over the Jordan River and sounded the alarm. The Israelites came ready to fight. He said, "Follow me! The Lord has given us the Moabites."

With Ehud in the lead, they attacked the Moabites, killing over 10,000 warriors. Because of that battle, the Moabites had to serve Israel, and the people lived in peace for eighty years.

61 Deborah and Barak

Building a Nation

Judges 4 – 5

After Ehud died, Israel once again sinned against God. So the Lord sold them to a Canaanite king. This king ruled over them for twenty years. He was harsh and cruel. His army had 900 iron chariots, and his commander's name was Sisera.

The person who judged Israel at the time was a prophet named Deborah. When the people had problems among themselves, they went to a place called the "Palm Tree of Deborah." She would sit there and hear their complaints and then settle their disagreements.

One day she called for a man named Barak and said to him, "The Lord has a message for you. He says, 'Take 10,000 men and go to Mount Tabor. I'll cause Sisera to come to you with his chariots and his army. He'll come to fight you, but I'll give him to you.'"

Barak said to Deborah, "I'll go and do as the Lord says, but only if you go with me. If you don't go, I won't go."

She said, "I'll go with you, but if I do, you won't get the credit for killing Sisera. The Lord will give that honor to a woman." Barak agreed, so Deborah went with him.

Barak gathered 10,000 men and went up Mount Tabor. Sisera heard about this, so he took his 900 chariots and his army and headed toward Mount Tabor. Deborah said to Barak, "Now's the time! Take your men and attack Sisera."

So Barak moved his men down the mountain

and attacked the Canaanite army. The Lord was with him, and caused Sisera's men to be confused. They turned and ran. When Sisera saw this, he left his chariot and tried to escape on foot. Barak chased the army until every man was killed.

Sisera ran until he came to the tent of Jael. Her husband was in alliance with the Canaanite king. She saw Sisera coming, so she went out and said, "Come in here, and you'll be safe."

He went in and she hid him under a rug. He said, "Please, give me water to drink." She gave him milk, and he sat up and drank it. He said, "Stand at the door of the tent. If anyone asks if there is a man in here, tell them 'No.'"

She then covered him again, and since he was exhausted, he fell into a deep sleep.

Jael went and got a tent peg and a hammer. She quietly knelt down next to Sisera and put the tent peg on the temple of his head. Then with solid blows, she nailed it through his head and into the ground.

Soon Barak came by her tent in search of Sisera. She went out and said, "Come and I'll show you the man you're looking for." Barak went into her tent and saw Sisera lying dead on the floor with a tent peg through his temple.

Israel continued to fight the Canaanite king until they were victorious. Then they lived in peace for forty years.

62 Gideon's Fleece

Building a Nation

Judges 6

For seven years, the Midianites came into Israel like a swarm of locusts. They moved across the land, taking everything off it - all the crops and farm animals. They left nothing for the Israelites to eat. The people became desperate and had to find places to hide in mountain caves.

A man named Gideon was also hiding from the Midianites. He had to thresh his wheat in a wine vat instead of an open threshing floor. The Angel of the Lord came and sat under an oak tree nearby. He said, "The Lord is with you, oh mighty warrior."

Gideon said, "Oh my Lord! If God is with us, why is he allowing all these bad things to happen to us? Where are all the wonderful miracles our fathers told us about? God is no longer fighting for us."

The Angel said, "I'm sending you to deliver Israel from the Midianites."

Gideon was shocked. "Lord, how can I deliver Israel? I'm a nobody."

The Lord said, "Yes, but I'll be with you, and you'll have victory."

Gideon said, "Lord, I need a sign that you're really talking to me. Please, stay here while I prepare a sacrifice."

The Lord said. "I stay here until you return."

Gideon rushed off and prepared a sacrifice for him. When it was ready, he put it on a rock. The Angel of the Lord reached over and touched the sacrifice with the tip of the his staff. Fire came up from the rock and burnt it up. And then the Lord vanished.

Gideon yelled, "Lord God! I'm about to die! I've seen the Angel of the Lord face to face!"

The Lord said, "Don't be afraid. You're not going to die. Do what I say. Your father has an altar of Baal. Tear it down and build an altar to God. Then offer a burnt offering to the Lord."

Gideon obeyed, but did it at night. He was afraid of his family and the men who lived in his city.

In the morning, people found Baal's altar torn down. They saw the altar to the Lord built in its place, and the ashes of the burnt offering on top of it. Soon they learned Gideon had done this.

The men of the city went to his father's house and said, "Give us your son! We'll kill him because he tore down Baal's altar."

Gideon's father said to them, "Show me the man who is defending Baal. He'll be dead by morning! If Baal is really a god, let him defend himself."

Once again the Midianites came into Israel and camped in a valley. The Spirit of the Lord filled Gideon, and he sent out messages for people to come, ready to fight.

Then Gideon prayed, "Lord, give me a sign." He then put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor and said to God "I'll know you'll deliver us if the morning dew is only on the fleece, and all the ground is dry."

He got up early in the morning and found that the fleece was soaking wet, but the ground was dry.

Gideon said, "Lord, don't be angry with me. Allow me one more test. This time let the fleece remain dry, and the dew be all over the ground." In the morning, the fleece was dry, and dew was all over the ground.

Continued in the next story

63 Three Hundred Men

Judges 7 – 8

Continued from the previous story

Gideon gathered a troop of 32,000 men. He took them and camped south of the Midianites. The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many men with you. If I give the Midianites to you now, Israel will say, ‘We won this victory by our own power.’ Tell them, ‘If you’re afraid, go home.’ ”

Gideon said this to the people, and 22,000 people left, leaving 10,000 men.

The Lord said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water. Watch carefully. Notice those who use their hands to bring the water to their mouth. Separate them from those who kneel down and drink like a dog.”

There were 300 men who drank, using their hands. The Lord said, “I’ll give you victory over the Midianites using these 300 men. Send the rest of them home.” So Gideon sent them home.

Those who were left made camp above where the Midianites were in the valley. The people of Midian were like a swarm of locusts, and their camels were like the sand by the sea.

That night the Lord said to Gideon, “Sneak into the Midianite camp. If you’re afraid, take your servant with you. Listen to what the soldiers say.” So Gideon took his servant and went into the Midianite camp.

He heard a man telling a friend about a dream. He said, “I saw a loaf of bread rolling into our camp. It struck a tent and totally destroyed it.”

His friend answered: “I know what it means.

Building a Nation

That loaf of bread is the sword of Gideon the Israelite. God has handed the entire Midianite camp over to him.”

Gideon returned to Israel’s camp and said, “Get up, for the Lord has given the Midianites to you.” He divided the 300 men into three companies of 100. He gave each man a trumpet and a jar with a torch inside it.

He said, “Watch me and follow my lead. When we’re all at the edge of their camp, our group will blow our trumpets. You’re to do the same. Everyone shout, ‘The sword of the Lord and Gideon!’ ”

Then he placed them on three sides of the camp. When they were all in place, Gideon’s group blew their trumpets and broke the jars. The other two groups did the same. They held their torches in their left hands, their trumpets in their right hands, and shouted, “The sword of the Lord and Gideon!”

This totally shocked the Midianite army! They panicked and started to run, yelling as they ran. Gideon’s men blew their 300 trumpets. With this, the Midianite soldiers drew their swords and started killing one another.

Gideon then sent for the rest of the men of Israel. Together they ran after the Midianites as they tried to leave Israel. God gave a great victory that day over Midian, and they were no longer a threat to Israel.

After the battle, the people wanted to make Gideon their king, but he refused. He simply went back to live at his house. Then Israel was at peace for forty years.

64 King of the Trees

Building a Nation

! Judges 9

Gideon and his many wives produced seventy sons. He also had a son by a concubine in the town of Shechem. His name was Abimelech.

After the death of Gideon, Abimelech went to his uncles in Shechem. He said, "Talk to the officials of the city and say, 'Do you want the seventy sons of Gideon to rule over you? Instead of them, select me. I'm a son of Gideon, but I'm also your blood relative.' "

The men of Shechem agreed to make him king of Israel. They gave him seventy silver coins from the Temple of Baal.

With this, he hired a gang of thugs as his private army. The first thing they did was to kill the seventy sons of Gideon. But they missed one – the youngest – a man named Jotham.

The men of Shechem had a celebration to honor Abimelech. Suddenly they heard yelling off in the distance. It was Jotham. "Listen to me! The trees decided to have a king. They went to the olive tree and said, 'Be our king.'

"The olive tree said, 'I don't have time for such foolishness. I produce precious oil that honors God and man.'

"So they went to the fig tree and said, 'Be our king.' The fig tree said, 'I don't have time for such foolishness. I produce sweet fruit that's enjoyed by everyone.'

"They went to the grapevine and said, 'Be our king.' The grapevine said, 'I don't have time for such foolishness. I produce wine that brings happiness to people.'

"Finally the trees went to the thorn bush. They said, 'Be our king.' The thorn bush said, 'Yes, I'll be your king. But from now on, you're under my shade of protection. If any of you rebel, fire will come from my thorns and burn you to ashes.'

"My father risked his life for you. And how did you reward him? You killed his sons! Now you've made the son of a slave girl your king.

"If this is right, I wish you well. But if it's wrong, I ask that fire come from Abimelech and burn you up." He then ran for his life because he

knew his half brother would try to hunt him down.

Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years. Then God put a bad spirit between him and the men of Shechem. This was to bring justice for what was done to the sons of Gideon.

The men started a rebellion against the king they had set up. At one point, they threw a big party and got drunk. They started cursing Abimelech and bragging about how they were going to overthrow him.

The mayor of the city became angry at this talk and sent for Abimelech. The mayor agreed to help his army ambush the men of Shechem.

That night, Abimelech put his men in hiding outside of the city so he could attack in the morning. At sunrise, one of the men of Shechem stood at the gate with the mayor. Suddenly he saw some movement. He said, "Look! What is that? Is it men coming to attack us?"

The mayor said, "No. That's only shadows from the mountain."

A few moments later, the man saw several units of men coming at the city. He ran back into the city and yelled, "We're under attack!"

The battle lasted several days. Finally the city was captured and the people escaped to a tower. Abimelech and his men put tree branches around the tower and burned it down. Over 1,000 men and women died there that day. Jotham's curse on the men of Shechem had come true.

Abimelech completely destroyed the city and tore it down. He spread salt over it so nothing could grow there.

When that was done, he and his men went to destroy another rebellious city. Again the people escaped to a tower. Abimelech and his men went and got wood so they could set it on fire. As they were putting it in place, a woman looked down and saw Abimelech directly beneath her. So she dropped a piece of a millstone down on his head.

Abimelech called for one of his soldiers. "Quick, kill me with your sword. I don't want to be known as the man who was killed by a woman."

65 Jephthah's Vow

Building a Nation

! *Judges 10:6 – 11:40*

Jephthah's mother was a prostitute, but his father was a prominent man in Israel. Jephthah was raised in his father's house, but when his half brothers were old enough they said, "Get out! You're not a son of our mother, and you're not going to inherit anything from our father."

So Jephthah left the area. He became a great warrior and organized a gang of thugs.

During this time, the people of Israel once again rebelled against the Lord and started worshiping other gods. God allowed the Ammonites to conquer them. The Ammonites were extremely cruel, and Israel suffered under their cruelty for eighteen years.

The people cried out to the Lord and said, "Deliver us!"

The Lord said, "No! I won't do it. I've delivered you over and over. I won't do it again. Go call on your idols to deliver you."

So the Israelites got rid of their false gods and started worshiping the Lord. They said, "Do what you want with us. We know we've sinned. But please, get us out of this mess!" With that, God once again had mercy on them.

The Ammonites moved into the land to fight against Israel. The Israelites went out to meet them, but they didn't have a leader. They sent for Jephthah and said to him, "Come and lead our troops into battle against the Ammonites."

He sent a message back saying, "You're the same people who kicked me out! Now you're coming to me for help?"

They said, "It's true. We did that, but if you'll come and give us victory, you'll be our leader.

Listen, the Lord is our witness. We will do as we've said."

So the Spirit of God came upon Jephthah, and he led the people into battle. He made a vow before the Lord and said, "Oh God, if you'll give me victory over the Ammonites, when I go home I'll give you the first thing that comes out of my house. I'll sacrifice it to you as a burnt offering."

The Lord gave Jephthah victory. He totally turned the Ammonite army away and even destroyed twenty of their cities.

Jephthah only had one child, a daughter. When he went home, she came dancing out to him. She was so proud of his victory. When Jephthah saw her, he ripped his clothes and fell down. He cried, "Oh my daughter! What have I done! I've made a vow to God, and I can't take it back."

She said, "Father, you must keep your word to the Lord. He kept his part of the bargain by giving you a great victory. Now you must keep yours. I just ask one thing. Since I'll never marry, allow me to go to the hills with my friends for two months. Together, we'll mourn the fact that I'll never marry."

Her father agreed, so she and her girlfriends went to the hills. For two months, they mourned the fact that she'd never be intimate with a man and have the joy of nursing children.

She then went back home, and Jephthah fulfilled his vow. After that, it became a custom in Israel. Every year, young women went out and spent four days remembering the daughter of Jephthah.

66 The Birth of Samson

Judges 13

There was a man from the tribe of Dan whose wife couldn't have children. This was during the time when the Philistines had taken control of Israel. The angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said, "Soon you'll become pregnant. The child you'll be carrying is going to have the vow of a Nazirite from the time he's born. So be careful. Don't drink alcohol or eat anything that is against the Law of Moses. And never cut your son's hair. He will save Israel from the Philistines."

The woman didn't realize she was talking to the angel of the Lord. She ran to her husband and said, "A man of God came and told me that you and I are going to have a baby. He told me not to drink any alcohol or eat anything that is against the Law of Moses. I'm not to cut his hair because our son is going to keep the Nazirite vow from birth."

Her husband immediately prayed and asked God if he would once again send the man of God to them. He wanted more instruction on exactly what they were to do when the child was born.

Later, the woman was sitting in the field, suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to her again. She quickly ran and got her husband. She said, "That same man of God is out in the field."

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The husband ran to meet him. He said, "Are you the man who talked to my wife?"

"Yes, I am."

The angel then gave him the same instructions he had given the woman. The man said, "Please stay here as we prepare a meal for you."

The angel said, "I'll stay, but I won't eat a meal with you. Instead, present a burnt offering to God."

The man and his wife still didn't know they were talking to the Angel of the Lord. The man said, "What's your name? We want to honor you when all you say comes true."

The angel said, "I'm not going to tell you my name. It is too wonderful for you."

So the man prepared a burnt offering and sacrificed it on a rock. The flames rose up into the sky. Suddenly, as the man and his wife watched, the angel of the Lord went up into the flames.

The couple immediately fell to the ground. The man said, "We're going to die! We've seen God!!"

The woman said, "I don't think we're going to die. He accepted our burnt offering. Besides he said we were going to have a baby."

The woman followed the instructions she was given, and at the appointed time, she gave birth to a baby boy. They named him Samson.

Judges 14

When Samson was a young man, he saw a particular Philistine woman. He went to his parents and said, "Arrange a marriage between me and that woman."

They were shocked. "The Philistines are pagan. You need to find a woman from the people of Israel."

"No. She is the one I want. Go make the arrangements." His parents didn't know that the Lord wanted this to happen in order to cause an offense against the Philistines.

Samson and his father went to make the final arrangements. Along the way, Samson stepped off the path by himself. Suddenly a young lion attacked him. The Spirit of God filled Samson and he grabbed the lion and ripped him apart as if it were a small animal. Afterwards, he went back to his parents but didn't tell them about the lion. They continued their trip and together finalized the wedding plans.

When the big day came, Samson and his parents went back along the same route. When they got to a place where he killed the lion, Samson once again stepped aside without his parents.

He found the dead lion and was amazed to see that honeybees had made a hive in it. He reached in and grabbed some honey and ate it. He then took some to his parents, but didn't tell them where he had gotten it.

Thirty young Philistine men came to the wedding party, which lasted seven days. Samson said, "I have a riddle. If you can figure it out

during these seven days, I'll give you thirty changes of clothes, including undergarments. But if you can't figure it out, you must give me thirty changes of clothes, including undergarments."

They said, "We agree. Tell us the riddle."

He said, "From the eater, came something to eat. From the strong came something sweet."

For three days the young men worked on the riddle. On the fourth day, they went to Samson's wife and said, "You brought us here to rob us. We won't stand for it. You're his wife. Get the answer to his riddle, or we will burn down everything that belongs to your father."

So she went to Samson and asked him for its meaning. He said, "I'm not going to tell you. I haven't even told my parents." She started to cry. "You don't love me."

She kept crying and begging until he couldn't stand it anymore. On the last day of the feast, he told her the meaning of the riddle. She immediately ran and told the men.

That night, just before the time was up, the men said to Samson, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?"

He immediately knew what they had done. He said, "You wouldn't have been able to plow that field without my young cow."

He went to a Philistine town nearby and God gave him the power to kill thirty men. He took their clothes and gave them to the wedding guests. He was so angry that he went back to his father's house without his wife.

68 Three Hundred Foxes and a Jawbone

Judges 15

Samson's father-in-law gave his daughter to a man who attended the wedding party. He figured Samson didn't want her any more since he went home without her.

Later, Samson went back to visit his wife with a gift. His father-in-law said, "What do you want?" "I've come to visit my wife in her room."

The man said, "Oh, you can't do that. I thought you hated my daughter, so I gave her to another man. But don't worry. I have a younger daughter. You can have her. Everyone knows that she's more beautiful than her sister."

Samson became angry and said, "I'm going to hurt some Philistines – a lot of them – and I'm going to enjoy it."

He caught 300 foxes and put them in pairs, and tied a torch to the tails of each pair. He then lit the torches as he set the foxes loose in different Philistine fields.

The foxes ran, burning everything they came across. This not only destroyed standing grain, but also piles of grain that had already been harvested. They even destroyed vineyards and olive groves. The Philistines found out that it was Samson who did this. They blamed his father-in-law because he had made Samson angry by giving away his wife.

They took him and his daughter and burned them to death. This made Samson even more furious. He found each man who had a part in this and tore him apart, limb-by-limb. Many people died. Once he was done, he left Philistia, and went back and hid in a cave in Israel.

The Philistines invaded Israel with an army.

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The Israelites said, "Why are you attacking us?"

"You're protecting Samson. He must be punished for what he's done."

3,000 Israelites went to the cave where Samson was hiding. They said, "We're taking you back to the Philistines. They have ruled over us in peace, but now you've stirred them up."

He said, "I'll go with you if you swear you won't kill me."

They said, "We won't kill you, but we will tie you up." They tied him with two new ropes and led him away. Once the Philistines had him, they shouted with joy.

Instantly the Spirit of the Lord filled him and he tore the ropes off his hands. He grabbed the jawbone of a donkey and ran into the Philistine crowd, killing 1,000 of them.

After his victory, he threw away the jawbone. He looked up and shouted, "Lord, you gave me victory. I've killed 1,000 men. Now, are you going to let me die of thirst?"

Suddenly a rock cracked open and water gushed out. Samson drank until he was refreshed.

He was a judge over Israel for 20 years, even though the Philistines still ruled over the land.

One time, he went to a Philistine city to sleep with a prostitute. Once they heard he was in their city, they closed the gates so they could capture him at sunrise.

Around midnight, Samson got up to go home. When he got to the gate, he pulled it out of the ground and carried it away. He took it to the top of an Israeli hill and left it there, still closed and locked.

69 Samson & Delilah

Building a Nation

Judges 16

In time, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. When the Philistines found out about this, a group of their leaders met with her. They said, “Each of us will pay you 1,100 pieces of silver if you can find out the secret of his strength. Once we know that, we’ll be able to kill him.”

So she asked Samson, “How can someone tie you up in a way that makes you powerless?”

“Oh,” he said. “I’ll be like any other man if someone ties me up with seven brand new bowstrings.”

The Philistines gave her seven fresh bowstrings, and hid some guards in her room. She tied Samson up with the bowstrings, and then shouted, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” He jumped up and snapped the bowstrings as if they were pieces of yarn touched by a fire.

Delilah said, “You lied to me! Why would you make fun of me like that? Please tell me how you can be tied up.”

He said, “The key is new ropes, but only ones that haven’t been used for anything else. If I’m tied up with new ropes, I’ll be like other people.”

So she took some new ropes and tied him up. Guards were still in their hiding place. She yelled, “Samson, quick! The Philistines are here!” He jumped up and snapped the ropes like they were pieces of threads.

She said, “I’m nothing but a joke to you. Why do you keep lying to me? Now tell me how you can be tied up.”

He said, “It’s my hair. If you weave my seven braids with the web of a loom, I’ll be as weak as any other man.”

So she waited until he was asleep and carefully wove his seven braids into the loom. Then she yelled, “Samson! The Philistines are here.” He woke up and pulled his hair away from the loom.

Delilah said, “How can you say you love me when you don’t trust me? Three times now you’ve laughed at me by telling me a lie. Why can’t you

trust me with the secret of your strength?”

She kept this up day after day. She begged and nagged him until she wore him down. Finally, he told her the truth. He said, “I’m what our people call a Nazirite. I’ve been one since birth. My hair has never been cut, and that’s the secret of my strength. If someone shaves my head, I’ll be like any other man.”

Delilah realized that he had finally told her the truth. She sent for the Philistine rulers. “Come. I finally got the truth out of him. Be sure to bring my money with you.” So they came with her money.

That night, he fell asleep with his head on her lap. A man came out of hiding and cut off his seven braids. As he did, Samson’s strength left him. Then she yelled, “Samson, the Philistines are here!”

He jumped up to defend himself, but he didn’t know the Lord wasn’t with him.

The Philistines grabbed him and he couldn’t break loose. They held him down on the ground and poked out his eyes. They then took him to prison, where he was forced to push a grain millstone.

While he was in prison, Samson’s hair started to grow back. In time, the Philistines gathered to worship in the temple of their god. They ate and drank until they were drunk. Someone yelled, “Go get Samson. That’ll give us a good laugh.”

The place was packed as a boy led Samson into the temple. He said to the boy, “Take me to the supporting pillars.”

Samson called out to God. “Oh Lord God. Give me strength just one more time. Allow me to pay back the Philistines for taking my eyes. I’ll die with them.”

He then grabbed the two supporting pillars and pushed on them with all he had. They gave way and the temple fell on the Philistines, including all their leaders. More people died in Samson’s death, then he had killed in all of his life. He had been a judge in Israel for 20 years.

70 Grandson of Moses

Judges 17 – 18

During the time of the Judges, a man named Micah stole 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother. Suddenly he found out that she had put a curse on whoever took it. So he gave it back.

She said, “Oh, son. I didn’t know it was you. I was going to give it to you anyway. But he refused to keep it. So she took some of it and made an idol for her son to put in his home. With the rest, Micah made some special clothes for worship, and provisions for a priest.

A young man named Jonathan was a Levite from Bethlehem. He left home looking for a place to settle down. He stayed the night in Micah’s house and the two of them became friends. Finally Micah said, “Stay here and I’ll make you the priest for my idol. I’ll give you everything you need – clothes, meals, a place to stay, and I’ll even give you a salary.” Jonathan agreed, and soon he became like one of the family.

At that same time, the tribe of Dan was looking for a permanent place for their people. In all of the years since Joshua, they hadn’t found a place of their own. They decided to send out five soldiers as spies.

The spies camped near Micah’s house, and Jonathan went out to visit with them. They said, “You have a Bethlehem accent. What are you doing here?”

He told them about his job and how well Micah treated him. When they found out that he was a Levite and a priest, they said, “Please, ask God if we’ll be successful.”

He said, “Don’t worry about a thing. The Lord is with you.”

The men left and continued their search. Finally they found a wonderful place, where the people were peaceable and unprotected. The spies went back to their tribe and said, “We’ve found a place for us to live! It’s a good land and the people will be easy to conquer.”

So the people of Dan sent 600 men to

Building a Nation

conquer the city. When they got to Micah’s house, the five spies said to the others, “The man who owns that house has an idol, clothes for worship, and even a priest. We could use those things in our new city.”

So the 600 men went to Micah’s house. Jonathan came out to greet them. While he stood there, the five spies went into the house and took the idol and all the stuff that went along with it.

Jonathan said, “What are you doing?”

They said, “Shut up and listen carefully. You have a choice. You can stay here and be a priest for one man, or you can come with us and be a priest for a whole tribe. You can tell us what God wants us to do.”

Jonathan thought this sounded like a good opportunity, so he agreed to go with them. He even helped them take all the things of worship from Micah’s home.

When Micah found out what happened, he organized some men and chased after the Danites. As soon as he saw them, he yelled at them. Immediately they stopped, turned, and faced the men following them. They yelled back, “Why are you following us?”

Micah said, “How can you say that? You took my god and my priest. I have nothing left.”

The men from Dan said, “Stop yelling at us or we’ll take something else from you. We’ll take your life and kill your family.”

Micah saw there was nothing he could do. So he turned and went home.

The Danites continued on their military campaign. They attacked the peaceable people and killed them all. They burned down their city and built a new one. They called it Dan, and it became their permanent home.

Jonathan and his descendants were priests for the Danites for hundreds of years. They helped them worship that idol until the Assyrians took them into captivity. Jonathan was the grandson of Moses.

! Judges 19

Once, during the time of the judges, civil war broke out throughout the nation of Israel. All the tribes united against the tribe of Benjamin and almost eliminated them. It all started with a woman leaving a man.

A certain Levite got a woman to become his concubine. One day she left him and went back to the home of her parents. After four months, the man decided to go and be nice to her in hopes that she would return to his house.

When he got there, her father welcomed him into his home. The two men became friends, so the Levite stayed for three days.

He got up early on the fourth day to go home. The girl's father said, "Have a good breakfast before you leave. It will help you have a better day as you travel."

So they ate together and enjoyed their friendship. Time went by and finally it was late in the afternoon. The father said, "It's too late to leave now. Wait until morning when you can have an early start."

The Levite stayed the night, and in the morning the girl's father said, "Have a good breakfast before you leave. It will help you have a better day as you travel." Again, they ate and talked until late afternoon. The father said, "It's too late to leave now. Wait until morning when you can have an early start."

This time, the man was determined to leave. He set out with his concubine, but didn't get far before they realized they needed to spend the night somewhere.

They traveled on to a city controlled by the

tribe of Benjamin. They stood around hoping someone would invite them into their home. At first, no one responded, but finally an old man saw them and invited them into his house.

They were enjoying each other's company that evening, when suddenly a gang of men surrounded the old man's house. They beat on the door and said, "Send out that man who is staying with you. We want to have sex with him."

The old man yelled back, "This man is a guest in my house. I won't let you abuse him. I'll send out my virgin daughter and the man's concubine. Do what you want with them, but you can't have the man."

The men outside wouldn't listen. They became more violent and insisted on having sex with the man. Finally the Levite grabbed his concubine and pushed her out the door.

The gang of men took turns raping her for the rest of the night. Early in the morning, they let her go. She crawled back to the house and collapsed outside the door.

The Levite woke up and got ready to continue his trip. He saw his concubine at the door. "Get up. It's time to go." She didn't move, so he put her on his donkey and went home.

When they got there, he realized she was dead. He cut her body into twelve pieces, and then sent them to every area of Israel. When the people saw this, they said, "Nothing like this has ever happened in the nation of Israel."

It became the topic of discussion in every town. Finally the people knew they had to take action against the tribe of Benjamin.

Continued in the next story

 *Judges 20 – 21*

Continued from the previous story

The entire nation of Israel prepared for civil war. All the tribes united against the tribe of Benjamin. They declared that no city was exempt from this war. Any that violated this would be destroyed. They also swore an oath that no man would give his daughter to marry a Benjaminite.

Both sides gathered massive armies. The commanders of Israel went to Bethel and sought God's leadership. In the morning, the war started. By the end of the day, the Benjaminites had killed many Israelites and had won the battle.

The commanders of Israel went before the Lord in anguish. They said, "Should we continue this battle against our brothers?"

The Lord said, "Fight them."

The next day, the Benjaminites once again killed many Israelites and won the battle. This time, the entire army went before the Lord at Bethel. They made sacrifices and cried out in anguish. They said, "Should we go up against Benjamin again, or should we stop?"

The Lord said, "Go and fight them. I'll give you victory tomorrow."

The Israelite army prepared to fight in the morning, but this time they hid some of their men behind the city. The Benjaminites came out to fight, and once again it seem like they were winning. The Israelites pulled back and the Benjaminites ran after them. They shouted, "We always win every battle!"

Soon the city was unprotected. Those in hiding entered the city and totally destroyed it, killing everyone. When the army of Israel saw the smoke coming from the city, they turned and charged back into battle. The army of Benjamin also saw the smoke and knew they'd been tricked.

The Lord fought against Benjamin, and soon they were terrified and tried to run, but Israel had them surrounded. The only ones to survive were 600 men who hid in a fortress. Everyone else in the tribe was killed, and their cities destroyed.

Once it was over, the people of Israel realized what they had done. They went to Bethel and sat before the Lord. They sobbed and mourned. "Oh Lord God. What have we done? Now we're missing one of our twelve tribes."

They stayed before the Lord all day and made sacrifices. They said, "What can we do? We only have 600 men from Benjamin and all their women are dead." They knew it was important that the tribe repopulate.

They couldn't give them their daughters because of the oath they had taken. Suddenly they got an idea. "Was there a city that didn't come to battle as they were commanded?"

One city had disobeyed the order to fight. So the army of Israel went and killed everyone there. The only exception was virgin women. When the battle was over, they had 400 virgins from that city.

Israel made peace with the 600 men in the fortress, and gave them the 400 women to be their wives. They still needed 200 women.

Then they had another idea. They said to the Benjaminites, "Shiloh has an annual festival. At one point, young women come dancing out of the city. Hide in the vineyard next to the road. When the time is right, each of you jump out and grab a wife for yourself. Take them back to your own land. Don't worry about their fathers and brothers. They'll complain to us, but we'll explain the situation."

So the Benjaminites hid in the vineyard next to the road. They waited until the young women came dancing out of Shiloh. At the right moment, they jumped up and grabbed wives for themselves.

The fathers and brothers of the women complained, but the men of Israel said, "Be kind and let them keep your daughters. They need wives, and we don't have enough to give them. Don't worry about the curse because you didn't actually give them your daughters. They took them!"

The men of Benjamin went back to their cities and rebuilt them. They settled down with their new wives and raised families. Once again, all was peaceful in the land.

Ruth 1-2

During the time of the judges, a man decided to leave his home in Bethlehem. He took this wife Naomi and their two sons and went to the country of Moab.

Things did not go well there. They lived in Moab for ten years. During that time, the man died, the two sons married Moabite women, and then the sons died. Naomi was left alone with her two daughters-in-law.

She decided to go back to Bethlehem. So the three women prepared for the trip and left. Along the way, Naomi turned to her daughters-in-law and said, "Go back to your homes. May the Lord bless you, as you have been a blessing to me. I pray the Lord will give each of you a good husband and many children." She then kissed them good-bye.

All three women cried, and both daughters-in-law insisted they wanted to stay with Naomi. She said, "No, you need to go home. I have no more sons to give you. Even if I got pregnant tonight, would you wait for my baby to grow up so you could marry him? No, it's better that you go home. Life with me is going to be bitter." With that, one daughter-in-law kissed Naomi and went home.

The second daughter-in-law was Ruth. She said, "I won't leave you! Don't make me go back. I'm going with you. Wherever you live, that's where I'll live. Your people will be my people. Your God is now my God. The place where you die is where I'll die and be buried. Only death will separate you and me."

Naomi saw she couldn't argue with Ruth. So they both went back to Bethlehem.

When they got there, the whole town was excited that Naomi had come back home. She said to them, "Don't call me Naomi any more. That means 'pleasant,' and life is no longer pleasant. Call me Mara, which means 'bitter.' The Lord has made my life bitter."

So Naomi and Ruth established their home in Bethlehem. Life was hard because the two women were poor.

Fortunately it was harvest time. Poor people were allowed to go into the fields and pick up any grain that was dropped during harvest. So Ruth went to the fields to gather food for the two of them. She went to a field owned by a man named Boaz.

Later in the morning, Boaz came to his field. He saw Ruth and said to the foreman, "Who is that young woman?"

"Oh, she is the Moabite who came here with Naomi. She's a hard worker."

Boaz went to Ruth and said, "Don't go to any other field. Stay here and work alongside my servant girls. Watch them and go wherever they go. The men won't hurt you. I've already told them to stay away from you. In fact, go drink from their water when you're thirsty."

Ruth bowed her head and thanked Boaz. She said, "Why are you so kind to a foreigner?"

He said, "We've all heard how well you've treated Naomi. You left your parents and country to come here and care for her. May the Lord richly bless you!"

He then went back and told his men to leave extra grain in her path. Also, they were to provide her food when they stopped to eat.

That evening, Ruth went back home with all she had gathered. She even had leftovers from her meal. Naomi was amazed when she saw all of this. Ruth told her about the kindness of Boaz, the owner of the field.

Naomi responded when she heard the name Boaz. She said, "The Lord bless him! Oh Ruth, he's a close relative of our family. Stay in his field, just as he has said. You'll be safe there."

So Ruth continued to work with the servant girls of Boaz. She gathered grain throughout the barley harvest and the wheat harvest.

Continued in the next story

Ruth 3-4

Continued from the previous story

At the end of harvest, Naomi said to Ruth, “I am going to make sure you’re cared for. Here’s what you’re to do. Take a bath and put on some perfume. Dress in your best clothes. Boaz and his men will be working late tonight at the threshing floor. When they’re done, they’ll eat and drink, and then sleep on the threshing floor to protect the grain.

“Go there, but don’t let the men see you. Watch carefully and note where Boaz lies down. Once everyone is asleep, uncover his feet, and lie down next to them. When he wakes up, he’ll explain what you’re to do.”

So Ruth went to where the men were working and hid in the shadows. She watched carefully until she saw Boaz and the others lie down on the threshing floor. Their heads were towards the grain with their feet pointing out. Once they were asleep, she quietly uncovered the feet of Boaz, and lay down.

During the night, Boaz realized there was a woman lying at his feet. He said, “Who are you?”

She said, “I’m Ruth. Spread your protection over me, because you’re my closest relative.”

He said, “The Lord bless you! You didn’t come to our village looking for a husband, rich or poor. Instead you proved yourself to be a woman of integrity.

“Still, there is a next-of-kin who is closer than I. In the morning I’ll talk to him and give him an opportunity to redeem you. If he doesn’t, I will. For now, it’s not safe to go home in the night. I’ll send you there in the morning.”

She lay at his feet until morning, and then got up while it was still dark. Boaz gave her grain to take to Naomi.

Ruth told her mother-in-law everything that happened. Naomi said, “Now you’re to wait. Boaz won’t rest until this matter is settled.”

That day, Boaz arranged a meeting with the next-of-kin and the elders of the city. He said, “Naomi has come back from Moab and is selling her husband’s land. You’re the closest relative. Buy it in the presence of these elders. And if you don’t, I’ll buy it.”

The man was quick to answer. “I’ll buy it!”

Boaz went on to explain, “Well, when you buy it, you must also marry Ruth, the Moabite woman. This will keep the family name with the property.”

The man said, “I can’t marry this woman. It would ruin my own family name. You have my permission to buy the property.” With that, the man took off one of his sandals and handed it to Boaz. That made the deal legally binding.

Boaz held the sandal out toward the elders. “You are witnesses that I just bought the property that belonged to Naomi’s husband and sons. And because of that, Ruth will become my wife.”

People had gathered around and were watching all of this. The elders said, “Yes, we’ve seen the whole thing. May the Lord bless you, and may the Lord bless this woman who will become your wife.”

So Boaz took Ruth as his wife, and in the course of time, she gave birth to a son named Obed. He had a son named Jesse, who became the father of a shepherd boy named David. He became the great king of Israel!

75 The Call of Samuel

Building a Nation

I Samuel 1 – 3

Hannah couldn't have children. This tormented her so much that she went to the Tabernacle and begged God for a child. She said, "Oh Lord, if you'll give me a son, I'll give him back to you and he'll serve you for the rest of his life."

Eli, the high priest, noticed that Hannah was moving her mouth but she wasn't saying anything. He thought she was drunk. "Woman, put away your wine!"

"Oh sir! I'm not drunk. I'm praying to God."

"Oh, well ... uh ... go your way. The Lord will answer your prayer."

Sure enough, the Lord answered her prayer. In less than a year, she gave birth to a baby boy and named him "Samuel," which means "God heard me."

When the boy was old enough, his mother took him back to the Tabernacle and presented him to Eli. She said, "I prayed for a child, and the Lord answered me. Now I'll give my son to the Lord, and he'll serve Him for the rest of his life."

Every year Hannah came to visit and brought new clothes for Samuel. The priest prayed that God would give Hannah more children. After that she had three sons and two daughters.

Eli gave Samuel work to do in the Tabernacle. As he grew physically, he also grew in favor with the Lord and with people.

Eli's sons were just the opposite. They were wicked and didn't honor God in any way. Many of their sins were committed in the house of the Lord. Eli talked to them about this, but did nothing about it.

One night, while Samuel was sleeping, the Lord called out, "Samuel, Samuel."

He woke up and ran to where Eli was sleeping. He said, "Yes, I'm here!"

Eli woke up and looked at the boy. "I didn't call you, Samuel. Go back to your bed."

Samuel went back and lay down. As he

was going to sleep, the Lord called him again. "Samuel, Samuel."

This time he knew he wasn't dreaming. He got up and ran to Eli. "Here I am!"

Eli once again said, "Son, I didn't call you. Now, go back to sleep." So Samuel went back and lay down.

Once again, the Lord called to him, "Samuel, Samuel."

At this point in his life, Samuel didn't know God, and the Lord hadn't talked to him. So, the boy did the only thing he knew to do. For the third time, he ran to Eli. "I'm here because you called me."

This time, Eli realized what was happening. He knew the Lord was calling Samuel, so he said, "Go back and lie down. If you hear someone calling you again, say, 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

Samuel went back to his bed and lay down. The Lord called him once again, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Quietly Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

God said, "I'm not pleased with how Eli allows his sons to do evil in my house. I'm going to judge him and his sons."

Samuel lay back in his bed. In the morning, Eli called him, "Samuel, what did the Lord say to you?"

The boy was afraid to tell him the message from God. Eli said, "Son, don't hide it from me." So Samuel told him everything.

Eli said, "He's Lord! Let Him do what is good in His eyes."

The Lord was with Samuel from that day on, and God continued to reveal His words to him. Samuel obeyed the Lord, and everything he said came true. All of Israel recognized that he was a prophet of the Lord.

76 The Ark Captured

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 4

God was not pleased with Eli. The high priest knew his two sons were sinning in the sanctuary of the Lord. They didn't even try to hide it. Still Eli hadn't stopped them. God told him that his family would be judged. The Lord said, "I will do something that will cause people to shudder when they hear about it."

When Eli was 98 years old, the Philistines made war with Israel. The army went out to defend their nation, but they lost the battle and 4,000 men were killed.

The elders of Israel were confused. "Why did the Lord allow this to happen?" Suddenly one of them had an idea. "Let's go get the Ark of the Lord! We'll take it with us into battle, and it will give us victory." So they sent for the Ark of God, and the sons of Eli brought it to the camp. When the Israelites saw it, they shouted for joy. The shout was so loud that it seemed like the ground shook.

The Philistines heard the shout and thought it was a war cry. They sent spies to see what was going on and found that the Ark of God had been brought into the camp. The Philistines panicked. They said, "Their gods are now in their camp. We're doomed! These are magnificent gods. They're the ones that slaughtered the Egyptians with plagues."

The Philistine leaders stood before the troops. "Be strong and act like men! You are mighty Philistines, not weak Hebrews. Now is the time to fight like you've never fought before. If you don't, you'll be their slaves."

So the Philistines fought as if they had everything to lose. Israel was crushed – their soldiers slaughtered. 30,000 men were killed, including Eli's two sons. The Philistines then captured the Ark of God and took it to their own camp.

Back in Israel, Eli was sitting on a chair beside the road waiting for a report from the battle. He was concerned about the Ark of God. A man ran from the battle to tell everyone what happened. The entire city started crying out in pain. Eli was blind and had difficulty hearing. He heard the noise, but couldn't hear what was said. "What's going on?"

The man got close to the old priest and said, "Our men were slaughtered today. Your two sons were killed, and the Ark of God was captured." When Eli heard about the Ark of God, he fell backwards off the chair. He was a heavy man, so the fall broke his neck and he died.

Eli's daughter-in-law was due to give birth to a child. She heard about the Ark of God and her husband's death. She then heard that her father-in-law was also dead. Suddenly she went into labor and gave birth to a son. Those helping her said, "You now have something to be happy about. You've given birth to a son!"

At first she didn't respond, and then she finally said, "The glory has departed from Israel because the Ark of God has been captured." Just before she died, she named the boy Ichabod, which means, "The glory has departed."

Continued in the next story

77 Ark of God Returned

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 5-6

Continued from the previous story

After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they put it in the temple of their god. The next morning, they found their idol face down in front of the Ark. They set the idol back up, but the next morning it was on the ground again. This time, the head and hands were broken off.

Suddenly the city was overrun with mice, and the people had large tumors covering their bodies. The men said, "This is being caused by the Ark of Israel's God." So they moved it to another city.

Immediately, God's judgment hit that city. They were overrun with mice and the people developed large painful tumors. This caused the people to panic. The men sent the Ark of God to yet another city, but the people there yelled at them. "You're trying to kill us! We don't want that Ark in our city!"

They moved the Ark from city to city for seven months. Fear and death followed it wherever it went. Finally the Philistines asked their priests, "How can we send the Ark of the Lord back to Israel?"

They said, "If you send the Ark back to Israel, you must send a guilt offering with it. Then God will remove his hand of judgment, and you'll be healed. Make five gold images of your tumors and five gold images of the mice that are destroying the land. Give glory to the God of Israel, and he will stop crushing you. But if you become stubborn, you'll be like Pharaoh when these people left Egypt. He'll send more plagues upon you until you send the Ark back to Israel.

"Here's what to do. Prepare a new cart and place the Ark of God on it. Put the gold objects in a box beside it. Select two milk cows that

have never been in a yoke, and hitch them to the cart. Take the calves away from the cows and put them in a pen nearby. Then stand back and see what the cows do. If they ignore their calves and go up the road toward Israel, you'll know it was the Lord who tormented us for seven months. But, if the cows go toward their calves, we'll know that all of this was just something that happened by chance. It wasn't God's judgment."

The men did exactly as they were instructed. They got two milk cows and separated them from their calves. They hitched the cows to a cart, even though they had never been in a yoke before. They put the Ark on a new cart, along with the five gold images of their tumors and the mice.

When all was ready, they stood back and watched. The cows went straight up the road toward Israel. They stayed on that road with their heads down, lowing as they went. The Philistine rulers walked behind them all the way to the territory of Israel.

The people of Israel were harvesting wheat when they saw the Ark coming toward them. They shouted for joy. As they watched, the cows pulled the cart to a field near a large rock and stopped. The people of Israel put the Ark on the rock. They then used the wood from the cart to offer the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. When the Philistine rulers saw this, they returned to their country.

There were 70 men from a nearby town who were curious about what was in the Ark of God, so they opened it and looked inside. All 70 men died by the hand of God. This struck fear into the people, but it was the beginning of the nation of Israel turning their hearts back to God.

1 Samuel 7 – 8

The people of Israel slowly turned back to God. This was a process that took twenty years. Finally Samuel said, “If it’s true you want to serve God, get rid of all your idols. Dedicate yourself to the Lord and serve him only. Do this, and he’ll give you victory over the Philistines.”

The people did what Samuel said and got rid of their idols. So he told them to come together for a dedication service. He said, “Come, and I’ll pray for you.” The people came together and dedicated themselves to God. From then on, Samuel was their judge.

The Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered in one place. They thought this was an act of war, so they marched into the land and prepared to attack Israel. The people were afraid when they saw the massive Philistine army.

Samuel said, “Don’t look at your enemy. Instead, focus on God and pray to him. The Lord will save us from the Philistines.” He then presented a sacrifice to God, and asked for help.

The Lord answered Samuel’s prayer. Suddenly loud thunder was heard throughout the Philistine camp. They became confused and started to run. The men of Israel chased after them and killed many of them.

Samuel set up a large stone as a monument of what happened that day. He called it Ebenezer, which means “Rock of Help.” He said, “The Lord has helped us up to this point.”

The Lord fought against the Philistines as long as Samuel lived. Every year the prophet went on a circuit so he could better judge the people. The rest of the time, he judged them from his hometown.

When he was old, he appointed his sons to become judges. Unfortunately, they didn’t have his integrity. They accepted bribes and judged accordingly.

The people went to Samuel and said, “Your sons are not just. Therefore, we want to be like all the other nations and have a king. Select one for us before you die.”

Samuel was shocked. He couldn’t understand why they would want such a thing. He prayed to God, but the Lord said, “Don’t be offended. They haven’t rejected you. They’ve rejected me. Do what they say, but first tell them what it will be like having a king.”

Samuel stood before the people and described in detail how a king would abuse them and take advantage of them. He said, “A king will take your sons away from you and they’ll work for him instead of you. They’ll serve in his military, or work for him personally. He’ll take your daughters and put them to work. He’ll take your best fields, vineyards, and orchards. He’ll tax you so he can live in luxury. You’ll become his servants, and you’ll work to fulfill his every whim. When that happens, you’ll complain to the Lord, but he won’t help you.”

The people refused to take this warning. They insisted, “We still want a king! He’ll judge us and fight our battles for us.”

The Lord said, “Do as they ask. Give them a king.”

So Samuel told them to go home, and he would find them a king.

79 Saul Made King

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 9 – 10

Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. He was tall and handsome and stood head and shoulders above everyone else. One day, his father asked him to go find their lost donkeys, so he took some servants and went looking for them. After a long search, they were about to give up and go home. Then one of the servants pointed to a nearby town and said, "There's a man of God in that town. Let's go ask him if he can tell us where the donkeys are."

They went into the town and saw a man coming toward them. They didn't know it was Samuel. The night before, God had told him that Saul would come the next day. The Lord said, "He'll be the king who will rule over Israel."

Saul said to Samuel, "Do you know where the prophet lives?"

"I'm the prophet. Come with me to a sacrifice. Afterwards we'll have a meal together and I'll tell you many things. Oh, concerning those donkeys you're looking for; they've been found. You have more important things to worry about. The future of Israel is in your hands."

Saul was shocked. He said, "The future of Israel can't be in my hands. I'm from the smallest tribe in Israel. And even in that tribe, our family is not important."

Samuel took Saul to a banquet with thirty important people and gave him the place of honor. The chef brought a special meal to Saul and said, "This meal has been set aside, waiting for this day. Now I'm serving it to you."

Saul and his servants went to Samuel's house to spend the night. He was given a place on the flat roof, where it was cool. In the morning the prophet said to Saul, "Send your servants home. I want you to stay a little longer. I'll tell you about a message I have from God."

After Saul's servants left, Samuel took some oil and anointed Saul. He said, "God has anointed you prince over his people."

The prophet then told Saul what would happen to him over the next few days, the places he would go and the people he would meet. He said, "When all of these things happen, the Spirit of God will come on you. You'll be transformed and become a completely new person. At that point, you'll know what to do because God will be with you."

Everything happened just as Samuel had said. So a day was appointed when Samuel was to present the new king to all the tribes of Israel. When the exact moment arrived, Samuel looked around, but couldn't find Saul. He asked God, "Where is he?"

The Lord said, "Look over there. He's hiding among the baggage."

Samuel sent some men to bring Saul before the people. Then Samuel turned to the others and shouted, "Here is the man who will be your king and fight your battles and rule over you."

The people shouted, "Long live the king!" From that day on, the Lord was with Saul and enabled him to perform all the duties of a king.

80 Peace for an Eye

Building a Nation

 *1 Samuel 11*

Saul went back to his hometown after he was made king and the ceremony was over. God moved several fighting men to go with him. Others laughed at the thought of him being their king. They showed their disgust by refusing to give him a gift. Saul ignored this and went back to work on the family farm.

At that same time, the Ammonite army went to fight against a city in Israel. The leaders of the city said to the Ammonite king, “We’re willing to surrender to you. What are your terms?”

The king said, “Here are my terms. I’m going to use you to insult all of Israel. I’ll do this by gouging out the right eye of everyone who lives in your city.”

The leaders of the city sent back a message. “Give us seven days to consider your demands. We’ll use that time to see if anyone in Israel is able to help us. If not, we’ll submit to your terms.”

The city leaders sent messengers to all of Israel. When the news of this came to Saul’s town, the people began to moan and cry. Saul came in to town with his oxen after finishing a day’s work in the field. He looked around and said, “Why is everyone crying?”

They told him the terms of the Ammonite king. Anger burned within Saul when he heard these words, and the Spirit of God took control of his spirit. He turned and killed his own oxen. He cut them into pieces and sent them throughout

Israel with this message. “Look at this piece of meat. This is what your ox will look like if you don’t come immediately and fight. Every man is to march behind Saul and Samuel. There are no exceptions.”

As soon as people heard this message, the fear of the Lord filled them. 330,000 men united to follow Saul into battle.

He sent a message to the city that was under the threat of the Ammonites. “We’re bringing an army to defend you. We’ll be there before midmorning.”

The people of the city were overjoyed. They send a message to the Ammonite king and said, “We’ll come out to you tomorrow. You can then do whatever you want with us.”

Before sunrise, Saul’s army attacked the Ammonite camp. The Israelites kept killing Ammonites all morning and into the afternoon. Only a few escaped.

After this great victory, the people said to Samuel, “Who are those men who were disgusted about Saul being our king? Give us their names and we’ll kill them.”

Saul spoke up, “No! Don’t kill them! Today is a special day. Today, the Lord delivered Israel.”

Samuel said, “I have a better idea. Let’s unite together and once again make Saul our king.” So the people united together and rejoiced as they made Saul their king.

81 Failing the Test

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 13

When Saul became king of Israel, the people had to go to the Philistines to buy iron farm tools. When these tools became dull, the people had to go back to the Philistines to have them sharpened since they weren't allowed to have blacksmiths. But the Philistines wouldn't sell weapons of war to the people of Israel. The only ones to have modern swords and spears were Saul and his son Jonathan.

As king, Saul organized an army of 3,000 men. He personally oversaw 2,000 of them, and gave 1,000 to his son. Jonathan took his men and attacked a Philistine outpost. Saul knew that this was an act of war, so he quickly tried to build his forces in preparation.

The Philistines reacted to this attack with force. They marched into Israel with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and a massive number of troops.

The men of Israel were terrified when they saw this huge army come into their land. Most of the men in Saul's army ran for their lives. They hid wherever they could. They hid in caves, among rocks, and down in wells. Some even left the country. Others actually joined the Philistine army!

Samuel told the king not to go into battle until they had sacrificed to the Lord. He told Saul to go to a particular place and wait for him. The king went to that place, but Samuel wasn't there. He waited three day – four days. Still Samuel

didn't come. He waited five day – six days. Samuel didn't come.

Saul watched as his men continue to desert the army. Finally, on the seventh day, he felt he couldn't wait any longer. He got the things needed for the burnt sacrifice, and offered it up.

Just as he finished, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to greet him. The prophet said, "What have you done?"

Saul said, "The Philistines are about to attack, and my army is leaving me. I didn't know if I would have the Lord's help. I waited for you, but you didn't come. I had no other choice, so I decided to act on my own. I offered the burnt offering to the Lord."

Samuel said, "Oh, you have acted like a fool! Didn't you realize this was a test? You failed it! If you had trusted God, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. Now your kingdom won't last long. The Lord has already found a man after his own heart. He'll become king and God will establish his kingdom for ever."

Samuel then turned and left the king. Saul counted his men and found he only had 600 soldiers. The Philistines had camped on the top of a cliff so they could control the important pass that was below. So Saul took his small army and camped on top of the cliffs on the opposite side of the pass.

Continued on next page

82 Jonathan's Victory

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 13-14

Continued from previous page

Jonathan looked at the Philistines' camp on the other side of the pass. He said to his armor bearer, "Let's go there and kill a few Philistines. The Lord just might help us. He's not limited by how many of us there are."

The man said, "If you go, I'll go with you."

Jonathan said, "Here's my plan. We'll go across to the rear of the Philistine camp. We'll let them see us at the bottom of their cliffs. If they tell us to stop, we'll come back here. But if they tell us to come up, we'll consider that a sign from God. We'll know that the Lord will give us victory."

They decided not to tell the king where they were going. When they got to the cliffs, the Philistines saw them. They said, "Look, the Hebrews are coming out of their hiding places!" They yelled down to Jonathan. "Come on up, and we'll teach you a lesson!"

Jonathan laughed, "Follow me. The Lord has given them to us." The two men climbed up the cliffs and killed twenty Philistines.

News quickly spread through the rest of the Philistine camp. This caused panic. They said, "The Israelites have attacked us from behind." Suddenly the earth shook, and their panic turned to terror. They ran in every direction.

Men in Saul's camp saw this and told the king. He looked around. "Call the roll and find out who's missing." They found that Jonathan and his armor bearer were gone.

As Saul assembled his troops, the panic in the Philistine camp intensified. When Saul's army marched into battle, he found that the Philistines were fighting each other.

The Israelites that had joined the Philistines now rallied around Saul. Those who hid among rocks and caves came out and joined the battle.

Saul wanted his men to completely focus on winning the battle, so he shouted, "I put a curse on anyone who eats food before we win this victory." His men obeyed, but soon they became hungry and tired.

Jonathan didn't know what his father had said. He found some honey in the forest and ate it. Others immediately told him about the king's order. He said, "The king shouldn't have said that. Look at me. I ate some honey, now I'm ready to fight again. Our men should eat all of this food that the Philistines have left behind. Then they would fight harder."

Saul finally realized his army was famished! He had a meal prepared and allowed his men to eat. The king then wanted to go back into battle, but suddenly realized something was wrong. He called everyone together and said, "Something is wrong, and I'm going to find out who's behind it. Once I know who it is, he'll be put to death, even if he's my own son."

He then drew lots, and it fell on Jonathan. The king asked him, "What did you do?"

"I ate some honey. If I'm to die for that, then I'm ready to die."

Saul said to his son, "I took an oath, therefore you must die."

The people shouted, "Jonathan won't die! God used him to give us victory today. As the Lord God lives, not one hair of his head will fall to the ground."

So the people saved Jonathan's life. With that, the battle was over and the Philistines returned to their own territory.

83 Saul's Disobedience

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 14:47 – 1 Samuel 15:35

One day Samuel went to Saul with instructions from God. "The Amalekites attacked my people when I brought them out of Egypt. Therefore, go to battle with them and destroy everything. Kill all the people and all of their livestock. Don't leave anything alive."

So Saul took his army and attacked the Amalekites. He defeated them, but didn't kill everything. Saul's men kept the best of the livestock for themselves. They also captured king Agag and didn't kill him.

The Lord said to Samuel, "I regret that I made Saul king over Israel. He doesn't follow me and he doesn't do as I say."

Samuel grieved in his spirit, and prayed all night. The next morning, he went and found Saul. As the prophet walked up, the king said, "The Lord bless you. I've done what God asked me to do."

Samuel looked at him. "Then why do I hear the sounds of sheep and cattle?"

"Oh, the men saved the best livestock so we could sacrifice them to the Lord. But we destroyed the rest."

Samuel said, "Stop talking! I'll tell you what God thinks of what you've done. When you were humble, God made you the leader over his people. He then gave you a job to do. He said, 'Go kill this extremely sinful people. Don't let any person or animal live.' Why did you make him angry by not doing what he said?"

Saul said, "I did obey him. I killed everyone except Agag, their king. And then I killed all the animals except these few. We kept the best for a sacrifice."

Samuel said, "Do you think the Lord wants sacrifice more than obedience? No! To obey is better than a sacrifice. Rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft. Stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols. You rejected God's command. Therefore, he's rejected you as king over Israel."

Saul said, "I've sinned! I can now see clearly that I ignored the Lord's command, and didn't listen to you. I was afraid of the people, and obeyed them rather than God. Please forgive my sin. Come. Let's worship the Lord together."

Samuel turned away, "No, I won't go with you. You rejected the Lord. Now he's rejecting you as king."

Saul grabbed Samuel's robe and it tore as he turned away. Samuel stopped and looked at the rip. He said, "The Lord has ripped the kingdom of Israel away from you today. He's given it to your neighbor, who's better than you. God isn't like men. He won't change his mind."

Saul yelled, "I've sinned! All I ask is that you honor me in front of the people. Come, worship with me."

So Samuel went with him and allowed him to bow down before the Lord. The prophet then said, "Bring me Agag, king of the Amalekites."

Agag came before Samuel, not knowing what to expect. Samuel took a sword and said, "You've made many women childless. Now your mother will be childless." The prophet then killed Agag and cut him into pieces.

Then Samuel returned to his home. He never again visited Saul as long as he lived. Still, he grieved over him constantly.

84 The Anointing of David

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I Samuel 16

Samuel couldn't stop thinking about how God rejected Saul as king over Israel. The Lord said to Samuel, "Stop brooding about Saul! Take some anointing oil and go to the home of Jesse at Bethlehem. I've selected one of his sons to become king."

Samuel said, "Lord, King Saul will kill me if he finds out."

The Lord said, "Take a calf to Bethlehem and say you're coming to sacrifice to the Lord. Invite Jesse and his sons to join you. I'll show you which one to anoint."

So Samuel went to Bethlehem and invited Jesse and his sons to join him in sacrificing to the Lord. When they came, Samuel was immediately impressed with Jesse's oldest son. "Ah," he thought. "This is the one the Lord will choose."

God said, "Samuel, don't look at outward appearance. It doesn't matter how tall a man is or how strong. I see things you can't see. He's not the one."

Jesse then introduced his second son to Samuel. Again, he wasn't the Lord's choice. Jesse introduced seven of his sons to the prophet. As he met each of them, the Lord said, "He's not the one."

Finally, Samuel said to Jesse, "Don't you have any other children?"

"Oh, well yes. I do have one more – my youngest. He's out watching the sheep."

"Send for him. I'll not eat with you until I see him."

As soon as David walked into the room, Samuel could see that he was a striking young man – healthy and handsome. The Lord said, "This is the one. Get up and anoint him." So Samuel anointed him with oil. After that the Spirit of God departed from King Saul and came upon David in a mighty way.

From that day on, King Saul was tormented with depression. His servants had an idea. They said, "Allow us to find a man skilled at playing the harp. Then his music will cheer you when you become depressed."

When Saul agreed, one of the servants said, "I've heard of a young man who is very skilled at the harp. He's a son of Jesse from Bethlehem. In addition to being good on the harp, he's a good fighter and has the ability to talk in front of people. He's also a man who walks with God."

Saul sent for David and was immediately impressed with him. David was made Saul's armor bearer, but he also played the harp every time the king went into deep depression. The sound of his harp soothed the king's spirit and brought him peace.

1 Samuel 17

The Philistines once again invaded Israel. Both armies faced one another across a ravine. Suddenly a large Philistine stepped forward. His name was Goliath, and he was 9 feet, 9 inches tall.

He yelled, "Why are you preparing for battle? Let two of us settle this. Send someone out and we'll fight. If your man kills me, we'll be your slaves. But if I kill your man, you'll be our slaves. Come on, send someone out and let's fight."

No one accepted his challenge, so he came out and yelled at Israel every morning and evening. This went on for forty days. Saul offered a reward to anyone who could defeat this giant. He said, "I'll make him wealthy and he can marry my daughter."

While this was happening, Jesse said to David, "Go visit your brothers and take them some food. Bring back word of how the battle is going."

So David got up early and went to the battle site. He saw the men lined up in battle formations. He gave the food to the quartermaster and ran to see what was going on.

Suddenly, Goliath started shouting his challenge. "Come on. Send someone out here and let's fight – man to man. Winner takes all." Everyone backed away.

David was shocked. He said, "Who does this ungodly Philistine think he is? He's defying the armies of the living God."

David's oldest brother got angry. "Why are you here? Go back to your sheep. War is for men."

David answered him. "I didn't do anything wrong. I just asked a question." He turned and asked the question again. "Who does this ungodly Philistine think he is?"

Saul heard about David's question and sent for him. David said, "Don't worry about this Philistine. I'll fight him."

The king said, "He's a warrior – a seasoned fighter. You're young with no experience."

David said, "I watch my father's sheep. Every time a bear or a lion has come and tried to take a lamb, I grabbed the beast and killed it. The Lord

was always with me and gave me victory. This ungodly Philistine is just another lion or bear. The Lord will give him to me."

Saul said, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

He then gave David his suit of armor, but he couldn't walk because it was too heavy. He said, "I can't wear these. They'll hold me back."

David got his shepherd's staff and a sling. He went down to the brook and selected five smooth rocks and put them in his shepherd's bag. Then he started walking toward the giant.

Goliath saw David coming. He yelled, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? Come and I will give your flesh to the birds."

David yelled back, "You come to me with a sword and a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord. You've insulted him. Therefore I'm going to cut off your head and give your body to the birds. This battle is the Lord's, and he has given you to me."

Goliath started walking toward David, but David ran toward the giant. He reached into his shepherd's bag and put a rock into his sling. With deadly accuracy, the rock hit Goliath and sank into his forehead. He fell to the ground face forward. David ran up, pulled out Goliath's sword, and cut off the giant's head.

Both armies were shocked when they saw this. The Philistines turned and ran. The Israelites shouted a victory cry and chased after them. Many Philistines died that day.

Saul asked Abner, his general, "Who is that young man?"

"I don't know."

Saul sent for David. He came and stood before the king with the giant's head still in his hands. Saul said, "Who are you? Who is your father?"

David said, "I am the son of Jesse of Bethlehem."

Saul didn't let David go back home, but made him a commander in the army. David was successful in everything Saul had him do.

1 Samuel 18

After the death of Goliath, Saul's son, Jonathan, became a close friend to David. The love between these two men was great. Jonathan gave David everything he needed to fight on the battlefield, and also what he needed for working in the king's court.

David was successful as a commander in the army. All the people admired him, and his men became loyal to him. One day when Saul and his army came in from battle, the women from the various cities greeted them with dancing and singing. Their song was, "Saul has killed thousands. David has killed tens of thousands."

This made Saul furious! He said, "Listen to them. They give him more credit than me. What will they do next? Give him the kingdom?" From that day on, Saul became more and more jealous of David.

The next day, God allowed an evil spirit to take control of Saul. He started to act crazy. It was still David's job to go play his harp when the king was in one of these moods. As David played, Saul said to himself, "I'll end this right now. I'll pin him to the wall." When the time was just right, he grabbed a spear and threw it at David. David dodged it just in time, and kept playing the harp. Saul waited, and once again when the time was just right, he grabbed another spear and threw it at David. Again David dodged it just in time.

With that, Saul realized that the Spirit of the

Lord had left him and was now with David. The king's anger turned to fear.

He put David in charge of 1,000 soldiers and sent him out to battle. David was successful in every campaign he led. This increased the love that the people had for him, but it made Saul even more afraid of him.

One of the king's daughters, named Michal, loved David. When Saul found out about this, he got an idea. He thought of a plan where the Philistines would kill David. The king had his servants go to David and say, "The king likes you so much that he's willing for you to become his son-in-law."

When David heard this, he said, "I am not a rich man. I can't offer the king anything for his daughter."

"Oh, the king doesn't want you to pay him money. All he wants is for you to get revenge on his enemies. He wants you to kill 100 Philistines, and bring back proof that they're dead."

David was pleased by these terms. So he and his men went out and killed 200 Philistines and took Saul proof that they were dead. Saul had no choice but to give his daughter Michal to David.

Even more now, Saul considered David to be his enemy. Still, the Lord gave David victory every time he went out to battle. He was more successful than all of the other military officers and his name became more and more famous.

87 Protecting David

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1 Samuel 19

Saul wanted David dead. So he told his servants and Jonathan to find him and kill him. Jonathan rushed and told David, “Go and hide. I’ll talk to my father and see if I can reason with him. I’ll let you know if I’m successful.”

Jonathan talked to his father and told him that David was a loyal servant and would do nothing to harm the king. Saul listened to his son and promised to let David live. So David went back into the king’s courts and served him. War once again broke out with the Philistines and David led the army to victory against them.

Once again the Lord allowed an evil spirit to enter the king. As David played the harp, Saul grabbed a spear and threw it at him. He jumped out of the way and ran from the room.

Saul called his guards and told them to go to David’s house in the morning and kill him. Michal heard about this and warned her husband. “You must leave tonight. They’ll be here in the morning to kill you.”

He went out the window and she helped lower him down to the ground. She placed an image in his bed and put goat hair on top of it. She then covered it with a blanket. In the morning, she told the guards, “He’s sick in bed.”

They went and told the king. He said, “Go! Bring me the bed with David in it, and I’ll kill him myself.”

When they went to the bed, they found the image with the goat hair. Saul yelled at Michal. “How could you lie to me and let my enemy get away?”

She said, “He forced me to do it. He said he would kill me if I didn’t.”

David went to Samuel and told him everything that had happened. Saul found out that David was with Samuel, so he sent guards to go get him. When they got there, they saw Samuel sitting with some prophets. Suddenly the guards sat down and started prophesying.

Saul heard about this, so he sent more guards. The same thing happened to them. They sat down and started prophesying. So Saul sent a third set of guards, and again they sat down and started prophesying.

Finally Saul went himself. When he got close to where they were, the Spirit of God came on him and he started prophesying as he walked along. When he entered the house, the king took off his clothes as he was prophesying. He then collapsed and lay naked the rest of that day, and all night.

1 Samuel 20

David said, “Jonathan, why is your father trying to kill me? What have I done?”

He said, “The king doesn’t want to kill you. I would know about it if he did. He doesn’t hide anything from me.”

David said, “As sure as there is a God, and as sure as you’re alive, your father wants to kill me. He doesn’t tell you because he knows we’re best friends.”

Jonathan said, “What do you want me to do? Name it and I’ll do it.”

David said, “Tomorrow, I’m scheduled to go to a three-day banquet with the king. If he notices that I’m not there, tell him you gave me permission to go to Bethlehem for an annual sacrifice. Tell him it was important that I be there because it involves my entire clan.

“If your father accepts that answer, then we’ll know all is well and he doesn’t hate me. But if he gets angry, then it will be clear to both of us that he wants to kill me.

“Jonathan, if you find out that he has good reason to hate me, then come ... and kill me yourself.”

Jonathan said, “I’ll go and find out exactly what my father thinks about you. If you’re right and he wants to kill you, I’ll send you away in peace. But remember, we made a vow to each other before the Lord. If I die and God blesses you, take care of my family. Love my household as if they’re your own.

“Here’s my plan. Hide next to the big rock in the field. I’ll find out what my father thinks about you. Then I’ll come here and shoot three arrows toward the rock. I’ll send my servant to get them. As he goes, I’ll yell something to him. If I say, ‘They are on this side of the rock.’ That’s your sign that all is well and you can come back.

“But if I yell, ‘They’re on the other side of the rock,’ That’s your sign that you need to run for your life because my father is trying to kill you.”

During the first day of the banquet, Saul noticed that David was not in his place, but he didn’t say anything. On the second day, Saul said to Jonathan, “Where is that son of Jesse? He’s missed both days so far.”

“Oh, I gave him permission to go to Bethlehem. His family is having a big annual sacrifice, and his brothers insisted that he be there.”

Saul yelled at his son. “You son of a prostitute! I know what you’re doing. You’re taking his side. Don’t you realize he’s going to take away your kingdom? You’re a shame to our family. Now go get him and bring him here so I can kill him.”

Jonathan yelled back. “What has he done? Why do you want to kill him?”

Saul grabbed a spear and threw it at his son. Jonathan got up from the table and left. He didn’t eat for a whole day because he was ashamed of his father.

In the morning, he went to the field with his servant. He shot three arrows out beyond the rock. As the servant ran out to get them, Jonathan yelled, “There on the other side of that rock. You need to hurry. Go as fast as you can.”

The servant found the arrows and brought them back. Jonathan then told him to take the equipment and go back to the city.

After he left, David came out of hiding. The two men hugged and cried. Jonathan said, “You’re right. My father is determined to kill you. Go. But remember our pledge to one another, and between your children and my children.” With that, David left, and Jonathan went back to the city.

89 Running from Saul

1 Samuel 21-22

David escaped from Saul with only a few men to help him. They went to Ahimelech, the priest who was in charge of the Ark of God. The priest said, “Why are you here?”

“The king sent me on a special mission. He told me not to tell anyone about where I’m going. I left so fast that we don’t have anything to eat. Please give us some bread.”

Ahimelech said, “The only bread we have is the old showbread taken from the holy place. Only priests are allowed to eat it.”

This was old bread they took from the altar when they put new bread there. The priest said, “I suppose you can have the old bread, but only if your men have kept themselves clean before the Lord.”

David said, “We’re all on a mission for the king, so of course we’ve all kept ourselves holy before the Lord.”

So Ahimelech gave them the old bread. David noticed that Doeg, the Edomite, saw this whole thing. He was the chief shepherd for Saul.

David said to Ahimelech, “I left so fast that I forgot to bring my weapons. Do you have a spear or sword that I could use?”

“The only sword I have is the one you took from Goliath. You can have that one back. It’s all I have.”

David took the sword and continued his escape from Saul. He went to Gath, a city of the Philistines. There, he would be out of Saul’s reach. But people told the king of the Philistines, “This is David, the one they sing about — ‘Saul has killed his thousands, but David has killed his tens of thousands.’ ”

When David heard this, he immediately

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pretended like he was insane. People of that day didn’t hurt those who were insane because they were afraid there might be an evil spirit in them. David fell down and started clawing on the doorpost. He let drool flow into his beard. When the king saw this, he said, “This man is crazy. Get him out of here!”

David left Gath and hid in a cave. His brothers brought him all their relatives so they’d be safe from Saul. David took his parents to Moab and left them in the protection of the king there.

Soon men started arriving to join David. These were men who were in some kind of trouble or overwhelmed with debt. Finally there were 400 men who rallied around David, and he became their leader.

Meanwhile, Doeg, the Edomite, went to Saul and said, “I saw Ahimelech give David food and the sword of Goliath.”

Saul sent for Ahimelech and all 85 priests that were with him. “Why did you help this son of Jesse? You know he wants to kill me.”

Ahimelech said, “I thought he was your faithful servant. After all, he’s your son-in-law. I didn’t know there was trouble between you.”

Saul turned to his guards. “Kill these men, all of them. They’re on David’s side.”

The guards were shocked. They didn’t move because they weren’t about to kill the priest of the Lord.

Saul then turned to Doeg, the Edomite. “Kill all of these men and everything they own.” So, Doeg killed all of the priests, their wives, their children, and even their livestock. Only one son of Ahimelech was able to escape. He ran and told David all that happened.

Saul started chasing David from place to place. At one point, they came to a large rock formation. David and his men were on one side, and Saul's army was on the other. If Saul had gone a little farther, he would've seen David and been able to get him.

Just then a messenger went to Saul and said, "Hurry! You need to come back. The Philistines have invaded our land!" So Saul had to retreat in order to save the nation from the Philistines. After that, that rock formation was called "Rock of Escape."

David moved his men to the canyons of En-gedi. After Saul was done fighting the Philistines, he heard that David was at En-gedi. He selected 3,000 of his best soldiers and took them toward En-gedi.

Along the way, Saul stopped, and went into a cave to relieve himself. He didn't know David and his army were in the back of that cave. His men were thrilled that the Lord had given Saul to David. They whispered, "Kill him!"

Instead, David quietly got close and cut off the corner of Saul's robe. Instantly, he felt guilty for doing this. He said to his men, "Hear what I'm saying. God anointed Saul to be king over Israel. Even my little finger won't hurt him." He held his men back so Saul could leave the cave peacefully.

As the king was walking away, David came

out and yelled, "My lord the king!" Saul stopped and looked back. David was standing there. He said, "Who are you listening to? Who told you I wanted to hurt you? Look at the corner of your robe. It's missing because I'm holding it in my hand. God gave your life to me when you came into this cave. My men told me to kill you, but I didn't because you're my king. You're the Lord's anointed, and I would never hurt you.

"Listen to what I'm saying. I haven't sinned against you. Still you're trying to kill me. I'm asking the Lord to judge between us, and I know he will make things right. But I will never hurt you."

When Saul heard this, he broke down and cried. He said, "Oh my son David, you're more righteous than I. You have only returned good for all the bad I've done to you. How is it that the Lord gave me to you, and you didn't kill me? Who's heard of such a thing?

"Now I know it's true. You'll be king over Israel. Oh David my son, swear to me by the Lord. When you're king, don't kill my descendants. Don't eliminate my father's name from our tribe." So David made that vow to Saul.

The king then took his men and returned back home. David went back into hiding. About that same time, the prophet Samuel died, and everyone in Israel mourned his death.

91 Abigail

1 Samuel 25

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David and his men lived in the same area as a rich herdsman named Nabal, a descendant of Caleb. He was known to be mean and harsh, but he had a beautiful wife who was much more practical in how she dealt with others. Her name was Abigail.

Having David's army in the area was a great advantage to Nabal because foreign raiders didn't come and steal from his herds. Still, Nabal didn't invite David and his men to his annual sheep-shearing feast. So David sent 10 young men with a message. "Peace to you and yours. I respect you as my own father. Your shepherds will tell you that we have protected your flocks over the entire time we have lived in this area. Instead of us coming to your feast, please send some food and provisions with these young men."

Nabal said, "I don't know David. I'm definitely not his father. Slaves are always running away from their masters. Tell him to go back to where he came from. I'm not going to take food away from my servants and give it to strangers."

The young men went back and told David everything that was said. David said to his men, "Put on your swords. I protected this man's goods, and he repays me with insults. Not one man in his camp will be alive in the morning."

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants went and told Abigail what was said and done. He said, "David's men were 'a wall' to us while we were out in the fields. They protected us night and day. We didn't lose one animal during this time. Yet, your husband insulted them and refused to help them. You must think of something because your husband has offended an army that can kill all of us."

Without telling her husband, Abigail gathered provisions for David's men. She got 200 loaves of

bread, 2 wine skins, 5 butchered sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 cakes of pressed figs. She put all of these things on some donkeys and headed down the road.

As she rounded a corner, she saw David's men coming toward her. She got off the donkey and ran to him. She knelt down with her face to the ground and said, "It's my fault your men were mistreated. I would have treated them well if I had known they were coming. Forgive my husband. His name means 'fool,' and that's how he acts. Please accept these gifts of food.

"It's the Lord who's kept you from getting revenge today. He has always fought your battles for you, and he always will. When he makes you king, you'll want a clear conscience about this day."

David said, "It was God who sent you here today. Your wisdom has kept me from shedding blood and taking revenge on a man who offended me. If you hadn't come, every male in your camp would have died." He then accepted Abigail's gifts.

She went back home to find Nabal feasting like a king. She didn't tell him what happened. He got drunk and fell asleep.

In the morning, she waited until he was sober, and then told him what she did the day before. He immediately had a heart attack and lay in a coma for 10 days. Then the Lord killed him.

David heard about his death and said, "Praise the Lord! God kept me from doing evil and punished Nabal for the evil that he did."

David then sent a message to Abigail asking if she would become his wife. She agreed and went to him.

Meanwhile, Saul gave his daughter Michal to become the wife of another.

92 Sparing God's Anointed

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 26-27

Saul once again took 3,000 of his best warriors and went after David. That night they set up camp beside the road. David heard where they were, so he went there during the night.

Saul was asleep in the middle of the camp with his men circled around him. Next to him was Abner, the commander of the army. The Lord caused a deep sleep to come over all of them.

David took one of his men and walked right up to where Saul and Abner were sleeping. The man with David said, "Today God gave you your enemy. Say the word and I'll thrust him through with this spear and pin him to the ground."

David said, "No. God anointed him king of Israel. Only God can take that away. He has appointed a time for Saul to die, and we will accept that. I'll never touch a man anointed by God."

David took the king's water jug and the spear that was stuck in the ground next to Saul's head. They left the camp without anyone waking up.

When they were at a safe distance on the top of the next hill, David yelled at Saul's camp. "Abner, listen to me."

Abner woke up and then yelled back. "How dare you wake up the king. Who are you?"

David said, "Abner, you're the best soldier in Israel. Yet, you failed to protect the king, God's anointed. Men came into the camp while you were sleeping. Look around. Where is the king's spear and water jug? You should be executed."

Saul yelled back, "My son David, is that your

voice I hear?"

"Yes, my king. It's my voice. What have I done to cause you to hunt me down like a criminal? Whoever turned you against me should be cursed. They're making me leave the land that is blessed of God."

Saul said, "Oh my son David. Once again you had a chance to kill me and you didn't. It's now clear to me that I've sinned. I've been a fool. Come back to me. I won't hurt you."

David said, "Yes, it's true. The Lord gave you to me, but I knew that I wasn't to touch His anointed king. May God value my life and spare me, just like I value your life. I want him to see that I'm righteous and loyal. Send a young man over here to get your spear."

Saul said, "My son, you are blessed of God. You will do great things for the Lord." With that, King Saul went back home.

David said to his men, "Eventually Saul will find me, and when he does he'll kill me. I must go to a place that is out of his reach. What better place than with the king of the Philistines?"

So David took his 600 men to Gath. All of them took their families with them. David said to the king, "Please give me a small town nearby. I don't deserve to live in the same town with so great a king." So he gave David the town of Ziklag. David and his men stayed there for a year and four months. The king of the Philistines learned to trust David as one of his own countrymen.

93 Staying by the Stuff

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 29 – 30

As the Philistines started making plans to invade Israel, their king said to David, “You’ll march with me. I want you and your men to be my personal bodyguards.”

David said, “Good, now you’ll be able to see what my men and I can do.”

All the military units went to a place where they could present themselves in review as they prepared for war. The Philistine commanders were shocked when they saw David and his men. They said to the king, “You can’t bring those Hebrews to fight with us!”

He said, “David defected from Israel, and has been faithful to me ever since. I have no reason to doubt his loyalty.”

The commanders got mad. “Send him away! He’s the one they sing about. ‘Saul has killed his thousands; David his tens of thousands.’ He might suddenly turn on us in the middle of a battle. That would be a good way for him to regain Saul’s favor.”

The king went to David. “You’re an honorable man, and I personally want you by my side in battle. But the commanders don’t trust you. Therefore I have to send you back to Ziklag.”

David said, “What have I done to deserve this? I’ve been faithful to you from the first day I came here.”

The king said, “I know you have, but my hands are tied. You must leave in the morning.”

So David and his men left. When they got back to Ziklag, they found that foreign raiders had come and burnt down the town. They hadn’t killed anyone, but simply took all the people with them. This included all the wives, sons, and daughters of David and his men.

The men cried until they could cry no more. Some of the men wanted to stone David, but God

stood by him. He prayed to the Lord, “Should I chase after these raiders? Will I catch them?”

The Lord said, “Go after them. You’ll catch them and get everything back that was taken from you.”

So David took his 600 men and went after the invaders. At one point, they stopped because 200 of his men were too exhausted to go farther. So the 400 left their supplies with the 200 and continued on.

They came upon a slave who had belonged to the raiders, but had been left behind because he had gotten sick. He hadn’t eaten anything for three days. David’s men gave him food and water and helped revive him.

David said, “Will you lead us to the raiders?”

He said, “I’ll lead you to them if you swear you won’t kill me, and you won’t give me back to them.” David agreed.

The slave led David’s men directly to the raiders. They were celebrating how much plunder they had gotten from the Philistines and the Israelites. Without warning, David’s men attacked and quickly killed most of them. Only a few got away. David’s men got everything back they had lost, plus all the plunder the raiders had taken from other cities.

When they got back to the 200 men, some of the 400 said, “They didn’t go with us into battle. So they only get their wives and children back. They don’t get any of the extra plunder we took.”

David said, “No! That’s wrong. God gave us a great victory today. We’ll share equally with those who stayed back with our supplies.” So that became the law of Israel from that day on.

David and his men went back to Ziklag. He then sent some of the plunder back to various cities in Israel.

94 Witch of Endor

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 28

The Philistines started their massive invasion of Israel. They entered the land and set up camp. Saul gathered his army and made preparations for war. His body shook with fear when he saw how large the Philistine army was.

He asked the Lord for guidance, but God didn't talk to him. All was silent. There wasn't a dream, or a priest, or a prophet that gave him a message from the Lord.

He wanted to talk to Samuel, but he was dead and Saul had removed everyone who claimed to be able to speak to the dead. Still he desperately wanted to talk to Samuel. He said to his servants, "Find a woman who can talk to the spirits of those who have died. I need to find out what's going to happen."

They said, "There is a woman at Endor. She says she can talk to the dead."

That night Saul put on a disguise, took two servants, and went to the woman's house. He said to her, "I want you to bring up a spirit for me."

She said, "Are you setting a trap for me? You know King Saul will kill anyone who does that."

He said, "Listen to me carefully. As sure as God lives, you'll not suffer for doing this."

She said, "Who do you want me to bring up from the dead?"

"Bring back Samuel. I want to talk to him."

Suddenly the woman saw Samuel. She screamed and then she turned and yelled at the king. "You tricked me! You're King Saul!"

He said, "Don't worry about that. Now tell me, what do you see?"

"I see a spirit coming up from the ground."

"What does he look like?"

"It's an old man wearing a robe."

Saul knew it was Samuel so he fell down with his face to the ground. The prophet said, "Why are you disturbing me? What do you want?"

"Oh, I'm in trouble and I don't know what to do. God won't talk to me, and the Philistines have invaded the land with a massive army. So I called on you. Please tell me what to do."

Samuel said, "The Lord is now your enemy, so why do you think I'd help you? I've already told you what he was going to do. Well, he's finally doing it. He's ripping the kingship out of your hands and giving it to your neighbor David. You didn't obey God. You refused to do what he told you to do. Therefore, tomorrow you and your sons will join me. Israel will be handed over to the Philistines."

Saul was terrified when he heard this and stayed on the ground. He was weak because his hadn't eaten anything for over a day. The woman said, "I'll make some food. You need to regain your strength before you leave."

At first the king refused, but his servants agreed with the woman. Finally he got up and sat on the bed while she prepared the meal. She killed a fatted calf, cooked it, and baked some bread. Saul and his servants ate the meal, and then left into the night.

95 Death of Saul & Jonathan

Building a Nation

1 Samuel 31 & 1 Chronicles 10

The war between the Philistines and Israel was fierce. Many Israelites died and the others ran from the battlefield. Three of Saul's sons were killed, including Jonathan.

An arrow hit Saul and he knew he was about to die. He turned to the man who carried his armor. "Pull out your sword and kill me. If these pagans find me alive, they'll torture me until I'm dead."

The armor-bearer refused to kill his king, so Saul fell on his own sword and died. When his armor-bearer saw this, he fell on his sword and died.

A man came along who was a soldier for Israel, but from another country. He saw that Saul was dead, so he took the king's crown off his head so he could take it to David.

When the people who lived in that area saw the total destruction of Saul's army, they left their cities and ran for their lives. The Philistines entered those cities and took them over.

The next day, they went back into the field to plunder the dead bodies. That was when they found Saul and his sons. They cut off Saul's head and hung his body from a city wall. They then hung the bodies of his son's next to him. They sent his armor back to their country and it was put in the temple of their gods. News of Saul's death spread throughout their country.

Back when Saul first became king, his first act was to rescue a city that was being threatened by the Ammonites, who said they would gouge out the right eye of everyone in the city. When that city heard about Saul's body hanging from a wall, they traveled all night to get to it. They took it down from the wall, as well as the bodies of his sons. Once they buried them, they fasted for seven days.

The man with Saul's crown went to Ziklag to tell David about the death of King Saul and his sons. David said, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan are dead?"

A man said, "I was walking through the battlefield when the king saw me. He yelled, 'Come over here and kill me with your sword. These ungodly dogs will be here in a few minutes. If they find me alive, they'll torture me.' So I did as I was told. I took my sword and killed him. I then brought his crown to you."

David ripped his clothes and cried out in pain. He and his men mourned the death of Saul and Jonathan. David then said to the man who came with the news. "You've admitted that you killed the Lord's anointed." He turned to one of his men. "Pull out your sword and kill this man."

David continued to mourn the death of King Saul and Jonathan.

2 Samuel 2 & I Chronicles 2:16, 12:22

While David lived in the Philistine town of Ziklag, men from all the tribes of Israel kept coming to join his forces. They came day after day until he had a great army. After Saul's death, David asked the Lord if he should go back to a town in Judah. The Lord said, "Go to Hebron."

So David and his men took their families and moved to all the towns around Hebron. The men of Judah went to David and made him king of their tribe.

All the other tribes followed the leadership of Abner, the commander of Saul's army. He took Ish-bosheth, a son of King Saul, and made him king over all of Israel except Judah.

This caused a war between these two sides. Abner led his men out to face David's army led by Joab, the son of David's sister. The two armies met on opposite sides of a pool. Abner yelled over to Joab. "Let's each send out 12 men to fight for us." So each side sent 12 men out to battle. All 24 men were skilled at battle, so each man killed his opponent. All 24 men died.

With that, both sides went into battle and Joab was victorious. After the fierce fighting, Abner and his men ran away. One of the brothers of Joab ran after Abner. The young man was an extremely fast runner, but he wasn't as skilled in fighting as Abner.

Abner saw Joab's brother gaining on him. He

yelled back, "Go after one of my soldiers who is more like you. Fight it out and see what happens."

But the young man didn't listen to this advice. He kept gaining on Abner. Again he warned him. "Don't make me do this. After killing you, I'd never be able to face your brother again."

Still, the young man refused to listen and continued on. When he was right behind Abner, the skilled warrior turned and thrust his spear through the stomach of the young man. He fell to the ground and died.

The army of Joab continued to chase after the men of Abner. By sunset, reinforcements came and joined Abner's men. He yelled to Joab. "Let's end this battle. If we keep fighting, it'll only increase the bitterness. Tell your men to stop running after their brothers."

Joab yelled back, "You're right! We would have fought all night if you hadn't said something. So he blew the ram's horn and his men stopped. Both armies marched back to their cities, and Joab buried his brother in their family tomb in Bethlehem.

The war continued between Judah and Israel. The people of Judah followed David as their king, and Ish-bosheth was king over all the other tribes. It was a long, bitter struggle. David's rule became stronger and stronger, and the rule of Ish-bosheth became weaker.

97 David Made King

Building a Nation

2 Samuel 3 – 5:4 & I Chronicles 11:1-3

The kingdom of Ish-bosheth continued to grow weaker. Still, Abner's influence grew stronger. One day the king said to him, "Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?"

Abner got angry and said, "How dare you! My loyalty to your father is the only thing that has kept me from handing you over to David. Now you're accusing me of sinning with this woman. That's it! I'm going to establish David as king over all of Israel." Ish-bosheth was speechless.

Abner sent a message to David. "I'm ready to give you the kingdom of Israel. Let's work out the agreements."

David said, "One thing has to happen first before I'll work out any agreement with you. If you come, you must bring my wife Michal, Saul's daughter. Don't come without her."

Guards went and got Michal, and took her away from her new husband. As they walked down the road, the husband followed behind them, crying as he walked. Finally Abner turned and yelled, "Go home!" So the man turned and went home.

Abner got the elders of Israel to agree that David was king of Israel. He then went and told David. Together they had a banquet to celebrate the news.

Abner then said, "I'll go and make the final arrangements for your coronation. Then you'll be king over the whole nation." So David sent him away in peace.

Joab had been away while all of this was happening. He returned just after Abner had left. He went to David and said, "Why did you let Abner escape? Don't you realize that all of this is just a trick to entrap you?"

Then, without the king knowing it, Joab sent a message to Abner. "Please, come back to Hebron." When Abner got back, Joab asked him to step aside so they could have a private conversation. Once they did, Joab stabbed Abner in the stomach. He fell to the ground and died.

David was devastated when he heard about what had happened. He put a curse on Joab and his descendants. The king knew that Joab had killed Abner to revenge his brother's death. Still, he made him and his men rip their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn Abner.

David then walked behind the funeral procession, and cried openly at the gravesite. He wouldn't eat anything for the rest of the day. He said to his soldiers, "A great leader of Israel has died today."

All of Israel took note of what David did, and they were convinced that he had nothing to do with Abner's death.

Two men went into the house of Ish-bosheth and killed him while he was in bed taking an afternoon nap. They cut off his head and took it to King David saying, "Your enemy is dead."

David said, "When I was in Ziklag, a man came and told me he was merciful to King Saul by killing him before the Philistines could torture him. He thought he was bringing me good news, but I had him put to death. Now you come and tell me you killed the king of Israel while he was sleeping in his bed." David had both men killed. He then had their hands and feet cut off and their bodies were hung near the pool of Hebron.

All the tribes of Israel met in Hebron and made David their king. He was 30 years old.

98 David's Mighty Men

Building a Nation

2 Samuel 5, 23:13-23 & 1 Chronicles 11

David had developed a group of 30 men that were the core of his fighting force. Joab's brother led the group because of his bravery.

All 30 of these fighting men were proven warriors with skill and courage. But three of them were an inspiration to the entire army. One of these men personally killed 800 soldiers in a battle. Another stood firm when the rest of the army retreated. While they fell back, he turned and attacked the Philistines by himself. He fought so hard and so long that his hand stuck to his sword. The others finally came back, but only to plunder the dead bodies around him.

Before David became king, there was a time when he and his men were in hiding. He became thirsty and said, "Oh, I long for the water from the well in Bethlehem!" At that time, Bethlehem was in the hands of the Philistines.

These three men heard David longing for that water. They slipped out of the camp and went to Bethlehem, which was controlled by the Philistines at the time. They crept into the city and got water from the well. They were then able to get safely back out of the Philistine area.

When they brought the water to David, he was shocked at what they had done. He said, "I won't drink this water! This is precious like the blood of the men who risked their lives to get it." He stood before the Lord and poured it out as an

offering to God.

All of David's men remained loyal to him after he became king. God was with him and established his kingdom over Israel.

Jerusalem was a walled city on Mount Zion controlled by the Jebusites. David said to his men, "Whoever is able to conquer this city will become the commander of my army." Joab conquered it by getting inside the walls through the water tunnels. So he became the commander of the army.

David renamed the town, "The City of David," and from that time on it was the center of his government.

When the Philistines heard about him becoming king of Israel, they decided to fight against him. David asked the Lord, "Should I go fight them?"

The Lord said, "Go. I will give them to you." So David went and defeated them.

Later, they invaded Israel again. So he asked the Lord, "Should I go fight them?"

The Lord said, "Go, but this time circle around behind them. Put your camp in a grove of trees. Wait until you hear the sound of marching in the top of the trees. Then you'll know that I have marched ahead of you.

David did exactly what the Lord told him to do. He defeated the Philistines and totally ran them out of the land.

99 Moving the Ark

Building a Nation

2 Samuel 6 & I Chronicles 13, 15-17

The Ark of God had been ignored during Saul's reign as king. So David decided to bring it to his new capital. He sent a message throughout Israel inviting them to come join him for this great event.

The people agreed that this was the right thing to do. Unfortunately, they didn't follow God's instructions on how the Ark was to be moved. Instead they put it on a new cart and pulled it with a team of oxen.

As the cart moved toward Jerusalem, the king and the people walked along celebrating. They sang songs, and played instruments.

Suddenly one of the oxen stumbled and shook the cart. A man named Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark. The moment he touched it, God struck him and he fell to the ground and died.

David was shocked and confused. He didn't know why God had done this. He needed time to think about what to do, so he put the Ark of God in a nearby home. It stayed there for three months. During that time, the Lord blessed the family that lived there.

David heard how God was blessing the family, so he once again decided to bring the Ark to

Jerusalem. This time he told the Levites to purify themselves and follow the instructions Moses gave on how the Ark of God was to be carried.

The people of Israel were excited as it entered Jerusalem. They made sacrifices to the Lord, shouted for joy, and blew trumpets. David took off his outer coat and danced with all of his might. Everyone rejoiced together.

Michal looked out of the window and was shocked to see her husband leaping around in front of the Ark. She thought it was disgusting.

David placed the Ark in a special tent he had prepared for it. Sacrifices and burnt offerings were made to the Lord. David then blessed the people, and gave them food to eat.

Michal confronted her husband when he went home. She said, "What you did was shameful. You took off your royal coat and jumped around like a fool in front of common slave girls."

David said, "I humbled myself before the Lord. And yes, I'll do it again. Those common people you talked about will honor me for the rest of their lives."

Michal lived her entire life without ever having children.

100 Building an Empire

Building a Nation

2 Samuel 7-8 & 4:4 & I Chronicles 17-18

David established his kingdom and defended it from the nations around him. Finally there was peace in Israel. He then started thinking about building a Temple for the Lord. One day he said to the prophet of God, "I live in a beautiful palace, while the Ark of God remains in a tent!"

The prophet agreed, "Go ahead and build the Temple. God will be pleased."

That night God spoke to the prophet and gave him a message for David. The Lord said, "You were following sheep when I made you king of Israel. I've been with you all these years, and have given you victory over your enemies. Now I'll establish your name among the greatest men who'll ever live. Your royal family line will last forever.

"Still, I won't allow you to build my house. I've made you a man of war and many have died because of you. Your son will be a man of peace, and he will build my house. I'll be a father to him and establish his kingdom."

King David was content when he heard this message, and humbled himself before the Lord. From that day he started looking at the nations around him. He invaded the Philistines and took back the cities and lands they had taken from Israel. He then turned to the Moabites and Edomites and brought them into submission to Israel.

He turned his armies north and defeated nation after nation. Jerusalem became prosperous as gold, silver, bronze, and horses were brought to the city. David set up garrisons in all of these countries to maintain control over

them. He used their men to build up his army. His name became feared and honored throughout that part of the world.

David dedicated to the Lord all that he gained. He brought justice to the people, and taught them righteousness.

One day David asked his servants, "Are there any members of Saul's family still alive? I want to show them kindness just like Jonathan showed kindness to me."

A servant named Ziba spoke up and told him about Mephibosheth, who was Jonathan's son. He was five years old when his nurse heard about the death of Saul and Jonathan. She panicked and ran with the boy on her shoulders. He fell to the ground and his feet were hurt. Ever since, he had been lame in both feet.

David sent for him. He came in and bowed down on the ground. He said, "I am your servant."

David said, "Don't be afraid. I'm returning to you the kindness that your father gave to me. I'm giving you all the fields that belonged to Saul. Also, from now on, you'll eat at my table."

Mephibosheth once again bowed down and said, "I'm nothing but a dead dog. Why should you care about me?"

The king said to Ziba, "You and your sons are to work the lands that I have just given to Mephibosheth. You're now his servants."

So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem and ate at the king's table. He became like one of the David's sons.

2 Samuel 10 & I Chronicles 19-20

In all of David's conquest, he didn't attack the Ammonites because the king had been kind to him when he was running from Saul. One day, the king of the Ammonites died and his son ruled in his place.

David sent a group of men with a message of comfort to the new king. When the men got there, the Ammonite leaders said to their king, "These men aren't here to show David's concern for you. They aren't here to show respect for your father. They're spying on us. They're scouting out our city to see where we're weak."

So the new king took the men and shaved off half of their beard. He then cut off their robes, exposing the lower half of their bodies. The men went back to Israel deeply humiliated.

David heard about this great insult and sent word to his men. "Stay in Jericho until your beards grow back. Then return to us."

The Ammonites finally realized what they had done. They had made David extremely angry. So they started building up their army. They even hired 33,000 soldiers from other countries.

David sent Joab and his army to fight against

the Ammonites. When they were in place, the Ammonite army moved to a position where they were on one side of the Israelites, with the foreign soldiers on the other. Joab realized he was in between the two, with front lines on both sides. Therefore he split the army. He selected his best troops to fight with him and attack the foreign soldiers. Everyone else was to fight the Ammonites under the command of his brother.

Joab said to his brother, "Both of us will be ready to help the other if there's a need. Be brave and fight hard. We must protect our people and the cities of God. May the Lord's will be done."

The battle was decisive. Joab and his elite troops hit the foreign armies so hard that they turned and ran. When the Ammonites saw this, they retreated back into their walled cities. With this, Joab took his army back to Jerusalem.

The foreign army reorganized and came back to fight again. This time, David went with his men and totally defeated them, killing over 40,000 men. Those who escaped went back to their country and never returned again. David waited until spring to finish defeating the Ammonites.

II Samuel 11

When it was spring, it was time to once again attack the Ammonites. Normally David would go with his men, but he decided to stay home.

After taking a nap one afternoon, he walked along the sundeck that was on the roof of the palace. From there, he saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. He sent for a servant and asked, "Who is that woman?"

"Oh, her name is Bathsheba. She is the wife of Uriah, one of your 30 fighting men."

David sent for her, so she came to the palace. He slept with her that night. In time she realized she was expecting a baby, and she knew it was from the night she spent with the king. She sent word to David that she was pregnant.

He decided he had to hide what he had done. So he immediately sent a message to Joab. "Send Uriah to me."

The soldier arrived and the king asked him, "How is the battle going? Is Joab well?" After Uriah gave a report, the king told him he could go home to his wife before going back to the battle. He even sent a gift for the couple.

Uriah left the king, but didn't go home. He slept the night at the door of the palace with all of the king's servants. In the morning, the king called him in and asked, "Why didn't you go home?"

"No, I wouldn't do that. The Ark of God is on the field of battle. The army of Israel sleeps in tents. Joab and his officers are on the field. I can't go to my house and live in ease. I can't eat and drink with my wife while they are sacrificing for our nation."

David said, "Stay here one more day, and then I'll send you back to the battle."

The king then asked Uriah to eat and drink with him. During the course of the evening, David got him drunk. Still, he didn't go home, but slept on a cot at the palace doors.

The next morning David wrote a letter to his commander. "Put Uriah in the front where the fighting is the most fierce. At an assigned moment, have your men fall back, leaving him to die."

The king gave the sealed letter to Uriah, and told him to take it to Joab. He went back to the battle and gave the letter to his commander. Joab obeyed the order and put Uriah at the exact place that was the most dangerous. At the assigned moment, everyone else fell back and Uriah was killed. Bathsheba heard that her husband died in battle, and she mourned his death.

Joab continued his battle against the Ammonite capital city. Finally he broke through and captured their water supply. He sent word to David. "Come quickly! Lead the army into the city and capture it so you'll get the glory."

David went and led the army to victory over the Ammonite cities. He had the Ammonite people totally tear down their walls and all of their buildings. He took everything of value, and put the people to work making bricks.

David then went back to Jerusalem. Once Bathsheba's time of mourning was over, he made her his wife. Soon afterwards, she gave birth to their son. Only God knew about their sin, and he was not pleased.

103 Nathan's Story

Building a Nation

II Samuel 12 & Psalm 51

Only God knew about David's sin with Bathsheba. He sent the prophet Nathan, who stood before the king and told this story: "There were two men who lived in the same city. One was rich. He had a large herd of cattle and a large flock of sheep. The other was poor. He only had one small lamb, but she was like a daughter to him. The lamb grew up with his children as a pet. She ate from their bowls, drank from their cups, and even slept with them at night.

The rich man had a friend come to visit from a far off city. When it came time for a meal, the rich man didn't want to use one of his own sheep. Instead he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for his guest."

David became angry. He stood up and shouted, "That's disgusting! How could he be so heartless? He deserves to die. He'll give the poor man four lambs for what he's done."

Nathan pointed at David and said, "You are the man! The Lord says, 'I made you king over Israel and gave you all you have. I would've given you more if you had asked for it. So why have you despised me and done this evil? You killed Uriah with an Ammonite sword, and took his wife. Because of this, the sword will never leave your house. You did all of this in secret, but I'll judge you openly.' "

David broke down before Nathan. "I have sinned against the Lord."

Later, he wrote this prayer:

"Oh God, have mercy upon me.

Hold me tight within your love.

In your compassion, remove my rebellion.

*Wash my guilt, and remove
the stain of my sin.*

I know I'm rebellious.

My sin haunts me day and night.

You're the one I fought against.

This evil is against you.

You're right to be angry and throw me away.

I've been this way all my life.

But I know you want to teach me.

Go deep inside of me and put wisdom there.

*Use harsh cleansers until
everything is absolutely clean.*

Replace my depression with joy.

*Remove my sin and give me
a clean new heart.*

*Give me a determined spirit,
and restore the joy of my salvation.*

*If you do these things, I'll teach others about
your ways."*

Nathan went to David and said, "The Lord has heard your prayer and has taken away your sin. You'll not die, but the child will die because of how you treated the Lord."

Suddenly, the child became sick. David begged God to spare him. The king wouldn't eat, but spent day and night on the ground pleading with God. His servants tried to get him to eat, but he refused.

On the seventh day, the child died. The servants were afraid to tell David. They had watched him agonize while the child was still alive. They thought he would do something desperate when he found out the child was dead.

He saw them whispering to one another. He said, "Is the child dead?"

"Yes, he is dead."

So David got up off the ground, took a bath, and put on clean clothes. He worshipped in the house of the Lord and then sent for something to eat.

The servants were amazed. He explained it to them. "While the child was still alive, I pleaded with the Lord in case he would be gracious and let the child live. But now that he's dead, there's nothing I can do. He can't come back to me, but I can go to him."

Later, Bathsheba gave birth to another son, and David named him Solomon. The Lord loved Solomon, and said he would be the next king of Israel.

 2 Samuel 13

Amnon was David's oldest son, and was his favorite. Amnon had everything he wanted, except one thing. He wanted his half sister Tamar. She was beautiful and a virgin. He thought about her all the time. He literally got sick wishing he could go to bed with her.

He had a cousin who was known to be crafty. Once he heard how Amnon felt, he came up with a plan. He said, "Lay in your bed as if you're sick. When the king asks about you, tell him you want Tamar to come make some bread in your room. Tell him you want her to feed it to you."

Amnon followed this plan, so the king asked Tamar to go help her brother with some food. While she was there, Amnon sent all the servants out of the room. As she handed him some food, he grabbed her and said, "Get in bed with me!"

She begged him, "No, please. Stop this. This is a horrible sin. You're putting me to shame. Ask the king and he'll give me to you. He'll give you anything."

But Amnon wouldn't listen. He pulled her into bed and raped her. As soon as he was done, he no longer wanted her. In fact, he hated her. He said, "Get out of here!"

She yelled, "No! Don't throw me away. What you've done is wrong, but sending me away is worse."

He shouted for his servant. "Take this woman out of here and lock the door behind her."

After Tamar was put out, she tore her clothes, the ones that showed she was a virgin. She put ashes on her head and cried as she walked along.

Her brother was Absalom. As soon as he

heard what happened, he vowed to kill Amnon. But he knew it had to be planned out carefully. So, he had his sister move into his house. He told her, "For now, try to put it out of your mind. Don't say anything about it."

From that day on, Tamar was sad and moody, and Absalom totally stopped speaking to Amnon. The king was furious when he heard about the rape. Still he didn't do anything about it.

Two years later, Absalom held a sheep shearing party and invited all of David's sons. He made sure Amnon would be there. Absalom provided a large banquet for the occasion. Everyone had plenty to eat and drink.

Absalom told the servants to watch Amnon carefully. He said, "Wait until he's had plenty to drink, then kill him. Don't be afraid. You won't get into trouble. You're simply following my orders."

They did exactly as they were told. When the time was right, they killed Amnon. The other sons ran for their lives.

News of this quickly got back to the king. He was told Absalom had killed all of the king's sons. David ripped his clothes and fell to the ground. Finally someone told him that it wasn't true. Only Amnon had died. They said, "Absalom has been planning this since his sister was raped."

Finally, the other sons of David came down the road and went before the king. Everyone cried together.

Absalom ran to a neighboring country to hide from his father. David grieved for Amnon for three years.

105 Absalom's Return

Building a Nation

2 Samuel 14

After three years, David finally stopped mourning for Amnon. Then he started to miss his son Absalom. Still, he wouldn't ask him to return from hiding.

Joab noticed this, so he hired a woman who was good at acting. He told her to go to the king, and he gave her the words she should say. She went before David dressed in clothes of mourning. She bowed before him and said, "Help me, my king."

David said, "Tell me your problem."

"I only had two sons after my husband died. Recently they got into a fight and no one stopped them. Soon, one killed the other one. Now my family says I'm to give them the only son I have left. They say he must die because he's a murderer. My king, this would remove my husband's name from the earth."

David said, "You can go home. I'll take care of this for you. If anyone says this isn't right, bring them to me."

She said, "Oh, please swear by God that my son won't be killed for what he did."

David said, "I swear it by the Lord who lives. Your son won't die for this."

She said, "May I ask you one more question?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I knew you'd give me a right judgment because the wisdom of God is in you. You clearly see what is good and what is evil. That's why this judgment was good.

"So, why don't you follow your own judgments? You're wronging the nation of God by not bringing back your son. We're all going

to die someday, but God is the God of life. He wants us to be reconciled to one another."

David said, "You asked me a question, now I have one for you. Listen to me carefully. You must tell me the truth. Did Joab send you here to talk to me?"

She said, "My lord the king has the wisdom of the Angel of the Lord. No one can get anything around him. Yes, your servant Joab told me what to say, but it's only because he loves you and wants what's best for you."

The king called for Joab and said, "Go and bring Absalom back in peace, but I don't want to see him." So Joab went and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. He was allowed to live in his own house.

Two years went by and he still wasn't allowed to see the king. Finally he decided to ask Joab to arrange a meeting between him and his father. He sent for Joab, but he didn't come. He sent for him a second time, but he still didn't come. Finally Absalom sent his servants to set a fire to Joab's barley field.

Joab went and yelled at Absalom. "Why did you set fire to my field?"

"I had to get your attention. Now tell me. Why did you bring me back to Jerusalem? I was better off where I was. Go to the king and arrange a meeting between the two of us. I want to see him even if he kills me."

So Joab arranged a time when the king and his son could meet. Absalom went before his father and bowed down with his face to the ground. David got up and went and kissed his son.

II Samuel 15-17:23

Absalom was a handsome man with beautiful thick hair. He was also ambitious and wanted to be king. To impress people, he rode in a chariot with 50 men running ahead of him.

In the morning, he stood by the road that went to the city gate. He honored anyone who bowed down to him. If he saw someone going to see the king about a problem, he asked, "What city are you from?" If they were from one of the northern tribes, he'd say, "I understand your problem. It's too bad the king won't listen to you. If I were king, I'd make sure you were heard."

Soon, the northern tribes of Israel became loyal to Absalom. When the time was right, he sent messengers to them saying, "Listen for the ram's horn. When you hear it, shout, 'Absalom is king!'"

The conspiracy spread quickly. More and more people started supporting Absalom. He left the city and enlisted the help of Ahithophel, one of David's advisors. Both David and Absalom knew that Ahithophel's wisdom was a gift from the Lord.

David didn't hear about this until it was too late. By then he knew his life was in danger, so he and his servants quickly left the city. He took off his shoes, covered his head, and openly cried as he walked up the Mount of Olives. People came and cried along the path.

Once he arrived on top of the Mount, he saw Hushai, one of his friends and advisors. David said to him, "Don't come with me. Go tell Absalom that you'll serve him just like you served me. Advise my son against Ahithophel's counsel as much as you can."

They then set up a way Hushai could send David information about Absalom's plans. Hushai returned to Jerusalem just as Absalom and a large crowd were entering the city. Ahithophel was at his side. Hushai bowed before Absalom and said, "Long live the king!"

Absalom said, "Why didn't you go with your friend?"

Hushai said, "I'll serve the one the Lord and the people have chosen. I'll serve you just as I served your father."

As David was leaving, he passed by the home of a man named Shimei. He was from the family of Saul. Shimei started throwing stones at David and yelling, "You deserve this, you filthy murderer! God is judging you for what you did to King Saul. Go hide in a hole, where you belong."

A soldier pulled out his sword and said, "This filthy dog is dead! I'm going to cut off his head!"

David turned to him, "Why would you do that? It was the Lord who said to him, 'Shimei, go curse David!' Why would we fight God at a time like this? Maybe the Lord will see what I'm going through and have pity on me."

So David and his men continued down the road with Shimei on a ridge above them. He kept yelling curses at David and throwing stones and dirt at him.

Once Absalom was in the palace, Ahithophel said, "Allow me to take 12,000 men and chase after David tonight. I'll attack him while he's weak and tired. This will cause his people to panic and they'll scatter. I'll only kill the king, and bring all the others back to you. We'll have peace when

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people see that you've only killed the king and allowed everyone else to live."

This proposal seemed good to Absalom, but he said, "Send for Hushai. I want to hear his advice."

When Hushai heard this plan, he said, "Oh no! Don't do that. You know your father and his men. They're warriors. Right now they're like a wild bear, robbed of her cubs. Your father knows how to fight. He's probably hiding in one of the caves, waiting for your men to come out. If you act now, some of your men will get killed. Once the people hear that, they'll say that David is slaughtering your forces. Everyone will believe it because they know your father is

a skilled warrior.

"Here's what you should do. Gather a great army from all over Israel. Personally lead them into battle. Attack David wherever you find him. With a massive army, you can make sure he doesn't escape. If any city hides him, totally destroy that city and don't leave one stone on top of another."

The Lord caused Absalom to ignore Ahithophel's advice, even though it was better. Therefore Absalom said, "We'll follow the advice of Hushai."

When Ahithophel heard this, he knew that David would win the war. So he went to his hometown, set his affairs in order, and hung himself.

Continued in the next story

107 Absalom's Defeat

Building a Nation

II Samuel 17:24 – 19:8

Continued from the previous story

David was prepared for war by the time Absalom had gathered a large army and chased after him. People of that area had given him supplies and Joab had organized the army.

David laid out a plan of action to fight the army of Absalom. He said to his men, "I'll lead you into battle."

They said, "No! Stay in the city. If one of us dies, no one will care. Half of us could die, and no one would even notice. But you're worth 10,000 soldiers. Stay in the city."

So the king stood beside the gate while his troops marched out. He said to Joab, loud enough so everyone could hear, "For my sake, be merciful with my son, Absalom."

David's army marched into battle and defeated the army of Israel. It turned into a slaughter, with over 20,000 men dead.

Absalom was riding away from the battle on a mule. Suddenly his hair got caught in the branches of a large tree. It pulled him off the mule, and he was left hanging in midair. Some of David's men saw him hanging there, and went and told Joab.

He said, "What? You saw him hanging there, and you didn't kill him? I would've paid you ten pieces of silver if you had killed him!"

They said, "We wouldn't kill the king's son even if you gave us 1,000 pieces of silver. We heard what he said. He wants us to spare his son. If we had killed him, the king would find out about it, ... and you'd let us take the blame."

Joab said, "I'm wasting my time talking to you!" He took three spears and went to where Absalom was hanging. He and several of his guards surrounded Absalom and killed him.

Joab then blew the ram's horn, and his troops stopped chasing the army of Israel. Absalom was taken down from the tree and thrown into a large pit. With that, all the men of Israel went home.

A young man said to Joab, "I'll run and tell the king how the Lord has given him victory."

Joab said, "No, I'll send someone else." So he then sent another runner.

The young man begged Joab to let him run as well. Finally he was given permission to go. The young man ran, but he was faster than the other runner and got to the king first.

David was sitting just inside the gate, waiting for news of the battle. A watchman on the wall called down and told him a runner was coming.

As the young man got close, the watchman called down to David that another runner was coming. The young man bowed before the king and said, "The battle went well. You've won! The Lord has given you victory."

David said, "What about Absalom? Is he alive?"

"I don't know. I heard a lot of noise, but I didn't know what that was about."

"Stand over there and wait."

The second runner came up and said, "I have good news. God has given you victory today."

David said, "What about Absalom? Is he alive?"

The runner said, "May all of your enemies end up like him."

The king was cut to the heart! He went up to the gate chamber and cried out in anguish. "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!"

News of this got back to the army. Suddenly their joy of victory turned to sadness. It was as if they had lost the battle.

Joab went to David. "Your men risked their lives for you. They not only saved your life, but they saved the lives of your family. Now they're ashamed of what they have done. They think you wanted them to die instead of your son.

"Get up right now. Go out and encourage your men. If you don't, they'll all leave you and your troubles will be worse than ever."

So David got up and went to sit at the gate. Soon all of his men came and sat with him.

108 David's Kingdom Restored

Building a Nation

II Samuel 19:9 – 20:13

After Absalom was defeated and killed, his army ran from the battlefield and went back to their homes. At that point the people of Israel started remembering all the good things David had done for them through the years. Together they issued a call to David, asking him to once again be their king.

The tribe of Judah wasn't represented in this call, so David sent them a message. "Why aren't you asking me to come back? After all, I'm one of you."

They immediately sent him a message, "Come back and be our king." They then rushed to the Jordan River and escorted him and his family across.

As soon as David crossed the river, Shimei ran up and fell down before him. He said, "I know I sinned against you when you left Jerusalem. Please don't hold that against me. As you can see, I'm the first one to welcome you back."

Joab's brother stepped forward and said, "Let

me kill him. You're the Lord's anointed, and he disgraced you."

David said, "Put away your sword. Today is a special day. I'm once again king. No one will be killed in Israel today." He then turned to the man before him. "Shimei, you'll not die for what you did."

Immediately, there was an argument between the tribes of Israel. The other tribes said to Judah, "Why didn't you include us when you brought the king across the river?"

Judah said, "We're his relatives."

The others said, "He's king over all of Israel, not just Judah. So he's ten times more our king than yours." This once again divided the nation and the fighting between the tribes became intense.

A man named Sheba stepped forward and blew a ram's horn. He said, "David isn't king over Israel. Let Judah have him. Let's go home."

With that, the people of Israel left. Only the tribe of Judah took David to Jerusalem.

109 Wise Woman of Abel

Building a Nation

❗ *II Samuel 19:13 & chapter 20 &
I Chronicles 2:16-17*

David removed Joab from his command of the army. He replaced him with Amasa, who was also his nephew. He said to Amasa, “Gather my troops in three days so you can hunt down Sheba.”

Amasa started gathering an army, but it took him too long. He wasn’t back in three days. David said to Joab’s brother, “We must act fast if we’re to defeat Sheba. If we give him time, he’ll be a bigger danger than Absalom ever was. Go after him immediately.”

Joab joined his brother, and together they quickly organized an army. They then left Jerusalem to capture Sheba.

Along the way, Amasa finally caught up with them. Joab walked over to him, “Amasa, my cousin. How are you?” He then reached up with his right hand as if to draw Amasa closer and greet him with a kiss. Amasa didn’t see the knife in Joab’s left hand.

Joab stabbed Amasa in the stomach. He fell to the ground, dying but not yet dead. Joab turned and left to continue his search for Sheba. A soldier stood next to Amasa and shouted, “Follow Joab if you’re loyal to king David.”

As the army followed Joab, they kept slowing down as they passed Amasa, who was groaning in extreme pain. Some even stopped to look at him. Finally a soldier pulled Amasa off to the side of the road and threw a blanket over him. Then the army moved along quickly.

They chased Sheba all around the country. He

finally took his men to a city called Abel. Joab’s troops lay siege on the city and built a ramp against its walls. The purpose was to tear down the walls and destroy the city.

As they were working, a woman yelled out to them. She was known around that area as woman of wisdom. She said, “Go get Joab so I can talk to him.”

Joab came to that part of the wall and yelled, “What do you want?”

She yelled back, “Are you Joab?”

“Yes, what do you want?”

She said, “People say, ‘Go to Abel to get the best advice.’ That’s because we know how to solve problems. So why would you want to destroy a valuable resource like Abel? Our city is like a mother to Israel.”

He said, “We’re not here to destroy your city. We’re chasing Sheba, who has rebelled against David, our king. If you give us this man, we’ll leave your city alone.”

The woman said, “I’ll hold you to that. We’ll throw Sheba’s head out to you.”

The woman went and talked to the city officials. They trusted her wisdom, so they caught Sheba, cut off his head, and threw it out to Joab.

Once Joab saw it, he blew the ram’s horn, and his army went home. Joab went back to Jerusalem, where he was once again made commander of David’s army.

110 Ethnic Cleansing

Building a Nation

! *II Samuel 21*

A famine hit the land of Israel. At first, David thought it was a natural event until it lasted for three years. He then realized the famine was from God. So he asked the Lord about it. God said, “It is because of what Saul did to the Gibeonites.”

The Tabernacles of God was at Gibeon. The Ark of God was in Jerusalem, but the Tabernacle was set up in Gibeon. So there were two place of worship.

The Gibeonites made an agreement with Israel in the days of Joshua. Saul decided to ignore those agreements and eliminate the Gibeonite population. He tried to totally annihilate their existence.

David went to them and said, “Our people have wronged you. How can we once again be reconciled with you?”

They said, “Money can’t pay for killing our brothers and sisters. And we don’t have the power to strike back at Israel. Still, our complaint isn’t toward Israel. It’s only toward the man who tried to exterminate us from the earth.”

David said, “So, what can we do for you?”

They said, “Give us seven of Saul’s descendants. We will hang them in his hometown, near where the people worship the Lord.”

David agreed. He selected two of Saul’s sons and five of his grandsons. He spared Mephibosheth because of his promise to Jonathan.

The Gibeonites killed the seven men and hung their bodies on a hill near where people went to worship. They were to hang there from April, which was the beginning of harvest, until October, which was the beginning of the rainy season.

Saul’s wife went to the site where her sons and grandsons were hanging. She stayed there day and night to protect the bodies from the birds during the day and the wild animals during the night.

When the allotted time was over, David went to the city where Saul and Jonathan were buried and got their bones. He then buried them in their family tomb, along with the seven men. After all of this was done, God once again heard David’s prayers concerning the land.

Years later, the Philistines once again declared war on Israel. David went with his men to fight a battle. He suddenly became exhausted during the fight. A relative of Goliath saw this as his opportunity to kill David. The Philistine was a huge man of great strength. He moved in to make the kill. One of David’s men stopped the giant and killed him.

David was taken off the battlefield, and his men took an oath. They said, “You are never to fight with us again. You’re the Lamp of Israel, and you’re not to put it out on the battlefield.” So David never went out to war again.

111 Numbering the People

Building a Nation

II Samuel 24 & I Chronicles 21

King David called for Joab and said, “Go throughout the land and number all the people.” He did this to see how big of an army he could build.

Joab knew this wasn’t God’s will for David. He said, “Don’t disobey the Lord. God will give you as many people as you need for any situation.” But David insisted, so Joab used his army to go to every part of Israel and count the people. When they were finished, he told David there were over 1,300,000 men who were able to go to war if needed.

After David heard this report, he knew the Lord wasn’t pleased that he had done this. He prayed, “Oh God, I’ve acted foolishly and sinned against you. Forgive my sin.”

The Lord sent a prophet to give David a message. “You’re to choose one of three punishments for this sin.

- a famine that will devastate the land three years,
- an invading army to whom you’ll lose battle after battle for three months,
- or an epidemic that will sweep across the land for three days.”

David said, “All three of these terrify me! Still, I choose to suffer under the hand of God, rather than at the hands of men. I know the Lord is merciful.”

So God sent the angel of the Lord, who swept across the land with a severe epidemic. 70,000 men died! The angel then focused on Jerusalem. As death came upon the city, God said, “Stop! It’s enough!”

The angel immediately stopped. He was over a threshing floor owned by a Jebusite named

Ornan. It was the exact place where Abraham had offered his son to the Lord.

David looked up and saw the angel holding a sword stretched out over the city. Ornan also saw the angel so he ran and hid.

David fell down with his face to the ground. “Oh Lord, I’m the one who sinned! Not these people. They’re like sheep. What have they done? Punish me and my family.”

The prophet walked up to David with a message from God. “Build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor.” David immediately walked toward it. When Ornan saw this, he ran to the king and bowed down.

David said, “Sell me your threshing floor, so I can build an altar to the Lord. Then he will hold back the plague from the people. I’ll pay you full price for it.”

Ornan said, “Oh King, I’ll give it to you. Please take it and build your altar. Use my oxen for the burnt offering, and use my wood for the fire. I give it all. I trust the Lord will hear you.”

David said, “No my friend, I’ll buy it all at full price. I won’t sacrifice to the Lord using that which costs me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor, the oxen, and the wood. He then built the altar and sacrificed to the Lord.

God heard David’s prayer and sent fire from heaven to burn up the offering. He then commanded the angel, “Put away your sword!” With that, the epidemic was over.

From that day on, David used that altar whenever he sacrificed to God. He said, “This is the house of the Lord.”

Then he organized people and bought materials that were needed for building the Temple. Years later, Solomon built the Temple of the Lord at that very place.

1 Kings 1

When David became old and frail, he was always cold. Covering him with blankets didn't help. Finally they decided to provide him with a nurse that would sleep with him. They found a beautiful virgin and she was his constant nurse. She slept with him, but they didn't have sex.

Adonijah was the fourth son of David, a younger brother of Absalom. He was just as handsome as his brother. David never disciplined Adonijah, or even corrected him.

Since David was old and bedridden, Adonijah said, "I'll be the next king." He hired 50 bodyguards to run before him as he rode through the streets in a chariot. He asked Joab to help him, and also enlisted the help of the high priest. Others refused to help, including Nathan the prophet.

Adonijah hosted a banquet and invited those who supported him. He also invited his brothers, David's servants, and officials of Judah. But he didn't invite those who opposed him, and he didn't invite Solomon.

Bathsheba was Solomon's mother. Nathan went and told her what was happening. He said, "The king doesn't know what Adonijah is doing. If we don't stop this, you and your son will die." He then told her exactly how they should tell the king.

She went to David's bedroom, where his nurse was serving him. Bathsheba said, "My lord, you said Solomon would be king after you. But now Adonijah has made himself king without you knowing it. All of Israel is looking to you to tell them exactly who should be king. If you die without telling them, Solomon and I will be killed as criminals."

At that exact moment, Nathan came in and

said, "My lord king, did you make Adonijah king? Today he's having a banquet with the officials of Israel. They're eating and drinking and saying 'Long live the King.' Many of us weren't invited. I'm surprised you authorized this without letting me know."

David said to Bathsheba, "As sure as the Lord lives, your son Solomon will be king after me. It will happen today."

He then gave an assignment to certain priests, officials, and the prophet Nathan. "Have Solomon ride on my personal mule to the place where you'll anoint him king. Afterwards, blow the rams horns and shout 'Long live King Solomon!' Then have him sit on my throne. Tell everyone he's the one I've selected to be king after me."

The men followed David's instructions. As soon as Solomon was pronounced king, the people flowed into the streets shouting, playing flutes, and celebrating.

The people at Adonijah's banquet heard the noise and wondered what was happening. Men rushed in and told them. "King David has made Solomon king of Israel! Right now he's sitting on the royal throne."

Everyone quickly left the banquet and went home. Adonijah was terrified of what Solomon would do to him. He went to the Tabernacle and grabbed the horns of the altar. He sent a message to Solomon saying "I'm your slave. Please promise me you'll not kill me."

Solomon sent a message back. "I won't kill you if you act like a man of character. But if not, I'll have you killed." So Adonijah went and bowed down before Solomon and gave him honor as the new king.

113 Death of David & Joab

Building a Nation

I Kings 2

Before David died, he gave Solomon instructions on how he should rule as king. He said, "To be successful, you must be strong and brave, and always walk in the ways of God's commandments.

"Kill Joab when the time is right. He murdered two commanders of Israel – Abner, Saul's commander, and Amasa, his cousin. He didn't kill them on the battlefield. Both of these men trusted him because it was a time of peace. Don't let him grow old peacefully.

"Remember that Shimei cursed me when I was running from Absalom. He begged for mercy and I said he could live. It's up to you to punish him. Deal with him according to your wisdom."

Soon after that, David died and they buried him in Jerusalem. He had been king for forty years.

Later, Adonijah went to Bathsheba and said, "You know that all of Israel expected me to become king. I accept Solomon as king, because it's God's will for Israel. I just have one request."

"What is it?"

"The king won't refuse anything if you ask for it. So please, go and ask if I can have David's nurse as my wife."

So Bathsheba went to Solomon. He stood and greeted her and called for a throne to be set at his right hand.

She sat down and said, "I have one little request. Please don't turn me down."

"Mother, ask and I'll give it to you."

She said, "Please let Adonijah have David's nurse as a wife."

Solomon was shocked. He said, "This is the same as asking if he could be made king. This

request will cost Adonijah his life. He'll be dead before this day ends." Solomon then gave the order, and Adonijah was killed.

The high priest had supported Adonijah, so the king took his job away from him. He was the last priest from the line of Eli. This fulfilled the prophecy given about him.

Joab knew that his time had come, so he went to the Tabernacle and grabbed the horns of the altar. Solomon heard about this and told a guard, "Go kill him."

The guard went and told Joab, "Come out here."

He said, "No, I'll die here."

The guard went back and told the king. Solomon said, "Do as he asked. Kill him there! He deserves to die for murdering two good men who were better than himself." So Joab was killed at the altar and buried near his home.

Solomon then called for Shimei. The king said, "Build a house in Jerusalem and live there. You're not to leave this city for the rest of your life. If you leave, you'll die. So, your life is in your hands."

Shimei said, "This is fair. I'll do as you have said."

He lived in Jerusalem for three years. One day, two of his slaves ran away, so Shimei went after them and brought them back.

Solomon had him brought in. "You ignored the command I gave you. Now you'll pay for what you did to my father. You cursed him, yet his kingdom will last forever." With that, Shimei was killed.

So Solomon established himself as King of Israel.