

THE SAR'IM CHRONICLES

BOOK 6: THE ROYAL CONFLICT



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THE SAR'IM CHRONICLES

Volume 2: THE BOOKS OF CONFLICT

Book 6: THE ROYAL CONFLICT

INSPIRED BY YAH'S HOLY SPIRIT



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THE ROYAL CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

The Sar'im Chronicles is the title given to a series of books that will be divided into five distinct volumes. The first of these, *The Books of War*, contains three books that deal primarily with the theme of the eternal conflict between the powers of angels and demons. *The Books of War* set forth the history of this conflict, from its origin until it became fully manifest on Earth, bearing not only on the spiritual characters that are its principle players, but also the humans who are caught in the middle.

Volume 2: The Books of Conflict, deal with the theme on a more personal level. Gone are the grandiose battles that take place in the Heavenly Kingdom, above the Ark, at the Tower of Babel. The three books that fall under this heading show how individual characters, such as Abraham and Moses, deal with the spiritual world and its factors, and they reveal the fact that individual choices have a great impact on the history of our world.

The third and fourth volumes, likewise, present unique viewpoints to the spiritual controversy, but the fifth volume is unique even among these. *Volume 5: The Books of Ages* present disjoint episodes from the history of the warfare, nevertheless they hang together on the central idea that Yahshua the Messiah (Jesus the Christ) was ordained from the foundation of the world to present Himself as a Sacrifice for fallen man. This eternal truth has had an impact both before and after the incident actually occurred, and the age in which men are living matters not nearly as much as the quality of that man's character as it relates to the divine purpose.

— David Aguilar

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

PROLOGUE: A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

Fear not.

I am Jehuel, a Prince of Heaven, and one of the blessed Seraphim. I stand here upon the beach and look out over the waters, where the setting sun's light is playing over the waves, making patterns and designs in a secret language that only spirits know. I stand here with the wind rushing past me, knowing that if I desired I could feel it coursing through the feathers of my six wings, and whipping about the hair that hangs down past my shoulders.

As I close my eyes I can hear the sounds made by the creatures under the water, the crawling things in the grass beyond the sand at my feet, and the living things that wing through the heavens, and I hear a kind of music that reminds me who the Creator is. The beaches are among my favorite places on the earth, for standing on the ground, and looking out over the waters, I remember the very first days of this planet's formation.

Those who are familiar with the testimonies of my brethren will remember me as the first to feel the direct wounds of Lucifer's dark arsenal. I was the first of the angels to know pain beyond the emotional and spiritual unease of the rebellion, and to fall, though only temporarily, to the adversary's might. The end of the first day of the earth's creation was the end of the dark angels' period of grace, and the beginning of our painful war. All these things come back to me as I see the ocean, which lay like a serene blanket over this theater of spirits from before your people came to be.

There, in the waters, was the promise of beauty, and as I look over them now I remember one man in particular, who was a creature of great beauty. This record, which I now bear, is not about that man. This record is not about my part in the history of your world beyond a few isolated incidents, but the man of whom I am thinking is the one who first drew my attention to the events I must relate.

His name was Samuel, and he was a prophet.

Samuel was a friend of mine, although he never saw me revealed in bodily form. While I was the guide of his visions, and his guardian spirit, I was never made manifest to him. Nevertheless, as the conduit through which the prophet spoke to

the Almighty, I knew this man more intimately than any human could have known him, and in that knowledge I rejoiced that we angels were created as ministering spirits.

But for want of wings and for the body of flesh, Samuel was a Seraph. He played and heard the songs of the prophets. His voice was ever raised in thanksgiving to His exalted Father, and his long hair, fragrant with the oils of earth's chemistry, was a sign of his sacred nature. Samuel was a crown on the head of humanity, particularly so in the dark time during which he was called to service, and for the love of Samuel I willingly kept watch over the nation of Israel long after the old man took his rest.

As the sun continues to set, and the light on the waters fade, I remember another night that was not so pleasant, for one who had received an anointing, a great anointing, had come to the end of his time.

He and I, at one time, had shared a love of Samuel. He and I, at one time, had the good of IaHWeH's chosen as our foremost concern. He and I, at one time, felt the sting of Lucifer's dark blade, but there our similarities ended. I recovered, and this individual did not.

The wound was in his heart, deep and festering, sparkling with a dark glow that was readily apparent to the many angels and demons that watched over this hooded figure's desperate journey. It was not a new injury. In fact, it had been there for years, polluting the flow of his thoughts, and turning every hope to despair. The fear of death, the too-late fear of madness, was upon this mighty figure, as he trudged through the mud and undergrowth of his country. It was a dark night, and a quiet one. There was a storm raging, but it was not a storm of rain and lightning; it was a storm of spirit.

The two soldiers who traveled with this man said nothing. They had spoken their minds, and attempted to dissuade their lord from his course, but they were men under authority, and could not force his hand. They, in fact, were the ones who had made this adventure possible, having provided their companion with the location of the woman he now sought, though their consciences now stung them, and regret grew ever more weighty with every step.

As they approached the hidden dwelling, the night seemed to darken even more, although the stars continued to shine in the sky up above. What these soldiers had no way of knowing was that the darkness they felt rather than saw was the dense cloud of demons that had anticipated their journey, and had gathered themselves to watch.

There were few angels in proportion to the number of fallen spirits. I stood nearby, for the love of Samuel, and a small company was with me; but by the very darkness that hung as a dome of midnight over that house, we knew that any

requests for intervention we could think to make would be denied. The curse and blessing of freedom were met tonight in the heart of the one who was attempting to act, and to walk, as if he were no king.

“Who are these, my lords, that come to seek my aid?” came a voice from the shadows of the home. A short while later the faint glow of burning oil came into view, and a woman with a lamp pushed the door open, almost as if she had been expecting them.

She was of medium height, and the color of her hair indicated that she was not of any great age. Her clothing seemed to speak of means beyond what the state and location of her home would indicate, and she was not a thin woman – she was not lacking for food or any financial considerations. The soldiers who entered with their master knew the import of these things: she was being paid. Although her trade, and her practices, even her life, was forbidden in Israel, there were some, and enough, who resorted to her methods and kept her in business.

“I come seeking the benefits of your talents,” said the hooded man, who stood with a decided stoop, and sloped, tired shoulders.

“My talents, my lord?” came the reply. “What talents can this daughter of Israel possess that would cause you to come such a way? For your men are tired, and I bid you all to sit and take your rest.”

“I seek the benefits of your talents,” repeated the traveler, and he added, “those that cause you to live apart from other daughters of Israel, though you dress and live as the wife of one who could sit in the gates of a city.” The incongruence of the woman’s appearance to her housing had not escaped this man’s notice, for he knew quality workmanship when he saw it, and he did not wish to remain in this place, playing at games, any longer than necessary.

The traveler then said, directly, “I pray, grant me a divination, and use your skill with familiar spirits. Call forth for me one whom I will name to you.”

“Divination?” asked the woman, as if hearing it for the first time. “Surely...” she began a denial, but then she saw the eyes of the three men upon her, and said, rather, “Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off from the land all who have familiar spirits, and necromancers, so why have you come to ask about such things? Why have you come seeking me? Why do you speak to me of such forbidden things? Are you seeking to entrap me, to secure my death, as they have done with others before me?”

“No,” said the hooded man. “As Yahweh lives,” he spoke, invoking in human language the name of the very Creator, “you will not be punished for this thing I ask of you.”

The woman pursed her lips and stared at the men for a moment before turning away. As she did so, one of the soldiers noticed the strange way in which her eyes caught the flickering light of the lamp. Had he known the ancient first-queen of Babylon, he would surely have recognized it. “Who are you,” she asked, “that I should take so great a risk for your sakes?”

“We are those that can pay,” said the traveler. “You will be compensated, even rewarded, for telling me that which I must know. Have no fear of penalty, for I assure you of protection from the king.”

“And who will ensure *your* protection,” she asked, warily. “None are above the law of Saul, and we have heard, even here in En’Dor, that he is quick to anger, and without mercy for transgressors... more so in these latter years than ever before.”

“Let that be my affair. We look to our own safety, but do for me that which I ask.”

“And whom shall I bring up for you?”

“Bring me up Samuel.”

“Samuel the *prophet*?” came the surprised reply. “What have I to do with a man who spoke in Saul’s ear to cast us out of the land, or down into she’ol? What have I to do with Samuel with witch-killer, Samuel the judge, who spoke with fire, and slew kings with the edge of the sword? Was it not Samuel who said we have no power but that which we pretended to have, or were deceived into believing we possessed? Was it not this Samuel who blasphemed the gods of the old ways, and spoke ill of the spirits of the sacred departed?”

“That Samuel,” said the man. “That Samuel, now dead, who left me without counselor or guide. Bring him up to speak with me from his place of rest. I am not yet satisfied listening to his words.”

Surely, if you know of this incident from your Histories, the events that happened that night must have raised questions in your mind. Why should this traveler, who *knew* Samuel, and knew what Samuel said about the true nature of spirits, seek to contact one who was beyond contact until the day of resurrection? Why should this traveler, who knew the command of King Saul, go to such great risks to speak with one who had declared his counsel ended? Why should the woman, who knew Samuel’s reputation, seek to call forth his disembodied essence from the land of the dead?

The last question is, perhaps, the easiest to answer.

My brothers have told you of the Tower at Babel, and the terrible things that took place in that place at that time. They have told you of the demons’ work, to

influence human minds, and to give them the illusion that spirits are theirs to summon and, if carefully handled, to control. All such notions are foolishness and vanity. One angel, on a divine mission, can crush your planet's moon. One demon, operating under the cover of spiritual darkness, can lay waste to a nation. A single spirit, unopposed and given enough time, can destroy every human being alive, until the day your bodies are changed by resurrection or translation into glorified form.

This woman of En'Dor, as one who dealt with evil spirits, was a spiritual descendant of the first high-sorceress, the wife of Nimrod and the corrupter of the world after the flood. It was at her hand, and that of the magician Jebus (of which this record has something to do) that the rituals and procedures for summoning and "containing" demons were forged and passed down to other men who were led to believe that these words and diagrams could contain a creature of the primary genesis. For this reason the witch who received the strange visitation that night truly believed that even the spirit of the prophet Samuel (which she believed had returned to its "pure" and incorporeal form) was at her command if she so desired.

This brings us to the traveler. Samuel had taught all of Israel, as had the messengers before him, that divination and contact with the dead was contrary to the Law of IaHWeH. Not only was it dangerous, it was worse than that... it was useless. Demons know more than men, and can read the patterns of nature and human behavior to a very great degree, and thus are able to make a fairly good show at predicting the future. Necromancy, on the other hand, is a far more serious deception. As the very kings of Israel, who were students of the prophets, wrote, "*The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing,*" and, "*His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*" Despite the often-misunderstood passages of the Histories that have been used in an attempt to demonstrate otherwise, man was created as a union of flesh and life-giving spirit. Upon the separation of these two, the soul ceases to function until the elements of that creature are reunited at the judgment.

Samuel, my former charge, my beloved Seraph, was truly gone until the sounding of the Trumpets. I had mourned for him, as had many in Israel, and was now content to await his return in the day when the lives of the righteous shall be made anew. Yet this traveler, driven beyond reason by fear and a long, painful warfare against sin, was clutching at straws. "Could it be so?" he asked, when he began to turn away from Samuel's teachings to the darker arts that spoke of other wisdom. "The prophets do not know everything," he mused, "and if all is lost in any event, let me see what the spirits can indeed tell me." He had been told by the living Samuel, before his death, that his end was near. He had seen his enemies rise against him, mighty in power and number, and he saw no recourse but to seek aid, even if it were at the hands of the enemies of One whom he now felt had abandoned him.

It was under these conditions that he had said to the soldiers under his command, “Seek me such a one as can provide me this insight,” and said to them thereafter, “Let us go forth and inquire at her spirits.”

As the woman began her arcane rituals, one dark spirit detached himself from the cloud of shadows hanging over the scene. He drifted slowly over to the chanting necromancer and placed his hand upon her shoulders. He leaned forward to whisper into the woman’s ear, even as he had done so often in the past, to give her a message for the confused and desperate seeker. She sat down on the ground and raised her hands, anticipating the words of the spirits, which she had been trained to hear.

As her familiar made ready to speak at the pretense of being Samuel, one even greater than he in Satan’s unholy hierarchy entered the room. He had been watching from farther away than the others, and when he drew near the others bowed before him. This fallen angel, this high spirit of the Order of Powers, caught the attention of the one with his hand on the woman, and said, “This action is ordained by the greater minds. Let me stand before the woman.”

“Of course, *Ba’ali*,” said the familiar spirit. “We are honored by your presence.”

The necromancer’s regular contact with the spiritual world was a demon of a higher Order than the newcomer, nevertheless Kaspriel was the chief of the fallen Ko’achim, or Powers, and was in full favor with Lucifer, the King of the Nine Houses of Evil.

As the lesser spirit removed his hand from his victim’s shoulder, Kaspriel placed his hand upon her head and closed his eyes. “See,” he said, “see.”

The woman’s eyes opened, and she saw smoke arising from her lamp. As the smoke swirled and grew denser, she glanced from this unusual sight to the three men, who were continuing to look expectantly at her. It was clear that they were not able to see what she was seeing, and indeed, there was nothing to see... all that appeared before her was the result of Kaspriel’s work upon her mind. This Power, who had stood with the priests of Egypt against Moses, had only continued to improve his ability to cast illusions over humanity’s senses. By the time of Israel’s monarchy, he had grown to the point where he needed not manipulate the natural world – this had become the specialty of his fellow demon and constant companion Zaphkiel – but could produce almost any vision he wished by working directly upon the signals of the brain. Each of the two Powers had a role to play in deceiving those who wished to serve the Creator. Zaphkiel could produce illusions that were perceived by many, although they were more limited in scope. Kaspriel could force those who fell under his shadow to experience nearly *anything*, but could only do so with one or a few humans at a time.

Before the sorceress, who had been expecting the voice of her familiar friend, there now appeared within the smoke a commanding figure with fierce eyes, long, sacred hair, and a unique garment. With a fearful cry, the woman fell back, scrambling up from her sitting position only to slip and land on the ground again.

In addition to Samuel it appeared, in her view, as if many other mighty and commanding spirits were standing and giving respect to the prophet. “Surely,” she thought, “this is beyond my skill!” The ghostly prophet looked at the woman with the very judgment she would have expected of one who had been responsible for the death and exile of many of her kind. Then, appearing to lose interest in her, the apparition turned to the three men, stretched out a hand, pointed a finger, and said, “Saul.”

Fear gripped the heart of the medium, and she said, “You! Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!”

“Do not be afraid,” the traveler said, stretching himself to his full height, and pulling back the hood that covered his face. Without his deliberate stoop, it would have been immediately clear to any observer who this man was, for he was among the tallest of the Israelites, and there could be no mistaking his regal bearing, marred as it was by a life run aground like a shipwreck.

“Tell me,” said the king, when the woman continued to stare in wordless shock, “What did you see?”

“I saw...” she stammered, “I saw gods ascending out of the earth, and one mighty among them.”

“What does he look like?” Saul inquired eagerly.

“An old man is come up, and he wears a torn mantle over his...”

“Samuel!” the king interrupted, a memory flooding his mind. The last time King Saul had seen his former mentor, many years before this night, the prophet had said to him, “I will not return to the people and worship before them with you, for you have rejected the word of Yahweh, and Yahweh has likewise rejected you as king over Israel!” Saul was unwilling to accept this, however, despite the many opportunities he had been offered to amend a rebellious course. He grabbed for Samuel’s arm, hoping to restrain the old man a moment longer, and to reason with him. All he succeeded in doing, however, was grasping the edge of the prophet’s mantle, and tearing it in two.

Samuel, ever fond of parables, held up the pieces of his ruined garment and said, “Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and given it to one of your fellows that is better than you. This is not my doing, Saul; the Strength of

Israel will not lie, nor will He reverse His decision, for He is not a man, that He should repent.”

“Ah, but for the people, Samuel,” Saul said, using his best argument, and one that had persuaded the old prophet before. “For the sake of the people, and the elders of the people, that they should honor Yahweh’s king, return to the camp with me, that we should worship Yahweh, your Almighty.”

Samuel scowled at Saul, and narrowed his eyes, but then he closed them in resignation and inhaled deeply. They turned to go back to the encampment. “This is the last time, oh king of Israel,” said Samuel, “that you will see my face. For the sake of the people Yahweh has borne long with your pride and your disobedience. You were chosen king to serve, not to rule, the people of Yahweh, who is their one and true King. You have been infected by the heathen nations around you, who treat their rulers as an Israelite should treat Yahweh alone.”

Saul said nothing, but as they drew near enough for the people to see their faces, his eyes lit up in triumph, and he grabbed the prophet’s arm, lifting it in a display of unity and victory that turned the old man’s stomach for sorrow as much as for disgust. Samuel meant what he said; as soon as the distasteful events of that foul day were ended, the prophet returned to his home and never again consented to see the face of the king that he himself had once anointed over the people of Israel.

In the witch’s home, Saul now felt the remorse that he should have felt on that fateful day, for he now saw how he had squandered the time he had been lent, and wasted the benefits of friendship with that old man. “Samuel...” he said, unable to see the vision that Kaspriel was producing in the necromancer’s mind.

As Saul lay on his face, the demonic Power said, “Why have you disturbed my rest, to bring me up?” The woman repeated his words, trembling at the ferocity of the apparition’s tones.

“I am sorely distressed,” replied the unfortunate king, “for the Philistines are at war against me, and Elohim is departed from me. He gives me no answers, not by the prophets, nor by dreams. For this I have called out to you, so that you can tell me... please tell me what I must do.”

“Why do you ask these things of me,” came the reply from the woman’s lips, “seeing that Yahweh has departed from you, and has become your enemy?” Saul lowered his eyes in defeat, but the demon continued to fill the woman’s mind with words, words designed for one thing, and one thing only: to steal the last ember of hope from the fallen king of Israel.

“Yahweh has done to you even as He has spoken by my mouth, for Yahweh has torn the kingdom from your hand, even as you tore my garment – do you remember, Saul? He has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your

neighbor, even unto the young man David. Because you did not obey the voice of Yahweh, nor did you execute His fierce wrath upon Agag of Amalek; for this Yahweh has forsaken you this day.

“Moreover, Yahweh will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will join me in death, for Yahweh will also deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”

The angels standing with me burned with fury. Much of what Kaspiel said was absolutely true. Saul had broken faith with Yahweh, and for this reason the nation had been taken from his hand, and was destined to be led by the young man of whom the vision spoke. Yet Yahweh had said nothing of Saul’s death on that day, nor was this His will for the proud monarch. Saul was to be humbled, yes, stripped of rank and power, yes... but these were to be done for his good, and for the education of the nation of Israel, as it is even written in your Histories, *“A man’s pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.”*

What was to have happened to Saul was to happen in public, as a warning to the nation, yet were it not for the loose lips of the two soldiers with Saul that day, and the decree of IaHWeH that this be known, the events of that night would have been swallowed up and forgotten. From the time of the kings of Israel, the Almighty had decreed that no nation would ever overcome His people. Indeed, no nation ever did, until the land had grown so dark in apostasy, many generations later, that Babylon was allowed to prevail upon it... and even then only for a time. From Saul down to the Messiah, Israel was to be true to its name, as a nation of Overcomers, and the false Samuel who said to Saul, “Yahweh will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines,” spoke there not genuine prophecy, but the will of the demons themselves, that the earth should be left without a witness to the greatness of the Almighty.

Of course, your History declares the truth of the events of that night anyway. Not only was this “Samuel” the source of a false prediction, for the Philistines did not overcome all of Israel in the battle that followed – they only came as far as the outer cities and were content to dwell there until driven off – but he is identified as an evil spirit in the Chronicles of Israel, where it was written of the events that followed, “So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against Yahweh, even against the word of Yahweh, which he kept not, and also for asking of *a familiar spirit*, to enquire.” So reads the record, when the additions of certain men are removed from the English text, and Kaspiel was king, the greatest, of those considered as “familiar spirits.”

All that Saul knew that night, however, was that Samuel had not only confirmed Yahweh’s rejection of him as king, but he had now also added a death sentence for not only himself, but his sons as well.

“Ah, my strength is gone,” said the sorrowful king, lying on the floor of the woman’s home. Saul had been fasting throughout this journey, hoping for a favorable response from the shade of his former mentor; he was now drained of energy, hope and faith.

“Stand, my lord,” said the necromancer, concerned for the king’s state of mind, and also for her own life. While Saul had indeed promised her that there would be no penalty for her actions, the woman of En’Dor had no guarantee that this desperate man would honor his agreements having now received the most wretched of prophecies at her hand. “Behold, this your handmaid has obeyed your commands, even at risk of my own life, and I have heeded all the words you have spoken unto me. Listen now also unto the voice of your handmaid. Let me set a bit of food before you, that you may eat it for your strength before you depart.”

This she said, using careful language, and hoping in her heart that his departure would not be long in coming. “I will eat nothing,” groaned the king, who seemed content to lie motionless until the sun should rise.

“Come up, my lord,” the woman repeated, more insistently this time. She cast a glance at the two silent soldiers, who finally stepped forward and lent their persuasion to resolving the situation.

“What have we to do with this wife of the serpent?” one said, “Who knows what purpose she can have for speaking as she did?”

“We ought to slay her for her words,” the other said,” and moved to grasp the king’s arm to raise him from the floor.

“Let her be,” Saul muttered, pulling himself up partway. “She has spoken only what I have deserved to hear.”

“Come and sit,” said the woman, deliberately ignoring what the soldiers said. “Come and let your handmaid prepare you a meal.”

Eager to appease the unstable king, the woman took the best of her animals, which had been purchased and fed by her predictions to the disobedient Israelites that dwelt near her home, and slew it. As the meat was being cooked, she took some flour and made some bread to accompany the meal. As she prepared the food, she listened carefully to the words of the men in the other room.

“David, always David,” Saul was muttering. “I should have slain that boy when I had the chance, and many times over. I had him in my hand so many times, and how he runs through the wilderness and plots against me, as if the Philistine army were not plague enough!”

“David is not your concern now, my lord,” one of the soldiers said, “we must prepare for the battle ahead. We have greater warriors than the Philistines, and even if what the woman said truly came from Samuel, that old man has been wrong before. Do you not recall, my lord, what things you have said of him before the army? Had not age clouded his judgment even in life? How much more, then, will his vision of Yahweh’s purpose be obscured from the very grave?”

“It is David!” fumed the king. “You have known of these things as well as I, and now this woman speaks of him taking the kingdom. I swear, as Yahweh lives, if I survive tomorrow’s battle, every soldier loyal to the throne will be sent to search out this serpent, and great reward will be his who brings me his head.”

The woman brought in the food and set it before the three men. The two soldiers ate eagerly, but Saul barely took anything in. Even so, when they had finished all appeared to be revived, and they left without saying many more words. The woman breathed a sigh of relief, giving no thought to the fact that she hadn’t been paid a single coin.

Saul marched forth the next day against Philistia and, as the demonic spirit had purposed, he was overcome. Both he and his son Jonathan, of whom this record will also speak, perished before the heathen army, as did two more of Saul’s male children. All those who went out with the king were overcome, and the Israelites of the surrounding cities fled, leaving the region entirely unprotected.

A few days later the news of Saul’s death reached the ears of one who mourned greatly for the loss of the king, although he might have rejoiced that his enemy was deceased. There was no feigned sorrow here, however; this young man wrote a funeral song for the fallen monarch, and it is of the singer of this mournful music that I have come this day to tell you.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

SECTION 1: THE KING OF FIVE STONES CHAPTER 1: JEHUEL'S INVOCATION

I remember the battle in Heaven. I remember Lucifer's eyes, ablaze with hatred, with violence, and with fear. I remember him cutting me down before the witnessing spirits, flexing his muscles for their amazement and awe. I remember awakening with the archangel Raphael's hands on me, and the Cherubim Zephon and Za'afiel looking on anxiously. I remember, when I awakened, that his words were ringing in my ears, "You, Jehuel, have seen me stand before you in the Temple unveiled, and yet here I am!"

This had been my first trial.

Za'afiel has told you of his experience with Lucifer in the Temple. Mine was different. The angels know that, when in the presence of the Shekinah Glory, housed in the sacred Temple in Heaven, our faces must be veiled. Until the corruption of the material plane after the fall of Adam, we Seraphim were as the other angels in this respect, and whenever we entered this most holy ground, our veils were wrapped around our heads as a sign of our utmost respect for that which we have come to call True Light.

By that day I am now recalling, many of Heaven's angels had already become aware of the discontent that was revealing itself more clearly with every passing cycle within Azazel, once the most exalted of the Host. This mighty one, also known as Lucifer, had already managed to win the complete confidence of several spirits, including my fellow Seraph Kemuel. It was this angel I had come to see, to speak with about the rumors. Lucifer, along with his followers, was beginning to perform some strange activities, drawing aside individual members of the Host, bringing them to remote locations, and sharing with them... something I did not know, and something I wished to discover.

As I searched the upper court for Kemuel, I sensed the presence of two powerful spirits. I looked over one of the golden partitions to behold the angel who had recently relinquished the role of Covering Cherub and a four-winged Throne named Nechamael, or The Comfort of El. I caught only the end of the conversation, but the Throne angel was clearly distressed by what he had been hearing.

“You seal up the sum of impropriety,” Nechamael said. “If El Michael has seen fit to preserve your life after this disrespect, I marvel at His patience. As for me, I would be comforted if I did not see your face again for a time, and never in this manner.”

These were strange words coming forth from the uncomfortable Throne; but in those days the Host was becoming accustomed to hearing strange words, and knowing in an instant what they meant. The rebellion was causing, for all its pain and sorrow, growth in the understanding of the ministering spirits. We were beginning to understand things of which we had no reason to conceive before Lucifer began to abuse his freedom. By indulging in rebellious thoughts and actions, the archangel was forcing us all through a hazardous schooling, but of such things you have already been told, and I will not dwell overly long on these unpleasant concepts.

Lucifer began to make a reply, when his partner in conversation abruptly barked, “Enough of this,” and turned to exit the temple.

“You have seen too much, Nechamael,” the falling angel said to the departing spirit, “to ignore what I have said. If you want freedom, and the power you deserve, you must stand with the rest of us. You have little time left!”

I had noticed all along, on some level, that something was wrong with Lucifer’s appearance. It was, however, so absurd a notion that precisely what it was had somehow failed to register in my mind. Nevertheless, when Lucifer turned around, and his face was toward me, there was no mistaking the grave wrongness of the circumstances. I immediately knew what had caused the Throne angel to withdraw so hastily: Lucifer was unveiled within these sanctified walls.

“If you are so eager to meet privately with others,” I said to the angel on the plane below me, “I am ready for my interview.”

“Brave words,” came the reply, as I descended on wing to stand before my former superior.

One attribute of Azazel’s, of which none of my fellow Sar’im has made much mention, is his great height. In the pagan and misinformed writings among humans, the tallness of the angels are often exaggerated to truly nonsensical proportions; nevertheless, it is often the case that an angel’s size is somewhat reflective of his initial glory. I say “initial,” because many of the demons, including Lucifer himself, have retained much of their former stature, although their features have necessarily changed due to the long and weary weight of sin.

I stood before Lucifer, a mighty and tall angel myself, yet this high Prince of the Cherubim was over me by a head, and as he began to speak four more wings sparkled out from his back, giving him the appearance (as Cherubim may assume

at will) of one of my Order. “Do not feel slighted by my apparent neglect, Jehuel. Your turn was coming soon.”

“I cannot consider that a welcome honor,” I replied, “for the few who will speak of your meetings with them after their audience have few pleasant things to report. The others, those who say nothing, are an even greater testimony to the confusion you are creating. They speak little even to their closest friends, and their work suffers. Some have even left their posts, creating more work for others to do. I desire only the plainest of answers, Adonai. What have you done?”

“Jehuel desires plainness of speech,” Lucifer said, sounding amused. “A Seraph’s speech is never plain, and I, who taught the chief of your Order his first song, have earned the right – so I declare – to speak as I desire before the Host.”

“Say on, then, Adonai,” I said, gesturing for him to continue, and being consciously polite to offset the tension creeping through my essence. “Why have you unveiled yourself in this holy place? You of all angels should know why we maintain such reverence here.”

“Consider, my friend; I have four things for you to consider. First, who has commanded us to veil our faces before the Shekinah, and when was this ever declared before the Host? Second, what is the *purpose* of this veiling? Can these thin strips of material prevent the displeasure of Elohim? Third, what is freedom? Have you ever considered the meaning of the word, and what it means to truly be able to choose your own way? And finally, Jehuel, consider this well: here I stand before you, unveiled, and unpunished.”

“I make my reply, Lucifer,” I said, “not to one who does not know these things already, but to one who must need a reminder of why we do as we always have done. First, none commanded us to be veiled; it is as a part of our essences as the songs of a Seraph’s praise. Second, the purpose of the veiling is not to prevent IaHWeH’s displeasure, but to confirm *our* pleasure, that we serve a Master that is above us, beyond us, and worthy of our adoration and praise. Third, freedom is what allows us to know we are acting for love, and not compulsion.

“Fourth,” I concluded, as the meaning of *punishment* registered in my essence, “do not challenge El Michael or IaHWeH with your arrogance. The Almighty is not a Law, that acts without thought or emotion. The Law is His creation. Neither is His mercy unbalanced by justice, for He knows all things, and does always that which is best for His creation. Mercy also is His creation.”

“You are not unique in these replies, Jehuel,” said Lucifer. “Others have said the same, believed the same, tried to convince me, or ‘remind’ me of these same things. Here I stand, unconvinced.” Lucifer shook his head, almost, it seemed to me at the time, regretfully. “I cannot be won so easily with words, my friend, not anymore. I have seen the glory of IaHWeH, I have led His praise, and I have cast

my crown at His feet. Nothing, none of these, has contented me in these latter days. What would you have me do, Seraph? Shall I ignore these thoughts for all of the ceaseless ages before us?”

“You speak as one who has no hope of healing,” I said, understanding these things even as I gave voice to them. “This *machaleh*,” I said, using a word that translates into human languages as “sickness,” “it does not come from the things you have done, but the thing you have become, because you have not been soft of heart, and easily satisfied.”

“Easily manipulated, you mean,” retorted the darkening archangel. “Your third reply was the weakest. To know we are acting for love and not compulsion... I do not know that this has ever been true.”

“Then you are no longer free,” I pointed out. “When we are commanded, ‘Do,’ we know that we may do, or not do. Yet who would choose not to do? Why would IaHWeH say, ‘Do,’ unless it was best that it be done? Does He not know all things? Does He not desire all that is good for all?”

“So we have been told, my friend,” came the reply. “But how can you say you are in a place to evaluate these claims? We see what IaHWeH wishes us to see, and know only what He permits us to know. This, at least, that we thought we knew, turned out to be error.” As he said this, he was indicating the veil trailing over his shoulder, instead of over his eyes where it should have been.

“Can you evaluate them?” I asked. “We know from Zephon what comes to those who follow your rebellion: death. But which of us have seen death? Perhaps you have already fallen into it, but do not yet know what that means.”

The rest of our conversation that day only resulted in an impasse. I could not convince the archangel to reconsider his course, and his words made no sense to me. Yes, the unveiling of his face had caused me to wonder why he had been allowed to continue existing, when all that we knew of ourselves appeared to require reverence as a core attribute. Nevertheless, I was not about to so eagerly join the ranks of those who wished to test this for themselves. We may have been *free* to disobey this commonly known principle, but what purpose could it possibly serve to do so?

When the war did break out openly, those who were ultimately cast from the Kingdom were not those who disobeyed – at least, this was not the reason why they were exiled – but those who, by their disobedience, had severed their connection to IaHWeH, the very Source of their lives and comfort. This is a fairly subtle point, but one that must be fully understood by those who desire to hold true freedom without falling victim to Lucifer’s deceptions. Our essences determine our actions, but these actions may depend upon other factors as well, some of which may be unknown to other observers. What remains as the true measure of

the creature is the essence itself, and this is what the eye of the Almighty considers.

I remember the night that the prophet Samuel was first called into service. The youth was staying with one known as Eli, a rather careless and ill-tempered old man. Yet for all his faults, the priest knew the ways of the Almighty, and when I attuned the ears of my young charge to hear the voice of IaHWeH, he instructed the child to reply, "Speak, Yahweh; for your servant hears."

As Prince Michael stood invisibly in the room with the boy, and as I stood near him to enable him to hear His words, He continued, speaking with the authority of His Union with the Most High after being prompted to continue, "I will do a thing in Israel, at which the ears of those who hear will tingle."

Samuel, a child of only twelve, stood on his feet and looked in the direction from which the voice, he believed, was coming. El Michael continued, "In that day I will perform against Eli all the things I have spoken concerning his house. What I have begun, I will also bring to an end. I have told him that I will place a lasting judgment upon his house for the iniquity that he well knows; because his sons made themselves vile, and he has not restrained them. For this I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of his house shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering for ever."

When the Prince ceased to speak, the boy sat down without another word and Michael returned to Heaven. I remained with the child, and though I did not clearly know his thoughts, I could well imagine of what they consisted. Eli had indeed been warned about his sons; a prophet had come to him in days past, and told him, "Because you honor your sons more than you honor me or my ministry, this shall be a sign unto you, that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall both die. And I will raise up a faithful priest, that will do according to that which is in my heart and my mind. And I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before my anointed for ever."

Yet even this most direct caution had not led Eli to seriously rebuke his sons, nor to remove them from their office. He certainly had the authority to do this, and the temple guards were at his disposal, yet for the sake of peace within his family the old man had heard and ignored reports of the vilest offenses from his boys, and he did little beyond merely voicing his displeasure. Far more than this was required by the responsibilities of his office.

No doubt Samuel was remembering the prophet's visit, for he had been present. No doubt Samuel was remembering the contempt with which Eli's sons had treated their father's new helper, being too busy themselves with the corruption of the sacrifices (and they who sacrificed) to be of much assistance to their aged father. No doubt he remembered the many unpleasant incidents that had come upon him at their hand in the years he had served at the temple, yet for all these

things the boy held no anger in his heart. Instead, as Samuel sat on the floor in his quarters, the boy sighed, and tears formed in his eyes. Finally, sleep found him, and he lay still until the morning.

The next day, as Samuel was opening the doors of the temple according to his regular duties, Eli came up behind him and called his name. Samuel's heart leaped at the sound of the old man's voice, for he had been hoping to avoid him, at least until his memory of the night before had faded. But Eli remembered being awakened three times by the child, until he had realized that it was Yahweh's voice he was hearing and instructed his young charge to reply without arising.

"What is the message that Yahweh spoke to you last night, boy? Hide nothing from me, but may His frown rest upon you if you keep from me anything that He has said to you."

Eli might well have added that last part. Though he had resisted the Spirit's conviction, and the suggestions of his own guardian, Eli well knew that he was guilty of much wrongdoing, and his age was no mitigating factor for his degree of blame. The priest had received more warning than most men of the error of his ways, yet he had done nothing to stem the tide of evil being practiced even before the sacred temple. He fully suspected that the nightly visit to his helper had much to do with him and his failure as a father and as a priest.

"Do not be angry with me, my father," Samuel began, "but there was nothing pleasant in what I was told."

"The fault is not yours, my faithful friend," Eli said, speaking to the child as he would to one much older. "Say what you have heard."

"A voice came to me at night, and three times I thought you had called me. When you told me to say, 'Speak, Yahweh, for your servant hears,' then the voice said that it would do something strange in Israel, to tingle the ears of all who heard it.

"It said," Samuel continued, "That the judgments spoken to you by the prophet who visited the temple were coming to pass, for the guilt that you know you have accepted, for your sons and because you have not restrained them. It said... it said that no sacrifice or offering could cleanse your house from this point forward."

Samuel spoke the last words with a breaking voice, for even if he could not deeply mourn the judgment against Hophni and Phinehas, he knew that their deaths would break the old man's heart. His fatherly love for them, though imperfect and sentimental in nature, was nevertheless fervent. Had it been a divine love, it would have indeed worked to check their course, and perhaps even prevented their destruction, but such wisdom was beyond that of the old man's own experience. This was to be a lesson learned by suffering, and a knowledge that would come, for his family, far too late.

In a way, Eli was much like Lucifer, at least as I remembered him standing before me in the Heavenly temple. He had been warned, more than once, yet he had continued to show a marked lack of reverence for sacred things. In Lucifer's case the crime had directly been his own, yet humans as well as angels are held responsible for the things they could have consciously prevented, yet failed to do so. Now, judgment was pronounced, and, as in Lucifer's case, the heavenly record was inscribed with the word *mavet*, "death," though the outward manifestation of this sure sentence was yet to come.

"It is Yahweh who has spoken this unto you," Eli said, resigning himself to his fate, "Let Him do as it seems best to Him."

Even then, perhaps even then, Eli might have done something to prevent the full weight of the disaster from falling upon him or his family. The doom of his sons was, for all intents and purposes, unchangeable; but when, and how, and why, were not yet fully fixed. Eli himself might have left a better record of his life had he attempted at the last to amend his deeds, yet the warnings of the Throne, intended to spur him finally on to righteous actions, were accepted as the decree of One who no longer cared for him.

Ironically, the false ghost of Samuel, much later, would steal hope in a similar manner from a broken king, yet the intent of those words had always been to destroy. It is men's reactions, often times, to the words and prophecies of spirits that determine what finally occurs, regardless of their origin. Many a time Lucifer's own tongue has caused his own confusion, having spoken a word too freely to a human being. What had been intended for evil had been turned, by a Spirit-led conscience, to good. In Eli's case, unfortunately, the reverse proved true – what had been intended for good was corrupted and turned only to sorrow.

* * * * *

"Samuel's ministry has begun," El Michael said to me, as I departed from the tragic scene of Samuel's revelation. "From this moment onward you are to speak to him in my name, and to thereby guide the course of Israel. Long has Eli neglected the necessary work of guiding the people, and so far have my people fallen away from me that an occasional voice of prophecy will no longer suffice.

"Take Kaleon and Ariel," El Michael said, "and drive away the demons from my House. You are to reside with Samuel and be my voice in his ear."

Rejoicing, I summoned the two Seraphim that El Michael had indicated. Ariel, the fiery, red-haired angel that had been appointed as the guardian spirit of the Israelite Tribe of Judah was the first to appear. He was followed immediately thereafter by Kaleon, the guardian of Levi, the Tribe to which Eli and Samuel both belonged, though Samuel's family had dwelt in the land of Ephraim. As we descended to the

earth my six-winged companions burst into flame, glowing so brightly that their features were obscured, and leaving behind them a long trail of spiritual fire. Though all three of us were of the Order of Seraphim, Kaleon and Ariel, along with ten others, had been chosen as tribal guardians. These angels, known to the Host as the *Chalkydri*, were responsible for ensuring that the spiritual state of the nation never became too darkened, although many was the time when the actions of human rulers prevented their influence from being as effective as it might have been.

Eli's ministry was certainly one of those times, and the two bright spirits who were chosen to accompany me on this task were eager to help prepare the way for Samuel's work.

"Shadowy as ever," Kaleon remarked as we drew closer, noting the stormy spiritual atmosphere that hung over that consecrated building. "Has it ever been this bleak before now?"

"There have been times," Ariel replied, no doubt thinking of the recently past generations, when the judges of Israel fought against the invasion of heathen armies from without and the corruption of idolatrous practices from within. Not all of these judges had been entirely successful in their work and demons had, in those years, become far more familiar with the earthly temple than any angel would have desired.

Many spiritual heads turned in our direction as we hovered just above the sanctuary, looking down at the assembled agents of darkness. There were about twenty wicked angels awaiting our company. Three heralds swirled upward into the air, and hung before us as we took in the scene.

"What instruction?" came the question from one of the demons, whom I recognized as Edrael. Edrael, The Force of El, was a fallen Virtue from the House of Pride. He was under the command of the powerful spirit Nisroch, and although he had made few inroads into Eli's character, he had maintained a steady grasp on the old priest's sons for most if not all of their lives. The question he asked, "What instruction?" has become a common greeting, if it may be termed as such, between angels and demons.

Since the fall of Babel a great many years before that day, there had been no open warfare between the spirits of holiness and sin. There were conflicts, there were smaller-scale battles, such as when Moses led the Israelites forth from Egypt as you have recently been made aware, but nothing that involved all or even most of the mighty armies of either side. The relative peace that existed between our respective camps was not so much as a result of a truce as a mutual understanding of the futility of most direct combat. Until the judgment the demons were restrained, but could not be permanently destroyed. The angels, even more securely, were protected from the dark blades of the adversaries.

In Heaven, as the first conflict erupted, we gained belts of gold and swords of flame. At the time of Babel, we received shields of faith. When we watched over the journey and trials of Abraham, we obtained helmets to protect our heads from injury, and during the days of Moses we received breastplates in order to more easily resist the attacks of our enemies. While the fallen angels were always seeking new ways to gain an advantage in battle, often perverting the laws of nature and the spiritual realm to do so, we nevertheless had numbers and, more importantly, the strength of IaHWeH on our part.

As a result, whenever the angels sought to confront demons, they assumed that this was the result of specific instructions, and Edrael rightly concluded from the appearance of three powerful Seraphim that we had been sent with a definite purpose.

“The end of your hold on Israel’s priesthood is come,” I said to the evil Virtue. It should not be thought that the influence of Eli was restricted to his own sons, or that their awful example had not damaged the work of the others appointed from the Levitical Tribe. Eli was the most responsible, being in charge of the Temple itself, but the demons’ poison had drawn the hearts of men away from IaHWeH’s ministry as a result of a general decline in the zeal and authority of the priests.

“That is the choice of the priests,” came the response of one of the other fallen spirits. “We are here by right, and have remained, unchallenged, for years.”

“When the cup of iniquity is full,” Kaleon replied, “IaHWeH will act. The head of the priesthood is to be taken off, and a prophet will arise among the people.”

“The priests are all corrupt,” Edrael laughed, “what new priesthood could change the state of Israel now? And as for prophets, they have come, and they have gone. Your last messenger did nothing to heal Eli’s work, or even his family. What is one more voice amongst a crowd of angry noises?”

“You have not seen this kind before,” I said. “Samuel is to become a prophet of another sort. He will stand in the place where Moses once stood, where Seth and Abraham held office. He will be also a judge like the judges in generations past, with the power to command men, and a heart to guide the people according to the will of the Throne.”

The demons glanced at one another. Not since the days of the patriarchs had a sustained prophet stood in Israel as a leader. Some had prophesied during the days of the judges, and others had been raised up to deliver specific messages, but what I was describing was indeed a second Moses, a prophet after a more ancient order, and one that was called only during times of the greatest national crisis.

“Then we have our duty,” said the demon who had not yet spoken. This one was a Cherub, and he drew his sword, which burst into black and purple flames upon clearing its sheath. The Virtue drew his weapon also, which stretched out into a long and dangerous-looking spear, while the third angel placed his palms together in preparation for an attack of a different nature.

We drew our blades, and without pausing we struck, knowing that at any time seventeen more demons could swarm us with their dark weapons. The Cherub was the only demon of the first three that withstood our first attack, but instead of standing his ground against us he streamed downward to rouse the others. “Draw your weapons, fools!” he screamed. Some had already begun to do so when Edrael and the other were defeated, and before their limp forms had come to rest on the surface of the earth to which they had anchored their beings, we were surrounded.

“You well know,” Ariel said to them, “that Heaven could have sent countless warriors to cleanse this dark spot. We three were chosen, because we three were enough.”

The Cherub that had been with the first three flapped his wings and drew nearer to us. “I am Neshephiel,” he said, giving his name as “Twilight of El;” this was not his original title. “As I said before, we have our duty. That Heaven can err is evidenced by our conflict this day. That angels can err is evidenced by the state of the priesthood that you allowed us to corrupt. If Heaven will send countless warriors, let it send them. You three will not be here to see their victory.”

With that he lunged at Ariel, who turned his blade easily aside. His next attack, however, was not as easily defended. Neshephiel drew a second dark kherev, having no doubt learned the trick from Azrael of the House of wrath, and plunged it into the Seraph’s side. “Burn, Chalkydri,” he said mockingly, turning to face Kaleon as Ariel demonstrated great fortitude and struggled to pull the weapon out of his being.

Kaleon met him blade-for-blade, and forced him back into the cloud of dark spirits. As he did so, and they converged on him, I quickly flew past Ariel, grabbing at the wicked weapon. As my fingers wrapped around the handle, virtue went out of me and purified the blade. The light of the Spirit crept swiftly up the weapon’s length, and the dark flames dimmed and sputtered out. As I pulled the kherev free, now easily done in its more pure form, its sharp edge sparkled, and soon it was glowing and burning with the light of Heaven as it was designed, but never had the occasion, to do.

This was not my sword, and I knew that as soon as it left my hand it would begin to once again reflect the fallen essence of whichever spirit had produced it, but I resolved not to waste the few moments of usefulness it afforded me. With all my

strength I spun around and hurled it into the dense tangle of wings and weapons that surrounded Kaleon, and I saw it strike two demons as it arced through the air.

Fifteen were left.

Between Kaleon and myself, we were able to hold off the dark spirits as they sought to contain us and cut us out of the air. The situation changed, however, when Ariel recovered and plunged into the battle.

With a burning blade, the six-winged angel scattered the assembled demons, and soon the few that were left intact were fleeing to distant regions. Neshephiel, having “survived” a second time, cast us a sharp glance before escaping. “We should keep an eye on that one,” Ariel said. “He is not one to lose gracefully.”

“You have encountered him before?” I asked.

“He was a cornerstone of Satan’s work in misleading the priests of Israel,” he replied. “He considers this project his own, and as long as there is a priesthood, that Cherub will haunt the nation.”

With the demons removed from the precincts, a more sanctified atmosphere was possible at the temple. Samuel’s training could begin in earnest and, unopposed by the large volume of wicked spirits, he truly flourished as the years went by.

Eli’s sons indeed met their fated end, and when the old man heard of their passing he too departed this world, shocked and dismayed. His story is a sad one indeed. Yet Samuel’s prediction of the priest’s family’s destruction became known in Israel, and soon it was known that a prophet had come forth yet again. This was, the Host hoped, a turning point in the history of the embattled country.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 2: THE SHEPHERD BOY

Israel was in a sorry state in those days. Both during and after the long rule of the judges, the instability of the people had caused a series of peaks and valleys of faith, each fall deeper than the last, and therefore more difficult to overcome. The condition of the priesthood was only symptomatic of the general spiritual state of the country, and every angel knew that things needed to change in short order.

It was into this environment that Samuel entered, and the deeds that he said and did during the course of his ministry would merit a record all their own. For many years he worked to stabilize the country, and to build a nation out of what was left after generations of wavering and backsliding. In the course of time he set up a king, according to the will of the people, and it was this first monarch, Saul, that sought to call forth my former charge from his grave. As I have said, however, this that I bring you is not about Samuel. It is about the kings that he established.

Of Saul you already know much, and most of what is necessary to understand this record. We will visit him again as I continue to speak, but suffice it to say that in the days when Samuel was old Saul had already gone the way of the priests and Levites. Neshephiel had made a nuisance of himself during the entire course of Samuel's ministry, as Ariel had warned, and although he had failed to corrupt the prophet himself, he sought every occasion to turn the blessings provided by Samuel's presence into a curse.

Along with Edrael and other demons from Nisroch's house, the wicked Cherub made particularly bold attacks upon the character of Israel's first king, and soon the once valiant and humble man began to see his aged counselor as an annoyance, the unwelcome voice of conscience, as he sought to order Israel after his own will. It finally came to a point that, despite Samuel's best efforts, IaHWeH could no longer fulfill His covenant to establish the Tribes of Jacob as examples of His sovereignty to the heathen nations. It was then that the incident in which Samuel pronounced an end to Saul's kingdom (and the latter tore his mantle) took place.

Samuel mourned deeply for the rejection of Saul. He had come to see the younger man as his own son, and – if the truth be known – Saul had been closer to the prophet than the old man's biological offspring. Samuel did, by that point, have two sons of his own, but unfortunately the influence of his childhood under the careless and permissive Eli had a telling effect on how even this spiritual man reared his own boys. Joel and Abiah, by following in the ways of Eli's sons,

concerned the people to the degree that they had demanded Samuel anoint a king over them, and this was the very thing that had led to Saul's coronation.

It was in a state of grief that Samuel received another of my visits, although, as always, he was unaware of my presence. My place in Samuel's ministry was merely to prepare his mind to receive the Word of Yahweh, and as I did so the Throne spoke to his sorrowful mind.

"How long will you mourn for Saul," came the voice from Heaven, "whom I have rejected as king of Israel?" The prophet had no answer, and only awaited a word of comfort. "Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse, a man of Bethlehem, for I have provided a king for myself from amongst his sons."

"Another king?" Samuel asked in wonder. "Is my lord Saul so soon to die, then?" Another thought struck the prophet. "How can I go, my Lord? If Saul hears of this, he will surely kill me!"

"Take a heifer with you on your journey," came the reply, "and offer a sacrifice before me in Bethlehem. If any ask the purpose of your travel, say to him no more than this. When you arrive, call Jesse to the sacrifice, and then I will instruct you to anoint one of his sons, whom I will name for you."

With mixed feelings, Samuel followed the directions he had been given. No, IaHWeH had not declared that Saul would die, but what could a new king of Israel mean when the former one was still alive? Saul may have no longer been monarch in Heaven's estimation, but to himself, and to the people of Israel, he was still their ruler. Now Samuel was being sent to some man named Jesse from a little city in the middle of the country, to anoint a new king from among his sons.

As the prophet drew near to the gates of Bethlehem, he was met by a number of men, among whom he was certain were several city elders. As he approached the men fell on their faces before the well-known and highly respected figure. They knew of his wisdom, of his closeness with IaHWeH, and they had no doubt heard of him striking down the king of Amalek when Saul had failed to do so only a short time before. "My lord," asked one of the men, "Why is our city so honored by this visit? Is there war, or famine? Have we been displeasing in the sight of Elohim?"

"I am here to sacrifice unto Yahweh, according to His instructions. I have come in peace. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." When Samuel saw that the men were satisfied with his answer, he added, with a casual tone, "I have heard of one who dwells in this place named Jesse. Does anyone know where he may be found?" One of the men replied that he did, and Samuel said to him, "Greet him for me in the name of Yahweh, and bid him to attend the sacrifice with the elders."

At the time of the evening sacrifice the elders of the city, along with Jesse and his family, were standing before Samuel. The old man, with practiced care, slew the heifer he had brought with him. With prayers and supplications, the prophet prepared the corpse for acceptance as an offering to IaHWeH, and burned it before the people. As the witnesses prepared to partake of the public meal that often followed a public sacrifice, Samuel made his way through the group to where Jesse stood observing the proceedings with a somewhat perplexed look on his face.

“You have no doubt been wondering why I called you to this place,” Samuel said, looking up into the strong, handsome face of the man before him. “Have no fear, there is no word from Yahweh concerning you. I have come, however, to see your son.”

“My son?” Jesse asked. “Which of my sons have you come to see?”

The old man gave a smile that Jesse considered strange, and then he said, “I will know which son when I see him. You have your boys here with you, yes? Bring them forth that I may see them all.”

Jesse turned and called a young man from his place among the elders. The other men, who were sitting at meat, were casting glances at the conversation, but did their best to seem uninterested in what they could not, in any event, hear. The youth that Jesse had summoned was a tall, muscular boy, who had inherited all of his father’s attractive features. “This is my firstborn,” the proud father said, presenting him to the prophet.

Samuel’s heart leaped within him. Surely, this was a man worthy of replacing Saul! With a sudden wistfulness, the divine messenger remembered the anointing of Saul, how he had called the boy aside and rejoiced at the strength of his body and mind. Here, in this man, he saw an image of what Saul had been, and a promise of becoming something more than Saul had become. Samuel said, “What is your name, lad?”

“Eliab, my lord,” came the reply, in a rich and powerful voice.

“Eliab,” said Samuel, “surely El is your Father.” This was a play on what his name meant: My God is Father. “Surely,” continued Samuel, drawing out his horn of oil, “I have found Yahweh’s anointed.”

Upon instruction from Heaven, I placed a hand gently upon the prophet’s shoulder. Elohim spoke from on high, and by my intervention Samuel heard the words softly but powerfully in his mind, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, for I have refused him. IaHWeH does not see as man sees; for men look upon the outward appearance, but IaHWeH looks upon the heart.”

Samuel froze, one hand grasping the oil horn and the other partially extended toward the head of the kneeling Eliab. Jesse's firstborn was indeed like Saul, but in too many ways to insulate him from the very temptations that had led to the monarch's fall. The youth had been quick to overcome his surprise at the prophet's words, and he had knelt expectantly, unsure of why it was occurring, but already coveting the benefits of his anticipated royal station.

"No," the old man said, straightening himself suddenly. "No, this is not the one."

Samuel turned to Jesse, ignoring the look of consternation that flashed across Eliab's face, and said, "Bring me your second son."

This time, although the youth was almost as impressive as his older brother, the prophet was more cautious with his praise. Again, the message from Heaven was, "This is not the one." The third brother passed, and then the fourth, and another, and yet another. Finally, Jesse had no more sons to show.

"No more children *here*," Samuel repeated the end of Jesse's last reply to him, stressing the last word. "But are all your children here?"

"There is another," Jesse replied, "the youngest, but he is out keeping watch over our sheep."

"Send for him at once," the old man said. "We shall not sit down until he arrives." Jesse sent Eliab to look for his youngest brother.

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Since very early in his reign, Saul's course had been a downward spiral. The demons of pride and wrath worked on him ceaselessly, knowing that if a king who followed IaHWeH's instructions sat upon the throne of Israel, much of the work that they had been able to accomplish in other nations would come to naught. Subtly, and carefully, they made inroads into the human's character, and his guardian spirit soon found himself quite limited in his ability to keep his charge out of danger.

Though we holy angels could have driven the tempters off quickly and easily had the instruction been given, we knew that our only role at that time was to preserve human freedom, and to ensure that the demons did not take too many liberties in their work. As a result, it was as I said: Israel was in a sorry state in those days.

Upon Samuel's receipt of his instructions to go to Bethlehem, dark messengers immediately streaked off to Egypt and Babylon, where the greatest of the wicked angels maintained their presence. Some we were told to intercept, and others we allowed to pass on and inform their superiors in Satan's government. In matters of

spiritual warfare, mere instants can make a great difference in the outcome of the various conflicts that still scattered the land.

At Saul's left and right hands stood the two demons that the Chalkydri and I had encountered: Edrael and Neshephiel. The Cherub in particular had entrenched his presence in the faltering monarch's thoughts, and this evil spirit had facilitated problems ranging from judicial improprieties to conflicts within the king's family. The angels had been instructed that the cleansing of Israel would begin with the religious leaders, and the monarchy would follow, therefore since our conflict at the Temple we had not crossed swords with this demon or those who had been placed under his authority. As tension mounted between the angels and demons that observed Israel, it seemed to me that Samuel's journey to anoint a new king could cause things to boil over very easily. I was proven right in short order.

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Delicate but strong fingers were drawn over tight strings, and the angels nearby turned their heads to rejoice in the vibrations that rippled in the air as it passed through them. The young man sat on a bare rock, looking out over the sheep, and absently playing on his harp. Though the actual music was crude by angelic standards, especially since it was being produced by an instrument that was less than superior in quality, the beauty heard in those fields when David made melody could be found few other places in darkened Israel.

Soon the youth's voice was raised in song to harmonize with the notes his hands were drawing out of the wood and fibers, and even the earthly creatures that stood and sat around him seemed calmed by the full and cleverly arranged notes. The songs that David played and sung were the best that could have been played and sung; they were praises to IaHWeH Most High, and the heart that chanted the words could have transformed the most tuneless arrangement into a precious spiritual jewel. Let it not be thought that the songs were beautiful only in a spiritual sense. With rough instruments, and a home-trained voice, David's skill had earned him renown in Bethlehem, and many passers-by found themselves lingering in the pastures to hear the son of Jesse's talents being employed.

David's guardian was well chosen. He was a Virtue named Asheriel, and his office involved the appearance of music in nature. Although this might seem more suitable for the duties of a Seraph, our work is most often concerned with deliberate, conscious praise. Asheriel, like most Virtues, was appointed over divine principles of the most natural kind – the scents of flowers, the colors of roses, the sounds of gently flowing streams. In ways that would take too long to explain, Virtues were initially responsible for the manifestation of IaHWeH's character in the things of the natural world, and in the continuing creation they maintained and enhanced these things for the joy of the on looking universe.

By divine providence, the first psalm recorded in your Histories by this David begins with the statement, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,” and it is from that first word, “Blessed,” that the name of Asheriel was derived. His name means, “Blessedness of El.”

Of all the beings that rested around David as he played, the Virtue who watched over him was the first to detect the presence of foul spirits approaching. They indeed drew nearer, attached to his older brother Eliab, and confident in their position of authority despite his embattled guardian angel. David continued to sing, oblivious to the approach of his father’s eldest, until Eliab had stopped right in front of him.

“Father wants you,” the older boy said curtly. “Come immediately.”

“How shall I go,” David replied, “and leave the sheep unguarded? It may take time to gather them from the fields.”

“I will see to that,” Eliab said, “but my lord’s presence is requested by father, and by the prophet Samuel.”

“Samuel!” David exclaimed, ignoring the excessive politeness in Eliab’s choice of words. Without another word the young man gathered his things and left. His older brother had no real desire to do the work that David was appointed, but in his present ill temper he was not eager to return to the city.

David made his way to the place of sacrifice, to which Eliab had directed him, with many questions on his mind. He had, of course, heard of the prophet Samuel, but he had never seen him in person. He had heard of mighty deeds that the old seer had performed, directing the course of Saul’s battles to invariable victories, and performing miracles on behalf of the wayward nation. As David thought of Samuel, images of smoke and fire, of stern eyes, of burning flesh, of flashing swords came to mind. In those days men did not speak often of angels, but David saw us in his mind’s eye, attending Samuel’s ministry and standing on the ladder between Heaven and earth as Jacob once saw in his dream.

Samuel, in David’s imagination, was a tall and muscled figure, with long gray hair flowing from his head and face, blowing wildly in the wind as the storms raged around him. In David’s world authority was synonymous with physical power, as exemplified in his father and older brothers; it was only natural, therefore, that the tales he had heard of the old prophet would create such an image in the young man’s thoughts.

When he arrived at the sacrificial area, David found that he had been partly right. Samuel’s long, sacred hair hung down his chest, and down his back. He had a fierce, commanding look in his eyes, from a lifetime of speaking with the absolute authority of Heaven. He was used to being obeyed, but he was not a hard-hearted

man. When Saul was rejected, Samuel wept. When the monarch disobeyed divine instructions, Samuel had a ready rebuke on his tongue, but as soon as he was left to his own devices the prophet was on his knees praying for strength and patience. Many were the times I stood over him as he received wisdom and comfort from the Throne.

In Samuel was combined the rarest of virtues, true courage and true humility. He was all, in character, that David expected from the stories he had been told, yet he was not a physically imposing man. The prophet's strength was of a different order, but David was quick to see this, and to bow reverently before the visitor and all that he represented.

When David raised his eyes to meet the seer's, the old man's heart leaped as he felt the same sensation as when first beholding Eliab. Like David, Samuel had to reassess some of his assumptions, but like David, he quickly perceived the beauty of character and the strength of will that was embodied in the youth before him. There was an instant connection, and – strange as it may seem in those circumstances – a mutual joy.

* * * * *

Asheriel and I greeted one another. I was no stranger to this Virtue, but aside from the seasons of worship in Heaven that we attended when the state of affairs on earth permitted it, I had seen little of him in generations.

“Tell me of this, your charge,” I said to the angel who had come with David.

“You have no need to tell me of yours,” the guardian said with a smile. “Samuel's work is well known, as are your battles in preserving his freedom intact.”

Asheriel turned to see David standing before Samuel. It must be remembered that angels may move, and communicate, much more quickly than do human beings. As a few moments passed between the old man and the young man, much conversation passed between the virtue and myself.

“I was summoned to guard this human sixteen years ago,” Asheriel said. “It has been a joy for me to do so, above the charges that I have been given in the past. The boy's family is a good one, despite the tendency of his mother and older brothers to descend into jealousy or unsanctioned anger at times. The father in particular is pious, and the boy Shammah has been David's ally in little ways when necessary.

“The boy lacks nothing in courage, and does not consider his life at all. To protect the herds over which he has been appointed he has driven off wild beasts far more powerful than himself. Gladly would I have protected him, for IaHWeH guards his life through me, but there has seldom been any great need. He is clever, and

good with his sling; the animals fear these little injuries, and unless they are very hungry will be persuaded to seek easier prey than David's flock."

"And in times of want?" I asked, knowing that the beasts of Israel could be ferocious indeed when wild game and careless shepherds were scarce.

"There was a lion once," Asheriel replied, "and a bear another time. The bear resisted the sling for a while, coming first after the sheep and then after David himself, but when it was near enough David struck it in the eyes with two stones, and blinded it."

"That was quite a shot from one so young!" I exclaimed, impressed.

"It was. David is as skilled with the sling as with his harp."

"And what of the boy's piety?" I asked.

"This is where his skill is greatest," the Virtue said, smiling. "His weapons are dedicated to the work of the flock, and David has said, 'Never will these be used against any man of Israel.' As for his songs – you, my dear Seraph, will rejoice in his praise if Samuel and David are to have a history together. While the men of this new Israel raise their voices and strike their instruments in adoration of women, in the admiration of gold and silver, David gives thanks for his home, for his family, for his flocks. Even his brothers have been the subjects of their own songs in the privacy of the fields, for David thinks well of them even when there are unkind to him."

"You know, of course, why Samuel and I have come to Bethlehem," I said.

"I know it. The angels of Bethlehem speak of it frequently, and have been following the course of the prophet's journey eagerly. None were surprised when Saul was rejected, but we look forward to seeing IaHWeH's dealings with him now that a new king is to be anointed before us."

"If Saul is slain," I said, "and replaced as king in that manner, one of his own family will inherit the throne of Israel, and this is not to be. The members of the house of Saul are all under judgment for his actions. More importantly, Saul is not unloved by Heaven... if he will humble himself, and break free from the sins of the House of Pride, it may be that his soul will ultimately be saved."

"Do you yet hope for that?" Asheriel asked, surprised. "Is Saul not possessed by many foul demons?"

"He is on the border of losing his freedom entirely, but he is not given over completely yet. There are times when Zahaviel fears all is lost," I said, speaking

of the king's guardian, "but there are also times when he claims there remains a spark for the kindling."

"IaHWeH's will be done," Asheriel said. "But now comes the moment."

As he spoke, the Virtue was indicating the events taking place below us. Samuel, having received confirmation that this was indeed the chosen one, called the boy closer, told him to kneel before him, and he poured the oil from his horn over the head of the lad, indicating by this fuel for light that the Shekinah Spirit was to descend upon him for a special calling.

"You are chosen," the prophet said, "as king over all Israel!"

As his father and brothers stood by, watching in awe, Asheriel said, "It appears Eliab decided not to miss this occasion, for he has left his father's flocks unattended." The eldest had indeed followed after David, deciding that he could not miss this meeting. He still felt slighted, for Samuel had first named him as the one to receive the honor, and the demons that had rather free access to his mind filled him with all manner of unreasonable and unsanctified sentiments.

We had little time to contemplate what this could mean, however, for as David stood up we beheld a bright light from Heaven streaming down and falling upon the forehead of the boy. This light, which only spirits could see, meant that an open connection was now open between the human and the divine Throne. This process, commonly referred to in your History as "receiving the Holy Spirit" is the development of an active link between the human conscience and the Shekinah glory.

The difference that this makes in the life can be a subtle one, but I will try to explain it as best I can without a long discourse. Humanity is shaped by social pressures, and by ethical standards based largely upon where they are raised. In addition to the freedom of choice given to every human being, conscience is also instilled in them as a link to their spiritual selves. Angels, in a sense, are "all conscience," in that performing an act against our basic nature would "unmake" us in a very fundamental way. This is the reason why the demons, having turned away from the course of righteousness, are unanimously and accurately referred to as "evil." There can be no lasting neutrality for spiritual beings; there cannot be – really – for humans either, but creatures of flesh take longer to recognize this fundamental truth. Grace, of course, provides them with the time in which they can decide which side of the conflict they will ultimately serve, and the power to maintain that choice with the assistance of other divine help.

Even those demons that would be "good" or "neutral" because they receive no particular pleasure from harming human beings have no remaining mechanism, (such as a separate conscience) by which they may resist the promptings of sin that leads them to be selfish, unkind, and unsympathetic to others. Humans do, unless

they are possessed or have willingly chosen to cast off the subtle promptings to righteousness that IaHWeH sheds like sunshine or rain on all intelligent beings. Social pressures and moral inclinations tend to strengthen these promptings, and this may result in what is commonly described among human beings as a “good person.” While such an individual may be pleasant, the person is not truly spiritual at his very core, although they may be more easily persuaded to become so than those who are committed to evil – with some notable exceptions, of course.

David, though he loved what he knew of IaHWeH, as do many in even these last days, did not have a perfect connection to Him. His songs of praise were blessed, and sanctified by Heaven’s grace. His prayers were heard by the Almighty, because they were in accord with His own will, but the motivations behind even David’s best efforts were limited in perspective compared with what they should have been. A man without this vital connection to the Shekinah may pray, and receive the benefits of his prayers, but unless this man receives the Spirit in the way that I now describe, trials and temptations can swing him out of his righteous course. When the incentive to do evil, or the penalty for doing good, exceeds the force of a man’s social pressures and accepted level of morality, then is the spirit truly tested. It is then that men, who believe themselves to be righteous, often discover the truth in the words of your prophet, *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rag.”*

Isaiah, who wrote those words, was lamenting the general state of Israel. He himself, like all true messengers of the Divine Will, had received the Holy Spirit, even as David did at Samuel’s anointing. He was able to stand firm, to “set his face as a flint” even when morality would have failed him, and in situations for which society had entirely failed to prepare him.

Those who are willing to disregard social norms and conventions for a cherished ideal are either rebellious, or mad... or holy; such is the nature of humanity. This enters into an area of philosophy with which the greatest of human minds have wrestled, and come short of grasping the truth. I will make no effort to instruct you further on this, suffice it to say that on that day David became a different sort of human being – one willing to stand for righteousness beyond the limits of what he would have endured before. In unfamiliar situations, he would have an awakened and Spirit-led conscience as a counselor, and all the praiseworthy characteristics he had before: his thankful spirit, his patience with those who sought to harm him, his readiness to praise the name of IaHWeH, his great courage, his selflessness, these were given a new depth of meaning. His motives were purified as silver, seven times in the fires of the Shekinah glory.

The old man closed his eyes, and stood silently over David for many minutes without speaking. He had not seen the light, but in his own spirit he had sensed that a wonderful power was before him, and in the young man that he had anointed as king. In the moments of silence Samuel recalled the feelings, so similar to these, when he had anointed Saul, and he was praying, fervently, that this young

man would not resist the gift he had been given, and would arrive at a better end than his predecessor.

When he finally opened his eyes, the prophet looked around at David's family, and at the elders who had gathered nearer when the oil began to be poured. "For the sake of his life," Samuel said, "You shall speak nothing of these events. For your own lives, be silent, for Saul is not a man in these days who will have pity on those who knew of my actions here. I myself would see my life forfeit, if the ears of the king were turned to this anointing." With these, and other dire warnings, the seer turned about and went back to his home in Ramah to wait, and to pray, and to hope.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 3: TO SOOTHE THE SAVAGE BEAST

A few years passed following the incident in Bethlehem, and the people had wisely followed the prophet's counsel in keeping their town's secret to themselves. There had been calls to action at the border towns, when the pagan Philistines attempted to take the region that they considered their own, and to exploit the riches of the land to their benefit, and this came to occupy more of the citizens' thoughts than the strange incident related to them by the elders.

Despite the lack of guidance from Samuel, Saul had learned much about military matters from his time as the prophet's student, and he had become quite successful at repelling these occasional attacks. David's older brothers, particularly Eliab and Abinadab, had made a reputation for themselves as fierce warriors, and even David had participated in the most recent of battles, taking up a sword and a shield in defense of Israel as had so many before him.

The young man did not love war, and hated killing, but he knew the times in which he was living were vile ones, and the prophets themselves had called the people to follow their rulers into combat. The blessing of the Most High rested upon the armies of Israel, a special outpouring of mercy considering Saul's wretched spiritual state, and there were few casualties from among the sons of Jacob.

As the men rested one particular night, encamped before the Philistine army on the eve of an attack, David, who had brought along his musical instruments, began to softly play and sing. The words and the music began mournfully. They spoke of being far from home, of being surrounded by enemies, and of fearing the approach of death at the end of a sword, or a spear, and of feeling forsaken by the Elohim of Israel. Then the music changed, and David spoke of placing his trust in the Most High, who was his Shield, and his only true Defender. Victory was assured, David sang, because none can stand against the Mighty One of Israel, who established the land as His own country. None who were against Him could hope to prevail.

As the men listened, they were encouraged. The soldiers stopped sharpening their weapons to listen to the simple tune, and the powerful words driven by the Spirit of Holiness that streamed down from the Heavenly courts. As David's song ended, and the men went back to their preparations, Abinadab nudged his older brother and said, "You see that man?" indicating one who was returning to his place of rest.

“What of him?” Eliab asked, who glanced up and then returned to staring thoughtfully at the fire.

“He is one of Saul’s personal guards. He has received the benefit of the greatest training, and we are fortunate to have him among us.”

“Perhaps you should befriend him,” Eliab said. “It may mean a place for you in King Saul’s palace... or King David’s palace, if Yahweh will have it so.” As he said this he cast a sardonic look at his youngest brother, who pretended not to hear.

Although the Bethlehemites kept what they knew of David’s anointing a secret from outsiders, David’s older brothers, particularly Eliab, had made it a point to mention it in passing (or so they wished it to appear) at every possible occasion. Eliab was a brave man, and generally one of the morally good that I mentioned before... but he was not a spiritual man, and as such had no protection against the jealousy that he now felt toward his youngest sibling. The exhilaration he had felt when he thought he was to be chosen as the new king of Israel was replaced by a bitter feeling of rejection when the prophet seemed to have changed his mind and turned to David instead.

David’s family life had not changed much since that day; his father made sure that it was mentioned as little as possible, although his own prayers since then were more fervent that the nation should come under a wise and peaceful ruler. Jesse knew that David was well suited to this task, or at least that he would be some day. Above all he trusted the prophet’s words, although how they would be fulfilled remained a mystery to him. No one knew how soon Samuel’s prediction would come to pass, or that this night, when David played his harp before weary soldiers, would have a part to play in his entrance into the courts of King Saul.

When the sun rose, the warriors of Israel prepared to meet the Philistine army. Many of them were still burning with zeal from David’s song of the night before, and the morning light shining off of their weapons and armor bolstered their confidence. The Philistines stood in array against them, but with a cry the Israelite soldiers ran forward with blades raised.

Soon the heathen invaders found themselves being pushed back, first beyond their camp, and then further still to the very borders. They resisted fiercely, but soon the number of losses began to have a telling impact on the army’s effectiveness. At one point David was engaged by two Philistines, both experienced warriors, yet he was able to hold his own quite effectively. As he pushed forward, however, hoping to cut one down, the other struck David on his legs with the beam of his spear, and the young man fell over onto the ground.

With a shout of triumph the first Philistine fighter leaped upon him in an attempt to finish the job, but David rolled away and came up beside him. The experience of the older soldier came into play, however, as he turned to face the Israelite, and

charged into him, knocking away both his sword and his shield. David was now unarmed.

As his spear-wielding opponent charged in, David turned aside, and grabbed at the very shaft that had cost him his equipment. He stepped forward and in, and used his leverage to push the Philistine over. An Israelite who was nearby slashed downward, ending the threat. David looked up and saw it was the royal guard that Abinadab had indicated from the night before. With a stern nod, the guard turned away and continued his grim work. Armed with his new spear, David was able to dispatch the other enemy, despite his relative unfamiliarity with the longer weapon; in that process his guardian Asheriel did play some part.

As the day wore on, it was soon apparent that the invaders were about to be completely destroyed once again, and the Philistine warriors who had the perception to realize this turned and fled back to their home country. Israel, once again, was safe for the moment.

Nearly a week later King Saul, who had welcomed the report of yet another victory with his usual stoicism, was nevertheless furious on this day. At some trifling error on the part of his son Jonathan, Saul was raging throughout the palace, and his servants knew better than to speak a word to him, or to stand in his way. Whispers of “possession” were heard in the remote quarters of the king’s house, and even near his presence; some were saying that the ill temper the king was experiencing was the result of spiritual turmoil.

This was not news to King Saul. He knew that his mind was becoming unbalanced, and more noticeably so with every passing month since Samuel had announced his rejection as monarch. The statement had been made in private, so only Samuel and he knew (or so he thought) that IaHWeH had purposed to call another king, but Saul was certain at this point that Jonathan his son would be the neighbor “better” than himself of whom the seer had spoken.

What Saul did not know was that the new king had already been anointed, and Israel was to stand or fall based upon the faithfulness of another, but he had good reason for suspecting that Jonathan was next in line for the throne. In addition to his assumption that the kingdom would remain in his family, one well respected within the Tribe of Benjamin, Saul well knew that Jonathan was of a purer and nobler character than himself, particularly in these his waning years.

Jonathan had inherited some of his father’s tall stature, and his features were fair to look upon. Had he not been a prince his list of admirers would not have been much shorter, and the soldiers respected him for his courage that had been tried many times over in battle. It was for these very characteristics that Saul was beginning to resent the boy, seeing in him an able king. Jonathan, on the other hand, had no particular ambitions to the crown, was loyal to his father despite his

worsening state, and would not contemplate the future so far as after Saul's death was concerned.

Jonathan's devotion to his father the king made Saul's ill treatment of the young man all the more apparent to his courtiers, particularly those who knew the family well. Saul's occasional rants about death, and failure, and prophecy, became more and more directed at Jonathan himself, and those who were closest to the younger man began to fear for his safety.

One of Saul's attendants, a younger relative of the guard who David's brothers had noticed, had also been present at the battle against the Philistines. He had heard David playing, and seen him fight both armed and unarmed. He had seen him raise the spirits of the men around him, and had personal courage in conflict as well. As he thought on these things an angel, who had been sent with a particular commission, began to gently speak words of inspiration in his ear.

The attendant shared his plan with another youth who ministered unto Saul, and one whom he knew the monarch trusted well – inasmuch as any near to him was trusted in those days – and together the pair approached the king as he sat brooding on his seat over the latest imagined crisis.

“My lord the king,” the attendant began, “we your faithful servants have seen many things befall you. We know that an evil spirit has troubled you all these days, and that Yahweh has not provided you with comfort, though all who stand before you know of your prayers, and your faith, and your patient requests for relief.” These statements were not quite accurate; Saul's requests for relief had never taken the form of pious prayer, but of passionate demands and presumptuous reminders of obligations that Saul imagined were his due to his position in the kingdom. Yet what is a king to IaHWeH? Saul's ascent to royalty was not accomplished by any deeds of valor or great reputation for administrative brilliance. His place was given him as a gift, not a right, and Heaven turned away sorrowfully from such words as the king was wont to offer in his more vocal moments.

“Let my lord the king,” said the other attendant, “command these, his servants before him, to seek out man, a skillful and wise player of the harp, and it shall be thus, that when the evil spirit from Elohim is upon you, by his playing and his music you shall be healed.”

Saul looked at the two with an expression that was half annoyance and half curious hope. “My lord the king,” put in the first servant again, “consider not the request of your servants as a strange thing, for was it not so that the great Moses, when he led the people from Egypt, held before men a serpent of brass, and those afflicted were healed? And let my lord the king consider also, how that Moses and his sister Miriam sang to Yahweh after their victory, and they say that Barak the warrior, the son of Abinoam, drew courage from the songs of a prophet woman.”

Deborah, the woman the servant had mentioned, had actually composed that song *after* Barak's victory over the Canaanites, and in fact had sung it with him before the Tribes, but such details were conveniently forgotten by both the attendants and Saul himself. The king allowed himself to be convinced.

This suggestion had come so suddenly that the demons attending Saul had little time to compose a reasonable defense against his accepting the plan, but by the time they did the mighty angel who first whispered the suggestion for the arrangement was gazing at them from across the throne room with his hand on the hilt of his khrev. There would be no objections that day to this element of IaHWeH's purposes.

Naturally, Neshephiel and Edrael did not want David and his music anywhere near their charge. They had worked long and hard to ensure that Saul's guardian spirit had little influence in the decisions of the human monarch, and they loathed the idea that anything would help him to recover his grip. "Find me such a man," Saul said to his servants, "and bring him to me."

"I have heard of such a man," the first servant said, "and indeed I have seen him myself. He is a son of Jesse, a man of Bethlehem. The young man is cunning at the harp, and a mighty, valiant man, besides. He is a man of war, and wise in many matters. My lord the king, he is a pleasant person, and Yahweh is surely with him."

"This is high praise from my servants," Saul said, somewhat mystified by his attendant's lofty choice of words, but eager at this point to try any remedy. "Send for this young man. Tell his father, 'Send me your son, and I will compensate you for his absence at...' what is it the youth does at his home?"

"I have heard that he is a shepherd of his father's flocks," came the reply.

"Very well, then," Saul said with a rare smile, "tell this Jesse, 'Send me David your son, who is with the sheep.'"

* * * * *

Angels attended the servants on their journey to Bethlehem. There was no resistance, however from the demons. The sullen spirits looked on, but made no effort to interfere directly. The king of devils, no doubt, had been informed of these events almost immediately, just as he had when Samuel had made his way to the city some years earlier... and no doubt Lucifer could not be ignorant of IaHWeH's plan to familiarize David with the kingdom of Saul. We expected that he would have a reply to these advances soon enough.

As for me, I was watching over these incidents from afar, spending some of my time in Ramah with Samuel, but the rest of it on the Heavenly plane, listening to

the conversations of the spirits that were involved in the events taking place on earth.

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It is easy to lose sight of the fact that Israel was but one nation on the planet. Due to the selection of this little country by IaHWeH for His purposes, and the higher degree of success that the demons encountered in the other, “heathen,” lands, it is naturally the case that most of the records we Sar’im bring to you involve the events in that country. In a sense it is unfortunate that time does not permit a record to be given of the heroism and faith of men and women who, even without a direct revelation of the Creator’s character, nevertheless acted according to the promptings of His Spirit, and the leading of His will, and received unto themselves a promise of life in the coming creation.

In the world to come, there will be time enough to review these matters, but by purpose and providence, all that may now be spoken of what I heard during those times (though I heard much of other lands as well) must relate to the history of the holy bloodline that stretches down from Adam to the second Son of Man.

The Dominion Tamael had followed the course of the humans who had settled, after the fall of Babel, along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. As descendants of Ham, they had enjoyed good trade in both resources and knowledge with Egypt for a time, and these Philistine people had come to excel in weapon-making technology. Their metal work was noticeably superior to that of the Hebrews in those days, and the superior equipment borne by those who sought to invade Israel was balanced only by the supernatural might that stood ready to defend the country at IaHWeH’s pleasure.

Tamael was speaking in my hearing of one who had come to power in the armies of the Philistines. He was a truly gigantic human being, standing astonishingly taller than any other in those lands. In the eyes of men, who often measured worth by physical presence, Goliath of Gath had much value indeed. Yet Goliath’s talents did not end with the distance between his forehead and his feet. In addition to his great height, the giant’s musculature, unlike many who are unnaturally tall, was proportional. Further still, the monster of Gath had an almost insane dedication to combat. As it turned out, he got little practice that would have been of benefit to him, since his great reach and strength eliminated all but the greatest of Philistine warriors as training partners.

Failing to find competition among his fellow soldiers, Goliath had taken to carrying out feats of strength that required excessive amounts of effort, and training with wild beasts that would have devoured or destroyed any other man of his country. This, Tamael told us, was in store for the soldiers of the Israelite army.

* * * * *

There was another man in those days who trained with wild beasts, but out of necessity rather than a drive to dominate other creatures. As Goliath hurled boulders at lions and wrestled with bears, the future king of Israel slung stones at wolves and stood fearlessly with his simple staff against the predators that stalked his flocks.

When his brother Shammah came to him, David was leaning over the edge of a river, selecting new stones that the current had worn smooth to place in his pouch for future use.

“They have sent for you, brother,” said Shammah, who had always been kindest to David. Shammah’s expression was one that David could not read when he stood up to hear the news his brother had brought.

“Who has sent for me? Samuel?”

“Not Samuel,” Shammah said, “King Saul.”

David’s eyes widened in alarm. Had the king heard about Samuel’s mission to Bethlehem? Had he discovered the secret that could so easily mean death at the hands of a maddened monarch? What would become of him once he fell under Saul’s power? All these questions and more poured into the young man’s mind... but even as they did so Asheriel’s sweet influence worked against the fear, and soon David’s natural courage sprang forth and washed away any tendencies he may have had to flee or to hide.

“Let us go,” David said, and began to walk back to his home.

“David...” Shammah began, “you do not know why Saul is calling you.”

“Do you know?” David asked.

“I know nothing beyond what I told you, my brother.”

“Then it will do me no good to ask you. Whatever the reason, I cannot escape the command of the king any more than I can forget the oil that was poured on my head. Be of good courage, my brother. I know you care for me, but I have confidence that old Samuel’s words will not fall to the ground.”

“You are the bravest of us,” Shammah said, as they began to walk. “Even Eliab knows this, though he will never say so.”

When they arrived at Jesse’s house, his sons found him trying to pry information out of the royal herald’s mouth. “I have told you all I can tell you,” the visitor was

saying. “But I know this, the king summons your son to a place of privilege, and your family shall be compensated for his work.”

“I cannot believe, then,” Jesse said, “that any evil will befall him.” The messenger thought that Jesse referred only to Saul’s well-known fits of temper, but Jesse meant this and more, for he too had been startled by the herald’s arrival, and wondered if his son’s expected end had become known to the one whom he was destined to replace.

“David, my son,” Jesse said, seeing his youngest arrive. “As Shammah must have told you, King Saul requests your presence.” A wordless look passed between father and son; thoughts of Samuel’s visit and memories of the seer’s words flashed before them, but Jesse quickly smiled in what he hoped was a reassuring manner, and said, “I will send you with gifts for the king.”

Against the messenger’s objections, Jesse had the man come in and rest while he prepared a donkey to go with his son, and he loaded it down with wine from the local vineyard, and much of the bread for which Bethlehem was famous in those days (the name “Bethlehem” means “House of Bread”). In addition, Jesse chose one of his best young goats and tethered it to the donkey’s load by means of a short length of rope.

With equal parts excitement and sorrow, David beheld the last of the activities being performed, and then came the moment when he must bid farewell to his father, and mother, and brothers. As David embraced him, Jesse’s third born turned to his father and said, “May I accompany David to the palace?”

“You also have work, Shammah,” Jesse said.

“I will see that my place is filled,” the young man replied, “only do not let David go with this single messenger. He has brought few soldiers with him, and we know the dangers that may meet travelers on the way.” Shammah had stressed the word “dangers,” and given his father a meaningful glance. If nothing else, Shammah determined to find out just why his brother was being called.

“You may go,” the boys’ father said, after a moment of thought. “Be careful, both of you.”

With that the descendants of Judah, (for Jesse’s family was of this Tribe) a royal messenger, and a handful of armed soldiers left Bethlehem to escort King Saul’s latest guest to his palace.

As they journeyed, both David and Shammah were eager to speak to Saul’s soldiers about the battles taking place along the other regions of Israel’s coast. The soldiers, eager to break the silence with conversation, were free with their stories of battles they had seen, and with descriptions of Saul and his children.

Jonathan, David and Shammah were told, was an excellent shot with the bow, and an accomplished swordsman as well. His brothers Ishui and Melchishua were also heavily involved in the Israelite military, but had not made quite the name for themselves that Jonathan had. Saul's daughters by his wife Ahinoam were, according to their escorts, among the most beautiful young women in the country, and as filled with virtue as might be expected of any princess. They were the only ones, one of the soldiers mentioned, that did not seem to run the risk of offending their royal father on a daily basis.

When they arrived at the king's stronghold, Shammah said to his brother, "I will wait here for word. Send a message to me as soon as you can, and let me know what the king intends for you."

"If you do not see me within a day..." David began, but Shammah cut him off.

"I will wait until I hear from you," he said.

David continued in with the messenger and the armed men. They walked past rows of stony structures, and men dressed in fine armor. They walked past heralds in new clothing, and as they advanced toward the throne room David caught a glimpse of a young woman's face staring at him from a mostly concealed location. Their eyes met, briefly, and then she was gone. The guards let them past, and soon David was standing before Saul himself, who looked down at the young man from his seat, and extended his hand to summon him closer.

* * * * *

Shammah beheld the approaching messenger with some anxiety. It was the same who had come with them from Bethlehem, and the same soldiers were with him, but David was noticeably absent.

"How fares my brother?" Shammah asked.

"It is well," came the reply from the messenger. "He has pleased the king, and is to be his companion in times of rest."

"A companion," Shammah said, wondering at the term.

"Your brother's skill with the harp," explained the messenger, "may prove healthful to our troubled ruler."

"Of course," Shammah said, still uncertain. "I am relieved that he has pleased the king. I will return to my father with the news."

“We are coming with you,” said one of the soldiers, “for we have been sent with an official letter of welcome for your brother, and we are authorized to discuss the terms of his remaining with King Saul. In the times that he is at the palace, your father may be appointed a royal shepherd to guard his animals, or, if he prefers, payment instead.”

Even then, as the men retraced their steps to Bethlehem, David was playing on a harp before the king. This was no rough instrument like the one he was used to, but a fine device from the personal collection of one of Saul’s most accomplished musicians, set with precious stones and gold. As David played, even the young man himself was amazed by the quality of the notes he produced, and his singing that day was greater in power and beauty than ever before.

As he chanted song after sacred song in the presence of Saul and his attendants, a holy atmosphere filled the room, and angels gathered around. Asheriel was there with his charge, as was natural, but the ears of many nearby spirits drew them closer to hear and to see the result of the shepherd boy’s music being imbued with the Shekinah glory. Again the girl that David saw on his way to the palace appeared, but this time he took no notice of her, being focused on his work, and on the king’s reaction to his music.

Saul was no different than any other in attendance in his reaction to the music. The dark angels that held him in their grasp snarled at the newly arriving divine messengers, although the holy ones made no attempt to attack them.

Even so, the devils found that they could not effectively torment the thoughts of the king, or weaken him for future purposes while the music of the Bethlehemite was playing and the angels of Heaven stood in attendance. Saul rested, and thought on the words of the songs, and considered that perhaps he might find lasting relief before the end of his weary days.

* * * * *

Miles away in Ramah, Samuel sat at meditation with a joyful smile on his face. I was facilitating a vision as I stood behind him softly singing.

*Into the soul of one long dark,
Into the heart of one made stone,
A ray of light, a spring of hope;
And through the walls of madness flows,
Within the rooms of broken minds,
The song of youth, the sound of harps,
The voice of peace, the hymns of praise.*

The old man saw the two that he had anointed standing in one another's presence. He saw David playing beautiful music, and singing words of comfort and praise. He saw King Saul relax, his shoulders and facial expression softening as the notes filled the room. The prophet could see no one else, although others were there, but the former and future kings, and he – like Saul – dared to entertain the hope that his words might come to pass without the need for disaster.

Lucifer was also learning about the events taking place in Saul's chambers. The demons in attendance whispered silent messages across the distance, alerting their superiors to the unfolding scene. They in turn conveyed the words and images to the heads of their Houses, and these elite demons held counsel with Lucifer in the shadows of his kingdom.

As the wicked angels spoke, one came forward and said, "The tempters that attend Saul are Neshephiel of the House of Wrath, and Edrael of the House of Pride. Send one, *Ba'ali*, from your own House, the House of Fear, and the work of Samuel the prophet will come to naught."

"Have you a spirit in mind?" asked the darkest of the fallen Cherubim.

"Send me, *Ba'ali*."

"Go, then," came the eagerly anticipated reply. "Leave your current commission with others, and do work in the Kingdom of Israel."

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 4: THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

If Saul was finding a greater degree of rest as a result of young David's music, the rest of his country was coming to know greater distress than in the days before the shepherd came to grace the king's court with his presence. The dark messenger that Satan had appointed to trouble Saul and David was not the only new curse within the borders of Israel; the Philistines were stirring themselves up to work constant trouble along the edges of Saul's kingdom.

Attack after attack was repelled, and IaHWeH was with the armies of His nation. Although Saul still thought himself king, and the people acknowledged him as such, David had been the one anointed as the head of all Israel, and unbeknownst to any human except for Samuel, the people of IaHWeH would be blessed and cursed according to the state of the younger man's spirit.

The heathen warriors saw their ranks thinning, yet they continued to crash like waves against the rocks, relentlessly, and driven by deeper purposes than any of them truly suspected. There were political, territorial, even religious reasons why these men of the coasts wished to conquer the land of the Twelve Tribes, but the real motive was concealed from the humans, even from their kings: Lucifer wanted this little monarchy crushed, for he knew that it held great potential for the work of Elohim in the earth.

At Socoh, which was south of Jerusalem and west of Bethlehem, a small army of Philistines had gathered. Among them were two giants, one of flesh and one of spirit. The first of these was Goliath, the warrior of Gath; the second was the four-winged shadow that had presented himself before Lucifer when David was taken to King Saul.

There, as the men met and contemplated their strategy, Goliath was growing impatient. The commanders pointed out that they had lost men every battle, and that their casualties seemed to be in greater numbers than those of the Israelites, despite their more advanced weapons and armor. Did they lack conviction? No, for all the men were willing to die at the command of their officers. Did they lack strength? This was certainly not the case.

"Courage, men, is what is needed," Goliath said to them. Although he had not been chosen as a strategist, the man from Gath sat in on all the meetings, for...

among other things, none would oppose him. His ideas were sometimes useful, although all his suggestions were *invariably* given careful consideration – particularly when he was around to observe the proceedings.

“Had I been given the primacy, I would have led every charge, and terrified the dogs of Israel at the sight of my spear and my stature.”

“Fear wins many wars,” one captain conceded, “but you are only one man. What would it mean to our own warriors’ courage if you were to be set upon by ten men, and slain before them?”

“I can overcome ten Philistines,” Goliath replied sourly in his deeply rumbling voice, “and twenty of Jacob’s children.”

“Even so,” another said, “the risk we take with you running in ahead of our soldiers is too great. Your best use is as an image in the minds of our enemies. Let them know what may strike them, and let them think on these things as other blades cut them down.”

“This noble plan has not worked thus far,” a third said. “We continue to lose too much blood on the soil of Israel.”

“The plan has not been tried often,” the second replied. “How often have the armies of Israel even *seen* Goliath?”

“Not often enough,” Goliath said, cracking his large fingers. “We must give them more fear, and we will lose less blood.”

The first captain thought for a moment, and then said, “I stand convicted that Goliath is not to run first into battle. But,” he quickly added, as he saw the giant’s eyes swing in his direction, “there may be a way to set him before our armies nonetheless.”

“How would that be?” asked the third commander. “Before our armies, but not first into battle?”

“There will be no battle,” came the response. “Let this, our champion, challenge the greatest of the Israelites, a man of their own choosing, and let them fear when he is crushed easily by the greatest of our soldiers.”

“Single combat!” Goliath lit up visibly. “It will make poor sport, but at least it will give me a chance to be known before the men of Israel.”

“Do you think they will be eager to accept this challenge? The men of Israel have a king over them who is no fool. He has driven us back many times, and must know much about the course of warfare.”

“He may be no fool,” said Goliath, taking up the plan, “but he is a tribesman. These sons of Jacob have a strong sense of honor. They will accept, and if they do not, we will reproach them for their cowardly refusal to stand before me. Whatever comes of it, the men of Israel will see me, and will fear.”

There were no objections. The dark Throne-angel who had initially inspired the plan saw to it that there were none.

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David’s playing was interrupted by the appearance of an excited messenger. He had just returned to the court of King Saul – for he was permitted to return home periodically – and was doing his work before the monarch. Saul’s disposition since David had begun to minister to him had improved noticeably, and his reputation had gone throughout the land. Jesse began to be comforted that his son’s safety would not be threatened, even with the memory of Samuel’s visit to Bethlehem lingering in his mind.

As he turned to see who had burst into the king’s chamber unannounced, David took in the expression on the newcomer’s face, and he retreated to a corner of the room to hear what would be said. If Saul wished, he could have ordered everyone out of the room, and so the young harpist decided that the less conspicuous he made himself, the more likely he would be to remain and hear what had caused this sudden intrusion. Had this man not been known and respected by Saul, his entry would not have gone unpunished.

“The Philistines,” began the newcomer, “have advanced their armies to Socoh.”

Saul nodded his head in a manner that seemed almost bored. “I will have men sent to reinforce the region.”

“There is more to this,” said the man. “The armies of the Philistines are not attacking.”

“What do you mean?” the king asked.

“The armies are set as if to attack, but no advance is being made... not with arms.”

“What do you mean?” Saul asked again, his short temper already beginning to drain. “How can an ‘advance’ be made without arms, or what nonsense are you speaking?”

“There is a man among them, a giant. Some say he is from among the sons of Anak. He offers a challenge; he will fight one of our men, any of our choosing. If

we prevail, the giant declares that his commanders will withdraw their army. If we fail, we are to withdraw our forces instead, and allow them to possess the region.”

Saul’s eyes narrowed. “What have our men done?”

“The giant has been there for days now, crying aloud from morning to night, but none of our men have gone out against him, and no commander has ordered an attack.”

“I will go and see this man for myself,” Saul said, “and why he has not been challenged by any of our warriors. Do they not know how often Philistia has fallen before our blades? In every battle, we take more than we lose. In every fight we push them back, out of our borders. Why have none accepted this challenge? Even if the heathen do not honor their bargain, at worst we will have weakened their resolve.”

“This giant, my lord the king...” began the messenger, but Saul moved to silence him.

“No doubt he is large,” came the reply, “but what is size? All men must bleed the same.”

“Yes, my lord the king,” said the servant, without attempting to contradict Saul’s conviction.

Over the next few hours, as Saul prepared to go with his retinue to Socoh, David largely went unnoticed. When Saul finally did remember his new minstrel, it was only to say in a dismissive manner, “I will not have need of you in the field. You may return to your home.”

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Saul’s habit had been to enlist in his fighting forces any who had a reputation for battle, or had distinguished themselves in other ways. David’s family, because of their valor at the border towns, were easy choices. Eliab and Abinadab had already been fighting men, and now Shammah joined them when the call was made for swordsmen to connect with Saul at Socoh.

When the three brothers arrived at the Israelite encampment in the valley of Elah, they found the situation little changed from the report given by Saul’s excited messenger. There had been a few minor skirmishes, mostly instigated by the Israelites, but the Philistines had set up adequate defenses, and appeared to be committed to holding their location for a significant amount of time.

What they had intended, of course, was to await a reply to Goliath’s challenge, and the huge warrior had been going to the edge of their encampment nearest the

Israelites in the mornings and in the evenings, and issuing his challenges. “Why have you set your armies in array against us?” he would say, in the days before it was known that Saul himself was among the Hebrews. “Am I not the Philistine here before you? Are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man from among you, and let him come unto me.”

After Goliath learned that Saul was with his armies, his challenges intensified further. “Come and stand before me, king of Israel! I have taunted your armies these past days, and none have come. Have your orders taken the swords from the hands of your men? Is it you who cower when your armies would fight? If there is a man among you, is it not your king?”

Saul, for his part, showed admirable patience in not ordering his men to attack *en masse*, although had he done so, it is very likely that the Philistines, including Goliath, would have been overrun. The heathen’s challenge was doing its work well, striking fear into the hearts of the soldiers, and playing upon the sense of duty shared by the king and his commanders. The truth was, Goliath and his captains knew, the longer his challenge remained unanswered, the more impact the Philistine presence was having upon the minds of the Israelites, both the army gathered before them, and the people of the nearby cities who were hearing of the unanswered insults cast daily in their nation’s direction.

* * * * *

In Bethlehem, David had returned to his regular duties as shepherd. Though anointed king of Israel by the mighty prophet Samuel, and personal attendant to King Saul himself, David felt no elevated feelings regarding his duties. Pride had found no place in the young man’s heart, and the simple joys of the field and the flocks enticed him every bit as much as the gold and tapestries of Saul’s rich dwelling.

It was in the delight of his labors that David’s brother Ozem, one of the youngest, came to him. “Father calls you,” he said. “You are being sent back to the palace, and I will replace you here with the flocks.”

“Already?” David said, wondering. He knew that Saul had been going to Elah against the Philistines, but it had been only a few days since his departure, and he could not imagine that the conflict had been settled so quickly, from what he had learned of the situation.

When he returned home, David learned that his brother’s statement had been somewhat misinformed. David was to go to Saul’s *camp*, not to his palace; he was to take supplies from Bethlehem to Sucoth, and replenish his brothers who were with their king. His sister Abigail prepared bread, and his mother supplied grain and cheeses, and they set them upon a donkey. Jesse said to David, “You are the most familiar with Saul and his armies. Go to your brothers with these supplies,

for we have heard that the Philistines and our men are standing against each other, but are not fighting. This could be a long confrontation, and I do not want your brothers to need anything they do not have. Take the bread for your brothers, and give the cheeses to the captain of their company, and return with news of how they are doing.”

David gladly accepted this task, and set out very shortly after the supplies were readied. As he went, he took with him his shepherd’s equipment, for he had not rested much after knowing of his father’s request. David was eager to see his brothers, and to know how the battle was going for their sakes. He also took the royal harp that had been given to him in Saul’s home in Gibeah.

As David reached the end of his journey, leading the beast of burden, he crossed a little river and arrived in Saul’s camp, entrenched near to the Philistine army. What he found there surprised him. The tents were mostly empty, and he saw in the distance the majority of Israel’s forces that were gathered there, armed and moving in formation. The few men whom he could see had been left behind were running about busily, looking anxious. David brought his animal near one of the tents that still had some Israelites near it, and said, “What has happened?”

“King Saul has ordered an attack on the Philistine army.”

“I had heard there was a challenge,” David said. “Have any met it, or is this to be a battle?”

“None have met the challenge,” the soldier replied, “but by numbers, we should take the day. There are more of us here than the men of Philistia, and the giant among the heathen will not withstand us for long.”

“I will go and meet the army and see this giant,” David said. Without waiting for a reply, he asked instead, “May I leave this animal, and these supplies, here with you?”

“We are here to guard the camp from attack,” the man said. “We have no plans to be removed, at least not until the army returns.”

David turned and ran forward to meet the marching warriors, hoping to find his brothers among the men. The soldiers, shouting loudly to announce their approach to their Philistine opponents, took no notice of the young man as he drew near to them, and David moved quickly through the ranks, looking for Eliab and his other two siblings. Just as he thought he recognized one of his brother’s faces the army halted, for they had reached the outskirts of the Philistine encampment. Cries of alert began to go up from the would-be invaders, and the flashing of steel in the sun was seen as swords and spears were drawn and shields were equipped.

Ignoring the stirring Philistine camp, David approached his family members and said, “Greetings to you, my brothers!”

“David,” Abinadab said, incredulously, “What are you doing here?”

“I have brought you supplies from our father, but I saw that you had marched, and came forward to meet you and see the challengers of Israel.”

“You have been in battle before,” Abinadab said, “but not like this. The Philistines have come now in greater numbers than we have seen before, and there are mightier men among them. Return to the camp, for you are unarmed, and unarmored.”

As he said this, however, heads began to turn around them, and David and his brothers also looked to see what was calling the attention of their men. From among the tents of the Philistines came a gleaming light, and a rising cry to rival the shouts of Israel’s army as they had marched forward. As the flickering light drew closer, the men of Israel saw that it was the gleaming of the sun off of a helmet of polished bronze that sat on the head of Goliath of Gath.

The soldiers had all seen Goliath before, but there was something newly terrifying about him this day, carrying with him a huge spear in his hand, and another, thinner one for throwing strapped across his back. Before him went his armor bearer carrying his shield. This was a man of average height, but by contrast he seemed like a small child playing with his father’s military equipment.

“Men of Israel,” Goliath cried out when they had come within range, “have you all come out as the sands of the sea against the one who stands before you? You have heard my words, and know that the Philistines will not fight until my challenge is met. Will you cut me down before them like dogs with no honor, or will you choose a champion to face me in fair combat? I renew my challenge, as I have renewed it day and night before your camp for all these days: defeat me, and my men will return to our country, and trouble you no more. But let me prevail, and you in turn must withdraw from this region for ever.”

It was not only Goliath’s spear, and his shining helmet, that was striking dread into the heart of almost everyone there assembled. The dark Throne sent by Lucifer was standing above the human, using the abilities he had honed in the House of Fear to give great weight to the heathen warrior’s words, and making his appearance even more terrible in the sight of Israel. As was told to me later, for I was attending to Samuel in Ramah during this confrontation – though eagerly interested in its progress – David’s guardian approached the dark spirit, even as Goliath continued to reproach the army that had come out against his people.

As Asheriel drew near, his eyes widened in surprise. He recognized this particular demon. “Khereniël, of the House of Fear,” he named him.

“Asheriel, of the Virtues,” came the reply. In Satan’s kingdom, a spirit’s house, or purpose, was considered more important than his Heaven-assigned class.

“What instruction?”

“You are not the one that should be asking that,” Asheriel responded. “What place have you with these Philistines?”

“An assignment,” the evil angel replied. “I am to ensure the death of both of Israel’s kings – the former and the newly anointed.”

“We shall prevent you,” David’s guardian said.

“No doubt, you will prevent *me*,” came the response. “But I will do little beyond standing by. Goliath of Gath has his freedom to act as he will.” Even as he said this, however, dark tendrils of energy were seeping like shadowy smoke from the body of the four-winged spirit, and pouring over the land around Goliath and his armor bearer. “Do not concern yourself with this,” he continued, indicating the fear he was causing among the Israelites. “This will not be the day.”

“IaHWeH will choose the day of every victory,” Asheriel said, but even as he spoke this some of the men of Israel broke away from their ranks and ran back to the camp from which they had marched. Even David’s brothers stared at the giant as he approached, unable to summon the courage to stand firm.

As the others were departing more and more followed them, and Shammah finally said, “Brothers, if all the army leaves, and we three are left alone, how shall we stand against this giant?” The three sons of Jesse began to follow their companions back to the camp, and David, continuing to glance backward at the giant, wondered. He, of all the men of Israel, had felt no fear, and he was amazed that the army, superior in numbers, and from the nation blessed by the Almighty, would run before one man, however large. It was the Spirit that rested upon David that allowed him to be immune from the effects of Khereniel’s power. David had a natural courage that had caused him to stand up to wild beasts that challenged the flock, but this was a demonic fear that gripped the warriors in array against Goliath, and only supernatural support could prevent human weakness from appearing.

It was Khereniel’s turn to discover that he had misspoken, however. Goliath, instead of returning to the Philistine camp, said, “This wearies me greatly! I have had enough of this waiting.” Turning to his armor-bearer he said, “Call the men of action, of courage, from among our army. We go to the Israelites, and I will demand a champion from among them. If they will not fight us, we will camp before their faces. Let them see us all day to day, and force this to an end.”

His assistant ran back to the camp but Goliath, unmindful of the possibility of an ambush or a sudden stand by the fleeing Israelites, continued to follow the army. "Let them come to me!" he roared, knowing that his voice would carry to the retreating soldiers.

When they arrived back at Saul's camp, David left his brothers and began to make his way to Saul's tent. He wanted to know why this situation had been allowed to continue as long as it had. Naturally courageous, and spiritually protected against the influence of the demons that were with the Philistine army, David could see no reason for any further delay.

As he walked past the tent where he had left his supplies, he spoke to the soldier to whom he had entrusted his animal, and asked, "Is there no strength in Israel, that this giant should insult Yahweh of Hosts in so bold a manner?"

"The king has ordered no charge," said the soldier. "I think..." he hesitated, and then, deciding he had already begun, finished his sentence. "I think the king is awaiting someone to take up the giant's challenge, so that we can see his strength in battle before we attack."

David frowned, and then he said, "The man who takes up this challenge... what will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away this reproach from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should insult the armies of the living Elohim?"

"The men have said that they overheard King Saul. He said that the one who kills him will be granted great riches, and he will even give him his daughter as a wife, and make his father's house free in Israel."

"Which daughter?" David asked. He had seen two in Gibeah, and there may have been more.

"I know nothing more than what I have heard the men saying."

"Either would be a reward enough!" said another who stood with the first soldier.

"David!" came an angry voice from behind him. "Why did you come down here? Who did you leave to take care of our father's sheep in the wilderness?" Eliab looked at his brother disapprovingly. "I know the pride and wickedness of your heart; you have come down here to watch a fight!"

"What wrong do you accuse me of now?" David asked, "Is there not a reason for me to speak as I do?"

Turning to the other soldier, who had spoken of Saul's daughters, he asked, "Why have none taken up this challenge, to win for themselves the reward?" Eliab

fumed; he was not used to being ignored, yet he would not strike his younger brother before the army of Israel. He walked away, cursing to Abinadab about his brother's bold statements. Others, however, had heard David's statements as well, and even more heard it from Eliab's angry commentary. Soon it was known in the camp that a young boy was questioning the courage of the armies of Israel. On any other day, such annoyances might be ignored, but today, after fleeing as a man from the giant, there was enough wounded pride among the warriors that any insult to their power of will or weapon was worth repeating to at least one ear.

Within a very short time even Saul had heard of these things, and he was furious, as was his custom. "Bring me this boy," he said to his attendants.

David was not hard to find among the Israelite soldiers. He was making his way toward Saul's tent, but speaking to many along the way, asking who they were, and what family they came from, and why they believed the army of Israel had allowed the uncircumcised barbarian of the Philistines to insult IaHWeH unanswered.

Once brought before Saul, the king immediately recognized his musician, though in the weeks past he had come to learn little more about David than his name, and had forgotten even the few details that he at one time had known. David's music healed him when it was played, and that was all he mattered to the king.

"You," Saul said, "what is your purpose? To insult the armies of Israel this day?"

"Let no man's heart fail for fear this day, my lord the king," David replied confidently. "Let this, your servant, go forth against this Philistine."

On any other day, mocking laughter might have erupted from Saul's tent. On any other day, the boy might have been expelled from the king's presence, and perhaps given a beating as well, despite his being slightly older than a mere child. On any other day, there would not have been one particular demon hovering over Saul and his attendants, commanding the demons of pride and wrath to be silent as their superior worked his skill on the king of Israel. Kehreniel, once he had recovered from his surprise at Goliath's impatience, decided that he would well turn this situation to his advantage. If he was to cause the death of David and Saul, why was it necessary for one to kill the other?

The evil Throne's original plan had been for Saul to gradually become more and more paranoid of David. The demon knew that the young man had been chosen as Saul's successor, but Saul did not. By gradually manipulating circumstances to give the angry king the idea that his musician was actively seeking to replace him, he anticipated that it would not be long before David was slain. Taking care of Saul after that would be easy work, if it were – at that point – even deemed necessary.

Now, with Goliath advancing upon Israel's encampment, and his army not far behind, why not let David's foolish courage do half of the work he had been assigned?

Saul's pride did not rise up against David upon hearing this request, nor did his wrath cause him to act hastily. Instead, he thought within himself that he did wish for *someone* to test Goliath in battle... and if it were not the best of his warriors, perhaps his soldiers would be shamed by David's courage, and when he was slain by the giant of Gath, perhaps his men would stand forward and avenge him. In any event, he, Saul, would not have to go forth himself.

But no, his conscience pricked him for a moment, how could he send this youth to fight in his place, and the place of all Israel? "You cannot go to fight against this Philistine, for you are but a young man, and they say that this challenger has been a man of war from his own youth."

David said, undeterred, "Before your servant came to you in your house, he kept his father's sheep. There came a day when a lion and a bear both attacked our flocks. As I kept the bear away, the Lion took away one of our lambs, and I went after him. My lord, I caught this beast, and I struck him with my staff." David held his shepherd's stave before the king's face.

"I took back that lamb, my lord the king, I took him out of that lion's mouth, and when he rose up against me, I took him by the hair on his face, and I struck him again, and slew him. That day, my lord, I slew both a lion and a bear, and I tell you truly – this Philistine, this uncircumcised one, will be no different than either of these wild animals, for he has defied the armies of the living Elohim, and has made himself thus no better than the beasts of the field.

"Moreover, my lord," David put in, seeing that Saul was about to speak, "Yahweh is He who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and the paw of the bear. It is He who will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine!"

Cowardice, disguised as prudence and kindness, led Saul to reply, "Go, then, and may Yahweh be with you." Saul had honestly been impressed by David's fair speech, but on any other day, had he not been drowning in thick, dark wisps of spiritual smoke, he would have sent the boy back to his father's house.

As David turned to go, Saul said, "Wait!" He motioned to his attendants and said, "See that the boy is given the best weapons and armor we have in the camp."

"What armor is better than my lord's?" came the flattering reply, though it was certainly a true statement.

"Give him these," Saul said, having no intention of using it himself that day.

A short time later, David again appeared before the king, this time in his royal armor. He did not, however, seem at all comfortable. "My lord," David said, "I cannot go with these, for I am entirely unused to them." He took off the metal barriers, piece by piece, and removed the sword from around his waist. "Yahweh is my strength, and my shield."

With that, he turned and walked out of the tent. Kehreniel ensured that no one moved.

With his staff in his hand, David walked back out of the camp the way he had come from his father's house. As he stopped by the stream he had crossed before with his donkey, David knelt and drank the water that flowed past. When he had quenched his thirst, he selected five stones from the river, as he so often did on his father's land. He turned and walked again through the camp, this time toward the Philistine army. David walked slowly, but confidently, letting every man see him going and returning. He was proud, not for his own sake, but because he would show the warriors of Israel what it truly meant to be chosen by the Almighty. "Let me take away the reproach from our army," David said, "And they will fight as Israel ought to fight."

Goliath stood with Israel before him and the men of Philistia behind him. The captains had gathered the soldiers and followed their champion, not because they were eager to break the course upon which they had decided they should go, but because they did not want to see the giant slaughtered by the Israelite forces. To his amazement, and to his great joy, the warrior saw a single head bobbing into view from the camp of his enemies.

"A challenger!" he bellowed at the top of his voice, beginning to run forward. "A man of Israel at last! Come, and stand before me, that I may see the courage and the pride of this land!"

Every angel gathered there drew close to the scene as David approached Goliath. They knew that at a word from Heaven they could evaporate this threat to IaHWeH's chosen king. Yet every angel also knew, by the instruction of Heaven, that this was a battle the human must fight, and be seen fighting, for the good of all Israel.

Goliath's eyes blazed with anticipation as the combatants drew nearer, and then, suddenly, he stopped running. He stood still... and he stared.

Now the giant's eyes were blazing again, but this time with indignation. This, he was sure, must be some manner of jest.

"What is this?" he shouted. "What manner of act is this?"

"I am your challenger!" David shouted in reply, as loudly as he could.

“This, a boy!” bellowed the giant in fury. “And what am I, a dog, that you should come to me with a stick?”

“This boy, and this staff, are all that you see,” David said, “but I have with me a mightier hand than you have yet known, Philistine!”

“Whose hand is upon you, boy, that you should be turned to madness? And what is it, that infects Israel’s army, and its king, so that they should send you to be crushed?”

“The hand of Yahweh is upon me,” said the youth, “to destroy the enemies of Israel, for the faith of Yahweh is my weapon.”

“Faith!” Goliath roared, “Let me tell you a thing about faith, before I send you to the place where all are silent. In the days past, our mighty god Dagon fell before your Yahweh. The men of our nation saw that your God’s golden box had broken our idol. Because of this many did not wish to continue to try our claims for Israel. They were fools! It is not Dagon that gives victory, but these!”

Goliath swung his spear around, the tip screaming through the air. “It was not the men of faith that moved forward the advance of this warfare. It was the men of steel, of blood... we rule by strength, and all that gods are good for are blessing and cursing.”

“Blessings and cursings,” David shouted, “are more powerful than any sword or spear!”

“You believe so?” Goliath asked. “Those who believe in blessings for battle and those who do not both die alike – the difference, boy, is that those who believe die *surprised!*”

“But come, then, if my spear is weaker than my curse, then you shall have both. By Dagon, by Ashtoreth, by Ba’alZebub, may what little strength you have fail, and your sword fall by your side. Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field!”

David replied, “You come to me indeed with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come to you in the name of *Yahweh Sabaoth*, the Elohim of the armies of Israel, whom you have reproached! This day Yahweh will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down. It is I who will give carcasses this day, but of the host of the Philistines, to the fowls of the air, and the wild beasts of the field. And all the earth will know that there is a Mighty One in Israel! And all assembled here today will know that Yahweh does *not* save by swords, or by spears; for the battle is Yahweh’s and He will give you into our hands!”

Goliath growled in anger and rushed forward, thinking to kick the boy out of his way, or to run him through with his spear and then continue right up to the edge of the Israelite camp. This insult was too great to be endured!

David saw the giant charging, and he ran forward also, stopping only to reach into his pouch and pull out one of the stones he had collected from the river. Closer, closer drew the bronze-glad warrior, growing larger and larger in the boy's vision. Yet no fear shook David's heart; he did not, for an instant, countenance the idea that he would be harmed. Into a strap of leather David placed his tiny missile, and as the Philistine came within range, he began to swing it around in his hand. Goliath was nearer now, and in his fury he threw down his shield.

David changed the angle of his hand, and the stone was now spinning in circles over his head in the sling. Goliath gritted his teeth and opened his helmet. He wanted to see the fear on the face of this boy of Israel for an instant before he ended his short life.

Goliath was close now, close enough that David could see the flush on his skin for the excitement of battle, the exertion of his charge, and the anger that poured off of him like waves of heat. At that moment, just as the Philistine was raising his spear, David gave the stone one last twirl and released.

As angels and demons watched, the stone sped forward at terrific speed. Every spirit saw, long before the blow struck, that the shepherd's aim had been true. Kehreniel fluttered his wings in surprise and surged forward to intercept the tiny bit of matter, but instantly four mighty warriors of Heaven were barring his way. No, angels did not guide the stone that decided that confrontation – David's aim had been true. But angels did protect the stone as it left his sling, and streaked through the atmosphere of earth to land squarely in the forehead of the charging champion of the Philistines.

How frail is flesh! Goliath, the mighty man of war, continued to charge forward, his momentum carrying his mass even though the mind that guided those steps had gone blank in a flash of pain and pressure. The champion of Gath fell, as Dagon had once fallen, face first; and he landed squarely at the feet of the future king of Israel.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 5: SEEKING SHELTER

The sword of Goliath was made of iron, the likes of which was rarely seen in Israel in those days. It was also a little larger than the military's standard issue for either side of the conflict. David's young muscles strained and tightened as he held the blade over his head, and struck downward.

A moment of silence spread over the scene as both armies registered what they had just seen. Few of the onlookers had noticed, or understood, what had taken place with David's sling. Most of the warriors simply saw Goliath falling, and his head being hewn off by the Israelite boy. The armies of Israel gave a great shout of triumph, and immediately those who were not armed scrambled for weapons. Without instructions, or the need for instructions, from their king, the men of Israel charged into the Philistine line, and the heathen fled before them. Their champion was dead, their advantage of fear was broken, and all that remained was the simple fact that the Philistine army was outnumbered, and by a military force that had put them to flight many times in the past.

The invading army raced past the place where they had previously encamped for forty days, leaving supplies and equipment in their urgency. The Israelites pursued them all the way back to Ekron in Philistia, and those who were not swift enough were slain and wounded by their foes. Great was the victory, and great the rejoicing, as the men returned from their pursuit and took spoils from the tents of the Philistines. Heralds ran ahead, through the cities of Israel, proclaiming the news of the day, and the mighty deliverance that IaHWeH had wrought at the hands of a shepherd boy of Bethlehem.

David returned to Saul's tent, carrying with him the head of Goliath of Gath. The soldiers leaped about like children, for great was their release after forty days of tension and inactivity. Never had the men of Israel heard of any such thing as this, and they could not contain their shouts of praise for Israel, for IaHWeH, and for David.

As David came to the entrance of the tent a man stepped out, as if to prevent him from entering. This warrior had been in the tent of Saul at David's request to meet Goliath, but he had not spoken. Now, he knelt before the returning champion of Israel, and drew out his sword. "This weapon is yours, from this day forward. You will have also my bow, and my girdle."

“Who am I, that I should be so favored,” David said, “and who are you to offer me such gifts?” David was not naïve; he knew that the men of Israel would praise him. When they were of a mind to listen, he would assure them that it was not he who was deserving of their adoration, but the Almighty of Israel, who had protected him and given him the victory. At the moment, however, he was merely attempting to communicate clearly over the general din.

“I am Jonathan, son of Saul,” said the young soldier, looking up. “Braver words were never spoken before my father, nor braver deeds done in Israel, than that which you have done today.”

“This is praise indeed, coming from you,” David said. “I know of your adventures against the Philistines, that you raided their camp, and stole their weapons, that you and few others cut down a garrison of the heathen, and restored peace to Israel for a time.”

Jonathan laughed, “There will be time to trade tales of warfare later. Come, my father will want to see you.”

Saul said to David, in the presence of his attendants, all that one would have expected him to say. David was appointed riches and honor, and a permanent place in the court of Saul, but now as a warrior as well as a musician.

* * * * *

Kehreniel was livid. His brilliant idea for the speedy dispatch of David had failed, and the well-laid plans of the demons who had been guiding Goliath’s progress found that all their hard work was wasted. Not wishing to have an overly long conversation with the fallen spirits attending the Philistine army, the wicked Throne withdrew to Shinar to await further instructions or a new idea. He was, for the moment, defeated.

Edrael and Neshephiel, without so much as a word to the fear demon, went back to their work on Saul, combining their efforts to continue the king’s descent into total madness. For the time being they were working on him subtly. David was treated very well in the court of Saul, despite a potentially disastrous experience on the way back to Saul’s dwelling, and shortly after arriving there. As the army returned from their confrontation, the women of the cities came out to greet them, and on their lips were songs of praise. “Saul has slain his thousands,” they sang, “and David his tens of thousands!”

The songs, exalting David over Saul himself, stung the unstable monarch. They were particularly painful because, on more than one level, Saul knew that the words of the women were justified. Not only had David slain the giant that had terrified the entire Israelite army, including their king, but he was also of such a character that all his men appeared to immediately grant him respect, and even

deference. The justice of the praise, however, and the appropriateness, did nothing to provide Saul with a defense against his tempters' influence, and his rage against the young man began to build.

The day after their return, David – without so much as a word – took up his harp and went in to play before Saul, as had been his custom before being sent back to Bethlehem.

Saul's thoughts had been filled with violence lately, often directed toward his own household, or his dearest servants. When he closed his eyes in sleep, or even to rest for a moment, visions of terrible acts that he could commit against them flashed before him. In the mere hours had passed since their rout of the Philistines, these thoughts became increasingly focused within him. "Prudent, you would have been, to slay him when the opportunity presented itself," Neshephiel said in his ear. Saul had taken so little note of David after his initial appointment, despite the enjoyment and spiritual benefits obtained from his playing, that he had not even remembered what family he was from when he brought Goliath's head before his tent. Now, he was considering that he ought to have paid more attention in those earlier days.

That morning, as David set himself in order to play for him, Saul found that the music did little to soften the tightness between his brows, or the heat he felt creeping up his neck and surging through his limbs. "Shall we show you a thing?" Edrael whispered, "Do you want to know what will come to pass in Israel concerning this boy, and yourself?"

Saul heard the voice as a thought of his own devising, and he ignored it. David's music filled the room, and those attending him smiled, rejoicing silently in the young man's skill. "Do you seek to know the future of the son of Jesse, who sits before you in your throne room? We have seen the prophet Samuel, O King, how he took him a sacrifice to Bethlehem, in the days after he turned away from you... how he took him a horn of oil, a new king to anoint!"

Saul's distress and anger battled one another for supremacy. These thoughts were not like his own thoughts. He had done his best to dismiss Samuel entirely from his memories for the past few years, and so far as he knew the old man's words signified that Jonathan or one of his other children would take the throne after he passed away, however recently he feared that would be. But this voice was different, insistent, and speaking words that were beginning to draw his attention even further away from the sacred music, and to darker regions within his mind.

"This boy takes your armies!" the voice continued, demanding now his attention by its intensity. A holy man, or even a man who had not rejected the mercy of IaHWeH, could have resisted what was happening, but Saul was without such protection, and his anger at David was making even the gift of his music to strengthen him ineffective. "Your armies today, and your crown the next! And

what of your servants, O King? Who suggested that you bring this worm in before you, to feed at your table, to win the hearts of your men, and to exalt himself before all Israel as a man ten times better than yourself?"

The reminder of the women's songs caused Saul's rage to peak. In addition, Kehreniel could not have done a better job of inspiring fear and paranoia in the king's unsettled mind. If what the voices were saying was true, either IaHWeH was truly against him – for how could Samuel have anointed someone who would find his way so shortly thereafter into his courts? – or there was a conspiracy among his men. Either possibility was a cause for terror, and both must be dealt with in the same way.

With a snarl, Saul seized a javelin that had been leaning on the wall near his throne. "Your service does me no good," he cried out before his horrified attendants, and then he stood up and threw the deadly weapon with all his strength at David.

The young man leaped nimbly aside as the shaft flicked past him, burying itself in the wall. As shouts of surprise began to fill the room, David lost no time in running to the door and away from Saul's presence.

When, in the course of a week, this happened twice, David resolved that he would not return to Saul's chamber again, despite the urgings of his attendants.

It was just as well that he had decided this, for at the same time Saul, conveniently remembering the promises he made during the days of tension and fear, appointed the young man captain of his military forces. This was a decision accepted readily by even his most ambitious and seasoned veterans, although in truth the suspicious king simply wanted David out of his sight and in dangerous situations.

As he traveled to fulfill one particular military task that David was to perform along the southwestern border, he passed through Bethlehem to visit his home. His family, of course, was overjoyed to see him again, even Eliab, who had become far more humble concerning his brother after the battle at Elah. Of particular interest to David was Shammah, who had been injured during the pursuit of the Philistine army; his wound was not serious, but it caused him to remain at home, unlike Jesse's two eldest sons, who came and went at King Saul's needs.

The visit home was pleasant, and the border patrol uneventful, but when David returned to Saul's court a surprise awaited him. Summoned into the king's presence, David knelt in deference to the acknowledged leader of Israel. "Arise," Saul said to him, with an inviting, pleasant voice. David was immediately concerned.

"It came to pass, while you were away," Saul began, "that I considered the service that you have given to Israel. You played the man before Goliath the giant, whose sword you rightly won, and whose strength you have consumed because of the

reputation that is now yours. The people love you, and my servants also. The army bows before your courage and wisdom, from the newest swordsman to the most weathered of my veterans.”

“But I saw,” the king continued, “that Israel has not been to you as good as you have been to it. Great riches were promised to the man that slew Goliath, and a place in my kingdom, even the hand of my daughter in marriage, that there should be a union between my family and the family of that one who should take away the reproach from Israel.”

“Your servant slew Goliath,” David said, “not for reward, or for gain, but for the sake of Israel. As the Philistine, so shall be all those who take up a reproach against the people of Yahweh of Hosts.”

“To be sure,” Saul said, “all that you say is true. Nevertheless, it is my offer of friendship between my house and the house of Jesse, that I give my daughter unto you.”

“Which daughter?” David asked. The young man had come to learn the identity of the beautiful girl that had watched him from the distance the first day he arrived at Saul’s house. They had met, and even spoken, and although he had not yet said anything, he had developed a fondness for Saul’s daughter that he hoped she might return.

“My eldest, Merab. She will I give you, only...” Saul paused, waiting to see if David would prompt him. When he said nothing, Saul said, “only continue to be valiant against the Philistines. I know your latest patrol saw no danger, and this does not surprise me; after your defeat of their champion, no doubt these heathen will take their time and recover before crossing our borders again. And yet, shall we wait passively for their next attempt to invade the inheritance of Jacob?”

“No,” Saul said, answering his own question. “There must be action on our part! Let your hand, my servant, be upon them, for they know you by name, and will fear any men that you lead into their country.”

“When the javelin fails,” David thought to himself, “policy will make the attempt.”

David chose his words carefully, then he said, “My lord the king, the Philistines are not the only enemies of Israel. While our forces attempt to strike at an enemy that may not have strength, may we not leave ourselves unguarded from another angle?”

“I had no mind to send my entire army,” came the reply. “Surely, a champion of your might needs not many men to make our victory secure over a weakened foe.”

“Then let your majesty know,” David responded, “that while we drove off the Philistines at Socoh, we did not slay every man that fled. The Philistines are yet a considerable people, and a small force would not be sufficient to make a reasonable impact before they could again gather their strength. I fear that the terms of your eldest daughter’s hand are too high.”

“This matter of marriage...” Saul began to say, but David interrupted him smoothly.

“Who am I, and of what account is my life, or that of my father’s family in Israel, that I should be the son in law of the king?”

Saul rose and left the room, overcome with anger. While Saul knew that David’s humility was not feigned, he was also certain that the young warrior had realized his desire to severely shorten the career of his new general. Nevertheless, he was confident that he could find an excuse to place him in harm’s way.

As David left Saul’s presence, he passed an older man in a loose, but expensive-looking garment. “My young lord has answered discreetly,” he said quietly. “There is much danger for you here. Seek your opportunity, and escape this place.”

“And what is your concern?” David asked. “Who are you?”

“I am one who has learned much of you,” the man said. “I am a friend, and a former student of one you know well.” With that he turned and walked into the room David had just left, the court of King Saul.

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While this was taking place, Neshephiel and Edrael were berating Saul for letting David escape so easily. In truth, only the absence of an available weapon had prevented the maddened king from making yet another attempt on the young man’s life. Still, the two demons that had come to be so very familiar with King Saul’s household already had another, perhaps better, idea in mind.

David had every reason for rejecting Saul’s offer on the grounds that he had stated. Attacking the Philistines at that point in time, despite their recent defeat, was not a strategy that Heaven had ordained for success. There was, however, another reason why an ill-fated foray against the heathen armies was too high a cost for Merab’s hand in marriage, and it involved the growing feelings that had been developing between David and Saul’s second daughter Michal. The demons had not been blind to this, and knew that had Saul’s offer been different only in the prize, David may well have been tempted to accept.

Employing one of their most powerful weapons, that of gossip, the wicked spirits ensured that King Saul found out about this affection, and while, perhaps, if it had

been allowed to run its natural course it would have been a blessing to both, Lucifer's agents intended it for evil. It was to this end that Saul employed his new knowledge. Having married Merab off to another man during the heat of his anger, Saul decided to renew his offer to David, this time with a more enticing reward, and with (at least initially) less of a cost. He would also do things far more subtly now where the young man was concerned; at least, that was his resolution.

To the very servant who had brought Saul the news concerning David and his younger daughter, Saul said, "Tell David, as if in secret, that he has found favor with me. The reward that I have given him for his playing before me, and again for driving off the invaders, has been too little. In rejecting my offer of my daughter, I have been pained, for I desired to show him favor, yet I would see him married into the house of Saul.

"Tell David," Saul said to his eager servant, "that I know he is a poor man – for you have told me that this concerns him – and therefore I desire no bride price for my daughter Michal, but rather let him put his skills once again to the good of Israel. Let him provide me with another evidence of his valor – let him bring me a hundred foreskins of the uncircumcised Philistines."

If Saul's messenger was at all surprised by this, he said nothing, and made no indication. Had he known Saul's desire, however, to entice David into more and more dangerous exploits as the opportunities presented themselves, he might have been more hesitant at letting the king's words be known. As it stood, David heard the report of the servant with delight, for he had not known what would become of his desire for Michal with her father's recent attempts on his life. If the thing were anything like this servant was describing, it would be well. The young man did suspect Saul's motives, but he knew that the price the king was requesting was well within his abilities, particularly with the skillful and ready men that he had under his command.

Only a short time later Saul had his bag of skin, and David had a new wife.

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The marriage, at least initially, was a happy one. David and Michal did share genuine affection, and aside from the instability that resulted from Saul's deteriorating condition, their home life was peaceful. David resided in Gibeah near Saul's home, for as the chief captain of the Israelite army, he was frequently summoned for discussions with the king and other high officials of military service.

While Saul had fully expected David to accomplish his bridal requirement for Michal eventually, the speed and apparent ease at which he had accomplished his mission renewed the king's suspicions about the young man's rise to fame in his kingdom. Though outwardly Saul was civil to his new son-in-law, just under the

surface, and all the way to the core, he was the young man's deadly enemy. The demons that now had almost total control over Saul's thoughts and actions bided their time, waiting for an opportune moment to strike. That time was not long in coming.

After one particularly successful military action, the people were once again praising David's name in the streets. As your History records, he was "much set by" in Israel, and it was during the height of his popularity that Saul's mental and spiritual condition finally bottomed out. Enraged with jealousy over the acclamation David was receiving, Saul summoned his son Jonathan and several of his most trusted courtiers and opened up his heart before them.

"My son, and my servants who are as my own family, hear my words this day, and consider them well, for they are dire ones. You know that David, the son of Jesse, has come from a poor home, and a shepherd's life, to the highest position in my kingdom next to myself. Are these things occurrences of chance? Did Yahweh cause him to come up before us, and ascend into the heavens?"

"I think," Saul said, "neither of these... no, there must be a purpose, some ambition, that has led him to take opportunity. Soon, I know and fear, he will take opportunity against me, and you, my son, will not have the throne that is your right."

Jonathan began to protest, but Saul silenced him. "I know of your fondness for that boy, but this makes this matter all the more dangerous. He will lull you to sleep with music, and then comes a dagger. I tell you, there can be no trusting a man who knows both the harp and the sword with such skill – the thing is unnatural!"

Saul continued his speech for many minutes, allowing no interruptions, and no questions. His words became more and more erratic, reflecting the paranoia that had become anchored in his heart, and it was with great relief that Jonathan finally left the room. He had agreed, at least before his father, to betray David, but Saul's firstborn son had no intention of actually doing so.

The love that Jonathan had felt for David from that first meeting had not diminished with time. Theirs was a brotherhood of equal minds, and a commonality of spirit that your Record declares as "passing the love of women." Some, particularly in this generation, have thought this wording strange as applied to two men. It is, however, nothing unusual. In this generation men bond one to another, enjoying the company of others over things that, from the perspective of eternity, are quite trivial. This bond may be as strong, or stronger, than any familial or even marital affections. The friendship shared by David and Jonathan contained all these elements, and more. Jonathan, despite his parentage, was a genuinely spiritual human, and he easily discerned the spirit of IaHWeH that had come to rest on the Bethlehemite. What repelled Saul had entirely the opposite

effect on his son; there was nothing in this world or beyond that would have enticed Jonathan to turn away from this bond.

As soon as he could discreetly do so, Jonathan went to David and told him of his father's plan to kill him through his servants, since his attempts using the policy of the land and the circumstances surrounding his military career had failed. Saul had also hoped to use Michal as a spy of sorts, reporting to her father what David's mind was, and what he was about when the eyes of the court were not upon him. Michal, however, shared her brother's devotion to her husband, and would perform no such functions despite the enticements and threats of her father. Now, in desperation, Saul had openly declared his purpose to destroy David to his trusted attendants. The fact that he genuinely believed he could convince them that David presented a threat to himself, and to the kingdom of Israel, was simply an evidence of his failing mental faculties. Not one who knew David in any capacity believed him capable of treason.

At the end of their conversation that day, Jonathan said to David, "Watch yourself carefully this night, for my father may move impatiently through one of his servants. In the morning go somewhere safe, and hide yourself there. Let me try to speak to my father when his anger has cooled – for you know that the songs and praise you have received stirred him up – and I will see what he has to say." David agreed to this, and hid himself for a few days.

At the appointed time, Jonathan and David met at a location of their choosing, and Jonathan said, "I have spoken to my father, and... I know not how to take his words, but he seems kindlier disposed where you are concerned."

"Who would not think me a fool, who heard these things?" David said. "How many times has the king attempted to take my life, and yet I return?"

"My father has sworn by the name of Yahweh," Jonathan said, "that your life is not in danger."

"My life is in Yahweh's hands," David replied, "As far as your father goes... we shall see. Nevertheless, I will not hide myself any longer from him. If I have reproached the armies of Israel for their lack of courage before the Philistines, how shall I then appear if it were known that I have fled from Saul?"

For a time, it seemed that Saul would keep his word to the young man. With great affection, David was welcomed back into the court of the king. It may even be that Saul fully intended to avoid harming the young man, for he made a point of having all weapons removed from his immediate vicinity when David sat and played before him as in the former days. When the Philistines again recovered the strength of their armies and attempted again to take land from Israel, David was the trusted warrior once again sent out at the head of the nation's forces.

In order to avoid sounding repetitive, and to make a long record somewhat shorter, it is perhaps best to simply say that Saul's convictions were temporary, and even invoking the name of the Most High, if done by an unstable spirit, is no defense against the work of evil angels. Saul did, again, attempt to attack David as he sat playing music before him some time after the latest defeat of the Philistine army. So dark had the king's essence become that, despite his earlier words, and his invocation of IaHWeH Himself, this was no mere impulsive action. Saul planned to finally end the threat to his rule, as he saw it, and the factor that he supposed was at the root of his paranoia and growing madness. It made no difference to the mind of the king that his problems started long before David had ever come into his presence, at the rejection of IaHWeH's leadings in his life. Once he decided that for his own sake, and for the sake of all Israel, David must die, he enlisted the aid of a servant to conceal a javelin as he stood next to him in the throne room.

As in times past, David escaped from the presence of Saul as the deadly missile flew toward him, but this time he resolved that he would no longer endanger himself in the hopes that his influence on the faltering king would be of benefit to either of them any longer. Under any other circumstances, the young man would have simply left Saul's home and vanished to some distant place; as it was, he had a stop to make first.

"Yet another time," David groaned, coming in through the door of the house that he shared with Michal. "It is beyond foolish to remain in this place a moment longer."

"My father?" his wife asked.

"Yes. Yet another time he has attacked me before the presence of so many witnesses. If the people of Saul's court loved me, they would not have convinced me to go back before him another time!"

"Ah, he is my father, but I know what you say is so. If you do not protect yourself even tonight, by tomorrow you could be dead."

"Then I will go," David said, and embraced his wife.

"Not that way!" she said, as she saw him moving toward the door. She took up a rope and said, "No doubt, if my father has gone so far as you say, he has not been in this alone. It is best if no one knows where you are." She let him out a rear opening of the house, which was close to the gate of the city, and said, "Be safe, and return to me when you can."

"What will you tell them?" David asked as he went down the rope.

"Don't worry about that," his wife replied. "I know how to handle my father and his men."

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 6: THE EDGE OF THE SWORD

I have not spoken much of myself in the last few moments of my record. I was with Samuel at this time, hearing the old man's prayers, and bearing them before IaHWeH in Heaven. The seer knew well what Saul was about, and ever since hearing that David was to be taken to the court of Saul; he had been in fervent prayer for the young man's life. He knew that it was ordained for David to be king after the darkening monarch who now sat on the throne; nevertheless, he was familiar enough with the freedom allowed by IaHWeH to understand that even fore-ordained things are not to be presumptuously anticipated, but gratefully acknowledged and prayerfully sought.

It is here that I begin to re-enter the record, for the first place David went after finally fleeing from the murderous king was to Ramah, to see Samuel. The young man, though he had seen the prophet very little since the day of his anointing, never forgot the moment of true unity that they had shared in Bethlehem and, at a loss for where to go and what to do, his first impulse was to seek the counsel of the seer of Israel.

Samuel listened to David's tale with tears in his eyes. Yes, he had already mourned for Saul, but he was nevertheless heartbroken to hear the depths to which his former friend had fallen. "He was to have been the savior the people wanted," Saul said wistfully. "I resisted their desire for a king at first – did you know that? But I also saw that there might be a blessing in it, to have one in authority over them that could represent the Most High in so visible a way. I know it was not Yahweh's best for Israel, nevertheless it could have led to great things, had not Saul fallen to the pride of kingship."

"And this is the test to which I am now called?" David asked.

"There was a beauty also in Saul in those early days, but no... it will not be the same with you. For you, receiving the Spirit of Yah was a natural thing, like taking a breath. For Saul it was... much more difficult for him to be connected with all Heaven. It was almost a violent thing. When a group of prophets met him after departing from me, it was then it happened. They told me that when the Spirit entered him, he stood up and shouted, and praised the name of Yahweh mightily, even prophesying with them."

“And this means it was difficult?” David asked, somewhat confused. “I would think that these mighty signs show that Saul was greatly filled with the Spirit.”

“It meant that, indeed,” Samuel replied. “Saul was mightily filled with the Spirit, yet for all his prophesying and carrying on, what lasting good has it done him? Had he been living in fellowship with all he knew of the Elohim of Israel, the reception of the Spirit would have been an easy thing, and perhaps without even an outward sign. When you received it, I knew, for I saw the thing in your eyes, and that you recognized the Spirit in me. There are times, of course, when the Spirit leads men to cry aloud in warning, in joy, in anger at transgression. There are times when men must prophesy, for this is the voice of Yahweh in the earth... but it is not always thus that He speaks. It is the quiet faith and pure, gentle assurance of the divine presence – this is what is most valuable, and what I fear Saul may never again know. But ah, it is late, and we have far to go.”

“We?” David asked, surprised.

“You do not think that Saul will leave this old man alive when he finds out that I have anointed his successor, and that I harbored him in my home, when his life was sought by the king?”

“How will he know either of these things?”

“You will come to know, my son,” Samuel said, “that Saul has many eyes in the shadows. And where men will not speak a word in the king’s ears, there are darker enemies still, that seek your life.”

“You speak of spirits,” David said. “What have these to do with me?”

“You are a brave and faithful young man,” Samuel said. “You also have much to learn about this world into which you have been brought. Being king over Israel is not like being a king over some country anywhere else... to be king of Israel means you are a priest before the people and Yahweh. You are their prophet, their shepherd. Even as you guided your father’s sheep, so you will guide Israel, and fight their battles, and save them from the lion, and the bear, and the wolf. But this means that you are also the target of many evils, some human, and some... other.”

“You must tell me of these things,” David said, “for I know them to be so in my spirit.”

“There will be time for such things as we travel, my brave boy.”

Asheriel and I had much to discuss on the way as well.

* * * * *

“Samuel!” Saul roared. “I might have known this old deceiver would aid my enemies, since he has become an enemy to me!” The king had never told anyone what Samuel had said to him on their last meeting, that IaHWeH would remove him from the throne, and appoint another in his stead. Yet all who knew of Samuel knew that he and Saul had not parted company on easy terms, and they understood the king’s anger at discovering what his messengers had brought him that day.

“Come,” he said, “gather my messengers and send them to Samuel in Ramah. Tell them I wish to have them here immediately – demand of them – that they return with you, and if they refuse, I will send all my army to take them!”

The messengers went, and they found Samuel’s house empty. Upon returning to Saul, they said, “My lord the king, we sought the prophet and the young man, and we found them not. They may have heard that the king seeks their lives and – ”

“Who has said I seek their lives!” Saul demanded. “I wish to see my old friend again, and to speak with David concerning his argument with me. He is my son-in-law, and why should we be foes?” Not one messenger believed him. Saul’s words, like his moods, swung from one end of the spectrum to the other, and all of his attendants by this point were simply doing what the king told them for the safety of their own lives and those of their families.

“They are in Naioth, my lord the king,” came a voice from among the little group of messengers. “Naioth that is within Ramah... there you may seek them.”

“Who says this?” Saul asked, “And how did you come to know such a thing when my other servants stand around useless?”

By the time the little company of men had spread out to see who among them had spoken, they found no man in their midst.

* * * * *

When Edrael returned to his place at Saul’s side, he found an angry Virtue awaiting him. “It is the will of IaHWeH that allows you to act as you do, and reveal hidden things to the humans, but this does not excuse you from the consequences of the choices that you make!”

“There must not be prophets only among your people,” Edrael replied. “What I told Saul was less than your angels have told Samuel and David.”

“I need not tell you the history of our dealings with humans,” Asheriel responded. “What we tell them is for their benefit; what you reveal leads only to suffering and death.”

It was of suffering and death that David and Samuel were speaking in Naioth, which was still in the region of the prophet's former home, but in a place they believed they could keep hidden for a time. As they communed together about the history of Israel, and the pain that came from the nation's disobedience during the time of the former judges, Samuel was instructing his anointee regarding the need for a strong and pious figure at the head of the country.

As this was taking place, Saul's messengers approached the settlement and began to seek out the location of the prophet from the citizens of Naioth. Samuel, with his long hair and beard, was not difficult to recall, and those who had seen him were able to direct the emissaries of Saul's will to the place where he was staying with David. They had been told that the king sought his counselor and one of his soldiers; no suspicion was aroused in the minds of those with whom Saul's men spoke.

We who guarded the lives of these men, had no intention of allowing them to fall again into Saul's hands. My fellow guardians and I quickly approached the prophets of Naioth, men who had been receiving instruction for the guidance of Israel from Samuel while he resided in Ramah, and by the time the messengers from Gibeah had found and arrived at the house, they found a number of IaHWeH's faithful followers, and Samuel at their head.

"You men of Saul," Samuel began, looking at them fiercely, "have come out against us with a spirit of murder in your hearts. Let these men gathered here prophesy to you what shall be in the days to come!"

As the aged seer spoke, the Shekinah in Heaven was opened up, and Its perfect fiery beauty was poured out upon those who had assembled between David and Saul's servants. "The house of Saul shall fall!" one man cried out, and fell on his knees. "Long live David, king of Israel," shouted another. "The kingdom has been given to one who will lead Jacob well," a third said, and soon the entire company was singing, and shouting praises, and in general confusing the men from Saul's court.

One of those who had been sent by the king stepped forward and drew his weapon, thinking to demand entrance to the house. As he began to speak, however, Samuel said, "The truth is come to Israel," and fixed him with a stare.

The swordsman opened his mouth, and instead of what he intended to say, he instead uttered, "The Spirit of the Most High is in this place." His fellow messengers turned to look at him in surprise, but as another tried to speak he said, "Let not men lift their hands against the anointed king of Israel!" The men of Saul were confounded. As each tried to speak, he found himself speaking as one of Naioth's prophets, praising the name of the Creator, denouncing the sins of the house of Saul, or exalting David as the chosen monarch.

The servants of Saul, dumbfounded, fled from the area as quickly as they could. Few words were spoken one to another, partly because none wished to open the matter before his fellows, and partly for fear that they might again say something contrary to their appointed mission. As the men finally stood before Saul, commanded to speak and explain why neither Samuel nor David was with them, one stepped forward, trembling. He opened his mouth, and tried a simple word: "My." When this accomplished its desired end, the messenger decided that he was master of his words, and would not say anything that might anger Saul. He then said, and rather quickly, "My lord the king, your servants found the location of the prophet and David, yet as we tried to speak to them peaceably, and to bring them to you without force, a great confusion came over your servants, and we spoke dark things concerning..."

The messenger prudently decided to avoid relating the contents of their utterances. Saul was not patient enough to question further, in any event, but ordered the men out of his sight, and called another company, this one more trusted than the last. They were sent with the same mission, but they encountered the prophets of Naioth and Samuel, and the effect on them was much as it had been with their predecessors.

When the second group of messengers returned and gave Saul the same report again, he said, "I will go myself, and see my friends. No foolishness, no prophet's foolishness, will prevent me from accomplishing my aim." Several of his attendants winced at these words; speaking ill of a prophet was simply not done in Israel. Of course, when prophets were raised up with unpopular messages for the leaders and the people, that was another story, but the men of Naioth had said nothing threatening *immediate* destruction to Saul or his court, therefore in the eyes of his courtiers Saul had made a particularly grievous statement. As Saul had been losing respect for the religious authority placed among the prophets and priests in Israel, so his own men began to lose respect for his authority. Saul, in a very real sense, was pronouncing judgment upon himself by rejecting the Heaven-appointed speakers of Yahweh's will; as he did unto them, so would it also be done unto him by those who ought to have held him in high regard.

Saul prepared himself for his journey, and with him went a handful of Israel's mightiest warriors. Saul said to his new captain of the armies following David's sudden departure, "If these traitorous men will not cooperate with our wishes, let them be slain."

"Where are David and the prophet Samuel?" Saul demanded of one of Ramah's inhabitants.

"They reside here in Naioth, my lord," came the reply, and further directions followed.

As Saul and his men began the last leg of their journey, however, Saul began to speak as his messengers had done on previous occasions. In his case he began to speak words from the Spirit even before arriving at the place where David and Samuel were staying.

“Blessed is the name of the Most High, who sets up kings, and who takes down kings,” he cried. “Exalted shall be the name of David in Israel!”

Despite his words, however, it was clear that Saul wanted to push forward, and so his men followed as he led. The closer he got to their destination, however, the more loud his remarks became, and the more erratic his behavior. The king began to strip off articles of armor and clothing – prudently collected by his attendants as he left them along the way – and when they had arrived at Samuel’s house he fell down on the floor, unclothed. As he lay there uncovered he continued to speak words of unwilling prophecy.

David looked at the maddened monarch with wonder, but Samuel refused to look at his former friend at all.

For many hours Saul lay before the prophets of Naioth, with his men unable to move either to his aid or away from him. During this time Samuel said to David, “This thing is from Yahweh. While Saul is here, and helpless, his men will remain with him. Let us use this opportunity to hide you further away, beyond the reach of those who would seek your life.”

“You are not coming with me?” David asked, dismayed. Not only was Samuel speaking as if he were sending him out alone, but he also wondered where the old man would go – surely he could not stay here and wait for Saul to recover?

“This man will not harm me,” Samuel said confidently. “When the Spirit of Yahweh removes Itself from him, he will be chastened for a time, and return to Gibeah.” Without any further delay, the prophet prepared the future king for his journey, and with prayers and advice he sent him forth from the house. As David went forth, I was standing above Samuel’s house, continuing the song by which I had been holding Saul in his strange condition, and negating the madness inspired by his demonic tormentors. I was, at the same time, ensuring that his temporary, spiritually aware state rendered him entirely unable to harm Samuel or pursue David.

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“I am amazed to see you!” Jonathan asked incredulously. “My father is out seeking you, and you are here at his very home? You might well have saved him this search!”

“I ought to be at Beersheba by now, and heading south,” David replied, “for your father does not seek me for any peaceful intent.”

“But after I spoke with him?” Jonathan wondered aloud, “Can he truly be seeking your life again? And after he has sworn as Yahweh lives? Such a thing cannot surely be so.”

“What!” David exclaimed, “You are too good, my friend, to think such evil of anyone, much less your father, but surely there comes a time when such talents do little good. Your father sought to slay me even before witnesses again, and therefore I fled. He has men looking for me all over Israel, and I am here in secret so much that I have not even told my wife I am here.

“Ah,” David sighed, sinking down to sit as mental and physical weariness overcame him, “what is it that I have done to your father? What is my iniquity before him? What is my sin before him, that he should seek my life so fervently?”

“It shall not be so,” Jonathan said sharply. “You will surely not die; you know this, that my father will do nothing unless he first reveals to me his plan. Why should he have hidden this from me? Surely it *cannot* be so!”

“Your father knows of our friendship,” David said, looking up into the anxious face of his friend. “He knows that you would move to protect me from any harm he may think toward me, so he has assuredly said to his servants, ‘Do not let Jonathan know about this, or he will be grieved.’ Yet I tell you truly, as Yahweh lives, and as you yourself are alive, I am but a step away from death.”

“What is it you want me to do?” Jonathan asked. “Surely you came here with a plan.”

“There is a plan,” David said. “At the very least, there is a way you may see for yourself what mind your father has toward me. Tomorrow is the New Moon, and your father’s custom has been to gather his family and servants for the monthly feast. As the king has kept his intention from you, he does not expect that you will know why I am away. Truly, if I had not come to you today, you would know nothing at all of these events!

“As your father does not know that you know of my flight, he may pretend ignorance about my absence. If your father asks if you know where I am, say to him, ‘David has asked leave to return to his home in Bethlehem, for the annual sacrifice is soon upon us, and he wishes to be with his family.’ In truth, I will be awaiting you in the fields, hiding for three days until you return.

“Now, if you reply thus to your father and he says, ‘It is well,’ then perhaps he has calmed concerning me, or has given up. But if he is angry, he will surely reveal it

openly, for if we have spoken while he sought me he will know that you have chosen to help me despite what I am telling you now.

“When you know the evil your father intends toward me, remember to deal kindly with me,” David continued, feeling sorrowful for his plight. “You and I have a covenant in the name of Yahweh between us; and I tell you truly, if there is any iniquity in me, or any evil design toward your father and his throne – as he must surely think – then slay me yourself!”

“Let such things be far away,” Jonathan said, refusing to even countenance such thoughts. “And I am certain; if my father had any evil intentions toward you, I would surely know!”

David ignored his friend’s naïve protests. Instead he asked, “How will I know what your father has said, whether or not he has answered you harshly, since I will be hiding in the fields? How will you inform me?”

“Come with me,” Jonathan said, deciding to keep further thoughts along the lines of his current ones to himself. He led David out to a particular field, and he said, “By Yahweh Elohim of Israel, after I speak with my father, and he has relieved me concerning his intentions toward you, I will come and get you. This I promise by the name of Yahweh and by our oath of friendship.”

“And if he is angry?” David asked.

“I will show you this also,” Jonathan replied, “and you may flee wherever you wish. And may Yahweh be with you in such a case, even as once with my father. Only, for the sake our friendship, I ask you this thing.”

“Ask it,” David said.

“Let us renew our covenant, and promise one another a lasting peace. Let it be that, as long as you live, you shall do me no harm, nor seek revenge if what you say is so about my family. And not only for me, but for my children also, let there be kindness between our houses, even when Yahweh has cut off all your enemies from the face of the earth.” And the two renewed their covenant.

“Now,” Jonathan began again, “as you have said, tomorrow is the New Moon. I know you will be missed, for your seat will be empty, and after I have spoken with my father about this, and you have been here for three days, I will return here, and you must come also and hide behind this rock.

“I will shoot three arrows, as if at a target, and I will send a young man out to fetch them, saying, ‘Go and find my arrows.’ When he nears the rock I will shout out to him, and if I say just these words, ‘Behold, the arrows are beside you, take them,’

then come out of hiding and return, for there is safety for you here, and no harm will come to you as Yahweh lives.

“But now,” Jonathan continued, “if I say to the young man, ‘Behold, the arrows are further beyond you,’ then escape and go your way, for Yahweh will send you thus away. Only, if such a thing does come to pass, remember the covenant of Yahweh between you and I.”

“It is a good plan,” David said, “And I will remember our covenant.”

* * * * *

Saul was nearly in the full grip of his madness now. Edrael and Neshephiel had done efficient labor on the king’s mind, and he was now uncertain where he was, or what he was doing. He had times of lucidity, times of almost normal thoughts and functions, but much of the time he spent in anger or lethargy.

When the New Moon came, and his son-in-law’s place was found to be empty, Saul had no need to feign ignorance concerning the young man’s whereabouts. He had truly forgotten that only days before he had lain before Samuel in a spirit-induced stupor having sought to slay David in Naioth. As he sat, sullenly, before his magnificent feast, surrounded by his most trusted friends and his relatives, Saul glanced over at Jonathan with weary-looking eyes and gestured with his eyes at the empty chair, as if expecting his son to say something.

Jonathan decided not to bring the matter up himself, however. His father’s appearance concerned him greatly, and he began to suspect that, if Saul’s mind was so captive to madness, perhaps his friend’s words had been true after all, and this was not just some momentous misunderstanding. The meal passed in silence, not one daring to speak, lest they send their troubled king spiraling into another of his increasingly frequent rants.

On the second day, at mealtime, Saul again sat in his place, with Jonathan on one side and Abner, Saul’s cousin and a mighty army captain, on the other. This time, as Saul cast his eye around the table and again saw David’s seat empty, he spoke to his son and said, “Why has the son of Jesse neglected our table? He is not here today, and he was not here yesterday. I had thought that, perhaps, he had developed some uncleanness, and so was unsuited for our table on this sacred occasion, but again he is not at our meal.”

Jonathan took a deep breath, and replied, “David desired sincerely to be with his family in Bethlehem, therefore he asked my permission to go. His family has a sacrifice coming in the city, and he said that his brother has required him to be there for the occasion. He said, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes,’” Jonathan stressed these words, “‘then let me get away.’ This is why he is not here today at the king’s table.”

Saul breathed heavily once, twice, and three times, shutting his eyes. When he opened them, they were full of wrath and madness. “You! You have seen David? You, you son of a perverse... do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your confusion, to the rejection of your own family, and your king, to the confusion of your mother’s honor? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, you shall not be established, nor a kingdom raised in your name!”

Jonathan began to protest that he had no desire for such things, but Saul’s words rolled over him, as everyone else’s eyes were cast downward for fear of meeting their king’s gaze. “You, you who know where he is... at Bethlehem or wherever he is, fetch him for me at once, and he shall surely die!”

Jonathan was shocked, amazed, furious and appalled all at once. “Why? Why shall he be slain? What is it that David has done?”

But Saul was gone now, his strings being pulled by the evil angels that attended him and who had shut his guardian spirit away by the dome of thick spiritual darkness that surrounded the king. “Traitor!” he cried, and threw his javelin in Jonathan’s direction. It was well that Saul’s aim was crippled by his madness, for his son was too stunned to move. As the missile thudded into the wall, making yet another hole in the king’s house, Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger and walked out of the room silently, his thoughts full of grief and fury. Now he knew that every word David spoke to him was true.

For the rest of that day Jonathan stayed in his house. He spoke not to his wife, or the servants in his home, or anyone else. On the morning of the third day he took one of his servants and said to him, “Come with me.” He brought his archery equipment and went out into the field where he knew David was waiting. “Run out to that rock,” he said, pointing to David’s hiding place, “and I will shoot arrows that you will collect for me.” This was something the young man had done before, and he knew Jonathan’s abilities with the bow – he was not concerned about being accidentally struck. Willingly, he went.

With a heavy heart, Jonathan fitted an arrow into the bow. He raised the bow to the firing position and pulled back the string. He stood there for a long time, feeling the tension in his arms, which matched the tension in his heart, and then he pulled high and fired, sending the arrow some distance past the young man. Another time, and yet another, he sent the shafts streaking through the air.

As the boy arrived at the rock, Jonathan called out, “Aren’t the arrows further beyond you? Make haste and go!” The young servant looked up in confusion, for the arrows lay right at his feet near the rock in the field, tightly clustered together as befitting one of Jonathan’s skill. Nevertheless, he gathered up the three objects and ran back to his master.

Jonathan looked out over the field to see if he could spot David slipping away. When he saw nothing, he gave his bow to the boy with him and said, “Take these back to the city; I will remain here for a time.” Unquestioningly, and suspecting nothing amiss, the servant took Saul’s weapons and departed. As soon as he was out of sight, Jonathan ran to the rock to see if David was there, or if he had failed to hear the words of his signal.

By the time he got there, David was standing before it. David bowed before Jonathan three times and said, “Truly you are my friend in this dark time. I would not leave without a word to you.” Both men wept for David’s lot, not only that they should be parted, but that the young man’s life was in such great danger that Saul was now making no effort to conceal his plans. “Go in peace,” Jonathan said after his grief had subsided a little. “Only remember our covenant, that there will be peace between our families forever.” David arose and departed, not knowing when he would see his friend, or his wife, or his home in Gibeah, again.

* * * * *

The next few months saw a dramatic change in David’s life. Of this time I will pass over relatively quickly, for most of my attention was taken up with other matters, and also with the ailing Samuel, whose heart had suffered greatly to know that Saul was attempting to take David’s life, and that David had fled from Gibeah.

Of one or two incidents I will tell you, however, for they mark the beginning of a dark period in the character of the one who was to be king in Israel. Yes, David was a man who was in harmony with IaHWeH and his plans – for the most part – but one of the things David is most remembered for is a particularly grievous pair of sins: murder and adultery. How these things became manifest in one that knew so much of the beauty and purity of Heaven is a mystery of iniquity that ought to be carefully examined. I offer the beginning of an explanation of how it began.

There was one thing that David wanted with him as he went into exile – a symbol of his victory of faith, and his triumph over the enemies of Israel. If he had this, he thought, surely he could be comforted in his great distress. David slipped away from Gibeah and, gathering a handful of faithful friends and warriors who were willing to share his fate, he came unto the priests in Nob.

“My lord, David!” the old priest Ahimelech said when he saw the champion of Israel, “Why are you here alone, and no soldiers with you?”

The young man replied to the priest, and with a lie to one who was no enemy, “The king has sent me on an errand. It is a secret mission, and he said to me, ‘Let no man know of your business and what I have commanded you, that I have sent my servants out to various places.’ The military is prepared to move, and the soldiers gathered, but scouts have been sent to know the movements of certain ones

beforehand. But now my journey was ill-timed, and difficult, I fear, and I and my few men are greatly hungry.”

David saw that the priest was carrying bread into the tabernacle, and he said, “What is that in your hand? Give me, I pray you, five loaves from those, or any other food you have here with you.”

“This is no ordinary bread in my hand,” Ahimelech replied, “but the sacred bread of the tabernacle. Of this, as you are greatly hungry, you may eat, but... only if you are ritually pure, and have kept yourself from women.”

While there was nothing unclean about being with one’s wife, it had been the custom of the priests in those days to keep themselves from women just before performing duties in the tabernacle. This was according to the instruction Moses had been given at Sinai, to keep from marital relations for three days before the Ten Commandments were given in the presence of the Israelites.

“Truly,” David said, “we have been near no women for three days, not since my departure, and the bodies of the young men are thus holy.” The priest conceded, therefore, and gave him bread.

As they ate, an Edomite who had converted to Judaism, and who was loyal to King Saul, approached the tabernacle. Surprised to see men eating the sanctified bread, the traveler, whose name was Doeg, remained out of sight and listened as David and Ahimelech spoke. “Do you have any swords or spears here?” David was heard asking. “I have left on the king’s mission in such haste, I confess, I departed without my sword or any other weapon.”

The priest looked cautious, but said nothing about such haste that would require a warrior to leave unarmed. Instead he replied, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you slew in the valley of Elah, that one is here, and stored in cloth behind the ephod. If you wish a weapon, take back that which you have brought here to stand within the tabernacle of Yahweh, for there is no other weapon than that here.”

“There is none like that sword!” David said, “Let me have it.”

After they had eaten, and David had obtained Goliath’s large weapon, the future king of Israel departed in one direction and Doeg left in another. As David’s small band was going they saw the Edomite, and David said, “This man may well tell Saul we have been here. We must quickly depart from this region.”

As I have said, this is where many of the evils in David’s life truly began. When I heard of his lie to Ahimelech, who would have helped him regardless of his trouble with Saul, I was disappointed. Samuel, I am sure, would have been disappointed,

for he and Ahimelech were close friends, but it was not the prophet's place to know this in his aged and weakening condition.

Another such incident followed soon thereafter. Upon departing from the tabernacle in Nob, David fled Israel altogether, and he went down into the only other place that he knew with any great confidence: Gath. Leaving the protection of the twelve Chalkydri, David entered into the land of the Philistines.

Not only to Gath did David go; indeed, he went up to the very king's house, for he said to the young men with him, "Achish, the king of Gath, is no friend of Saul. If I tell him we are outlaws from Israel, and running for our lives, perhaps he will give us asylum, and we will wait there to see what will happen in Israel."

When he arrived, however, it was clear that some of the servants of Achish had been with Goliath in his last battle, for they ran to the king and said, "Isn't this David, the very king of Israel? Have we not heard of the songs they sang when he slew Goliath, that 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" Had Saul known how famous that song had become, and that David was called "the king of Israel" by some, the demons Edrael and Neshephiel would have had an easier time plunging him into total madness. As it was, they speeded David's descent into a feigned kind of madness.

When David saw that he was recognized, he turned to his men and hissed, "Do as you see me do, for your very lives!" With that he turned to Achish and with a cry he fell on the floor. "The armies of Israel!" he cried out. "The armies of Israel are upon me! They have taken away my spirit, and slain me and all my attendants. Betrayal! I am betrayed by my homeland, and left in this world of silence and shadows!" He crawled, without standing back up, over to the court gates and hung on them as if for his life, shouting and ranting, with spit draining down his beard in the fury and passion of his words. His men attempted to follow suit, and did so with various degrees of success.

Achish looked over the scene in amazement, and said, "Why have you brought this man into my presence? He is clearly insane. Have I a lack of madmen in Gath, that you have brought him here to act thus in my presence? This fellow shall not enter my house!"

David's guardian Asheriel, and those angels that had accompanied his men, looked over the scene with as much amazement as the Philistines, and far more dismay. Where was the courage that had attended David when he stood before the lion, and the bear, and the wolf, and the giant? It was as if Goliath's sword had drained him of the courage he had displayed when facing its former owner – as if it were a cursed thing. But the sword was not the curse; it was David's own humanity, which had showed itself in trial, which revealed a nature not entirely submitted to the Shekinah glory that had been poured out upon him from Heaven at his anointing.

Cast out of Achish's presence, David and his men stood up and, quietly, with much shame, made their way back to the Israelite border.

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Doeg was thrilled. He had been in favor with Saul for some time, despite the king's wavering moods and changing demeanor. Now, he believed, he would truly prove his worth. Saul had heard that David was nearby, and that his prophet Gad had gone out to join him. Gad was the mysterious man that David had met upon departing from Saul's presence after the first offer of marriage to one of his daughters. The prophet had warned David even then to escape from the presence of the king, and now that David had been openly revealed to Israel as an enemy of Saul's house, he went out to meet him after his return from Gath.

Gad was a younger man than Samuel and, although less experienced, he had provided valuable counsel to David already during their time together. His knowledge of Saul's ways, as well as the dreams and visions that were sent to him through his guardian Kanaphiel bolstered the courage of the young man's company – which now consisted of a growing number of disaffected Israelites, including his own family – and strengthened Asheriel in his labors.

Despite this setback, the loss of his only remaining prophet, Saul was confident of eventual victory. Gad had been useless to him lately in any event, and Saul had more than once considered sending him away or doing worse to the man who would only say, "Yahweh has not given me a word for you." Doeg knew these things, and thought that he would have the opportunity now to play the prophet, and reveal to the king things that had been hidden.

"My lord the king," the Edomite said, entering Saul's presence, "I have a word to speak in your ear."

Upon securing the monarch's attention, he began, "Your servant was in Nob paying his vows to the Almighty, and I saw there the son of Jesse speaking with the high priest there, Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. The high priest spoke to him, and inquired of Yahweh for him, and provided food for his men. Above this, your servant saw him give unto David the sword of Goliath, which he had kept there at the tabernacle."

"The priest at Nob," Saul mused. "He may know where David is hiding."

"Just so, my lord the king," Doeg said.

"Send for him at once. This Ahimelech has been no friend of the king of Israel, nor any of the priests of Yahweh. Let them come, and I will obtain from them the whereabouts of David."

Doeg was happy to comply, and soon thereafter the high priest and all those of his house were standing before Saul.

“Hear my words, oh son of Ahitub,” Saul said.

“I have come, my lord,” the high priest replied.

“Why have you conspired against me, you and this son of Jesse? I know that you have given him provisions when he fled from me, and armed him, and even enquired of Yahweh for him, which thing you have not done for me. And now he lies in wait to kill me, even unto this day.”

“Who is more faithful to the king than your servant?” the priest protested. “And who is more faithful among your servants than David? He is the king’s son-in-law, and goes forth at your bidding, and is honored in your house!” Ahimelech had received no word of what was going on between Saul and David. He had honestly believed the young man’s story when he had received him, and only learned of the king’s attempt to take his life when Doeg and a number of soldiers had arrived at Nob and demanded their presence before the king in Gibeah.

“And yet,” Ahimelech continued, “I did not know then of the rift between my lord the king and his servant David. Have I now, after learning this, begun to enquire of Yahweh for him? Let not the king impute any such thing to his servant, nor to any of my father’s household, for your servant knew nothing at all about any of these things.”

Saul stood up with his spear in his hand and pointed it at the priest. “You shall surely die, Ahimelech; you, and all your father’s house!” The priest was horrified, as were all who stood in attendance. To slay a priest of the tabernacle of Yahweh, and the high priest, and an innocent man! The demons reveled as the dome of darkness settled firmly over the scene. The holy angels were powerless to intervene, though many would have quickly come to the aid of the condemned men.

Angels of every order stood in attendance as El Michael Himself looked down on the crowd of humans and said, “This is a sorrowful moment. Let every creature know that my wrath against Saul, the once-anointed over my people Israel, is just and true. The priests of Israel shall not be spared the wrath of this man, just as you, my angels, were not spared the destruction of Lucifer’s rebellion. It must be so, that the hearts of Israel are turned away from Saul, that my people may receive the one who is already king over them in Heaven’s view.”

None protested; it is the lot of angels to watch violence committed, man against man, creature against creature. This is one of our tests, until the restoration of all things, to know that suffering must come, and that IaHWeH will be held

accountable by those who cannot see far enough ahead... but the knowledge that the greater good is being done does not often lessen the blow for us when evil is seen being performed. As the men of Israel drew back in astonishment, and as Doeg volunteered to become the murderer of eighty-five priests, and as innocent blood soaked the soil of the land of Israel, the angels wept.

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One of the men of Nob, Abiathar the son of Ahimelech, had escaped. While the slaughter was taking place and the soldiers were keeping the priests together to await their turn under Doeg's wicked blade, one of the warriors of Saul's army grasped the young priest's arm and pulled him away from the others. Those standing near the soldier saw what he did, but so great was their dismay at Saul's actions that none spoke a word of warning to the king, or moved to prevent this action. Safely outside of the circle of soldiers, the refugee from Saul's wrath slipped away, saving his anguish for a more convenient time of expression.

Abiathar fled to Bethlehem, see King David. When he couldn't find him, he sat near the abandoned house of his family, and began to pray. As he did so, one of the observing angels was commissioned to lead the young man along the way. Abiathar stood up after his prayer and, seized with a sudden conviction, began to walk.

As he went, neither eating nor drinking for several days, the priest was led by the Spirit, and guided by his angel Bachaniel, to find people who could direct him step by step to the one whom he sought. Though he was deeply sorrowful for the loss of his family, his steady purpose, and the knowledge that if he was captured his fate would be no better, kept him constant on his course. He did not know what David's reaction would be when he met him, but he was sure it would be a better fate than awaited him under Saul.

When Abiathar finally found David, he was devastated to learn that his actions had caused the death of the high priest and his family. It was at that time that the last of Nob's priests could properly mourn.

"I knew it, when I saw that man departing from the tabernacle," the future king of Israel reproached himself. "I have been the cause of the death of all within your father's house. Remain here with me, for he who seeks my life seeks yours now also, and you will be guarded here among us." With many such words David pledged to keep the young priest safe, and earnestly sought his forgiveness for failing to alert his family that Doeg had seen them together.

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Of the period that immediately followed this I have little to add beyond what is available to you in your History. With the combined help of Abiathar and the

prophet Gad, David was able to evade capture by Saul, and even to continue to protect Israel from the invasions of the Philistines, which continued while the erratic king expended effort and soldiers in seeking out the little band of outlaws. At more than one point they had very narrow escapes, being saved once from certain destruction by a timely Philistine attack that forced Saul away from his pursuit.

At another time David had Saul trapped, and it was well within his power to strike him down but, taking only a token of his nearness to the king, David let him live. Saul, in apparent gratitude, called off the hunt that day, but David knew from much past experience that such a respite could not last.

It was in those days that my friend, the prophet Samuel, was gathered to his people.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

SECTION 2: THE KING OF NINE HOUSES CHAPTER 7: THE HOUSE OF WRATH

I mourned for Samuel greatly at his passing. All of Israel, in truth, felt the loss of this great leader, the last mighty judge of the chosen nation. Saul himself attended the burial in Ramah, having been temporarily humbled by a near-defeat at the hands of David's outlaw band. On the last occasion, David himself had snuck up on him, and gotten so close that he was able to cut off a portion of his garment and hold it aloft as evidence that he had deliberately spared the king's life. For a time, therefore, Saul acted the part of the legitimate king, paying his respects at the passing of the nation's prophets, and concentrating his efforts on securing the borders from Philistine invasions. Even the demons controlling him knew that the king would need to step lightly for a while, for none in Israel had forgotten – nor would they ever forget – his callous slaughter of the High priest and his entire house.

At the passing of my charge, I was surprised at my next assignment. I was to assist Asheriel, Kanaphiel and Bachaniel as the primary watchers of David's little group. Asheriel and Kanaphiel, as you know, were the Virtue and the Cherub who guarded David and the prophet Gad respectively. Bachaniel was a Power attached to the young priest Abiathar, who had recently united with David after Saul's slaughter of his family.

I will begin now to tell you about what occurred in those days, when David was running for his life from Saul, and the pressure of preserving his existence began to introduce dark elements into the young man's character that would bear bitter fruit in his later life. I will speak of the actions of we four angels that stood guard over these men, and how we preserved them from danger and brought them to the end that IaHWeH had intended for them.

But first I must speak of something that will play into this record later on, and that is the matter of sons, and the consequences that fathers' decisions may have upon them. It involves, in fact, why I attended the funeral of my friend Samuel the prophet, and why he had a funeral at all. My brothers have spoken of Enoch, who was translated without seeing death, and your History tells you that it was not until he brought forth a son that he truly came to understand the tender care that the Almighty feels toward all His intelligent creations. You know also of Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem who was the second son of Noah. He also

passed from this world without tasting the sting of mortality, but his character was perfected for another reason, although it also involved his son.

Shem, like many fathers, loved his son greatly. His firstborn, Arphaxad, was a brave man, and willing to do all to perform the will of IaHWeH. It is he who went into the great city of Babel and cried against it, voicing a solemn warning before the wrath of the Almighty broke forth upon it, and a clash between angels and demons spelled defeat once again for Lucifer, and doom to all of the humans who followed him. It was through Arphaxad that the Creator led many souls to freedom from that dark place, and brought them to dwell in the tents of Noah.

But sending his firstborn into spiritual battle had not been an easy decision for Shem to make. He struggled with the instruction that Heaven had sent him, and though he submitted, it took a toll on him. Arphaxad, unlike his father, had been born after the great Flood that destroyed this planet and made it greatly less suitable for life. Until you have experienced the joys of Heaven, and the sweet environment of the renewed earth, you will truly have no conception of what this world was like before the Flood. Men born in those days were of a far greater stature than they now are. They were vigorous, brilliant, and astonishingly long-lived by current standards. Shem himself lived on this world for over six centuries, while his son aged, and then passed away, after two centuries less of life.

In the city then known as Salem, Melchizedek the Wise reigned over his people for a great many years. The city was a beacon of light for the world between the time of Babel and the time of Jacob. Into many heathen nations went the knowledge of the Most High, and although Satan's relentless efforts have corrupted many of the teachings in the modern descendants of those national religions, traces of truth and light are found in them all. There came a time, however, when the city began a great moral and spiritual decline, and it occurred at the death of Arphaxad.

When the old man finally died, the older man, his father, fell into such a state of grief that he could no longer effectively lead his people. As the spiritual head of the city, Shem was responsible for the well being of his citizens in every sense, morally, spiritually, and physically as well. Because of its reputation for purity and light, it was a constant target for those humans who had fallen to the wiles of the Adversary, and none were so ferociously bent upon its fall than the descendants of the sorcerer Jebus.

The Jebusites waged a constant war on Salem, just as the Philistines were called into service by Azazel to continually trouble the Israelites. For centuries they were held back by the angels and the righteous men who inhabited those walls, but at the decline of the divine vitality of its citizens, the attacks on their walls and their people began to have an effect. Prophets were sent to warn the people that the failing levels of success were indicative of a need for repentance, but few heeded the warning. In his tower, Shem shut himself away and would not be bothered with the destruction inching daily nearer.

Even though the angels were less and less able to offer protection, the men of that city were mighty and it took much time for the eventual collapse. Finally, the physical condition of Salem was decreed by Heaven to come to meet its spiritual one. An angel stood over the walls and cried out the doom of the citizens. The prophets fell on their faces, and the people ran about madly... while Shem looked out of his window and beheld the divine messenger spelling the end for his little kingdom.

It was then, when all was lost, that the memories of the centuries of walking with IaHWeH and His angels finally broke anew upon the old man. How foolish he had been, he realized! His son slept with their fathers, and would await him in the world to come... while he, by his actions, was sealing the fate of many other humans as precious as Arphaxad. Melchizedek, still within his tower, began to fast and pray.

For forty days the king of Salem fasted for his own soul, and for the sake of his people. With repentance and tears he sought the fellowship he had lost, and he was sustained by his own natural vitality and the Spirit of Elohim that had begun once again to shine Its light into his life. Finally, at the end of the time, it was El Michael Himself who appeared to His estranged friend.

“Arise, son of Noah,” He said to the penitent man. “Arise and eat, for your time of fasting is ended.”

“Have I found you again, my Lord?” he asked with trembling voice.

“The grace of IaHWeH is not easily withdrawn from one who has stood in His service,” El Michael said, “but beware, for those who fall from great heights fall far indeed.”

“My city, my Lord,” Shem cried out to the divine Visitor, “let them not suffer for my sake, nor let them see death for the sin of this old man!” Much as the prophet Moses is recorded as having said, Shem pleaded, “Save them, Oh Yahweh, and if not, then take me also out of the land of the living, and blot me out of your Book. Release them, Oh Yahweh, from their bindings to my soul, and let me go down into Sheol, only spare them this destruction.”

“You would stand for these people, even now?” El Michael said, drawing faith out of the king of Salem.

“I would surely die if they might live,” he replied. “I am their priest forever, whether I live or die before your face.”

“The people of Salem will not die,” El Michael said, “for your faithfulness, and for your willingness to replace them in death, yet Salem cannot stand. The doom

pronounced on this city is sure, though I repent of the evil I thought to bring up on the people for your sake. This city cannot be my city any longer, for the people of the earth know that it is impure. The people of Salem have followed your ways in righteousness, and followed your ways in evil. Those who will now return to the light will save themselves, and you will lead them from this death.”

“What must I do, O Lord?”

When Shem arose from his prayer, it was with new purpose. As the Jebusites closed once again on the borders of Salem, the king stood up in the midst of his people and said, “Men of Salem, hear my words! The judgment pronounced on this city, once so highly favored, is sure, and may not now be turned away. Nevertheless, we need not perish within these walls, but must go forth unto the Jebusites, and live.”

“Shall we surrender to the enemies of Yahweh?” cried one voice from the crowd.

“It is not the Jebusites, but we, who are the enemies of Yahweh!” Shem thundered. “The descendants of Jebus are but an instrument in the hand of Yahweh for our chastening, and we shall lie before them as faithful prisoners. Any who will do this will live, but those who remain within the city will surely die!”

“The old man has been in congress with our enemies,” the same voice cried again. “He seeks our lives as ransom for his own, for surely they have said to him, ‘Surrender your people to us, and we will spare your life.’ Is this not so?”

“I have spoken with none of the heathen,” Melchizedek said. “My conversation was with the Most High, before whom I stand as your priest and your king. All who will follow me, let us go forth and save our lives.”

At this there was a great noise in the crowd. Threats were made, and weapons drawn, but by the intervention of angels, who had returned to the city of Salem, no lives were lost in the chaos. Finally, the men of Salem had separated themselves into two factions, those who would go with their king into captivity, and those who would stand and fight. Shem said, “Those who wish to stay may stay. There will be no force, and I of all kings have not the authority to command any of you. My words now are an entreaty, a request. I, who have fallen so far, now see the value of life. I, who once betrayed you all for the memory of a dead son, now see the character of my Lord and my Redeemer, who will give Himself for our sakes!”

As he spoke, the old man began to prophesy. He spoke of the coming of the Creator in a human form, to surrender Himself into captivity, even as the faithful Salemites were to do that day. He spoke of the death of the One to come, but that through Him there would be life forever more for those who were faithful to their calling, even in that generation. Melchizedek said, “My priesthood is but a type of His priesthood, and while I once had pride in my office, and fear of its end, and

hatred of loss and sorrow, I now see the way in which my people must walk, and be perfect in His sight.”

“Now, let those who will stay release us unto the Jebusites, and we will go our way in peace.”

As he spoke, those who were willing to follow him drew near, and those who were left – it was roughly a half of the population – muttered reproaches, but did not prevent those who were escaping. As the sun began to go down, the faithful Salemites left the city, and the gates were shut behind them. With songs of praise to the Almighty, who had promised to spare their lives, Shem and his people went out, unarmed, to meet the army of the heathen.

That night, when it was dark, the Jebusites attacked the city of Salem. With fewer men to defend it, the walls did not stand against the invaders even one day longer. There was another reason as well... with the last of the faithful element removed from the city, the spiritual atmosphere over it was entirely dark. Demons now surged to the scene to make sport of the kingdom that had so effectively resisted them for so long. Creatures of darkness that had once been Egyptian men came with the army of Jebus, and demons in human form were marshalling the forces of evil.

Of the terrible fall of Salem I am not now commissioned to speak in great detail. It is enough for you to know that it fell indeed, and that the Jebusites came to dwell in that place for some time. They held it off and on down through the generations, and they occupied it once again during the time of David. Those who surrendered to the Jebusites were indeed spared by their invaders. The demons, for all their promptings and temptations, were unable to convince the men to raise a sword against anyone who had surrendered to them... but one out of their number was not found. In the following years the men of Salem worked to effectively save many souls from among their captors by speaking of the righteousness of IaHWeH and the final prophecy of their priest and their king, but Melchizedek himself was not found among the captives. He was not, for Elohim took him.

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You know of Samuel’s early years, being raised by the priest Eli. You have heard me speak of the evils of his sons, and the details are provided also in your History. You know that the old man was so remiss at his duties pertaining to fatherhood that his two male children became an eternal stain on the Levitical priesthood. These failings in the household of Eli were to have a lasting impact upon the character of young Samuel also.

When Samuel had grown, and taken a wife, and had sons of his own, he resolved that he would not repeat the errors of him who had practically been his father. He decided that a life of strict discipline would be the best way to form a proper

character in these boys. Unfortunately, Samuel overshot his target, and his children often perceived him to be one interested in justice to the detriment of mercy. Sharper than most, and spiritually discerning, the prophet came to understand that this was a ditch on the other side of the proper road, but by that time the damage had been done. The sons of the prophet had formed unwise friendships with individuals who continued to lead them in the wrong path long after Samuel attempted to steer them aright.

By the time the seer of Israel anointed Saul as king of Israel, he had come to the place where he could play a proper fatherly role for the young monarch. As a result of the former extremes, however, the prophet never had the advantage of Enoch, who grew to understand the perfect character of the Almighty by watching his son develop and grow in a loving early environment. He also lost the advantage of Shem, who shared a very close adulthood with his firstborn son, and whose loss – while it plunged him for a time into a dark place – was ultimately the means through which the king of Salem perfected the divine character and was transported from this world without seeing death. Had either of these experiences been my friend's, he also would have been taken to the eternal Kingdom and fitted with a spiritual body without falling victim to the mortality of the old.

David's sons are a matter of great importance to this record, and how he obtained several of them reveals one of the subtlest aspects of Lucifer's plan to overthrow the sovereignty of Israel by attacking the person of its king. Since his defeat, we had not seen Kehreniel, the demon from the House of Fear, in Israel. It seemed to amuse the demons, however, to begin to send temptations from every one of Satan's dark houses after David in turn. Beginning with his stumble in faith at Nob, when he failed to reveal to Ahimelech, and continuing with his shameful display in Gath, David had weakened his defenses, and the counsel of demons that sat in Egypt and Babylon lost no time in commissioning agents to exploit the cracks in the human's spiritual armor.

The first of these was Negaiel, Plague of El, a demon who served under Azrael, the master of the House of Wrath.

In the region of Carmel a man called Nabal was shearing his sheep. He was a wealthy man, but – as is often the case with the unsanctified wealthy – his poverty revealed itself in his character. Incongruously, this man was blessed with a wife that was beautiful both outwardly and inwardly. Through no choice of her own, for her father was a man who sought ease of life, the lovely Abigail was given to Nabal and, gentle soul that she was, she made the best of her lot.

Abigail was a blessing indeed to Nabal; had it not been for her presence, his servants may well have revolted long before the day when David crossed their paths.

Still in hiding from Saul, despite the king's claim to be at peace with the outlaws, David and his little tribe traveled the land, earning a living how they could, and drawing resources from relatives who sent food and supplies to them in secret. When the men who were examining a territory that was relatively unknown to them returned and told David that many sheep, all from one household, were being sheared, he quickly sent ten messengers out to greet the owner.

What he had them say was this: "Peace be unto you from our master David, the son of Jesse. Peace be upon yourself, and your house, and all that you possess. Our master has heard of your shearers, and he sends you word that his men have not troubled your shepherds that were near us, nor did any of their possessions go missing all the time they were in Carmel.

"Let my lord ask the young men that serve him, and they will tell you the same. Let therefore my servants find favor in your eyes; and because we come in a profitable day for you, let us receive hospitality at your hand, my men, who are your servants, and your son David."

When Nabal heard these words, he was angry with the messengers, and he said, "Shall I reward men simply for failing to do evil? That they harmed not my men, nor took from their possessions is what ought to be done in Israel! And who is David, the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days that break away from their masters; shall I therefore take my bread, and water, and meat that I have killed to feed my shearers, and give it unto men who are strangers to me?"

For all his wealth and influence in Carmel, Nabal was a man who almost prided himself on his ignorance. Nothing concerning the kingdom raised any interest in him; as long as he was fed, and the Philistines were kept at bay, he was not one to become involved in the political affairs of his land. He had heard the name of David before – as had everyone in Israel – but had taken so little note of the tales of the giant-killer than the title "son of Jesse" was soon lost to his memory. As far as he was concerned, David and his men were simply ruffians who had escaped from some landowner less loved by his servants than himself, and were making trouble throughout the land.

Into our company came the dark spirit from Egypt. "Greetings, guardians," came the soft voice of the demon of wrath. Negaiel, for all the reputation of his house, was a gentle speaker. Though he moved men to great fits of anger, so much so that they would tear down their kingdoms rather than allow slaves to prosper, he himself was no great warrior among the angels. He treaded softly and worked behind the scenes to bring about widespread destruction. Though in this he was entirely unlike the demon that was at the head of his House, Negaiel was one of Azrael's favorite agents to send forth.

Abiathar's watcher Bachaniel turned to the newcomer. "The oracles of Heaven foretold your appearance among us. We are not unprepared for your work among the men of David."

"Preparation is not the issue, my Or-Koach," the demon replied, utilizing his customary style of speaking, referring to the angel he was addressing by his Order. "Ask Asheriel and he will tell you. Ask this noble Seraph, this mighty Prince of Heaven, and he will tell you." The wicked Principality was looking at me as he spoke, and he had apparently been well informed.

"David's failings have been a disappointment to us," I admitted, knowing I was not giving the demon any information that he did not already have, "yet we have seen, and IaHWeH has accepted, his repentance. With genuine sorrow David spoke to Abiathar about the slaughter of his family. With genuine regret he has acknowledged his fear and mistrust that caused his feigned madness in the land of the Philistines. What reason remains for an accusation against this son of man?"

"You speak of reason, Seraph," Negaiel said with a smile worse than any drawn blade. "Let us speak of reasons. Repentance removed that man's guilt, yes... but what of the stain to his soul? Do you think we have been blind to the course that IaHWeH wishes to plot for this human's life? From the day of his anointing we have been examining his record, and seeing the life that he has lived since that day... and before it."

Asheriel seemed a little surprised to hear this. Negaiel continued, "What do men do with a wooden cup? They drink from it... though it be scarred and uneven, twisted and knotted, they drink from it. But guardians, what do men do with a golden cup if it is scratched or dented? Is not this cup, though more valuable than the first, melted down or discarded?"

"The men who do such things care not for their cups," Asheriel responded. "David is well loved by Heaven, and no scar will prevent him from walking the course that Heaven has outlined for him."

"That we shall see, we shall see," Negaiel said. "What I know is this: not one of you four, not even the prophet's Cherub, has any instruction to keep me from tempting this man to transgression."

A short time – far too short a time – later, David was saying to his men, "Gird on your swords!" For all of Nabal's faults of character, he was well within his rights to refuse to help David's men. With the threat of Philistine attacks constantly on the borders of Israel, it was indeed the case than many men had taken the opportunity, while their masters were away, to flee from bitter service, and to become robbers and bandits. David's message by his servants, for all its eloquence, was really a demand for assistance, and he ought to have politely accepted the refusal, ungracious as it may have been.

Of the band that had joined itself to David, four hundred of the men went with him while the other two hundred remained to guard their women, children and possessions. As they departed two angels appeared to us – one Abigail’s guardian, and the other Za’afiel, another Prince of Heaven like myself.

Za’afiel, “The Wrath of El,” was the first of my brethren to speak with you concerning this set of records. He represents within himself the proper use of anger, and against Negaiel no finer spirit could have been chosen by Heaven to counter the influence of the darkness that sought to overpower young David.

“We have been sent,” the Cherubic Prince said, “due to the intercession of the prophet Gad and the priest Abiathar. Their prayers have been heard, as have the prayers of all the faithful in this camp, for the safety and protection of their leader.”

“Have we instructions to drive the tempters away?” Kanaphiel asked, reaching for his fiery sword.

“Not on this occasion,” Za’afiel said. He then indicated the guardian with whom he had come. “This angel and I, have another work to do.” With that they both vanished; apparently, the four of us were to merely be spectators for this particular event.

One of the young men who returned from Nabal’s shearing suddenly felt a need to speak to the mistress of his house. Going to her he said, “My lady, do you know of David, the son of Jesse?” The young man, like most in Israel, well knew of the hero of Saul’s army. It was no surprise that Abigail did also.

“The slayer of Goliath? I know of him,” she replied.

“My lady may also know, then, that he flees from King Saul, for the rumors of the king’s health have spoken of an illness of the mind that has unsettled him, and caused him to think ill of several of his servants.”

“I know that many men have left him, and gone out to join themselves to David. Some say he seeks to take the throne from King Saul. Why do you ask me of him?”

“This David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, but he replied to them with railing. We know, however, that David’s men did us no harm when they were with us in the field. Many offered friendship, and took nothing from us, though they were armed, and perhaps in need. They were a wall to us against bandits, and wild beasts, while we kept our master’s sheep, and now I pray consider what you may do, for the men of David went away angry at my master Nabal’s reply. Surely they think to do our master ill, and all his household, for he

is – let my lady forgive me for speaking so freely – such a worthless fellow that none can speak to him and maintain his peace.”

In any other household, such words would have merited swift punishment. But in that home, and to that wise woman, the servant’s words were received with thanks. Abigail considered what she should do, and then the inspiration came to her.

As David and his men went in the heat of anger toward Nabal’s house, a mix of angels and demons attending them, a tiny figure appeared on their path. As they drew nearer, they saw that it was a small group of men leading donkeys. As they drew nearer still, they saw that the last of the beasts in the group bore a young woman, and as they approached and drew to a halt before them, she arose from her donkey, sought out David, and bowed herself down before him.

“Upon me, my lord,” she said, “upon me let this iniquity be which you go forth to justly punish, but let your handmaid speak in your presence, and hear her words.”

“Speak,” David said, curious as to who this might be.

“Let not my lord, I pray, consider this impatient and worthless man, Nabal, worthy of your anger. As his name, so is he, for folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the messengers that you sent to speak unto him.” The name “Nabal,” in Hebrew, means “Fool,” and has a connotation of impiety and wicked abandon. It is not a name of which any Israelite would be proud, yet this man bore the badge of his parents’ devising as a fitting emblem of his character.

Abigail continued, “My lord, as Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, see that Yahweh has prevented you from coming to shed blood this day, and from avenging yourself with your own hand, but let all your enemies, and those who seek to do evil to my lord, be as Nabal will surely be. Forgive, I pray, this trespass of your handmaid, for Yahweh will certainly establish you a sure house, because my lord fights the battles of Yahweh, as even we all have heard, and evil has not been found in you all your days.

“Who has not heard of David? For a man is risen to pursue you, and to seek your soul, but the soul of my lord shall be found in the bundle of life with Yahweh your Almighty. And the souls of your enemies shall be slung out, as from the midst of a sling.”

David glanced at his men, and they back at him. This woman, pouring forth great – and perhaps unnecessary – eloquence, had heard of David before, knowing the victories he experienced from his youth all the way up to his troubles with Saul. If this was the wife of Nabal, as David and his men now strongly suspected, could they go forth and shed blood in her home? And Abigail was not finished speaking yet.

“It will come to pass that, when Yahweh has done according to His desire for you, and according as He has spoken concerning you, to establish you as ruler over Israel, this that you do shall be no grief to you. For you will have turned away from shedding blood needlessly, and have turned away from avenging yourself with your own hand. And when Yahweh has dealt well with my lord, remember your handmaid, who has spoken well with you today.”

David knelt before the woman to look her in the face. “Who has told you these things, these words that Yahweh has spoken concerning me?” Even many among David’s own men did not know of his anointing, and the prophet and priest had kept these things largely to themselves.

“I have said what seemed good for me to say,” Abigail replied. “From my youth, men and women have praised my speech, saying that it is filled with the wisdom of Heaven, and that they have seen the Spirit of Elohim resting upon me.”

“It is even so,” David said, overwhelmed. His soul was refreshed by hearing the words of Samuel’s anointing repeated, and the temptation to wrath that had seemed so overpowering mere moments ago melted into the air like smoke. Negaiel, scowling, turned away and departed, refusing to watch the rest of the scene.

“Blessed be Yahweh, the Almighty One of Israel, who has sent you to meet me this day. And blessed is your advice, which has kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and to avenge myself with my own hand. I tell you truly, as Yahweh, Elohim of Israel lives, except you had come forth to meet me, surely there would be no living male in the house of Nabal by the morning’s light.”

Abigail provided David with all that she had brought along by the servants and the donkeys, supplies enough to last him and his men many days... and these things were but a minute portion of Nabal’s goods, so little that he would not even notice that they were gone, had Abigail not later told him of her adventure.

When she did tell him, Nabal had been drinking heavily, and railing against David and the men that he had sent to meet him. “The fools,” he was saying, “would have broken their spears against my walls, and bent their swords against my doors, for there were but few men with him, and weaklings from what my servants did say.” He then proceeded to mock David, having apparently asked his neighbors about who “this son of Jesse” was.

Abigail heard all his words but said nothing, for she knew that when wine was at the table, her voice ought not to be. In the morning, however, when Nabal had awakened, she said to him, “My lord, this man of whom you spoke lightly last night, he had not few men with him, nor weak ones. He came forth against you with many men yesterday, men of war, and had I not spoken kindly to them, and turned them out of the way, I fear great sorrow would have fallen upon this house before now.”

“You went forth and spoke to these men?” Nabal asked incredulously. “Who bid you go? And what gifts of my possessions did you take with you to bribe these worthless fellows?”

“Nothing my lord could not spare for the sake of his life, and the lives of his servants, and his wife besides,” she said firmly.

Nabal said nothing more, but his spirit lay heavy on him. He was angry, furious, at David, and his wife, and the servants who were always against him. Cursing inwardly all that were about him, he quietly filled up a cup of indignation that Heaven held for him from the day that he laid curses upon the anointed King of Israel. As your Histories record IaHWeH saying concerning the Fathers of Israel, “*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*” Even the later records of your people declare that one should speak well of the king, the leader, that the Almighty has allowed to rule, therefore just as Israel experienced success against the Philistines due to their corporate tie to their spiritual head, so this Nabal experienced the curse of rejecting the one that IaHWeH had anointed. Had his character been one of light and not darkness, he could have experienced a great blessing.

Instead, ten days after his drunken mocking of the chosen of Elohim, Za’afiel visited Nabal, and the Wrath of El was exacted upon this churlish man.

Upon hearing of his demise David thought to himself, “Who is like unto Abigail, the widow of Nabal? Of beauty she is not lacking, nor of the Spirit of Elohim, to speak the truth and to fill the air with wisdom.” He sent for her after the period of mourning her husband, and asked that she become his wife. Abigail’s words to David on the day that they met may have been excessively poetic and bordering on flattery, but they were sincerely spoken. She accepted David’s proposal.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 8: THE HOUSE OF SLOTH

During his time in the wilderness, David took another in addition to Abigail, Ahinoam of Jezreel. Michal, whom he had left behind in Gibeah, was given by Saul in anger to another man, despite her loud protests. David heard of this, and made sure that Saul knew this would not go unpunished.

While David often acted in anger during this point in his life, and later also, he had overcome the temptation from the House of Wrath due to the help of the wise and gentle Abigail. This was only the first in a series of temptations, however, and later attempts by the destroyers of souls would prove to be significantly more successful. The next work of woe that was visited upon the young king was at the hand of a creature from the House that was led by the lion demon Arioch. The House of Sloth sent a vile spirit from the Order of the Virtues named Tenumael, the “Slumber of El.”

Tenumael had initially started his work in the Kingdom of Lucifer as a demon of the House of Gluttony. He had decided at some point, however, that his particular talents were better suited to getting men to do nothing, rather than to act on self-indulgent interests. While it is not common for demons to change their houses, it was not unheard of even in the days of the kings of Israel, although at this current point in time all of them have fairly well solidified themselves into their roles. Like many demons, this spirit had altered his Heaven-given name to more naturally suit his current pursuits, although a number of fallen angels maintain their original titles as an ironic commentary on their perception of IaHWeH’s character. An example of this is Gadriel, one of the most powerful of the corrupted Cherubim, who still goes by this name, which means, “My Help is El.”

When Tenumael arrived in Israel, it was to behold a scene that facilitated an easy beginning of his work. Although Saul had recently made yet another pledge to cease his pursuit of David, the demons Edrael and Neshephiel ensured that he would never be able to maintain this resolve. Though David had actively spared his life on several occasions, both by holding his own blade in check, and by instructing his men to “touch not Yahweh’s anointed,” as soon as Saul’s memories of these incidents had faded a little, or he received word of David’s whereabouts, he was hot on the trail once again.

As the fallen Virtue, sent by his masters, hovered over the house of Saul, he saw three thousand armed soldiers in addition to Saul himself departing the gates. He had heard that David was in a region known as Ziph, and residing upon the hilly country there. David had already been dwelling there for some time, and he quickly became aware of the fact that Saul had entered the area, and had encamped until a favorable opportunity presented itself for them to strike at the little group of outlaws.

The opportunities that David encountered for taking and then sparing Saul's life had not been coincidences. The angels assigned to the followers of the future king, including myself, had worked to engineer these occasions in order to demonstrate to the watching universe that IaHWeH's judgment upon Saul was without fault. The angels, when they beheld David's kindness and Saul's unthinking fury, were confirmed in the decision of El Michael to replace the once-loved human as the leader of the chosen nation. The demons, when they saw the best efforts of their latest mortal puppet failing, were reminded of the power of Elohim. The humans, when they saw the contrast in the characters of these two men, would be more likely to throw their support behind the younger man when the time was right.

On the day that David heard of Saul's presence in Ziph we provided yet another such opportunity, and it occasioned our first meeting with Tenumael, and with the little band of spirits that he had brought with him. Unlike Negaiel, who liked working alone, this Virtue had decided that it would be more effective to even the odds against us.

Of the guardians with David's men, four of us were the most active: Kanaphiel, Asheriel, Bachaniel and myself. In Gibeah there dwelt a prophet named Nathan who, at IaHWeH's instruction, had not revealed himself as such, and had therefore not joined himself to the service of King Saul. His Cherubic guardian Nirael, the "Lamp of El," was also with us from time to time, for he knew that Nathan and David would work together when the plan of Heaven unfolded further. He is an oracle spirit, as are Zephon and Da'athiel of whom you have already heard, and he spent his time communing with Heaven and speaking to us of the demons' work, rather than assisting us directly in the "field."

After nightfall David and his cousin Abishai slowly and carefully crept up to the place where his watchmen had indicated Saul's encampment lay. They decided that few men would be harder to detect, and harder to provide living captives if escape was necessary, than a larger company, and it was decided that two would go down and see what Saul's forces were like on this occasion. David said to his men, above a few protests, "I myself will go down and see what the king has brought with him, whether he has left the borders of Israel unsound for my sake, or whether he has but a few men that may easily be turned back." When the protests were silenced by David's insistence, he asked, "Who will go with me?"

After some discussion, it was decided by the men that Abishai and Ahimelech – a Hittite who had converted to Judaism during Saul’s more spiritual years – were the swiftest and most silent of the warriors. The choice would thus be made between these two. There was no doubt that Joab, Abishai’s brother, was the greatest fighter of the little band. He was also David’s nephew, but due to their nearness of age they called one another “cousin.” Joab was not, however, so fleet of foot as his brother, and for this night’s purpose it was not skill in battle, but skill in scouting that was required. Of the pair considered, Abishai was chosen to be David’s companion.

These preparations would not be necessary, however, for as David and Abishai approached Saul’s place of rest I took my place above the encampment and began to sing.

The song of a Seraph can have a great many purposes, of which my former brethren have explored very little with you, and which so far I have only mentioned briefly and in passing. With our voices we Seraphim may sing the praises of IaHWeH to encourage and strengthen our fellow angels in battle or to lift their experience in worship yet higher. We may confuse and confound the fallen angels, leading their work to be less effective. We may use our songs in place of whispers to humans, giving impressions of warning, fear, or righteous anger. Although the effects are subtler upon humans than spiritual beings – and becoming more faint as the generations become more evil – we nevertheless have sufficient influence to achieve the results we desire. In this case, I wished the men of Saul to fall into a deep slumber, from which even loud noises could not awaken them.

*Cast off all thought of sword and spear,
Remove your armor and your wrath,
Lay them aside as lie your heads.
With eyes grown weak from weary miles,
With bodies drained of life and fire,
Consider not the day to come,
Think not of hours that lie before.*

David and his cousin beheld the camp of Saul with wonder. Here were soldiers that both men had worked with when they were united under Saul. These were mighty warriors, and reliable servants of the king, yet they lay sleeping on their weapons. Even the great Abner, who was often at Saul’s right hand in battle, lay next to the king... but entirely useless to him in his slumbering state.

“Surely, Elohim has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Never before have we seen them lie before us so unguarded! Now therefore let me strike Saul down – I pray you, let me strike but once, and I will pin him to the earth; I will not need a second blow.”

“Do not destroy him,” David replied to Abishai. “Who can stretch out his hand against Yahweh’s anointed and be guiltless?”

Abishai snorted as quietly as he could. He knew that David himself had run into opportunities like this before, but this was the first time that he personally was well within range of the king who sought their lives, and he considered it an incredible waste of providence to let this occasion slip by unused.

David gently lay his hand upon the younger man’s shoulder, and said, “As Yahweh lives, Yahweh *Himself* will strike him down, or his day will come when he will die naturally, or perhaps he will fall in battle. But Yahweh forbid that I should be the agent of his death, to stretch forth my hand against His anointed. But, I ask you this favor: take the spear that is at his side, and the jug of water from which he drinks, and let us retreat for now.”

David had entirely overcome the demon of wrath, or this last opportunity would have been Saul’s last, but in this the future king of Israel was doing a great work to endear Israel unto him. Had he been the one to take Saul’s life, there were many in the kingdom that would not have seen him in so bright a light. There were many who remembered Saul’s early days, and his anointing under the still very respected prophet Samuel. There were many who remembered the coronation of the first King of Israel before all the Tribes, and would not take kindly to a usurper, regardless of how unfit the old king had become.

Abishai managed to restrain himself that night, and went with David to retrieve the spear and Saul’s distinctive jug. They passed all through Saul’s camp, counting the men who were with him, and marveling at the sleep that had come over these ordinarily dependable watchmen and guards. More than once Abishai reached for his blade, but the words of David rang true with him, and he shed no blood.

On the other side of Saul’s encampment, David and Abishai ascended a small hill so that they could be seen by all of the men who had come out with the king. As I ceased my song, David lifted up his voice and shouted, “Abner, son of Ner and servant of King Saul!” He shouted this over and over again, until he saw stirring in the camp below. When he was sure he had gotten the soldiers’ attention, he said, continuing to address Abner, “Are you not a valiant man? Who is like you in all Israel? Why, then, have you not carefully guarded the life of your lord the king? There came into your camp one who would willingly slay your lord the king!”

Abishai held up his sword as David spoke these words, willingly acknowledging himself as the one that would have done so. He wasn’t sure if everyone in the camp could see his gesture, but he knew that Abner was close enough to recognize the glinting blade.

“You have done a terrible thing,” David said, berating the warrior. “As Yahweh lives, you are even worthy of death, for you have not kept your master safe, even Yahweh’s own anointed! And now, look and see the king’s spear, and his jug of water, which you brought out with you from Gibeah!”

“David,” Saul exclaimed, overcome with shock. “Is that your voice, my son?”

“It is my voice, my lord the king,” came the reply, though David’s politeness was offered in distant tones; he was not fooled by Saul’s addressing him as a son. “Why does my lord yet pursue his servant? What have I done, or what evil is in my hand? Let my lord the king hear now the words of his servant: If it is Yahweh that has stirred you up to seek after me, let Him accept an offering at my hand and be content. But if it is the children of men that have caused you to seek my life, let them be cursed before Yahweh, for they have driven me out from abiding in Israel, the inheritance of Yahweh, tempting me to go forth and serve other gods in distant lands.

These words were calculated to arouse sympathy in the Israelite hearers; David had not then, nor would he ever, be seriously tempted by the thought of serving the demons who masqueraded as pagan gods. Yet with idolatry such a serious taboo for a man of Israel, and with David’s knowledge that Saul had recently conducted a purge of the sorcerers and necromancers that remained within its borders, by his choice of words he hoped that the men who had driven him from safety within his homeland would feel the sting of his reproach. “Now then,” he continued, “do not let my blood fall to the earth before the face of Yahweh, for the king of Israel comes out after one of no account, as after a flea, as a man hunting a partridge in the mountains.”

“I have sinned against you,” Saul shouted aloud in the hearing of his men. “Return with me, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, for my life was precious in your eyes this day. I have done foolishly, and greatly erred.”

David replied, “See that the king’s spear is with me. Let one of the servants of the king come and restore it unto him. Let Yahweh render unto every man the just reward of his righteousness and faithfulness, for Yahweh delivered you into my hand this day – as this spear bears witness – but I would not stretch forth my hand against Yahweh’s anointed. And now, as your life was precious in my eyes this day, so also let my life be precious in the eyes of Yahweh, and deliver me out of all tribulation.”

“Blessed are you, my son David,” Saul replied, “You shall do great things indeed, and prevail.”

As Saul turned to his possessions and began to prepare for the return journey to Gibeah, his men noticed that he would not look them in the eyes. Shame had, for the moment, overcome madness, and the acting king of Israel wished only to

return to his home and lie still, away from the eyes of his warriors. In this moment of clarity he knew that IaHWeH's wisdom had departed from him, and he desired the counsel of his old friend Samuel, or the prophet Gad, or even any one of the family of priests whose blood still and forever stained his hands in Heaven's eyes.

His demons Edrael and Neshephiel looked at each other in frustration. Had Saul slain David, their dark master would have rejoiced, for every demon knew that the Almighty was preparing this man to be a great leader of His people. Had David slain Saul, they would also have triumphed, for the stain on the younger man's reputation, if not his actual character, would have significantly reduced his ability to perform IaHWeH's will as monarch. But this irritable graciousness that David continued to show to Saul, despite the urgings of his men and the tempters they had sent to plague him, was making all their work of none effect.

Negaiel had failed to provoke David to wrath in any lasting sense, and fled back to the House that sent him, and the Cherub and Virtue that remained with Saul were beginning to wonder if there was any point to continuing labor in this field. As one opened his mouth to voice his concerns to the other, the devil who had been watching from afar made his presence known.

"The House of Sloth sends me," Tenumael said. "As wrath has failed, we shall try the other extreme. And I bring help." As he spoke, about twenty other demons appeared. "Behold what I shall now do."

As David returned to his place, one of his men said to him, "Shall we remain in this wilderness, now that our location is known? Surely, my lord, the king is not a man of his word, and should his anger again rise against us, he will swiftly capture us, and our wives, and our little children. Who shall be spared? My lord knows of the priests of Nob, for the survivor has told us vividly of these things."

Others also began to speak. David had indeed intended to stay where he was, and perhaps to even draw nearer to the center of Israel. Instead, with the doubts of his men in his mind, the future king of IaHWeH's elect nation began to consider the situation in his heart. "Why should I stay until I perish at Saul's hand? It is best that my men and I escape once again into the land of the Philistines; except this time we shall not be few, but many, seeking refuge of Achish. Surely, he will give us shelter from Saul when he sees the weakness of the king in these many escapees. In time, perhaps Saul will truly forsake his search for my blood, and when he no longer seeks me I will have escaped out of his hand."

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“My lord the king,” the Philistine attendant said in the presence of his monarch, “there come from Israel men seeking refuge. One has been here before, and you cast him out of your presence.”

“Then turn him away again!” the king demanded, irritated that he should be bothered with matters that he considered settled already. “Why should I consider again that which has already been decided?”

“He comes with many men, and strong-looking warriors, yet they seek not battle, though they be many, but peace. The man who came before is David of Bethlehem, the same David whom your commanders declared as the slayer of Goliath, and he who was driven mad by his flight from Saul, the king of Israel.”

“And has his madness gathered company?” the king asked, now growing curious.

“His mind seems sound, my lord the king,” the attendant replied.

“Let me speak with this man,” the king said.

As David was brought before him, Achish looked intently at his face, and noted that his eyes seemed steady, and his posture seemed sound. “What is the meaning of your recovery, slayer of our champion? And why have you brought men here to seek refuge, seeing that you are many men, and no doubt safe from any enemy that may attack you in your own land of Israel.”

David bowed himself before Achish and said, “Let my lord hear the words of his servant: It is Israel itself that seeks the life of your servant, and those who travel with him. It is the king and all his armies that have been set against us by the Almighty of Israel, whether I have not found pleasure in His eyes, or else some wicked plot of men and your servant is innocent of transgression. Whichever it be, let my lord the king know assuredly that on my last visit I feigned myself mad, seeking the sympathy of my lord, but accepted his just decision that I should return to my own land.

“It was a benefit for your servant to have been there, for there I met and spared the life of my pursuer, even the King of Israel, yet still he seeks my life, though I showed myself innocent before him. Let now my lord give shelter unto his servant, and these men with me, and we shall serve the King of Gath with our very lives, for what benefit is it to us to await death in Israel?”

“You spared the life of Saul, your enemy, the King of Israel?” Achish asked, incredulous. “By the gods, you could have saved me some work!”

“If the king of Israel falls in battle, it is the will of Yahweh, our God; but it is not for an Israelite, my lord, to stretch out his hand against one that our God has set up over the people.”

“You have a strange sense of justice in Israel,” Achish replied. “You may not slay your king, though he seeks your life... but if I offer you shelter, and you serve me, will you not slay Israelites in battle?”

“If an Israelite falls defending his home, it is no dishonor, regardless of who holds the weapon.”

Bachaniel turned to Asheriel as we stood over the scene and asked him, “David means to slay Israelites in exchange for asylum?”

“I do not think he means to do so,” his guardian said. “Nevertheless, he will say such things to be granted refuge.”

“What he now does is not good,” I said, remembering his failure in Nob, and his last visit to Gath. “Our ability to protect him and his men diminishes with each such deception; the demons grow more bold, and their work on the minds of the men is already far stronger than when David first fled from Saul. In his youth, David would not have needed Abigail’s words to keep himself from violence against Nabal, nor would he have fled from Saul as any other man would have fled from Goliath.”

“You believe this,” Achish said, and repeated, “A strange sense of justice... Very well, you shall have shelter in my kingdom, only serve me without hesitation, or I will be the one to put your men to death.”

“This I will do. And now, if I have found grace in your eyes, let me have some dwelling place apart from your courts, for why should your servant dwell here in the royal city with my lord?”

“There is a city, a small one, to the south. Its inhabitants care not for the affairs of the kingdoms, and they shall not resist your presence. If they do, send word and I will convince them of the king’s will for David and his men.” With that, Achish dismissed David, who took his men and went to Ziklag, the city that the Philistine king had indicated.

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David’s activities over the next few months proved Asheriel’s perception accurate. Though he told Achish of Gath that he and his men were actively engaged in wiping out the Israelites in the southern regions, and preparing roads by which his homeland could be more easily invaded, he was actually attacking the Amalekites and the Geshurites that were dwelling even further southward

than Israel with his forces and the sword of Goliath in his hand. He also attacked the Gezrites, who were at peace with the Philistines but, as with the other two peoples, he left no survivors to take a contradictory tale abroad.

“Ah,” Achish said, when hearing the latest report, “David has made himself a man most hated to his fellow Israelites. If he was thinking to stay only for a time among the Philistines before, he cannot at all think to return now. He will be my servant, and an effective warrior for Gath, forever!”

This work of attacking the heathen peoples in the south, and deceiving the king of the Philistines, would have been well enough in that generation, except for the fact that David had no business in Gath. For all the good he was doing that could justify his presence away from Israel, his calling had been to wait out Saul’s wrath, and to gain popularity with the people while the transition was being made. Tenumael and his demons, working behind the scenes, ensured that things went smoothly for the Israelite refugees, and we, their guardians, could do little to help.

Had David or any of his chief officers once cried out for wisdom, or the leading of IaHWeH regarding what they were doing, we may have been instructed to act, to drive off the wicked spirits, and to enlighten the eyes of the men. Yet they made the common mistake of mistaking success for divine sanction, and they remained, to a large degree, in spiritual darkness and religious lethargy.

The tight situation into which David and his men had maneuvered themselves was never more clearly seen than when the Philistines once again declared war on Israel. As might be expected, the Sloth demon currently afflicting the young man designed this perfectly to cause David’s lack of zeal for returning to Israel to drive him into a position that would force him to betray IaHWeH or to turn aside entirely from the course He had mapped out.

As the Philistine armies set themselves in order for the attack, Achish called David out of Ziklag and said to him, “Know that I intend for you to go out with me to battle, you and all your men.”

Before the king, David put on a confident front. “You will surely see what your servant can do,” he said, indicating that his actions would speak for themselves in the fight against Israel. Inwardly, he was wondering how he could continue to keep up the pretense and not take an Israelite life.

“Do well,” Achish said, “and I will make you one of my personal guards.”

That evening, for the first time in a considerable period, David prayed for divine guidance.

It was during this time that the incident I first described to you occurred. Saul, also desperate to obtain supernatural wisdom, and by his own actions bereft of prophet or priest, sought the only other source of spiritual knowledge left in the land – the sorcerers and necromancers. He himself had given the orders that drove them from the land, and now, in his hour of perceived need, he turned to the very thing he had once so fiercely denounced. During his life, Samuel had urged Saul to cleanse the land of spiritualists. To a great degree, he had done so; however, he had not diligently sought to finish the work. It was not until recently, in a fit of madness brought on by a hatred of all spirits – pure as well as impure – that he remembered the words of the prophets and sought to complete the task. The demons, who knew that spiritualism was far less effective against Saul than their current work of deepening his insanity, did nothing to prevent the purge.

Now, however, they allowed one of their remaining oracles to be discovered by Saul's men, and the incident that took place that dark night unfolded. Here we see a sharp contrast in the characters of the past and future kings of Israel. During his time of trial, David turned to IaHWeH, even though he had erred in the past. Saul, by contrast, compounded his errors and sins by turning still further away from the One who had made His requirements for a faithful life so clear. Had Saul done the work at once which Samuel had commanded, there would not have been a single spiritualist living in Israel that was open about his or her profession to any least degree, but the delay that the king had allowed in doing this necessary work provided just the occasion of temptation that Edrael and Neshaphiel were seeking to complete their work of sealing the failing king's doom. David's remaining in Gath during this critical time in Israelite history was certainly a failure on his part, and the result of a Sloth demon's carefully orchestrated work; the young man had not recognized this to the degree that we could act to recover him from this snare – but what he did pray about, that we could address.

While the incident with Saul in En'Dor was taking place, I who had been Samuel's guardian during his life, was among the Philistines, working on the captains of Achish's army along with my fellow laborers: the guardians of Abiathar, Gad and David himself.

It was not a difficult thing to work on their already existing prejudices, and in one of the "strange works" that our Almighty sometimes instructs His servants to perform, we used our subtle influence on the minds of these men to strengthen their hatred for the chosen nation, and to look with great suspicion upon Achish's latest servant.

When the Philistines encamped at Aphek, and the Israelites – led by the downcast and now near-fatalistic Saul – were arrayed in nearby Jezreel, David and his men came forth with Achish and his soldiers. As the chiefs among the Philistines eyed the Israelites, and several representatives stepped forward to

voice their concerns to the king, the dark Virtue Tenumael appeared before us and gave us an evil look.

“You do the very work of our tempters,” he said, attempting to taunt us; but we knew that his words were empty, for he was about to see his work undone.

“By your own efforts you have failed,” Kanaphiel said. “Had your vile spirits not so eagerly encouraged a disdain for Israel in the hearts of the Philistines, even to having them repeatedly attack the borders of IaHWeH’s inheritance, our work would not have been half so easy as it was.”

“And what of the precious testimony that you wish Israel to bear? Do you not think you undo this grand plan of IaHWeH?”

“Not by these men,” Kanaphiel said, partly in triumph, but partly in sorrow. “These men shall fall to Israel, and they are known enemies of IaHWeH. What influence for evil can they now have further?” Kanaphiel’s sorrow well reflects the mind of an angel during the times of Israel’s battles. We knew that the cup of the heathen nations’ iniquity was full, and that for the sake of the coming redemption Israel needed to be established – even in the midst of a violent and unstable region – but this did not lessen the fact that every human being, regardless of beliefs or national loyalties, is a son of Adam, and one created originally in the image of our own common Creator.

Men may rejoice in military victories over their foes, and there may indeed be cause for rejoicing when the work of Elohim is advanced through conflict made necessary by the conditions of this fallen planet. But for angels such victories are always tinted with sadness for the souls that are cast down. We angels have had great battles, of which you already know more than most about the greatest. In Heaven, in Eden, in Babylon, we have fought the forces of Lucifer, and have always overcome... and yet it is different, for we know that the enemies we strike down are not permanently vanquished, at least not yet. And we have already wept for our departed friends, knowing that they were lost to us from the first great battle before the Throne of IaHWeH. There will be more tears shed when they meet their final judgment; as for men, we see their deaths as something worse, for those who have not accepted the salvation of Elohim will rise again only briefly before their eternal destruction.

“If you think to set all our careful efforts aside through this clever plot,” Tenumael said, “you will find yourselves mistaken. David has found favor with Achish, and whether he fights, or whether he sits back from this battle, if even the king of the Philistines survives, the Israelite will remain with him in lethargy. But no, my angels, I am too dark in my vision, for you must know by now what our master deceiver Kaspriel has done to the king of Israel this past night.”

“We know it,” I said, “But your plan will only advance the cause of IaHWeH. Behold what shall occur upon the death of Saul.”

“As to that,” the evil Virtue said, “we have that well in hand. David shall be in Gath, and Israel will be without a leader. Saul’s greatest sons, and those most capable of guiding this little nation, will stand and fall with him in battle, and who shall be left to rule? We shall return this place to its former chaos, when you were forced to raise up a man here or a man there to try to keep the peace, and there is nothing that you, or the Chalkydri can do about it!”

As he spoke, the demon glanced over at the twelve fiery Seraphim that stood over Israel’s army. They, like we, knew that with David away from his homeland, and Saul now completely despondent and cut off from Heaven’s graces, the borders of the country were in great danger of being breached. Yet they also knew, as did we, that the oracles in Heaven had spoken, and that all eventualities would be covered.

As Tenumael vanished, we saw that Achish had finished his conversation with the Philistine princes, and he turned and called David.

“Surely, as Yahweh your God lives,” the king said, “you have been upright, and all that you have done has been good in my sight, for I have found no cause for complaint in you since they day you appeared before me. And yet, the lords of my country do not view you in so positive a light.

“Because of this, return to Ziklag; go in peace, that you do not displease the lords of the Philistines.”

David, masking his great relief, and silently praising the Almighty for answered prayer, instead made himself appear upset, and said, “What? But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant so long as I have been with you that I may not go forth and fight the enemies of my lord the king?” David deliberately ignored the statement that it was Achish’s lords, and not he himself, who wished him to return to his city. By doing so the Israelite wished to incur even greater sympathy, and a more sure place in Gath, by claiming to be offended that the king did not wish him to fight against the Israelites.

As Achish answered David, explaining that it was not by his desire that David was to return to Ziklag, and David protested as the king might have expected him to do, my attention was distracted by a mighty Prince of Heaven descending upon the Israelite army.

Every angel there bowed in respect for Prince Uriel, one of the Archangels and Keepers of the Throne, as he spread his four fiery wings over the men of Israel as a sign of protection and comfort. He had not come, however, to give the army victory. Instead, he summoned Ariel, the guardian Seraph of the Tribe of

Judah. He spoke with loving, yet commanding tones, and Ariel, with his rich and musical voice, gave assent to the instructions that Heaven had sent him. With a bow, he vanished into the land of Gath, and Uriel ascended once more into Heaven.

In my record I have spoken less about the events that took place within the Heavenly kingdom during this time of human kings. This is as it should be, for there were things occurring before the Throne that have impact on human events even to this day, and I am given no commission to reveal such things. All that is necessary for you to know as they relate to the rise of David to his position over Israel I have revealed, but I would not have you think that Uriel's sudden appearance before us was mere happenstance. As you shall see in a short while, the work that he had given Ariel to do was about to bear fruit to the salvation of many souls.

* * * * *

Three days later, David and his men arrived at their home in Ziklag. What they found horrified them. The houses in which they had lived had been burned to the ground; and while they discovered no bodies within the wreckage, neither were their wives and children anywhere to be found.

In a daze, David wandered over the debris, and knelt down when he found an item of interest. "Amalekites!" he cried, recognizing the workmanship. Knowing now where his wives were, and the families of his men, David sat in the ashes, and began to weep loudly. Soon his warriors, weary from the journey, and emotionally drained at the near-disaster that would have pitted them against their own countrymen, joined him in lifting up their voices in sorrow.

Tenumael, who had followed them, beheld the scene in suspicion. No demon had been authorized to stir up the Amalekites to revenge for all the attacks that David had made upon them in the past months. Nor, he knew, would the armies of Amalek have attacked at that point without spiritual urgings to do so. "Heaven does something here," he hissed to his fellow demons from the House of Sloth. Approaching me, as I stood with the other guardians of the Israelite refugees, he drew his blade.

The dark fire of stolen energy crept up the edge of the fallen Virtue's Kherev, and he thrust it at me threateningly. As a precaution I drew my own sword, this one bursting into pure, spiritual fire. As I held it before me, I felt a slight burning across my abdomen, as I ever did when engaged in battle. The first wound that Lucifer ever openly inflicted, carved across my midsection, had healed completely to the eyes of my fellow angels; and yet, the sensation of it has remained with me as a testimony, even as my fellow Prince Dumah's voice has rested, and will continue to rest, until the Day of Judgment. Just as it had

when we had driven the demons away from the Tabernacle when my former charge Samuel was but a boy, so now the fiery tingle flickered in my being.

“What does Heaven do?” Tenumael demanded.

“If you think to force the answer from me,” I replied, “you should know far better than that.” I, like every holy angel above Aphek, had heard what Uriel had said to the chief of the Chalkydri. His words, however, appear to have been hidden from the demons; for, although many were present, none seemed to know why Amalek had invaded David’s camp – stirred to action by none other than Ariel, the guardian spirit of Judah.

“If you wish to see what Heaven will do,” I replied, “stay here and watch.”

So great was the distress of the people that they began to reproach David for his actions. “Why have we remained so long in Gath, when Saul has not sought us since the time of our departure from Israel! Why have we left our place all unguarded to go out in full force to appease the king of these uncircumcised Philistines? Is the friendship David has with these idol nations more than just a pretense?” These and other things were in the hearts, and even on the lips, of some of the men. David’s own sorrow at having lost his wives was soon lost to them, and the refugees of Israel began to speak of stoning him.

When David heard these things, he wandered away from his men – though not so far that they would think he was seeking to abandon or escape them – and he began once again to lift up his voice in prayer. As he spoke, Asheriel drew near to him and began a long, slow process of healing him.

Tenumael, his blade still drawn, also came closer, but Kanaphiel and I moved to stop him. “This man has prayed for our assistance,” I said. “Let the House of Sloth know, as the House of Wrath now knows, that David, the King of Israel, shall overcome all the forces of transgression, and stand before his nation in purity, and in victory!”

Tenumael sheathed his weapon, but did not depart.

“Abiathar!” David called, suddenly inspired to action. “Bring me the ephod,” he instructed the priest. When he had brought his equipment, David said to him, “Shall I pursue after this troop of Amalekites? Will I overtake them?”

This time it was Bachanael’s turn to act, and he facilitated the ministrations of IaHWeH’s priest. “Pursue,” Abiathar said. “You will surely overtake them, and recover all that you have lost.”

Suddenly filled with confidence, David arose and called to his men. “We go after the Amalekites!” he said, “Four hundred of us must go, and we will leave two hundred here to guard what... what little remains.”

Four hundred men quickly volunteered, though all were weary due to the travel from Aphek. Abiathar and the prophet Gad strengthened those who remained behind, and comforted them during their wait.

Along the way, David and his men encountered an Egyptian, one who had been captured and set to serve a man of the Amalekites. He, who had been callously left behind in the open with no food or water because he had fallen ill, felt no great loyalty toward his former masters. He readily confirmed that Amalek’s warriors has been engaged in an attack upon the southern portion of Israel, and had turned aside also and burned Ziklag, capturing all whom they had found therein. In exchange for his life, and for a promise that he would not be returned to his former master, the Egyptian showed them the way in which the Amalekites had gone, and David soon caught up to the marauding band.

In the strength of IaHWeH, David and his four hundred warriors attacked the heathen soldiers, and they fought over an entire night, with no Israelite feeling weary until the work was complete. The number of Amalekites who escaped was equal to the number of fighters that had come with David, departing on camels during the heat of the battle. When one came to David and told him that some had been left alive, he replied, “That is of no account. If Achish is told that we have attacked Amalekites, we need only show him the burned ruins of Ziklag. What we have done will be just in his eyes.”

What David was already thinking about, however, was a return to the land of Israel.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 9: THE HOUSE OF PRIDE

David returned to Ziklag in triumph. He brought with him all that the Amalekites had taken, and a great wealth of spoils besides. More important than all these material things, however, was a renewed sense of purpose that he received upon praying for divine assistance, and upon seeing a need to act. He shook off the chains of inactivity that the demon Tenumael had so artfully laid upon his soul, and though the evil Virtue tried once more with renewed efforts to convince David to remain in Gath, the latest news from the battle between the Philistines and the Israelites entirely destroyed this latest attempt to sink David into inactivity.

Even as David was sending tokens of the Amalekites' spoils to the elders of Judah as a present, and so that they would remember him and perhaps prepare a way for his return to Israel, news came to him about the events that took place in Apehek.

Zahaviel, Saul's guardian, had already come to us and told us what had occurred. The Philistines had quickly gotten the upper hand; Saul's instructions were vague and disjointed, and his captains fared no better. It was as if darkness had been cast over the entire Israelite army, and in point of fact that is just what occurred. Little would have delighted the devilish spirits more than to see the monarchy of Israel broken within its very first generation, and the man chosen to replace the first king an outlaw and a bitter exile in the land of the country's most active enemies.

When the Israelite ranks broke, the Philistines singled out Saul and his family, pursuing them and taking them down one after the other. Melchishua, Abinadab, and then even Jonathan fell behind and were overcome and slain by the heathen warriors. Finally, Saul himself came within range of their archers. As arrows fell around him, one struck the king in his side, and he stumbled.

As the swordsmen of Gath drew closer to finish the work begun by their bows, Saul turned to the armor bearer who had fled with him. "Draw your sword and finish me off, before these uncircumcised ones come and slay me, perhaps with torture first!"

"My king..." the young man said, but fear gripped him and he ran off, knowing that the warriors of Achish would not follow him once they had come upon the

dying king of Israel. As he saw his servant escaping, Saul knew that the end had come at last. Without a word, he drew his blade and fell upon it, ending a career that had begun so gloriously, only to end in madness and despair.

“What happened thereafter?” I asked, as the images Zahaviel had produced in our minds faded.

“Saul’s armor bearer had thought to escape, but he quickly saw that Saul was dead, he was surrounded, and that he was known to the Philistines as Saul’s personal servant. He knew that only death would come at the hands of these soldiers, so he did to himself what he had not done to the king of Israel.

“The Philistines are even now moving to occupy the cities nearby that the Israelites, upon hearing news of Saul’s defeat, fled.”

“So it has finally happened,” I sighed, thinking of the Philistines’ many failed attempts to take more Israelite territory in the past. “We shall see now the next step in what IaHWeH has in mind.”

By the time the news had reached David, other events were known to us. The Philistines had taken the bodies of Saul and his sons, and used them as trophies of victory. Saul they beheaded, and they put his armor in the temple of their goddess, over which the fallen Seraph Petahel, head of the demonic House of Lust, presided. Within a short time, some of the loyalists who lived near the border had taken it upon themselves to retrieve the body of their slain king and his three sons, and they burned their bodies to cleanse them – as they believed – from the spiritual pollution to which they had been subjected, and then buried their bones with due ceremony.

On the third day after David had returned to Ziklag following his attack on the Amalekites, an escapee from Saul’s camp wandered by, apparently drifting aimlessly along without a sense of purpose after the army’s shocking defeat. When he came up to David, he went to him and fell on his face, bowing before him.

Before the man had even said a word, David suspected what had happened as a result of Achish’s attack. “Where are you coming from?” he asked.

“I have escaped from the Israelite camp.”

“How went the battle? Tell me, I pray, all that occurred.”

The man raised himself to a kneeling position and said, “Israel has fled from the battle. Many of the people have fallen, and are now dead. King Saul, and his son, Jonathan, they are dead also.”

The angels in the room all sensed the pulse in David's body fall sharply, and then speed up to a very high rate. Even the humans in attendance could hardly have missed the astonishment and dismay that passed over his face at this report. "How do you know with a certainty," he asked, "that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

The escapee looked up and, seeing the depth of feeling in his questioner's face, realized that David was suppressing great sorrow. Thinking to himself that he was about to secure great favor with this man who was yet loyal to King Saul, he said, "I happened upon King Saul by chance, lying wounded atop Mount Gilboa. He was leaning upon his spear, and the chariots and horsemen of the enemy were drawing quickly nearer. He looked around and called out to me, and I went over to him.

"He asked me, 'Who are you?' and I replied that his servant, and your servant, is an Amalekite that dwells peacefully in Israel. He then said to me, 'Stand, I pray, over me and slay me, for I am wounded, though I am let alive for the capture.' So then, I stood up and slew him, for I was not sure that he could live with the wound he showed me, and I took the crown that he wore, and his royal bracelet, and brought them here unto you, my lord."

In truth, the Amalekite had come upon the place where Saul had been slain, but this was after the horsemen of Achish had already ridden off with the body, leaving much spoil in their wake including, incredibly, Saul's own imperial accessories. The young man's original plan had been to come to Ziklag, feigning to have slain Saul for David's sake, but when he saw that the outlaw took the news of his rival's death so hard, he changed his plan a little and emphasized the respect he thought he had shown to the now dead king. He had underestimated, however, the reaction he would encounter.

The men in Ziklag, following David's example before them, tore their clothing in sorrow, and resolved to fast until the sun went down. David went aside by himself to mourn for Saul, and for his dear friend Jonathan, with whom his last visit had been a most sorrowful parting.

When evening came, the young man was called again before David, who demanded, "Where are you from?"

"As I said, my lord," he replied, "your servant is an Amalekite, the son of one from Amalek and one from Israel, and who dwells peacefully in the land, and was in service to King Saul."

"Service," David said, "And how was it that you feared not to stretch forth your hand against Yahweh's anointed? If you were in service to King Saul, surely you have heard that I restrained my own hand from striking down the King of

Yahweh's inheritance, and yet you fell upon him as if he were one of no account!"

Turning to one of his men, David said, in a voice drained of emotion, "Fall upon him."

Before the young man could even react, he was slain. "Let your blood be upon your own head," David said to the body, "for your mouth has testified against you, that you have slain Yahweh's chosen." The angels neither praised nor reproached what David had done to this young man. In the times of David, this was the expected reaction, particularly before his men, to whom David had consistently held out the life of his adversary King Saul as most precious. At the same time, this was a death that could have been avoided, and those holy spirits that knew David best realized that it was not without some anger that David had slain yet another of Amalekite blood so soon after the raiding band had captured his wives and destroyed his city.

David and his men mourned for Saul and for Jonathan for many days, and the future king of Israel, as was common during times of great emotion, composed a song to commemorate his father-in-law and his friend. When the time was over, in a move that vastly disappointed Tenumael, David called Abiathar and Gad and asked them, "What does Yahweh say? Shall I now go up into any of the cities of Judah, seeing that Saul is now dead?"

"Go up," came back the reply, and David resolved to do just that.

"Where shall we go?" David asked.

"Hebron shall be the place of your entrance," Gad declared.

* * * * *

Messengers were sent back and forth between Ziklag and Hebron for a few days. The gifts that David sent to the elders of that and the surrounding areas had set him in good stead with the people. In addition, the men who had remained in Bethlehem, prompted by the spirits that stood above them, began to spread abroad the knowledge that they had kept for so long – that years ago, before the mighty prophet Samuel had departed this world, he had anointed David as the king of Israel. Now, they declared, it was time for his prophecy to come to pass, and for the anointing to be made public.

The Hebronites declared David welcome, and he, with his wives, and his men, and their families, departed from Ziklag without a word to Achish, and entered once again into their homeland. David knew that he would hear from his former shelterer eventually, especially with a greater Philistine presence now within the

borders of Israel. For the time being, at least, the Philistines were not making any further forays into the land, and Judah was, for the moment, secure.

The men from David's Tribe of Judah came up to Hebron upon his arrival, and there they declared their loyalty to the son of Jesse, that he should be king over them, and over all of Israel. Not all were of this mind, however. In the north, Abner, Saul's commander, had survived the Philistine attack. Still loyal to the house of Saul, he returned to Gibeah and there proclaimed Ishbosheth, one of Saul's remaining sons, king. The people of Gibeah were relieved to have someone to sit on the throne, and they gladly accepted this at the news of Saul's death. Praying that this would be a more stable leader than their last, they began to publish the news.

Ishbosheth, for his part, was never the ambitious type, and with three older brothers to precede him, he had never given a thought to ruling the nation of Israel. Fortunately, as he considered the matter, Abner was more than willing to give him advice and, when necessary, to tell him exactly what to do.

In Abner's view it was Saul's family that was to be the ruling clan of Israel. He had heard the words of the men of Bethlehem, that Samuel had purposed David to be king, yet he was not sure that he entirely trusted the words of these men from David's hometown. "It is a convenience," Abner had said to one of his officers, "that David – a well known rival of Saul – should have men who consider him now to be the rightful king. Samuel's name, it seems, is still useful."

Abner, for all his honor and courage, did not understand the outworking of IaHWeH's plan, and therefore he could not see the providence responsible for David's rise to fame in Israel, beginning even with the slaying of Goliath. Because of this continuing loyalty to the Benjaminite family, Abner sent messengers southward to Hebron in the name of King Ishbosheth, to enquire what right the Judeans had to declare another king.

These inquiries caused a great deal of tension to develop between the northern and southern regions of Israel. As with all else of a spiritually significant nature, this was no coincidence. Tenumael, the demon of Sloth, had departed in disgust shortly after David and his men returned to Israel and settled at Hebron. His forgiveness of Saul, readily, easily, reflected the purity that remained in the young warrior's heart, and as David judged others, so he himself was judged by Heaven; he was forgiven. In the departing demon's place, however, the dark watchers sent a spirit even more dangerous than he: Kishael, the "Bent One of El."

Kishael, a Dominion from the House of Pride, had proven himself time and again in Egypt and in Syria to be a highly successful tempter. As the demons continued to learn from their failures to sever the connection between David and

IaHWeH, this harsh and bitter demon brought with him a great number of evil spirits, and he said to them, “This work calls for a greater scope than my predecessors envisioned. It is not David alone that we shall target, but also the remnants of Saul’s house in the north, and Abner, the warrior whose pride was wounded by David at Hachilath near Ziph, when he was publicly rebuked for failing to protect Saul. This man will be a useful weapon against the men of David.”

As the pressure mounted between those loyal to David and those who were loyal to Saul, the nation itself became divided in opinion. Abner knew that this state of affairs was not good for the country, as it weakened the cohesion of the army. And with the Philistines’ last successful effort that resulted in them taking some land, it was paramount in the warrior’s mind that all Israel should be united. “If they will not concede Ishbosheth as king,” he said, “we shall have to force a concession from them at the edge of a sword, for the good of the country.”

Abner belonged to a certain class of men who believe that the greater good may justify even questionable actions. If it meant the increased safety of Israel, he would not hesitate to draw his sword against a man of Israel. David, although he felt the need for unity as much as Abner did, was far more hesitant to commit violence against one born of Jacob. When he heard that Abner was sending troops down to Hebron, however, he commissioned his cousin Joab to take the swordsmen of Judah and to go forth and oppose the northern warriors.

When the two factions met at Gibeon, Abner raised his hand and called for an audience with Joab. He knew that he had superior numbers, for of those loyal to David the Tribe of Judah and a few of Reuben constituted the majority of his forces. Although Judah was unquestionably the largest Tribe, it was but one of twelve, and Reuben’s inheritance was relatively small. Those from Reuben that threw their support behind David were even fewer. Despite his knowledge that he could overcome Joab’s forces, Abner had not been so greatly affected by Kishael’s efforts that he would so easily consent to a slaughter of the southern military. He would try once more to speak peacefully to the followers of David.

“I know you, Joab of Judah,” Abner said. “Are you intent upon following this counterfeit king of Israel?”

“Yahweh’s anointing is upon him,” Joab replied with uncharacteristic piety. “We follow the will of the Almighty One of Israel, and His servant Samuel. We follow also His servant David, whom Yahweh has placed over Judah, and all Israel.”

“This cannot stand,” Abner said. “The house of Saul was chosen in the sight of all Israel; why, then, should we believe in an anointing that has taken place in secret?”

“The providence of Yahweh has revealed all that has come to pass. Have you not been with David when he, but a youth, slew the champion of Gath, and restored honor to Yahweh’s inheritance? Have you not been with Saul when Yahweh delivered David out of his hand time and time again? And now that Saul and his most able sons are dead, have you not heard that David mourned for his loss, but then was told by Yahweh through the mouth of the prophet Gad, who once served King Saul with faithfulness and truth, to come up to Hebron and reign? Have you not heard, Abner, for I know you well also, how David honored those men from Jabesh-gilead who restored the body of Saul and his sons to Israel, stealing them back from the Philistines? Who will not follow this honorable man, rather than the weakling who sits on the throne in Gibeah?”

“The King Ishbosheth is of the Tribe of Benjamin, the chosen Tribe, and of the family of Saul, the chosen family. Who speaks so against the King of Israel? But come, I will not shed blood needlessly. Let us decide this matter like Israelites – let us choose champions, young men from among our soldiers, and let them arise and fight before us. If those from Saul’s house prevail, return to David and tell them that Abner has driven you back with honor, and with little shedding of blood. And if you prevail, I will return to Gibeah until Yahweh tells us what next to do.”

“Let them arise,” Joab agreed, seeing the size of Abner’s army, and went in to choose twelve of his mightiest fighters.

“This shall not be settled so easily,” I said, addressing Kishael, who stood with Abner’s men.

“I would not expect so,” the fallen Dominion replied. “This is but one step in our journey, prince of Heaven.”

As Kishael and I worked against each other, he having more authority than I to act due to Abner’s obedience to his promptings and Joab’s naturally irreligious nature, by Heaven’s providence we were able to exert precisely the same level of influence on the twelve champions chosen by each side. As the men ran at each other, each grabbed the other with one hand and drew a weapon at the same time. Before the astonished eyes of all the men on both sides of the conflict, twenty-four humans fell at the same moment.

Joab and Abner met again, perplexed. “We shall name this place, ‘Field of Swords,’” Joab said. “Never in all Israel has such a thing been seen.”

“We shall fight, then,” Abner said. “Yahweh so wills it.” Joab agreed, and returned to set his men in array.

The men of Israel charged one at another, and a fierce battle ensued. In addition to the divine right that David had to the throne of Israel, the truth is that Joab's warriors were superior, having been living in the wilderness for years on the run from Saul. Joab was a master swordsman, and had personally trained most of the men who had come with him from Hebron, and after a long conflict Abner's men were forced to retreat.

Not content to merely drive them off, Joab ordered the Judean warriors to give chase, and at the front of the advancing army was Joab himself and his two brothers: Abishai who had gone into Saul's camp the day he had stolen the king's spear, and their younger sibling Asahel. Asahel was not the best of warriors; Joab was better than he. Nor was he the stealthiest, which is why Abishai had been chosen by David that night. Where the youngest of the three excelled, however, was in his fleetness of foot.

Some time later Abner looked behind him to see who was pursuing him. "You are Asahel, the brother of Joab?" he panted, thinking that he recognized the young man.

"I am he," came the reply.

"You have cast off your armor, and I cannot fight you thus. Turn aside to the right, or the left, and take armor, and then I will stand and fight you."

Asahel, who had indeed sacrificed his armor for speed, gave no reply, but doubled his efforts to catch up with the retreating warrior.

Abner called out again, "Turn aside from following me! Why should I strike you to the ground? How then shall I look into the eyes of your brother Joab, who has fought honorably this day?"

Again Asahel refused to reply, or to give up his chase. Abner knew that this would not end well, but could think of no alternatives other than to slay this stubborn young man. As Abishai drew nearer the experienced warrior deliberately slowed his pace, bringing Joab's brother up behind him even faster than he expected. Falling to one knee, the warrior of the north did not even bother to turn his spear about, but thrust backward with the end, which was also pointed. In the evening's fading light, Asahel did not even see the sharp object thrust in his direction, and ran into it chest-first.

Joab and Abishai, who had been chasing others, saw their brother fall, and with a cry both turned to go after Abner, who stood up and began once more to run. As they fled, the Benjaminites gradually coalesced into one body, and the men of Judah who were after them gathered together as well. They chased the northerners up a hill, and then Joab and his brother heard the voice of Abner ringing out above the sounds of the pursuit.

“Shall the sword devour forever?” he cried out. “Know you not that this shall all but end in bitterness? How long shall it be until you call your men back from following after their brethren?”

Joab and Abishai spoke to one another. “I saw Abner strike our brother down!” Joab said. “Shall this go unpunished?”

“I was closer and saw. Abner wished to fight our brother face to face, but in haste Asahel pursued, and fell. Abner knows he is defeated for now... will there not be another day to avenge our fallen?”

Joab considered the matter for a few moments, and decided that Abishai was right. In any event, he would not forget what had been done to his family that day. For the moment, however, he called out, “As Elohim lives, had you not spoken these words, we would not have given up the chase until the morning!” He blew a trumpet, calling the Judeans away from the pursuit, and began the trip back to their camp, and from there southward to Hebron. They took with them the body of their brother, to be buried later in their family’s land in Bethlehem.

Abner, breathing deeply, rested atop the hill for a time with his men, and then they walked all the rest of that night. When the tallies were counted, Judah had lost but twenty men, including Joab’s brother Asahel, while Abner’s forces had seen a great defeat, being now three hundred and sixty men less.

This battle marked the first confrontation in a long, painful war between the houses of Saul and David.

* * * * *

Abner, heeding the whispers of Kishael, and knowing the weakness of Ishbosheth whom he had placed on the throne, began to feel more and more as if he were the true leader of Israel. His assessment was not entirely inaccurate, for Saul’s son did whatsoever Abner told him, and as the warrior continued to do battle with Judah, and to prevail in at least as many conflicts as he lost, he considered within himself that he ought to have the rights to more privileges than were afforded him as mere commander of the royal army.

In a sense, Abner knew when he took the former king’s concubine, Rizpah, to himself, that Ishbosheth would object. Nevertheless, he considered this a key opportunity to exert himself, and to test just how much liberty he could exercise with this figurehead on the throne. When Ishbosheth found out about the matter, for Abner had made no great effort to hide it, he called Abner before him, as the warrior expected he would do.

“Why have you done this,” the king of Israel asked his commander, “to go in unto my father’s concubine in the very house of Saul?”

Abner had expected Ishbosheth to object, but the disgusted manner with which the king had just addressed him sparked his anger, and he thought within himself that this man owed him everything, including the throne on which he sat and from which he was now speaking to him so imperiously.

“Am I a dog’s head,” Abner asked, raising his voice, “that I should be so addressed? Is it not Abner that shows your house such kindness by going against Judah until this day, and has not delivered you into the hand of David? Why then do you charge me with a fault concerning this woman?”

“For your work against Judah you have the thanks of the house of Saul,” Ishbosheth replied, “but for the actions of my commander against the house of Saul you have my reproach. Know you not that Rizpah has borne my father Saul two sons, my brothers? How shall I be viewed in Israel, if such a thing is known?”

“Such a thing is already known in Israel,” Abner retorted. “What is that to you? You have not taken your father’s concubines, nor certainly have you any eye toward this woman Rizpah yourself. What is it to you that I take her unto me?”

“Nevertheless,” Ishbosheth said, refusing to argue with his servant, “No such thing shall be done from this day forward.”

Abner’s anger peaked. “Elohim do so and more unto me,” he vowed, “if I do not do as Yahweh has sworn unto David, to take the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel as well as over Judah, from Dan even unto Be’erSheba!

“Whether the prophet Samuel spoke those words or not,” Abner said, seeing the fear rising in the younger man’s eyes, “they shall prove a true prediction.” With that he stormed out of the king’s presence.

This was not at all what Kishael had in mind! We, the angels of IaHWeH, had admittedly done very little to help this process along. We knew the heart of Abner better than this demon of pride, and we saw well enough the rising friction that came from his servitude to a king who could not properly command his kingdom after him. Abner was a great man in many respects, and would indeed have made a capable monarch in those warlike times. He grated under the figurehead that he himself had set up, and we needed to do little while the pressures within him boiled over, surprising the evil spirit that had facilitated it.

Kishael was not one to remain in a state of shock for very long, however. “I know well what I shall do with this development,” he said to the devils who looked on with a critical eye. “Keep your gazes fixed on this next great work.”

Over the next few days, Abner sent messengers to David in Hebron, unbeknownst to Joab. To the king of Israel, Abner said that he was attempting to find a way to engineer a peace between the north and the south; in truth, he and the king of Judah were arranging a way in which Ishbosheth was to be dethroned, and David would replace him. One of David’s stipulations was that his first wife, Michal the daughter of Saul, should be returned to him.

Thinking that this would cement their “alliance,” as Abner presented the matter to him, Ishbosheth sent Michal to Hebron, taking her from the husband to which Saul had given her when David was away. While this was taking place, Abner was speaking to the heads of the powerful families in northern Israel, and he said to them, “In time past, you favored the idea of David as your king. Now then, let us do it, for Yahweh has spoken of this David, saying, ‘By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the power of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies.’” Even to the house of Benjamin, Saul’s own Tribe, Abner spoke pleasing words, and he won the approval of the Israelites in this way.

Having secured their favor, Abner sought leave from Ishbosheth and, with twenty soldiers he went to David in Hebron. What Ishbosheth had been told was a diplomatic mission was actually the last meeting that David and Abner was to have, to solidify their plan to have David take the throne, and to begin to implement their plan. This was not, however, to be.

Kishael, the demon of pride, found Joab to be an easily swayed victim. From his youth the Judean warrior had been proud of his strength in battle, and of his family’s talents for warfare and athletics. When Abishai was slain by Abner, this created in his oldest brother a hatred that would not be appeased – and the fallen Dominion merely needed to tap this flow of bitter emotion, and to use it to steer this hero of David’s army.

As Joab and his troop returned from pursuing an invasion of the southern peoples that they had driven off, he learned from those who had remained in Hebron that Abner had just recently departed. Joab was astonished, and furious. “Abner, the son of Ner, came here, to the king? And he has sent him away in peace?”

When this was confirmed, Joab made his way to David, and demanded of his cousin, “What have you done? Abner came to you, and why is it that you sent him away unharmed? He is now gone, and free from our power! Don’t you know this Abner, how he has ever been loyal to the house of Saul? Surely he

came in to deceive you, and to know the ways of your armies, and all else that you do.”

“The people of Judah place their trust in me,” David said, “and Yahweh has anointed me ruler of His people Israel. What have you to do with this, cousin? Be content to know that I have received Abner in peace, and sent him away in peace, and it shall be well in Israel for this cause.”

“It shall be well in Israel,” Joab agreed, but then he said, “We who fight with the sword and the bow must see to that.” He departed in anger, but David did not suspect what he was about to do.

As Abner was on his return to the house of Ishbosheth, one came running to him from Judah, and saluted him, saying, “My lord the king would yet speak with Abner.”

“What can he have forgotten?” Abner wondered. Their meeting, as their feasting thereafter, had been thorough and satisfying. Nevertheless he turned about and returned to Hebron.

As he entered the gate, he saw Joab there, waiting for him. Abner bowed himself and said, “The hero of Judah, your brother Abishai, ought not to have fallen to the edge of my spear.”

“Come, then,” Joab said, looking the northern warrior squarely in the eye, “let us reconcile.” Joab led him aside, but as soon as they left the main area, where passers-by might see, he looked about in horror as Joab’s soldiers fell upon his twenty men. In a moment they were all on the ground, and Abner himself was seized from behind. “For my brother, Abishai,” he said coldly, and thrust his blade through Abner’s heart.

Abner sank to the ground, looking up to see that Asahel, the middle brother, had held him. He said only, “Yahweh judge between me and the house of your father. The warriors of Israel ought not to commit murder, as says also the Law of Yahweh.”

A short time later, Joab was standing before David. The king was furious beyond his usual softness of speech and eloquence. “I and my kingdom are guiltless before Yahweh forever from the blood of Abner, the son of Ner! Let this rest upon the head of Joab, and all his father’s house, and let there not be in the house of Joab one without an uncleanness, or a leprosy, or one lame, or one who dies from the sword, or one who lacks bread!”

David pointed at Joab, and Abishai, and the men who had been with them to slay the ambassadors from the north. “Rend your garments, and gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner.”

Immediately David set to work, personally preparing a grand funeral to honor his northern visitor. David himself stood by the burial, and wept at the grave in unfeigned sorrow. Abner had come to impress the young king greatly during the time of their acquaintance. He was, David discovered, a man of great honor and wisdom; and if he was little hot-tempered, this was a talent shared by Joab, another of his great men. Later in his life, David would reflect upon Abner and Joab, and consider that perhaps it was the very similarity in character between these two men that set his cousin off so sharply; but for the moment he thought only of the loss to Israel that had befallen them with the departure of this elect one.

Beholding his lamentation of Abner, and the fast that he imposed upon himself for one who was apparently in service to the House of Saul, those who once praised David for withholding his hand against Saul himself now had yet another reminder of their king's life-loving character. "Surely," they said, "David is not responsible for the death of this man." It was at that point that the wise in Israel began to notice the distinction between David and his cousin Joab, and their affections fell squarely upon the former man.

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"Now this king of Israel is useless to us," Kishael said, looking down on Ishbosheth in more ways than one. "I knew, when I moved Joab to slay Abner, that this would lead to David coming up over Israel, but the time of waiting for David to fall to some temptation before taking the throne is ended! Let him become king! Let the fool taste what Saul tasted, and then his pride shall rise up in him, and we will surely have him that day."

"Pride is a mighty house," Neshephiel said, who had remained with Edrael to trouble the crown of Israel even though Saul had passed away. "But what of the other houses? You have been sent from Egypt after your predecessor failed. No doubt, when you fail they will send another agent to tempt David. Why work in this manner, one by one?"

"You are of the house of Wrath," the Dominion said, "and though a Cherub, you have many things to learn about the subtleties of temptation. Azrael is not, for all his strength, a subtle spirit, and thus often finds himself overturned by the least of the efforts of IaHWeH's slaves. Transgression, as we of the House of Pride know, is not about overwhelming the will with a tide of trials, for with the wrong kind of heart, this will drive men only to prayer and confession, strengthening their faith. No, the best way, for men like David that are not given to sudden fury, is to find the key that fits their particular lock. Watch, therefore, and see."

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 10: THE HOUSES OF LUST AND ENVY

Although I begin to tell you now of the other houses that troubled David in the days that he became the king of Israel, it is necessary for me to speak to you of Kishael a little longer, for he truly laid the foundation work for what was shortly thereafter to come.

Ishbosheth, as one might imagine, was horrified to learn of his champion's death. He would have been even more horrified to hear the plotting of two of his army's captains. Knowing that the line of Saul was dwindling, and that Ishbosheth would not be an effective ruler without Abner's input, these two men, Baanah and Rechab, decided between themselves that they would attempt to find a place of goodwill with David, whom they believed would shortly be taking the throne of all Israel.

As a result the two unfaithful servants conspired against the life of their king and, when occasion presented itself, they murdered him in his sleep and took his head with them down to Hebron. There they planned to present it before David as a sign of their willingness to serve him. What they did not know, however, was how David had dealt with the Amalekite youth who had claimed to be the ultimate cause of Saul's death. He dealt with this latest attempt to win his favor in just the same way and dispatched them with little ceremony.

The efforts of these men were not without result, however. When the Tribes of the north knew that Ishbosheth was dead, and that there was none of Saul's line that they would accept as king, the elders with whom Abner had been speaking rose up and gathered the people together. David knew that they were coming, and with what intent, therefore he and his men set themselves in array to receive them warmly.

A representative of the northern Tribes came forward and bowed. He said, "Behold, we are of your bone, and your flesh. In time past, even while Saul was king, you were the one that led Israel out, and brought us in. And Yahweh has said to you, 'You shall feed my people Israel, and you shall be a captain over them.' Let us therefore now be united, and let my lord consent to be king, for the House of David is chosen above the House of Saul."

It was thus that, at the young age of thirty, David became the king of all Israel. In a rare display of irony both the angels and the demons who stood in attendance delighted in the scene, but for very different reasons.

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One of David's very first acts as king over Israel was to eliminate the presence of hostile, foreign peoples from within the borders of the country. Salem, of which I have told you a little before, was yet occupied by the Jebusites who by might and dark deceptions had taken it from Melchizedek and his people a great many years before. So long had this people remained in their walled city that they truly felt themselves impenetrable, even from the combined might of the twelve Tribes of Jacob.

In his seventh year in Hebron, David decided that the capital of Israel ought not to be so far to the south, away from the northern Tribes. Knowing of the history of the city from Gad the prophet, David desired that his center of government should be located at that place, and he said, "This city shall be the peace of Israel, even the City of Peace," naming it *Jerusalem*, which means just that: "City of Peace."

Bringing with him the mightiest of his army, David easily besieged Jerusalem, and issued a challenge to the heathen inhabitants, to depart from the city and face the army of Israel. In reply the haughty Jebusites declared, "What are the armies of Israel compared to the men of Jebus? Behold, even the blind and the lame stand guard against the Tribes of Jacob, to protect us from your hand. Unless you can take away these, our blind and our lame, you shall not come up into the city!"

Upon hearing their response, David said, "Whosoever climbs up the waterspout of this city and strikes down the Jebusites, and their 'lame and their blind' that are hated of my soul, the same shall be the chief and captain of the royal army of Israel."

Joab, already highly favored in David's army, and looking to reconfirm his position in light of David's anger at the murder of Abner, lost no time in responding to this call. He took with him a group of mighty men, and did just as their king instructed. Soon the defenses of Salem had fallen, to the astonishment of its inhabitants, and they were put to the sword before the setting of that day's sun. Before all the people of Israel, and in favor of all of the Tribes, David shortly thereafter entered the rebuilt and restored city of Jerusalem, and held the monarchy of Yahweh's people for another thirty and three years.

Since the death of Ishbosheth the fallen Dominion Kishael had been at work on David's spirit, and not David alone, but also those around him. Even his cousin

Joab, so free with his criticism on an ordinary day, was full of praise for the king of Israel, and his leadership. The words that David's attendants spoke were true enough, for the most part, but with flattering tongues the demon pressed them on to excess, and this did, as he predicted, begin to subtly wear away at the young king's spiritual armor.

When David saw that he was established as king of Israel, he considered within himself that he ought to make an even greater display of kingly power and, like the nations around him, he began to take even more wives to himself than he had already possessed. In addition to Michal, Abigail and Ahinoam, David united himself with a number of other women, considering them either wives equal to his initial three, or concubines who held a lesser standing in his royal courts.

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When Achish, king of the Philistines, heard what his formerly faithful servant had been doing for the past seven years, he cursed him and all Israel by the gods of their temples. Driven by wrath, he drew together his armies and decided to strike out and punish this one who had so deceptively used him and his people. As they advanced, the guards posted along Israel's borders quickly relayed the approach of the Philistines to the capital city, and David said, "This was no surprise." He called for Abiathar, who brought his ephod with him, and said to him, "Inquire of Yahweh on my behalf, and ask, 'Shall I go up to the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hand?'"

Abiathar interceded on behalf of David... but found to his surprise that it was a more difficult matter than it had been in the days before Jerusalem was occupied. Nevertheless, he was answered by the King of Heaven, and he replied to David, "Thus says Yahweh, 'Go up, for I will undoubtedly deliver the Philistines into your hand.'" This was precisely what happened.

Achish was not to be rebuffed at the result of a single battle, however. As soon as he was able he drew together the army of the Philistines once more, and again made an attempt to enter Israel's borders. Once more, Abiathar interceded with IaHWeH on behalf of Israel's young king, and again he received instructions that resulted in a victory over Israel. After this, Achish withdrew for a time, and David's success became known in all the surrounding regions. Abiathar continued to be troubled, however, that his intercession work for the king was becoming more and more difficult to perform.

With victory for Israel secured, and Jerusalem growing mightily as a capital city to rival the greatest centers of any known country, David considered that IaHWeH's Ark, which had been captured by the Philistines when Samuel was young, and then returned, ought to be with him in the City of David. Since its return, the Ark had remained in a city known as Kirjath-Jearim, in the care of a

Levite and his family. The king and his counselors planned the move, but in this matter they were somewhat careless.

In the days before Elohim walked the earth as a Man, the Covenant between IaHWeH and His people was enshrined within the gold-layered box known as the Ark of The Covenant. It represented the very presence of the Divine with the people of Israel, and in a very particular way it represented the power of all of the Creation. It was an object most sacred, most holy... and it was commanded that none, no human being, should ever touch it once it had been consecrated by Prince Moses, who led the people of IaHWeH out of Egyptian bondage. Even the instructions for carrying the Ark, when it was at all to be moved, were very carefully and solemnly enjoined upon the Israelites, for this product of divine craftsmanship was a spectacle to all the universe, a shrine to the Shekinah Glory that burned and pulsed with the essence of IaHWeH Himself.

It had been commanded that only those of the Israelite Tribe of Levi ought to bear the Ark, and even then very solemnly and carefully, lest any slight injury be done to it either physically or in the sense of its being handled reverently and respectfully. What David and his men did, however, was to set the Ark upon a cart drawn by beasts of the field, with the Levitical bearers as merely the guides.

David and his companions, a large company of Israelites, brought the Ark out from the home of the priest Abinadab in Gibeah, with his sons Ahio and Uzza guiding the cart. With great festivity they began to move toward Jerusalem, with musicians blaring the way on a variety of instruments.

As they passed over an unstable patch of ground near a threshing floor, however, one of the oxen stumbled, causing the cart to lurch dangerously to one side. The priest standing on that side, Uzza, instinctively stepped back and steadied the Ark, lest it fall off and end up on the ground. At that moment, the Shekinah in the Temple of Elohim in Heaven flared to life, and on earth a large cracking sound was heard, as of sudden thunder. The music did not fall silent for some time, because it took a matter of minutes for those around him to realize that Uzza had fallen to the ground, dead.

The humans who beheld this were astonished; the angels were merely sorrowful, but not surprised. Uzza had placed his hand upon the Ark of the Covenant; it would have been as if an angel had entered the very presence of the Most High without bowing and veiling himself in reverence. When Lucifer did this long ago and was not destroyed – *this* was the astonishing thing, but for one to be slain by the unmitigated glory of IaHWeH seemed the most natural thing to creatures who had stood before His awful, majestic throne.

The humans ceased their playing, and their laughter, and their shouts of joy, and assembled before King David, eagerly anticipating some response to what had

occurred. David beheld the people, but had little to say. “Return to your places,” he said, with more than a touch of anger. “I shall consider this matter of the Ark with my counselors.”

Consider the matter David did. Upon returning to Jerusalem, he ordered everyone out of the room except for Gad, Abiathar, and Nathan the prophet, who had revealed himself to David after the King established himself in Jerusalem and joined his service. When he did so, his guardian Nirael remained with us on a more consistent basis, although as before he preferred to say anchored near his charge, much as I had done with Samuel when the older prophet was alive.

“How shall the Ark of the Covenant come to me,” he asked his advisors, “seeing that Yahweh will slay any who try to move it from its place in Kirjath-Jearim?”

“My lord the king,” Nathan said, “This is not surely the case. Uzza, one man, was slain, and the life of my lord and his court are all preserved.”

“But a life is a life,” David protested. “Which of us would not have reached out a hand to steady the very Ark of Elohim?”

“What says the Law?” Gad asked, directly. “Shall we be rewarded for disobedience, even if human weakness tells us we are able to do Yahweh a service?”

“Is it weakness,” David asked, his anger bubbling forth, “to seek to revere the Ark of Yahweh’s covenant?”

“Who is Yahweh,” Gad asked, “that He should require our help? Think you not that Yahweh knew His Ark stumbled? Think you not that He has the power to reach down from Heaven and pluck it out of the air, if the cart should fall apart? And who holds the cart together? And who gives each breath to the oxen that bear it? And who gave the Law, which says that none may touch the Ark, save the Levites that bear it, and that they only shall be the bearers of the Ark?”

David was not sure whether he was angrier about Uzza’s death, about Gad’s argument, or about the fact that the old prophet was speaking the truth and he knew it. Suddenly weary of the conversation, the king revealed to his counselors the plans he had already made. “Let the ark remain where it fell. The priest Obed-edom that lives near Nachon’s land shall take it into his home, and there it shall remain, until... until it is moved.” He then left the room, still fuming.

Abiathar took that opportunity to tell the prophets of his concerns. “The Word of Yahweh is given to me concerning David through the Ephod, but from the

time that the Philistines began to invade, I have had difficulty receiving the clear Word. I have searched myself, and offered sacrifice, yet the difficulty persists.”

“The problem is not yours,” Nathan said. “From the day that David’s heart began to be lifted up, there has hung upon him a cloud of shadows. You know that Saul was troubled by an evil spirit, and this affected his actions.”

The others agreed, but Abiathar said, “Surely, you do not think the same fate will befall our king, as Saul?”

“David is not taken by this spirit to the same degree as was Saul,” the prophet replied. “Nevertheless, it seeks entrance, and he must be warned.” This intervention, Niraël’s influence upon Nathan’s perceptions, was the only input any of us were allowed at the moment. As always, however, it was enough.

With one consent, the three men approached David, who was still despondent at Uzza’s death. The prophets and the priest also perceived that the king’s pride had been wounded, for he had made much of his desire to bring the Ark into Jerusalem, and it was clear to all assembled that the frown of IaHWeH rested upon his efforts. This would be a delicate work that the servants of the Most High were about to attempt.

Weeks of subtle work, strategizing, and delicate labor had gone into preparing David for this moment. Kishael looked on with anticipation – and not without some anxiety. Had his efforts been enough to cause David to resist the counsel of these messengers? If so, the evil Dominion was certain that, in time, this latest king of Israel would be as much their slave as the first.

“My lord the king,” Gad said, addressing him respectfully, “I perceive that the prophet Nathan has spoken rightly concerning the Ark of Yahweh. If I may caution my lord, let him not be angry at his servants because they have spoken unto him what seemed good to them, nor less let him be angry with Elohim, for He has been glorified this day in Israel.”

“Has He been glorified?” David asked. “What glory is given to Him, when He displeases His servants who seek to steady His Ark, and displeases His servant who seeks to honor Him by removing the Ark to Jerusalem in Judah?”

“Does my lord the king seek to honor Yahweh?” Abiathar asked.

“Would you question this?” David asked, beginning to grow irritated once again.

“No, my lord,” the priest replied, “but let your servant speak. When the young man of Amalek came unto my lord, bearing tidings of Saul’s death, and

declaring also in our ears that his sword was the one that spilled the blood of the king, what did my lord say and do unto this man.”

“I slew him,” David replied, “for he had laid his hand on Yahweh’s anointed.”

“Just so,” Nathan spoke, catching on to the priest’s chain of thought. “And when those vile men of Ishbosheth’s house sought your favor by bringing you the head of Saul’s son, what did my lord say and do unto this man?”

“I slew them,” David replied, “for they had laid his hands upon royal blood.”

“What then shall the King of Heaven surely do,” Gad asked, “if men, even men thinking to do Him service, should lay their hands on His anointed Ark?”

David sat there before his three counselors, astounded. As the wisdom of Heaven, commissioned by angels, and laid out by humans, took hold on his mind, the king of Israel’s spirit was quieted, and his anger faded away as quickly as did Kishael’s confidence. “You have spoken true,” he admitted.

In the course of time, David offered prayers for guidance concerning the Ark. He now had a clear picture of what had gone wrong on his first attempt to bring it to Jerusalem, but he was unsure how exactly to proceed – would IaHWeH bless a subsequent effort, or was he to wait for a sign?

A sign was indeed to be provided, and the king need not have waited for long. It was not without some trepidation that Obed-edom had accepted had accepted the care of the most sacred relic of Israel, but he thought to himself, “Surely Yahweh will not turn His anger toward me, a Levite, if I carefully observe all that has been said of the Ark.” His thoughts were according to the divine order, and the son of Levi found himself blessed greatly in all ways. His fortune could not be kept hidden, and Obed-edom himself sent word to the king that the Ark of the Covenant was a pleasant guest in his humble home.

When David heard that the Levite has been prospered by the physical symbol of IaHWeH’s presence with His people, he sent word to its keeper, asking if he believed it would be safe to attempt another removal to Jerusalem. Obed-edom, without hesitation, answered in the affirmative, and David immediately began to make plans once again.

When the triumphant day came, David arose early, and committed himself and all of Israel to the hand of IaHWeH. Things would be different this time; Gad, Nathan and Abiathar had been involved in planning every stage of the process, and all was going to be done by the book. Above this, David had paid a sizeable sum to the herdsmen of Israel for animals worthy of sacrifice, and these were all standing ready for the day’s activities.

When the people had assembled, and the music had begun, there was rejoicing just as there had been the first time. It began a little more cautiously, but soon the sacred joy of Heaven filled the atmosphere, as the approval of IaHWeH was recognized by the chosen nation. To the sound of trumpets, the Ark made its way steadily toward the City of David. At every few steps an animal was sacrificed, and the path to the Ark's resting place was therefore covered with blood. To many, it was quite a gruesome spectacle, and for angels, there is no joy in death of any kind... yet the symbolic purpose of these sacrifices was clear, and made a lasting impression upon the witnesses of these acts. Sin requires an atonement of blood, and the Ark of the Covenant was a physical reminder of this principle.

Overcome with the delight of the occasion, David stripped off his royal attire and stood before the Ark in a linen ephod, such as a priest would wear. This was not, as it had been with Saul when he sacrificed an animal in Samuel's place, a presumptuous act, or one seeking to replace the work of the Levites. It showed true joy at the return of the Ark to what David considered its rightful place, and it also revealed to both the angels and demons that Kishael's growing power over David due to his pride had broken. The King of Israel was not ashamed that day to show the Israelites that he had accepted the Law of Elohim, and the instructions concerning the movement of His sacred objects. It showed that he was not the type to conceal his worship of the Most High, any more than he had been able to conceal his sorrow at the death of Abner, or his anger at the callous actions of Joab and his family.

Yet, while Kishael departed from Israel on that day, he did not leave in defeat. He said to his demons, in words that would have been a bitter excuse in the mouth of any lesser being, "David has not escaped the chains of the House of Pride. I know that after today I will not be able to make any more inroads for a time, or weaken him any further. Nevertheless, what I have done I have done, and the foundation is laid for the next wave of fury. This time, the King of Israel shall surely fall!

"Behold now King David. He believes he has overcome, and his foolish prophets believe that he is healed, but my work will lie in waiting, coiled around his heart, until a time convenient... a far greater challenge is now sent from our dark lords."

* * * * *

The fallen Dominion had spoken true. Neshephiel had unknowingly predicted the next stage in Lucifer's long considered plan... for it was not one house that was sent to assail David next, nor two. This time, those who had watched the young king with wicked eyes determined that after Kishael's work the occasion was ripe for the killing blow. From Abaddon's House of Envy came Chathiel, "The Dread of El," to Israel. He was a Virtue that was of great renown in his

House, and was considered by many to be Abaddon's "personal assistant" of sorts. From the alternate House of Envy, led by the vicious Sammael, the fallen Principality Chartsubbael had been sent. This angel from the Order of Ikari'im, whose name means "Bonds of El," had broken the minds of kings before, and set many of the Heathen nations against IaHWeH and then, for jealousy of the success of other realms, against one another.

The greatest danger, however, came from yet another of the Nine Houses. From this dark division of Pandemonium came at his own resolve a Seraph of immense power. This creature of inverted light, whose name meant "Impulse of El," was none other than Petahel, the appointed head of the House of Lust. If there were such a thing as royalty among the fallen spirits, Petahel would be it. He had been a close and personal companion of Azazel in Heaven, and now served the broken Archangel with a singleness of purpose that spoke well of the talents of persistence and loyalty that remained within his twisted essence. To the amazement of the witnessing Host, this mighty member of the Seraphim had consented to come forth personally, and to coordinate the efforts of Chathiel and Chartsubbael on this rare occasion when the Houses of Envy resolved to work in concert.

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Even as the dark spiritual clouds gathered around David's spirit, there were corresponding shadows cast over the more mundane levels of his life. The Ark had been brought up to Jerusalem with great triumph. The people had rejoiced to the sounds of trumpets, and David had danced before them for joy. One of flesh who beheld the scene, however, was not pleased.

Since she had been returned to David, his first wife had seemed a changed woman. Though their initial fondness had been genuine, and firm, the time apart, and her forcible marriage to a man whom she did not love had greatly damaged Michal, and her ability to render affection to her husband. The time that passed since their reunion had not been pleasant, and David had naturally gravitated to Abigail, whose beauty still captivated him, and whose wit matched his own. Michal regarded this with a curious mixture of relief and jealousy, and the tension between them continued to grow.

When Saul's daughter, looking down from her window at the celebration she had refused to attend, beheld David in the linen ephod dancing before Israel, her disquiet became anger, and her anger boiled away into disgust. All this took place long before she and her husband again spoke. When they did, it was for the last time.

As David entered her chamber, to see how she fared after being absent from the celebration, Michal immediately retorted with venom. "How glorious was the king of Israel," she said, "who disgraced himself in the sight of his handmaids

and his servants this day, as one of those common idlers would uncover himself!”

David glared at her and said, “It was before Yahweh, who chose me in place of your father to rule over His people Israel, and not for the sake of the people of Israel, that I played as I did.”

“And should one who lays claim to such high titles as my lord do so before the people?”

“That, and more,” David retorted. “I will be yet more vile than this, yet more base in your sight. And if you, my queen, will not honor me, I will nevertheless be honored in the eyes of the maidservants you disdain.” Though David had spoken rightly about his activities, his mental reaction to Michal’s criticism betrayed a remnant of Kishael’s work in his character. It was not without some pride that the king resolved that he would no longer go to his first wife Michal.

To outward appearances, little of staggering spiritual import took place in the months following the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem. David desired to build a tabernacle to house it but the prophet Nathan, after initially considering this to be a good idea, was informed by IaHWeH that this was to be left to the current king’s successor, as He wished, in His infinite wisdom, to have one known for peace construct His Temple in Jerusalem, the City of Peace.

The King of Israel, in those days, defended against and then attacked the Philistines. He annihilated the armies of Moab, and Syria, subdued Edom, and made peace with those nations that IaHWeH had not yet found past the point of final iniquity. He appointed Joab, with a few misgivings, as captain over the entire reunited Israelite army, and he appointed Zadok, the son of Ahitub, as priest alongside Abiathar. Remembering his covenant with Jonathan, David sought out any to whom he might yet show kindness, and discovered that there remained one, a lamed youth named Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan his friend. When he heard this, the king of Israel brought him to Jerusalem, to live there in peace.

* * * * *

Petahel, unlike most demons, was not a believer in a slow, subtle process of drawing men into temptations. To be sure, many of the House of Lust were as skilled in this manner of work as any evil spirit, but the great Spider-demon himself preferred to wait for an opportune moment to present itself, and then strike fast and hard.

While Chartsubbael and Chathiel worked upon cultivating the king’s remaining pride into a desire to emulate the monarchs of those nations he was conquering,

Petahel did little but keep them from attacking one another and wasting valuable time in arguments and strife. Instead, he merely bided his time, letting the poison of the two demons from the Houses of Envy work, increasing the likelihood of the right time coming to pass.

The right time came indeed, in the springtime when – as it is written – “kings go forth to battle.” Israel was involved in a battle with the Ammonites, and the armies had been placed under Joab and sent forth to besiege Rabbath, the last stronghold to fall before a total Israelite victory could be declared. David himself, having fought valiantly in the early and middle parts of the conflict, felt confident enough in success at this point that he had retired to Jerusalem to conduct affairs from the capital. With the siege firmly in place, it was only a simple matter to keep his forces around the walls supplied until the Ammonites surrendered or came out for one last desperate fight.

It was the evening of one of Israel’s spring days, and King David was at rest, for he had decided to lie down and cool his head from the news of battle. Above the king’s house the three demons sent by the Enemy of Souls looked down upon the scene, and Petahel, his six large wings fanned out in a display of intimidation against the angels of Israel, smiled. The Twelve Chalkydri, the Seraphic guardians of the chosen nation, were in attendance also, but due to Kishael’s carefully laid foundation, they could do nothing but witness the unfolding of the plans of Envy and Lust. “The time has come!” the spider-demon said, his still-musical voice ringing out over the land of Judah.

Flanked by the demons from the Houses of Envy, Petahel descended into David’s chamber, and stood by his bed. The silvery-gold glow that surrounded the king’s reclining form clearly marked him as “protected” from any attempts that even this most powerful Seraph could make to possess him outright, but his senses were wide open, and the least secure of his spiritual defenses. The angel of lust reached out and spoke to the flesh that lay before him, and David stirred.

A sudden restlessness seized the king of Israel. It was not a great need, as would be a mighty hunger or an urgent thirst. This was gentler, but persistent, and the king looked around himself for some distraction. The singers were not present, and the recorder was away, so there was neither music nor one to read to him from the royal documents. David considered composing another psalm, which he frequently did when a quiet period presented itself, but inspiration did not come to him at that moment.

The king stood on his feet, took up his harp, and set to wandering. Down the halls he went, and through the room of tapestries. Up the stairs he went, and on to the roof, where he could play and watch the stars as they gradually appeared in the fading light of day. This seemed to quiet him for a time – he did not feel the restlessness that had been driving him as long as he remained on the roof. At more of an insight than something he actually saw, however, David turned

his head and looked out over the roofs of the houses that stood near his royal dwelling place.

It was there, on a roof not far away, that he saw her, and – a flutter of wings, and a quick slash of a dark blade – he could not take his eyes off of her. She was standing above a large basin of water, and a young handmaid was washing her perfect, uncovered body. David turned away for a moment and then – a passing wind, a prick in the heart – his eyes found themselves turning back in her direction. It was a longing desire that gripped the husband of so many wives, but by the standards of David’s day it was not yet the sin that it would become. Petahel knew this, but he knew other things about that woman that would quickly make it so.

The king of Israel sat upon his roof, carefully positioning himself so that he could not easily be seen, and watched the bath with rapt attention. When the woman was finished, she and her servant left the roof, but David remained where he was for many minutes thereafter.

When he returned from the roof David immediately sought messengers and, finding them this time, he brought them up to the roof with him. Indicating the house upon which the woman had stood, David asked, “Whose house is this?”

“My lord the king,” a servant replied, “it is the house of your servant, Uriah of the Hittites.” David’s heart began to sink, but then another idea struck him. “Go and inquire,” he said to the attendant, “the name of the woman of the house.” “Perhaps,” the hopeful monarch thought to himself, “she is but a relative, and not a wife of Uriah.”

The messenger returned with less than welcome news. “Is not the woman of the house Bathsheba,” the young man said, using polite and official language, “the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

David thanked the young man, and went out again unto his roof, dejected. Alone, he glanced over at the house and remembered the woman – the wife – washing herself in all her glory before him. How he cherished these memories, so unreasonably, for none of his wives were at all unattractive; his favorite Abigail was yet living, and had not diminished in beauty with the passing of a few years.

“Uriah the Hittite,” David mused aloud, thinking of his faithful soldier. Uriah was one of the Gibborim, the “Mighty men” of the Israelite army. By unfortunate coincidence, the fallen Cherubim, such as Lucifer and Azrael, had also taken this title as a replacement for “Cherubim,” but among men it was yet a most honorable title. Uriah, a convert from the land of the Hittites, has been with David since a very early point in his reign. He had distinguished himself in combat, bringing with him the knowledge of war from his homeland,

combining it with the tactics of Israel and – most importantly – the worship of IaHWeH. He had been placed among the “Thirty,” a group of thirty-seven men (for there had originally been thirty) that were considered the elite among the soldiers of the king.

Uriah and his king had fought battles together, defending one another from the swords and spears of the heathen, and striking out against the enemies of Israel. Should the king of Israel, for a woman’s sake, betray his royal honor, and a trusted comrade? Such a thing ought not to be in even the heathen lands, much less in Israel, and yet – two silent slashes of Envy’s blades – ought not the king of Israel to have the best of women? Is it not so – a flaring-up of Pride’s remnant wounds – that the kings of the other nations do as they like, and set themselves above the people they rule?

Calling once again his messengers, David sent them forth to Uriah’s house, saying, “I wish to speak with the wife of my warrior Uriah; bring her unto me.” Without question, the servants did just that.

For the shame of it, for the wickedness, I, Jehuel will not reveal to you the words of that meeting between David and Bathsheba, just as the most tempting of Lucifer’s speeches have been summarized or omitted entirely by my brethren who bore you the former records. Asheriel and I were standing with the Chalkydri, mourning what we well knew would happen next – and your History tells you what happened next. David and Uriah’s wife fell into an intimacy forbidden by Heaven and the greater King of whom David was merely a pledged servant... and great folly was wrought in Israel. Echoes of that act still sound in the halls of the covenant people of IaHWeH to this very day.

As the man and woman came together, fallen so far from Eden’s first conjugal bliss, the mighty Seraph who had engineered it soared up out of the house with a screech of triumph. His blazing humanoid form burst apart, and a dark aspect emerged. As his mocking laughter echoed from Dan unto Beersheba, Petahel became an immense spidery shadow, and anchored his eight repulsive legs firmly in the foundation of David’s house. “What shall remove me from the House of David?” he challenged the watching angels joyfully. Chartsubbael and Chathiel, their eternal bickering forgotten for the moment, flew circles around Jerusalem, declaring, “Thus falls the king of Israel! What hand shall save him from the darkness of sin?”

The angels beheld the scene silently. We knew well that this tragic panorama was only a temporary victory by the fallen ones. IaHWeH had already declared His plans for Israel, and nothing that the mightiest of demons could do would waylay these; yet there was no guarantee that David, or any individual soul, would share in this triumph, and Asheriel’s face clearly revealed the state of his essence – this was a most unfortunate turn of events.

If you can believe it, however, my eyes witnessed an even worse thing that came upon the house of David that day. A fiend that we had believed vanquished, a dark, four-winged demon from an earlier episode of David's life slowly, cunningly, drew near to the house, and the scene of this angelic sorrow.

My eyes widened in surprise, and then blazed in anger, as Kehreniel, the Horn of El, the wicked, Ophanic angel who had failed in his attempts to use Goliath as a wedge into Israel, or to destroy David altogether, had returned. As he approached the house, he appeared to be ignoring the gigantic, arachnid Seraph, but we had no doubts they were whispering rapidly back and forth. The demon from the House of Fear descended into the house beneath the shadowy spider, and every holy angel knew to stand still and wait...

Some time later the devilish tempter walked out of the house, using the door as would a human, and keeping his wings folded behind him. He raised his face to the sky, searching out Asheriel, and when he found him he raised a hand in mocking greeting. "Your charge is to be congratulated," he cried out, "for once again he will be a father!"

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When David himself heard about this, fear (not surprisingly, for a number of reasons) gripped his heart. No doubt, the young lady sent from Bathsheba was a trusted servant, and would tell no one else of the message she bore to the king, but such a thing could surely not be hidden! Uriah himself had been away from Jerusalem for too long to enact the pretence that the child was his, unless...

"Send to me Uriah the Hittite." Joab read the brief message twice. His was not to question – at least, his curiosity was not sufficient in this case to compel him to do so – and therefore he called for his fellow-soldier, and informed him of his new orders.

Uriah knelt before his king and David, upon his throne, looked warmly upon his champion. "I would know of you," he said, "how Joab fares, and how the battle progresses." Joab glanced up, a little surprised – surely any messenger could have told him of these things. David noticed, however, and added, "We may speak as friends here, Uriah, for you know that my cousin has not always been a man of patience and tact, most obviously so in the matter of Abner, the son of Ner, whom he slew before the gates of Hebron. You, of his company, may best tell me, and speak freely, concerning this matter."

"My lord the king," Uriah said, "Joab does very well. The Ammonites resist as best they can, but they have no way to replenish their supplies, and we have sent warriors for miles in every direction to ensure that there is no secret cave, and no underground stream, by which they may move men in and out of Rabbah."

The king nodded, satisfied. “You have spoken well,” he said. “I will send you forth once again, but go down to your house first, and spend time with your wife, for you have been away for a long time.” Uriah bowed himself, and departed. David called an attendant and said, “See that a great meal is sent to the house of Uriah the Hittite.”

The meal arrived at his house, but Uriah himself did not. As soon as he had left the throne room he said to himself, “Shall I have the comfort of my house, and my wife, when my brothers are in the fields besieging Rabbah? Surely, this would be no honor to me.” The faithful soldier decided to encamp right by the entering in of the king’s house, and he remained there all that night with the other guards and servants.

In the morning this was told to David, who frowned in frustration. “Have you not returned from a long journey?” the king enquired of Uriah, when he was standing once again before him. “Why, then, did you not go down to your house?”

“The Ark of Israel,” Uriah replied, “and Judah abide in tents. And my captain Joab, along with the servants of my lord, is encamped in the open field. Shall I then go into my house, and eat and drink and lie with my wife? As the king lives, as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing as that.”

“Stay here with me,” David said, thinking to buy himself time to think, “and tomorrow I will send you out again to the fields.” That evening, the King of Israel called Uriah to himself and, claiming to be rewarding his servant, laid out a feast before him. Along with the attendants of the court, and the family of the king, Uriah ate and drank, and was filled. The king plied his warrior with wine, thinking to impair his judgment, and then sent him off when the meal was ended, saying again, “This is your last night in Jerusalem until the end of the siege of Rabbah. Take your occasion; go down to your house, and eat and drink and comfort your wife, and tomorrow go forth again to the men in the fields.”

Once again, however, Uriah remained with the servants outside of the king’s gate. This time, David did not sleep. “I cannot compel him,” the king mused, “or surely something will be suspected. I cannot bring his wife to him, for such a thing has not been done before. What, then, shall I do?”

Kehreniel and the two envy demons drew near at the question, under the shadow of Petahel that still remained over the house. “What cannot the king of Israel do?” one of the tempters from the House of Envy whispered. “Ought not such a wife as this to be the wife, even the wife, of the king of Israel?” Before this thought could even be rejected for the hateful thing it was implying, the other stepped in and said something further along those lines.

These suggestions would not, of course, have been sufficient for him to stagger under them, not even with the weight of lust that still hung over him like a fog. He, the champion of Israel, slayer of Goliath, and anointed of IaHWeH, would not for a moment consider this. But then, as his mind was calming, another voice spoke. “What shall be said of Israel? The men of Israel all know the Law of Elohim, and you know well the Law, which says, ‘Commit not adultery.’ What shall be said of Israel, and Israel’s king? What shall be said of Samuel, the prophet that anointed you, or of the Almighty, who chose you for His regent over the nation if His chosen one should be found worthy of death?”

“Disgrace!” the voice cried out. “What folly, to have thought that you could do as the other kings, and rule over your servants as they do!” This was a very wicked deception; by speaking against the earlier temptations of pride and envy, Kehreniel was acting as the voice of David’s conscience... in reality he was merely replacing one sin with another, and this one even greater than those which had come before. “Must not the reputation of the Most High be preserved? And shall not the reputation of the king prove more important than even the taking of the woman Bathsheba?” Kehreniel was only beginning. Throughout the night he worked on David under the influence of Petahel and the other two tempters. Gradually, carefully, he insinuated the kinds of disasters that would occur, on both a personal and national level, if it were known that David had lain with the wife of one of his champions. Everything from the possibility of Uriah challenging him to combat to an invasion of Philistines popped into his mind, sometimes overlapping, and as the morning broke the weary king called for a scroll and ink.

For the second time, Joab did a double take at one of David’s messages. The warrior shook his head, his mind filling with a sarcastic kind of concern about his cousin’s mental state. Nevertheless, he resolved to do just as he had been instructed – he has never really liked the annoyingly loyal foreigner anyway.

A few days later, a messenger ran in to David and said, “A message from your servant Joab.”

“Read it before me,” the king instructed.

“From Joab, servant of King David, unto his lord, the King of Israel: The servants of the king of Israel attempted an attack upon the walls of Rabbah. In this the men of Ammon prevailed against us, and came out to us in the field, and we were upon them even to the entrance of the gate.

“The archers shot from the wall upon your servants, and some of the king’s servants are dead.” The messenger had been told by Joab that if King David began to question the wisdom of the attack being described, he was to inform the him that his servant Uriah was slain also. The messenger did not, however,

wait to see the king's reaction. He added, of his own accord, "Your servant, Uriah the Hittite, is dead also."

David nodded slowly, his face betraying little emotion; in truth, he felt little at all. "Return to Joab," he said, "and tell him: 'Do not be displeased by the losses, for the sword of battle devours one as well as another. Make your battle even more fierce against the city, and overthrow it.' Encourage him in this matter for me."

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 11: THE HOUSES OF GREED AND GLUTTONY

The prophet Nathan awakened with a start. He had seen terrible things in his dreams, and with Gad and Abiathar away (one with the warriors at Rabbah, and the other somewhere else) he had none with whom he could take counsel. Deciding that he would consider things again in the morning, the oracle lay down once more to try to take advantage of the few remaining hours of rest. It was not, however, to be.

As dawn broke, Nathan was standing in the throne room, awaiting his king. When David arrived, Nathan went down on his knee before him, and waited to be addressed.

“What brings my friend Nathan here so early in the morning?” David asked.

“Yahweh has given me a story to relate before my lord the king.”

“A story?” David asked, curious now about his friend’s intention. “Why should Yahweh give you a story to tell me?”

“Perhaps in the telling of it will lie the answer,” replied the prophet.

“Say on,” the king instructed.

“There were two men in a city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing, except for one little ewe, which he had raised himself from its birth. It grew up in his home, and with his children. It ate the family’s food, and drank their water, and lay down with them at night, and was unto them almost as a member of that family, as a daughter.”

The king’s brow furrowed, but he motioned for Nathan to continue.

“There came a traveler unto the rich man and he, wishing to show hospitality to his guest – this traveler that had come to him – nevertheless took not from among his own animals, but took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for his visitor.”

“What!” David broke in, annoyed at Nathan’s words. “What a terrible story that Yahweh has given to you. Is this merely a tale, or do you know of such a man that did this? Surely, as Yahweh lives, the man that has done such a thing as this shall surely die! And four of his own best lambs besides,” David added, “shall be given unto the poor man, because he had no pity.”

“Is my lord the king angry with this man?” Nathan asked, carefully.

“Angry!” David replied.

“My lord,” Nathan said, “my friend... it is you. You are the man. Thus says Yahweh, Elohim of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master’s house, and his wives that you have taken to yourself, and I gave you the houses of Israel and Judah. And if this had been too little for you, I would have given you much else besides. Why, therefore, have you despised the commandment of Yahweh, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite as if you held the sword yourself; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the swords of the children of Ammon.’

“Now therefore,” Nathan said to the astounded king, “the sword shall never depart from your house. ‘Because you have despised me, and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife,’ thus says Yahweh, ‘behold, I will raise up disaster against you out of your house, and I will take your wives from before your eyes and give them unto your neighbor, and he will lie with them in the sight of the sun. You did this secretly, but I will do this before all Israel, and before the sun.’”

David sat upon the throne of Israel in perfect silence. The demons had seen Nathan entering into the king’s house with trepidation, for they well knew the dream that his guardian Niraël had facilitated the night before. And yet, just as the holy messengers had been powerless to act, so now the demons could not resist the prophet’s approach, nor could they force David’s decision one way or the other; this was the concord to which all spirits had been bound.

Almost undetected, the great web of death in which Petahel had bound David snapped. It is the law of spirit and flesh that the flesh is weaker in regard to temptations. Lucifer’s efforts, were they unopposed by ministering spirits, would inevitably be successful. Were it not for the Sacrifice of the One who was yet to come in the days of King David, there would not even be the means by which humanity could be aided by divine forces. And yet, even under that great shield, once humanity has fallen to the snares of the wicked ones, the only escape is death.

This is what happened to the king of Israel; it was not Petahel’s power over David’s heart that broke but the heart itself... this is a kind of “death,” and one

that may lead to life anew. “I have sinned,” David said to Nathan, heavy with the knowledge of how true those words really were. “I have sinned against Yahweh.”

As tears began to spill down the king’s face, Nathan stood up and went before him, looking the younger man straight in the eyes. “You have,” he said, “but Yahweh has put away your sin, that you shall not die. But my king... the deed is known, and it has given the enemies of Yahweh much cause to blaspheme His name. This cannot be without known consequence. The child, therefore, that is born to you will surely die.”

When Nathan departed David was yet dejected, but the prophet had comforted him in his sorrow, and when he left David had resolved to compose a psalm, feeling that this was the best way to think the matter through. This he did, that very night, and Asheriel drew near to him as he wrote. As the king set his thoughts down on paper, the Shekinah glory in the Heavenly Tabernacle flared, and pulsed, and light shone out from Heaven as it had not done since Samuel first anointed the young man of Bethlehem.

The bright beam lanced downward, down through the layers of air, down through the clouds above Israel, down through Petahel’s dark shadow, and down through the roof of David’s house to touch upon the king’s forehead. The great spider grunted, and shifted uncomfortably. The twelve Seraphim that guarded Israel lost no time in gathering themselves, seeing David’s repentance spreading like a fire over the land, and they surrounded the demons from the Houses of Envy. As the last of Kishael’s work in David’s soul burned away while his tears flowed, the fiery Seraphim put Chathiel and Chartsubbael to flight. They did not, to be honest, put up much of a resistance, but Petahel was another story.

“Fly to me, defenders!” the wicked Seraph cried, and immediately the house of David was surrounded by the greatest and darkest spirits from the House of Lust. The twelve fiery Chalkydri immediately engaged them, but David’s guardian had eyes for none but the spider himself.

“Relinquish your hold!” Asheriel bellowed, charging in on wing with his blade drawn.

“Lust is not easily dislodged,” Petahel replied, raising a massive leg to defend against the angel’s attack. The holy Virtue was persistent, however, slashing back and forth against the hairy limb and seeking an opening to the demon’s more sensitive parts.

“My charge repents,” Asheriel said, not slowing his attack. “You speak truly, it is not easily done. Yet what David now does is not an easy thing. Return to your masters, and tell them that this vile series of attacks has failed. What

House has been left untried? What man has withstood so many and so concerted a set of accusations?”

“Not David,” Petahel replied imperiously, and from his tone Asheriel knew he was replying to the question, “What man has withstood...”

Yet even as he said this, the dark monstrosity knew his hold was slipping. He could not resist the light of Heaven’s glory, the continuing and increasing pace of Asheriel’s khrev swings, and the Chalkydri drawing steadily closer as one after another of his guardians fell. With a grunt like the one he uttered when the light first passed through his form, Petahel dissolved back into his six-winged form, still flickering faintly from the remembered light of Heaven’s sanctuaries.

Asheriel pulled up short, expecting to be attacked, but Petahel merely stared at him and said, “The wind and rain may be gentle, guardian, but even the mightiest of castles eventually crumbles into dust.” These were his parting words, for he vanished before the surprised Virtue could respond.

The House of David was not free, by any means, of demonic hassles after Petahel and the agents of Envy were driven off, but the major problems were alleviated for the moment, or so we all hoped. I did not forget, however, that Kehreniel had been the real instigator behind the murder of Uriah. While not lessening David’s guilt in submitting to his hideous promptings, I held that demon personally responsible... and he was still anchored firmly in the House of David.

* * * * *

For seven days after the child born to him by Bathsheba fell ill, the king of Israel fasted and prayed. He wept, and lay on his face in supplication for many hours each day, leaving the affairs of the kingdom in the hands of Zadok and Gad. The priest Zadok’s guardian, a cheerful Principality named Beoriel (Torch of El) was a welcome addition to our company in those sorrowful days when David’s prayers ascended to Heaven, and were read before the Throne. Yet even the hand of infinite mercy could not be moved by the king’s pleas; the decree for the death of the child was given after David’s repentance, and was not subject to any condition of his spiritual state.

It was because of the king’s constant and heartfelt prayers for the life of his child that, when the promise of IaHWeH was fulfilled and the infant did die, David’s most trusted servants feared to tell him the news. Dutifully they entered the king’s chamber, but when they saw him there they stopped short, standing silently and beholding him lying on his face on the floor. As they whispered among themselves, David raised his weary face from the ground and saw the looks on their faces. Plainly he asked them, “Is the child dead?”

After a moment's hesitation one stepped forward and said, "He is dead."

"Well," David said, drawing in a long breath and sitting on the floor, "such is the will of Yahweh." Without another word he ushered his servants from the room, although they hesitated to leave him alone in the condition they perceived him to be. When he emerged a few minutes later, however, they were surprised. The king was attired better than they had seen him in over a week, and he had a look of peace on his face. He looked at each of them, and then walked past. Mystified, the servants followed him.

David walked straight to the place near his house where he kept the Ark of the Covenant, in preparation for the Temple that he knew his son, and not he, would build. And David bowed himself in the presence of IaHWeH, and worshipped there. When he arose, he went back to his home and sat, ordering that food should be brought to him. As the king broke his week-long fast his servants, who had practiced remarkable self-restraint in remaining silent for so long, finally asked what had been on their hearts since they first beheld him in changed clothing: "My lord the king, what is it that you have done? You fasted and wept while the child was yet alive, but now that he is dead, you have risen up and eaten?"

David looked them over and replied, "While the child was yet living, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who can tell? Perhaps Elohim will be gracious to me and the child may live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back to life again by sorrow? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

* * * * *

One of the things that had been distressing David since his repentance had been the matter of Bathsheba. David had taken her to wife after her period of mourning following Uriah's death. Must he now put her away? When he brought this up to Nathan, however, the prophet said, "Shall the woman be further dishonored by being cast out of the king's house? She is your wife, and you shall not put her away all your days."

In the due course of time Bathsheba conceived again, and brought forth a son, this one healthy. Nathan, when he saw the boy, said, "His name shall be Jedidiah," which means "Beloved of IaHWeH." He was more commonly known, however, by the name his father called him: Solomon, "He Who is Of Peace."

It was right about that time that David received word from Joab that they had finally broken the will of the Ammonites, and the siege was about to end. The king of Israel rode out to deliver the final blows, as was his right as monarch,

and he led his men into the final conflict at Rabbah. After this, there was nothing that the children of Israel had to fear from that nation.

* * * * *

David had taken the worst that hell could throw at him, and although he staggered under the weight of the combined efforts of so many powerful demons, he had survived. His life would forever after be altered by his experience, and his heart had required an entire change to shake free of the chains of guilt he had allowed the enemies of his soul to lay about him, but he had survived. There was one last wicked work, however, that those who sought the destruction of Israel would try within the embattled king's lifetime, and it was undoubtedly the most successful effort they had yet made.

The Cherub Chereshiel (Artificer of El) surveyed the House of David from his vantage point, floating above Israel's borders. He and his companion Oriel had been selected specifically by a collective of the heads of all nine Houses of Sin. When Petahel returned to the circle of nine, he did so not in disgrace, but with cunning resolve. Before all of the master demons, including Azazel himself, the fallen Seraph let his thoughts be known.

"My fellows, it is known to us that there are times, and there are places, when and where our Enemy places certain souls beyond our reach. This is not a weakness of strategy, or of our warriors' strength, merely a matter of the King of Heaven lording His power over all His creatures. David will not fall to our attacks, at least... not directly. But consider... who is it we wish to harm? Is this little king, whose life is but a breath of wind, worth all our effort? No, but it is the kingdom of Israel that is the enemy!"

"We know this well," said Cerviel, Ba'al of the House of Greed. "Yet we know also, as goes the head, so goes the body."

"This was certainly the case for your Principalities," Nisroch reminded him. Cerviel had once been the head of the Order of Ikari'im in Heaven, but with his fall the entire sector of angels fell into disrepute, and those Principalities that remained loyal to Heaven's cause were provided with an extended name, Or-Ikari'im, to indicate their non-fallen status.

The arch-demon, also known in the world of men as Legion, chose to ignore the Pride demon's jab. Instead, he said, "You know as well as we, Petahel, that we can do no lasting damage to Israel as long as David's faith remains strong."

"This is not quite so," Petahel smiled. "David will not be king forever. The work that the other demons did, even before I arrived in Israel, paved the way for a far more long-term work, and with his fall into adultery, we have before us an open door."

The other demons quickly caught on to what Petahel was proposing, and Cerviel said, “We may not be able to destroy David directly, but we can destroy his legacy.”

“This is what I suggest,” Petahel agreed. “Building on what we have done so far, it will not be a difficult matter, and then the work of IaHWeH in establishing a nation for the preservation of His laws among men will surely fail.”

“I have not yet attempted an attack upon the king,” Cerviel said, suddenly eager. “Surely, the House of Greed must have a part in the fall of the kingdom of Elohim.”

“In this we shall be allies,” came the first statement in the conversation from the Seraph Kokabiel, lord over the House of Gluttony. “Many have been the occasions when our Houses have worked together, and they will surely strengthen one another in this action.”

“Indeed,” Cerviel said. “And I know the pair to send, even as we speak.”

Eight heads turned to the one who was master of all houses. Without a word, Lucifer merely nodded in such a way as to give the impression – whether it was true or not – that he had thought of all this before.

It was thus that Chereshiel and Oliel now stood above the king’s house, and plotted their course. The Cherub had a number of ideas already, and Oliel, the angelic Power from the House of Gluttony whose name means “Yoke of El,” was not far behind either. With one last look over the landscape, their spiritual eyes sweeping from the western sea to the eastern border, the two dove down to entrench themselves amongst the members of Israel’s royal family.

* * * * *

The crown prince Amnon suffered from a very common problem shared by the firstborn sons of many of the principal men of Israel, including Eli and Samuel. His father, knowing that he was destined for a great purpose, made the mistake of letting them know this without fully explaining the service and responsibility that comes from true, divine greatness. The result of this process is a spoiled child, and a moody, willful youth.

After the descent of the two demons into his father’s house, however, the young man began to feel certain promptings far more strongly than before, and one of the primary temptations that assailed him concerned his half-sister Tamar, the daughter of Maacah. Unschooled in the works of true manhood, Amnon mistook desire for love, and a fierce, unreasoning love at that. Tamar, for her

part, had never so much as looked upon her half brother as anything but a sibling, and she went out and came in before him as would any sister in a large family.

Amnon's cousin Jonadab, however, was a cunning fellow, and ironically he was the son of David's most warm-hearted brother, Shammah. In this case the "apple had fallen far from the tree," as the expression goes, and Jonadab sought every occasion to stir up mischief. His primary targets were the children of David, for there was a certain jealousy that the young man felt toward his favored cousins. Shammah's son was not without genuine affection for his cousin Amnon, however, and sympathized with the poorly disguised feelings that he was displaying for Tamar.

As David's eldest sat in the upper chambers, looking out upon Tamar below, Jonadab came up behind him and looked down through the window. "And why are you, the king's son, going forth wasting away for desire over this girl?"

Amnon looked up, startled. "The sister of Absalom is fair to behold," Jonadab added, deliberately mentioning Tamar's short-tempered brother.

"That she is," he admitted slowly. Seeing the knowing look in his friend's eyes, he sighed and said, "I love her, though she is my brother's sister."

"If that is all," his cousin said, half out of concern and half out of his desire for amusement, "then listen now to what I tell you." Amnon's attention was entirely his.

Tamar, attired as the princess she was, entered her brother's chamber with not an ill thought in her head. Her father had called her into his chamber and said, "Your brother Amnon lies sick in bed. He has asked for you to attend him." This was not the first time Amnon had requested her presence, although never in all that time had she suspected anything other than sibling affection.

Her brother was in bed, with his face turned to the wall. "I am here," she said.

Without turning toward her he said, "Ah, my sister, you are merciful to one who suffers. Prepare for me a simple meal, for my body is not able to handle any great feast."

As Tamar began to work, Amnon slowly twisted around until he could see her, attempting to keep her from noticing. His sister was involved in her work, however, and did not so much as glance in his direction. As his eyes roamed over her, his desire grew, spurred on to even greater heights by the spiritual forces present in that room with the two children of David.

When Tamar had finished preparing the meal, Amnon called to her and said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat from the hands that so graciously prepared them." She did so, but when she drew near something in her brother's eyes startled her; it was a look that she had not seen before. As she began to draw back, Amnon reached out with a speed and strength belying his supposed illness, and he said to her, "Come and lie with me, my sister!"

Suddenly chilled and shaken, Tamar stammered, "No, my brother... do not force me to do any such thing, for this ought not to be done in Israel. Do not do this foolish thing!" Amnon grabbed her other arm, and dragged her nearer still. As she struggled, Tamar said, "And what shall I do? Where shall I cause my shame to go? And as for you," she twisted her arm around trying to get free, "will you not be counted as one vile in Israel?" Amnon drew her nearer still, even unto the couch with him, and she said, in a final attempt to free herself, or to buy time for further reasoning, "Ask for me, can you not do this? If your desire is thus, speak unto the king, and he will not withhold me from you, his firstborn." David would have been startled and astounded at such a request, and both of them knew it, but Tamar was out of options and, as Amnon's strength prevailed, out of time.

"Now we shall see," Chereshiel said to his companion, "what greed can do to lust. Ba'al Petahel would be pleased with our work here today."

Like a child bored with a toy, Amnon pushed his sister away from him. It was not a child's thoughts that were boiling over in his mind, however. As she lay on the floor, weeping, the sullen youth looked upon her, and the angels who had turned their faces away from the disgusting scene heard him mutter, "...not at all as it ought to have been." The demons that attended him had built up an image of this encounter in the prince's mind for so long that when he found, instead of an initially reluctant but eventually willing partner, the reality of his sister's fear and anguish, he was taken aback. Even as he was abusing her, the truth of the matter broke upon him, but he was nevertheless unable to turn from what he had begun.

Now, as his passion cooled, all that was left were the images in his mind of his sister's pain and terror, and his own disappointed hopes. "Go," he said to her, refusing to meet her eyes. "Arise and be gone from my sight."

For Tamar, this rejection of one who was her family, and one she considered a companion, was at least as terrible as what had passed in the last few moments of her life. "What is the cause for this treatment?" she protested tearfully. "This evil that you do in sending me away is greater than what was done before!"

Coldly, Amnon summoned a servant and said, "Put this woman out from my chamber, and... lock the door after her."

“My prince?” the servant asked, knowing fully well that Tamar was no mere “woman.”

“Do it!” Amnon ordered, and the servant went over to Tamar, uncertain how to proceed. The princess did not resist, however, and with a lowered head she allowed herself to be removed from her brother’s presence. Once there, however, grief overwhelmed her, and she fell on her knees in the streets, where any passer-by could have seen her. “Let them see!” she thought in desperate sorrow, and put ashes from the nearby lamp on her head. Rising to her feet, Tamar ripped her dress, a lovely gown worn by all the daughters of David that remained unmarried in his house, and began to slowly walk toward home, weeping as she went.

She had not gotten but part way when one came to Absalom, and told him what he had seen. Amazed beyond words, the other son of David came forth and got his sister, bringing her into his house, and saying, “Be at peace, my dearest sister, and do not grieve for this thing that Amnon has done to you. Remain here with me, and be comforted.” It took a very long time, and a great many words other than these, but Tamar consented to remain in the house of Absalom.

One of the younger prince’s first acts was to send a messenger to his father, the king, telling him what had happened. The messenger returned, and Absalom demanded of him, “What has the king determined to do unto this vile person? This violator of his own flesh, and blood, and bone?”

“He was most angry,” the servant said, “so that I feared for my own life, yet he declared no punishment before dismissing me.”

“What, then?” Absalom said. “I shall go unto him myself.”

Standing before his father, Absalom said, “My lord the king, my father, and father of my sister Tamar, who has been so brutally violated by our half-brother, that vile Absalom, what will you say to this thing?”

“My son,” David said, the anger and grief of his first hearing of this news still very apparent on his face, “the folly of the House of David rests upon me, as much as upon your brother Amnon. The judgment of Yahweh is upon this house, and all its sorrows are mine to bear.”

Absalom’s face tightened. “All Israel knows of your grief concerning your wife, and Uriah the Hittite. But yours is not the greatest grief in Israel this day – it is your daughter, my sister, that bears this great weight, and through no fault of her own.”

“My son,” David replied, “your brother Amnon is to be king in my room after I depart this world. What will you have me do? Execute him before Israel?”

“Shall he not surely die?” Absalom asked.

“What says the Law?” David asked, “Only that she must be cared for by him all the days of his life, and he must not put her away.”

“Cared for!” Absalom exclaimed. “You speak as if there ought to be a reward, a wife for Amnon, for this, his behavior!”

“She is his sister,” David said, “and by no means shall she be his wife, nevertheless Amnon must take all responsibility for her until the day of his death, according to the wisdom of Yahweh through His servant Moses.”

“My father,” Absalom argued, “the evil must be put away from Israel. What manner of king will he make, if he have the use of a woman not his, and then keeps her...” and there Absalom broke off, remembering vividly the details of the matter of Bathsheba, who had given him a younger brother not long ago. From the look in David’s face, it was clear that he also was thinking of this very thing, and the fire in his eyes warned his son not to proceed further upon that path. “This is not a closed matter,” David’s younger son growled, and departed from his father’s presence.

Asheriel was sorrowful. David had not done well to ignore his son’s plea for justice on behalf of his sister. It was true that Amnon was not to have been slain for his crime, but David’s anger did nothing to provide a corrective influence, and Absalom noted this well. “This shall not lead to pleasant days,” the guardian spirit said to me, and I agreed. The events that followed this tragic event proved his words quite right.

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Two full years later, Absalom the prince of Israel still held these matters in his heart. Tamar had rarely been seen in public since that day, and Absalom had spoken little if at all to his older brother. Yet for the sake of his anger the demons of greed and gluttony had access to his mind also, and this excess of hatred gave him a mind more cunning than even Jonadab his brother’s friend.

The time of shearing had come, and Absalom’s flocks were promising a good quantity of wool. Seeing his opportunity, the prince sent a message to all of his brothers, saying, “The year has been good to my sheep, and the blessing of Yahweh rests upon my flocks. Absalom invites all his brethren to a great feast to celebrate this joyful event, according to the traditions of the House of David.” Knowing his father well, Absalom went in person, and spoke his invitation before the throne.

Upon hearing his son's words, David was pleased. He knew that Amnon was among those invited, and he had not forgotten the events of two years ago either. Often in his prayers he would mention his troubled children by name, praying for soothing, for healing to come upon them. And yet, we angels who stood guard over the House of David beheld time after time occasions in which he could have actively participated in this healing process, but would not for the shame of the memories of his own great transgression.

Despite his positive response to the invitation, David declined to go in person. "No, my son, we cannot all go and partake of your celebration, for we are many, with servants and attendants. Shall we not be a drain to your precious resources, so newly refreshed? But be blessed in your gathering, my son, for the blessing of Yahweh rests upon all who labor honestly for their reward."

Absalom received the answer he had anticipated, and said, "Then let the king instruct his sons, whom I have invited, to surely come. And let them leave their servants, as many as they can do without, that the celebration may not be hindered by too many mouths. And let the king's firstborn, Amnon, surely be among those who attend."

As Absalom spoke these words, some of David's initial joy dissipated. Something about his son's words gave him pause, and he thought, "Why should I need to instruct them concerning this, if they are already invited? And why this interest in Amnon, who did such evil against him but a short time ago?" What he said to Absalom was, "Why should Amnon go with you?"

"As the king's representative," Absalom pressed. "My lord the king speaks truly, that many mouths would draw upon the festivities, and I would not think to ask the King of Israel to appear without his attendants. Nevertheless as your firstborn, Amnon would bless us with the presence of my lord in his absence, and give the smile of the Almighty to our fellowship."

"I shall let him go with you," David said, satisfied for the moment, "and all the other sons, your brothers." The king added this last part as emphasis, for although he accepted Absalom's explanation he was still not above suspecting his son of desiring some kind of revenge for what had been done to Tamar.

Absalom and his servants arrived at the place of celebration earlier than any other, and he there instructed his trusted men, "Watch carefully, and see when my brother Amnon is merry with the wine that shall be served. And when I say unto you, "Strike," then strike him down and kill him." Seeing the looks dawning in their eyes he quickly added, "Fear not do to this, for is it not at my command that you will act? Be courageous, and strong." The men were hesitant, particularly as they knew the stories of their king, how he had slain without hesitation those who had lifted up their hands against the royals of

Israel. Even so, they feared Absalom more, and consented to do as he required of them.

As the guests arrived, and the celebration began, all seemed as one might expect from a feast of royals. There was jesting, and wine in abundance, and stories of battles fought. There was fellowship between them, and as the strong drink had its effect they spoke sorrowfully of Chileab, David's second son who had passed away some years ago, leaving Absalom as the second son after the firstborn prince. Yet their hearts were nowhere near in unity, as evidenced by Absalom's drawing one of his servants aside and saying, "Strike."

In the commotion that followed, all of David's sons except for Absalom, who remained, and Amnon, who fell dead, ran to their animals and fled, believing that there was treason, and a plot to murder them all, not knowing who was responsible for the blade in their eldest brother's side. Some, believing the cries of treason and murder to be accurate, and seeing Absalom standing in his place, quickly went forth to David, telling others along the way, "Absalom the prince has slain his brother Amnon, and seeks the lives of all his brothers!" By the time the report reached the ears of the king, however, it had changed again, and the message was, "Absalom has slain all the king's sons, and not one of them is left!"

David received this news with absolute horror, and mingled with this was the self-reproach of knowing that he had suspected some ill design in Absalom's words. Still, how could he have anticipated this? This was beyond belief, beyond comprehension! The king of Israel tore his robes, and lay on the earth in sorrow, in far greater grief for those sons whom he had known and loved than for his first child by Bathsheba, who he had known to be doomed, and with whom he had not spent many years.

Amnon's friend Jonadab, who certainly had a part to play in how this matter had unfolded, was also nearby and shocked by the news; he attempted to comfort his uncle. "Let not my lord the king supposed that all of the princes, the sons of David, are slain. Surely, only Amnon only is dead, for what had Absalom against his other brothers? But by his determination, we might have known he would seek revenge since the day he forced his sister Tamar. Therefore, let the king know that Amnon alone is dead."

Looking out at the entering in of the gate, Jonadab saw that his assumption was correct. "Behold, the princes, the sons of the king, have come. As your servant as said, so it is."

When the princes arrived and saw their father mourning for Amnon they, who were nearly breathless from the fierce ride, collapsed before him and all wept. The servants of the king and of the princes joined in, and soon the air around the house of David was filled with the grief of its inhabitants. The only one of

David's children who was not mourning was Absalom; he had fled to Geshur, away from what he anticipated would be the swift justice that had been denied his sister two years ago.

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Although David longed for the presence of his son Absalom, he was nevertheless determined not to contact him, or seek reconciliation. All Israel knew of the murder that he had committed, and although the reasons were perhaps such as would stir the sympathies of the holy nation, it could not pass unpunished. Absalom appeared to have chosen exile, and David, wishing to spare himself the decision for death or imprisonment, was content to leave it at that.

David's cousin Joab and his son, the oldest now living, had a lot in common, and the captain of the armies of Israel greatly favored the young man, for he saw in him a kindred spirit. Seeing his king's expressions on the rare occasions when Absalom's name was mentioned, Joab determined that he would try to affect a healing of the breach between the current and in all probability future king. Knowing of the success of Nathan in convincing David of his sin with Bathsheba, the warrior decided to employ a similar method.

A few days later, an old woman of Israel was kneeling before the king of Israel, asking for his royal intervention.

"What ails you?" he asked.

"I am a widow of Israel," she said, "for my husband is dead. And now, your handmaid had two sons, and they fell to fighting in the fields, with none to separate them. One struck the other, and slew him, and now all the family is against me, although he is my son, and they said to me, 'Deliver the one who struck his brother down that we may kill him for the life that he took, and we will destroy the heir of that family.' But in so doing, my lord the king, they will extinguish my coal that is left, and leave to my husband neither name nor memory upon the earth."

"Go to your place," the king replied, "and let your spirit not be heavy, and I will give an order of protection concerning this matter."

"As my son has truly taken a life," the old woman said, "let the guilt of this iniquity rest with me and upon my father's house, and let the king and his throne be guiltless for protecting him."

"I am your protector in this matter," David affirmed to her. "If anyone says anything to you concerning this, bring him unto me, and he will trouble you no more."

“Let the king remember,” the woman said again, pressing a point that was beginning to annoy David, “that before Yahweh your Almighty One you have given protection to my son, to resist those who would take revenge upon my son for the life that he took, lest they destroy him.”

“As Yahweh lives,” David said, a hint of his irritation filtering into his voice, “not a hair on your son’s head shall come to harm.”

“Why then,” the woman said boldly, “have you done such a thing against the people of Elohim? For the king speaks this thing, though he is at fault in just such a matter, in that he does not bring home again and protect him that is banished. Our lives are as spilt water, which cannot be gathered up again, yet though it be so, Yahweh devises means by which we who are banished may be restored again.

“And now, therefore,” she continued before the amazed king, “I have come to speak to you of this thing, for I fear the people around me, and I said to myself, ‘I shall seek the aid of my king, that perhaps he fulfills the request of his handmaid. For the king will hear, and deliver his handmaid from the hand of he who would destroy her and her son, to extinguish our name in the inheritance of Elohim.’ I said, ‘The word of my lord the king shall now be as a comfort to me, as if an angel of Elohim had spoken it, for so is the skill of my lord the king, to determine good and evil, therefore Yahweh your Elohim will be with me.’”

“These are years of amazement,” David said, “for I hear one matter after another that causes me to be astonished. But hide not this matter from me, and answer the question that I will ask of you.” When the old woman indicated that she would reply openly and honestly, the king asked, “Is not the hand of Joab with you in all of this?”

“As your soul lives, o king,” she replied, “nothing can turn to the right or the left from what the king has spoken, for your servant Joab bade me to speak to you all these words that he has put in the mouth of your handmaid.”

As the old woman explained what Joab had told her to say, David became convinced that perhaps it was indeed time to consider reconciling with his son. After he dismissed his deceptive visitor, David called for the captain of his armies.

“This is what I will now do,” he said. “Go and bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. But mark this,” he added as Joab made to give him thanks, “he must reside in his own house, and he must not enter into my presence.”

“Today your servant knows that he has found grace in your sight, O King,” Joab said to his cousin in the most polite possible terms, “for the king has fulfilled

the request of his servant.” He went forth, and Absalom agreed to return with him, the condition David had mentioned notwithstanding.

“The stage is set,” the demon of Greed said to the demon of Gluttony. “Let us prepare for the next step!”

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For two years Absalom lived in Jerusalem, but did not see his father. During this time, the two tempters worked mightily upon his already polluted spirit, leading him to grasp in his heart after the throne that he imagined would be his. One thing in particular about the current arrangement truly irritated him, and he asked himself, “Shall I replace my father, the king, if at his death I am in disgrace?”

He therefore began to send messages to Joab, saying, “Speak unto my father, the king, and secure for me an audience with him.” When Joab refused to reply, he sent others, these containing more insistent wording. When he again received no reply, the heated impulses of the prince of Israel were stirred up, and he said, “Joab shall regret ignoring my voice. I shall get his attention with certainty because of what I will now do.”

Two days later Joab finally presented himself before Absalom; it was not in friendship, but in great wrath. “Why have your servants set my field on fire?” he demanded.

“Why have you not come to me when you have been summoned?” Absalom retorted. “I sent unto you, saying, ‘Come here, that I may send you to the king,’ and to ask him why he has brought me up from Geshur, only to waste away in Jerusalem. It would have been better for me to remain there, and now, let me go and see my father the king’s face, and if in his sight there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me and be done with it.”

And so Joab came and spoke to David concerning his son, and the king’s heart was warmed toward the thought of his oldest remaining child. The day when Absalom presented himself to his father, and the two wept and embraced, would have been a joyful scene to the angels, if we had not seen the demons that stood watch over the event rejoicing, and if we did not know what already lay like a serpent, coiled around the heart of the prince of Israel.

Now in favor with his father once again, Absalom’s greed, spurred on by Chereshiel’s influence, quickly moved him to take advantage of the situation. He called for fifty servants to run before him as he traveled, and he rose up early to stand in the gates of David’s house, and to greet all who entered therein.

The true deviousness of “his” plan, however, was seen in the way that he treated those who came to the king for a judgment, and the settling of any controversy. Whenever one came forth with a grievance, Absalom would ask about the matter, and would invariably take the side of the one with whom he spoke. It was even the case on a few occasions that both parties presented themselves before the king at different times, and the prince spoke to both of them as if he were on their part. Within a very short time, the wisdom of Absalom was being praised in Jerusalem, and all through the country.

So the matter passed for a few more years, and Absalom grew yet bolder in his attempts to undermine his father’s authority in the eyes of his people. It was not long before the impulsive young man began to consider cutting his wait for the throne short. His spies were all through the land, garnering support for rebellion, and when the time was right, he presented himself to his father and asked leave to go to Hebron. It was from here that he secretly planned to launch his attack on the capital of Israel. With him, the king’s son took two hundred of his father’s more influential attendants, asking them to accompany him in the fulfillment of a most solemn vow. They, innocently, went with him. Absalom now, knowing his father would believe that those nearest to him had deserted him in his time of need, signaled for his conspirators, and they gathered unto him from every Tribe of Jacob.

In your Histories, David is not often spoken of at this point in his life, except to mention his reaction to the sins of his offspring. This is, unfortunately, accurate, for David had not at that point recovered from his own transgressions of what was now quite a few years earlier, and he had become – in a manner fundamentally different from his predecessor Saul, but with the same practical results – an almost entirely ineffectual ruler.

This was never more apparent than when news came to him of his son’s revolt. The first thing David did was to call together his wise men, and his trusted advisors. Of these, few remained, and those who gathered in response to his call knew nothing of the whereabouts of the others. Gad and Nathan received no answers from IaHWeH concerning the king’s actions, for this too was a part of the judgment on the house of David. Despite all Heaven’s desire to see the events that would follow averted, we all knew that Israel needed to see the consequences of its leaders’ actions, and David himself needed to reap the harvest he had sown in the years following his adultery. Heaven had forgiven, freely and willingly, but David had not followed up on this spiritual cleansing with a cleaning of his household here on earth.

“We must flee,” David said to his attendants and those soldiers who remained with him. “We do not know how many of the people he has turned against me, and who knows whether or not we will be able to resist his attack in Jerusalem? And let us go quickly, lest he overtake us on the way, bring disaster upon us, and tear the city apart.” Here was the voice of fear speaking through one who

had stood, still a young man, against Goliath. David was not as certain, in these older years, of IaHWeH's presence with him as he had been in his more innocent days. In this, Kehreniel was only partly responsible – at least in a direct sense. It is true that his efforts continued to inspire dejecting thoughts in the king's mind, but the works of Petahel, the envy demons, and now the demons of greed and gluttony motivating his son were quite sufficient to encourage in the tired king a sense of despair.

As he departed, he and a large group of attendants, his wives, Tamar and her brothers, and various other ones, David was encouraged, but a little surprised, to see that six hundred of the men of Gath that had united themselves with Israel after his days as an outlaw were all yet faithful and present. He spoke to Ittai, the one placed at the head of that company, "Why are you with us? Return to your place, and abide with the new king of Israel, for you are a stranger here, and an exile – Absalom shall not have a controversy with you or your people. Why, then, should I compel you to come up and down with us in flight, seeing as we must go where we will? Return and take back your brethren, and may mercy and truth be with you."

"As Yahweh lives, and as my lord the king lives," Ittai answered, emphasizing his statement that David was yet the true king of Israel, "in whatsoever place my lord shall be, there will your servant be also."

"Pass over, then," David said, indicating the way before them, "and be with us in exile."

"Zadok," David said, seeing the priest and all the Levites had accompanied him, "why have you brought the Ark of the Covenant with us away from Jerusalem?" In truth the company that had come away from Jerusalem with David was so large that he had not even been aware of this development. "If I shall find favor in the eyes of Yahweh, will He not bring me back into the city where I was established over Israel? But if I find not favor in His eyes, let Him do with me as He pleases, but let the Ark remain where it has been brought with much rejoicing and ceremony."

When he saw that Zadok seemed unhappy with the idea of returning to a soon-to-be captured city, David considered relenting, but then an idea struck him. "Are you not a prophet?" he asked. "Return, then, to Jerusalem with Abiathar, and with your sons, and I will await your word in the wilderness, that you may report to me on what occurs at the hand of Absalom my son."

The journey, particularly after the priests turned back with the Ark, was a dreary one, and there was much weeping as they trod the miles away from the holy city. Men on horses, loyal to David, but curious about the events taking place, passed back and forth between the company and Jerusalem, and news was thus transmitted all the way from Absalom's camp to David's ears without the young

usurper knowing of it. By this means, David heard some rather unpleasant news. When Absalom had taken the wisest of David's counselors with him, he had formulated a dual purpose for this action. First, he wished to strengthen the impact of his father's sense of abandonment when news reached him of his plan to attack Jerusalem. Second, he had hoped that by his words to these men once they were away from his father, he could actually turn them to his cause. In the former action he was successful, but in the latter largely a failure. He did, however, manage to convince one very important member of his father's cabinet of the justice of his cause.

"Ahitophel is among the conspirators?" David asked the messenger, dumbfounded. Ahitophel had been to David more than a mere advisor; the king of Israel had considered him a friend, and he said, "Behold how one who has shared my bread, and eaten at my table, has lifted up his heel now against me!" He turned his eyes to the heavens and said, "Oh, Yahweh, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahitophel into foolishness before the face of my son Absalom!"

This prayer would begin to see an answer immediately, for as they continued on, David encountered one loyal to him who had been away from Jerusalem when the news had come of Absalom's rebellion. He had apparently heard of it anyway, however, for he approached David with torn clothing and ashes upon his head, signs of deep mourning.

"Ah, Hushai," David said, seeing the Archite, "you would be one more mouth to fill among us as we flee, but if you would do service to your king, return to the city and say to my son Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king, even as I have been your father's servant before,' and so will you be a counter to the advice given by that false Ahitophel, who has truly turned in his heart to serve him. And shall not Zadok and Abiathar the priests be with you in Jerusalem? Whatever you hear spoken, therefore, in the royal chambers, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar, and they shall send their sons unto me, to let me know all the things that you hear."

Hushai agreed to the plan, and he arrived at Jerusalem just as Absalom was taking the city.

As the mournful party continued on, David encountered two voices from his past. The first was Ziba, the servant of a descendant of Saul on whom David had taken pity years earlier, in part due to a physical deformity. Ziba brought a report that his master had remained in Jerusalem, thinking to wrest the kingdom from the house of David, and return it to the house of Saul in the confusion.

The second was one of Saul's relatives, a man named Shimei, a direct relative of Saul. As the procession passed by his dwelling place, he began to throw stones in David's direction, and to say, "Man of blood! Worthless man! Yahweh has returned upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose

place you have ruled, and Yahweh has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son, and behold you are taken in misfortune, for you are a man of blood!”

Abishai, the brother of Joab, drew near to the king, who had been bearing the insults patiently, and said, “Why should this dead dog curse the king? Let me go over, I pray, and strike off his head!”

David replied, “What have I to do with the sons of Zeruiah? Let him curse, for Yahweh has moved him to curse me. Who can say to him, therefore, ‘Why have you done this?’ Behold, even my son who came forth from my body seeks my life, how much more then may this Benjaminite do so? Let him alone that he curse me, for Yahweh has bidden him do it.

“Who knows,” David added, “if Yahweh will not look upon my affliction and restore unto me a blessing for the curses I receive this day.”

Some days later in Jerusalem, Hushai had managed to insinuate himself into Absalom’s good graces. The young man had taken the stronghold without incident, and was enjoying the praises of all who had remained in Jerusalem, those who accepted the change in government, or who feared to stand against the son of the king. Unfortunately, Hushai had not gained enough influence to prevent the next “official act” performed by Absalom on the advice of the traitorous Ahitophel. Upon the roof of the house of David in Jerusalem, the very roof upon which his father stood when he first caught sight of Bathsheba, Absalom set up a tent in the sight of all Israel, and called his father’s ten concubines in unto him one at a time.

As he began to carry out this work, Oliel of the House of Gluttony said to his companion, “His greed has been satisfied, for the moment, upon the taking of Jerusalem. Now let us see him go to still greater excess in the eyes of Israel.”

All the words that Ahitophel spoke to Absalom were perfect, from a strategic standpoint. The counselor knew David and his armies well, the minds of the people of Jerusalem and all Israel, and how best the young man might succeed in replacing his father. Although he had spent many years in service to David, he hesitated only a brief moment before laying before Absalom the next step as he knew it in order to bring success.

“Choose, my lord the king, twelve thousand men, and let me go with them to pursue David this very night. I will come upon him before he has had a chance to establish himself anywhere, while he is yet weak and weary. Fear will be on our side, and all the people that are with him will flee, and I will slay only the king. After this I will bring the people back to you with as little violence as possible, and so the land will be at peace.”

For all his wisdom, Ahitophel did not know how truly he had spoken when he said, “fear will be on our side.” Kehreniel, along with Absalom and all the elders of Israel, were thoroughly pleased with Ahitophel’s plan. Absalom was trying to act the part of king, however, and the idea of readily agreeing with all his counselors did not appeal to him so much as impressing them with a show of thoughtfulness. In this, pride actually acted against the demons’ designs, for it gave place for the voice of one to whom the angels yet ministered.

“It is a good saying,” the son of the king said, concerning Ahitophel’s strategy, “but call now Hushai the Archite also, that we may hear him likewise.”

After hearing the current proposal, Hushai immediately discerned that it was a very effective course of action indeed. Thinking quickly, he said, “The counsel that Ahitophel has given is not good... for this time. You know well your father and his men, that they are mighty warriors, and no doubt as angry in their departure as a she-bear robbed of her cubs. Your father himself is a great man of war, and will not remain anywhere where he may be easily found. No doubt, he is hidden already in some pit or other secret place, which he knows better than your troops.

“We know also, my lord, that David’s men are all seasoned, and if some of their men are overthrown they will stand, but if the younger troops with my lord Absalom should begin to fall, it will be said, ‘There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom,’ and their courage will fail, knowing that your father is a mighty man.

“I counsel, therefore,” Hushai continued, “that my lord take his time. Gather all Israel unto you, from Dan even to Beersheba, a great multitude as the sands of the sea, and then lead them forth yourself. So shall you come upon his little company where they may be found, and we will fall upon him as the dew upon the earth. Of him and his men there shall not be left but one, and even if they should hide in a city, you shall have all Israel with you, to bring ropes to draw it down into a river, until not so much as a stone shall be found there.”

“The counsel of Hushai is better than that of Ahitophel,” Absalom concluded, after conferring with the elders of Israel who stood with him. He dismissed all those assembled and went out to consider his next move.

As they were departing, Ahitophel went over to Hushai and said, “I know your ways, friend of David!” Hushai’s pulse leaped in a way easily discernable to the nearby angels. Fortunately, the counselor’s next words relieved him greatly. “Having turned away from the father, you have come now to the son, and seek to replace me as his right hand! Is it not for jealousy that you defeated my counsel before Absalom, to bring me to shame in the sight of Israel?”

Hushai said nothing, but walked away, breathing heavily with relief. He had not been named as a spy. As soon as he was certain that he was not being followed, he went to Zadok and Abiathar, and told them what had occurred. They, in turn, sent their sons to David to inform him of the development. Ahitophel, already struggling with guilt over his treason to the king of Israel, was now useless to the demons, for they well knew that Hushai would ever be a foil to their counsel through the traitorous Israelite. Having no further use for him, they turned him over to the depths of despair, and he did away with himself that very day.

* * * * *

Since Joab had departed from Jerusalem with David, Absalom appointed Amasa, the son of Ithra, as the captain over his armies and ordered his forces under him. David, for his part, took stock of his loyal warriors when he arrived in the city of Mahanaim, and set them in array: a third of his men under Joab, a third under Abishai, and a third under Ittai who had remained true to his word. When David declared his intention to go forth to battle with his people, however, they objected strongly, saying, "You shall not go forth with us, for if we are put to flight they will not hunt us down, but would leave a half of us to seek your life alone, for you are worth ten thousand of us to them. It is better, therefore, that you help us from the city."

Reluctantly, David agreed, and said to them, "Whatever seems best to you, that will I do."

As the days passed with David in Mahanaim and Absalom in Jerusalem, it quickly became apparent there would not be much time until their forces met in battle. There were too many messengers passing back and forth, too many informants, for David to imagine that he could stay hidden, or for Absalom to think that he could take his father by surprise. Tension mounted in Israel as it became known that Absalom had sent his warriors to David's dwelling place, and the ears of all were turned in the direction of the coming battle.

When the king of Israel sent his forces out against those of Absalom, he took his three captains and told them, before all his assembled troops, "Remember, it is my son against whom you go... deal gently with him for my sake."

Absalom was near the very head of his army; whatever else may be have been said about him, he was not without courage in battle. He was an impressive sight on horseback. From the days of his youth, Absalom had let his thick, dark hair grow long, and as he rode, his majestic locks streamed out behind him; those who watched him fly past would say, "Behold, the lion of Israel!"

It was this very hair, however, this proud mane of his, that ultimately proved to be the young man's undoing.

In the inevitable encounter between the men of David and those of Absalom, there was a great battle that lasted an entire day, and which resulted in twenty thousand Israelites falling. The great majority of the slain were Absalom's soldiers, and both he and the survivors of the struggle fled into the forests to escape their pursuers.

The young usurper galloped through the trees, looking backward to see if any would follow, and he soon found himself alone. His men had scattered, and there were none that he could hear coming up behind him. Smiling in relief, he turned back to face the front, already considering his plans, now that he was sure of the location of his father's defenders. As he swung forward, however, there was a great jolting, and a tearing sound, and a sudden, sharp pain in his head.

Absalom stood dazed for several minutes, but as his head began to clear, he realized he was not standing at all, but rather hanging from a low bough upon which his hair had caught. He might have laughed for the absurdity of his situation, had he not now heard that which he had been straining to hear mere moments before: the sound of galloping hooves. The son of David drew his sword, even while hanging, as the rider came to a stop. He tried to spin himself about to see who was approaching. After a minute or two of tense silence, however, the horseman turned himself about and left.

It was several minutes later when Absalom, now developing a pain in his neck, again heard the sounds of movement. This time, there were more horses. The pace of the beating hooves slowed to a canter, and then as they came into view, Absalom saw that among them was the man he least wanted to see.

"Did I not tell you, my lord Joab," said one of the riders to the other, "that he was caught fast in this oak? And though you asked why I did not kill him, and I said that I could not stretch forth my hand against the king's son because of the orders of King David, do now what you will concerning him."

"My cousin the king does not always know what is best for him," Joab said, and he took up a spear that was with him and got off of his horse. The captain of a third of David's armies, and once the overseer of all the army, looked up into the prince's face and sneered. "You have cost me much comfort, son of David," he said, and thrust the spear into the chest of the one he himself had brought back from exile.

Absalom cried out, but Joab was not content with this. He brought two more spears, one in each hand, and thrust them also at the heart of the man hanging in the tree. With the last spear, Joab did not release it, but rather shook it violently, until with further tearing sounds the young man, dying, fell to the earth. Without hesitation, the ten soldiers who traveled constantly with Joab fell

upon him and finished the job by taking even the last few seconds of his remaining life.

Amihaaz, the son of Zadok, who had been with them that day, said, "Let me run and tell this news to David, that Yahweh has given him vengeance upon his enemies."

"You are a man not delicate of speech," Joab said. "On days of glad tidings you may run to David, but on this day you will not run."

"What?" Amihaaz said, "Are these not good tidings that the enemy of our lord the king is dead?"

"For this reason," Joab said, "you will not run. For have you not heard the king's instructions before all his soldiers, that the young man Absalom was to be treated gently? And though I slew him for the nation of Israel, I know well that David will grieve for him, and it takes a smoother tongue than your own to bear such news."

Joab called another who was with him and said, "You, run and bear news of this victory to our lord the king."

As the young man sped off, Amihaaz said, "Let me, then, at least go with Cush, whom you have sent."

"What news do you have now to bear?" Joab asked.

"I would see the king when this is told him," he replied, still thinking that David would be pleased with the news.

"Run, then," Joab said, tired of the entreaties. "See for yourself what reward these tidings will bring."

Amihaaz departed immediately and, being the swifter runner, soon caught up with and then surpassed Cush.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 12: THE HOUSE OF FEAR

As we angels saw things, the children of David were, collectively, David himself in essence. Tamar and, later, Solomon, represented what was best in this king of Israel. Amnon and Absalom, in repeating and then surpassing their father's sins, were undoubtedly the worst. It was difficult not to feel sympathy for Absalom, however, and we who guarded the house of David were mourning even before the king received the news from the runners that Joab had sent.

When he did, however, he reacted just as he always had when receiving news of the death of one of his children. Amihaaz, the rather coarse son of Zadok, had arrived first, and with a grand smile on his face he reported, "All is well! Blessed be Yahweh your Almighty, who has delivered up the men that lifted their hands against my lord the king!" Absalom's death had been only one in a series; the forces of David had caught many of those who fled from the battle, and enlarged the number of slain far beyond the twenty thousand that had actually been killed during the fighting.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" David asked, expressing the thoughts that had been on his mind since he sent forth his armies, and which had become far more pressing a question upon seeing the runners approaching his home.

For the first time, Amihaaz looked up at the king's expression, and he was troubled by the deep concern that he saw there. Thoughts of the praise he hoped to gain from the king's lips when he rushed ahead of Cushy to speak faded away to nothingness, and instead of saying what he had come to say, the son of Zadok said, haltingly, "When Joab sent me, and the king's servant after me, I saw a great struggle, but... I did not know who it was. Perhaps my fellow runner, who left after I did, perhaps he can tell my lord the king of Absalom."

When Cushy arrived, he ignored Amihaaz, rather annoyed at his outpacing him, and instead focused on King David, who was as anxious to see him as he had been to see Amihaaz. "Tidings, my king," he said, "Yahweh has avenged you this day of all who have stood up against you!"

"Yes," David said, motioning slightly to the first runner, "but the young man Absalom... is he safe?"

Cushi, with as much tact as he could, said, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise up against him to do him harm, be even as the young man now is.”

At these words David staggered backwards and nearly collapsed. Without saying anything more to those in attendance he left the room. A short time later, those who passed by the gate of the city could hear their king weeping aloud, saying, “Oh, my son Absalom! Would that Elohim had granted me to die instead of you, Oh Absalom, my son!”

The armies of Israel returned to Manahaim in triumph, but as they approached the gate, the sounds of their mourning king could easily be heard. One of the soldiers who rode in the front slowed his pace, and then retreated until he found Joab. “Behold, the king weeps at the news of his son,” he said.

“Soldiers!” Joab cried out. “We do not enter the city by the gate, but let us go around the other way.” His message was relayed to the returning host, and all but those who had already gone through the gates turned aside and entered the city from another direction. Joab would not let this pass by without comment, however, and as soon as he dismounted he strode angrily to the gates of the city and entered the chamber there from which the king’s grief could freely be heard.

Dispensing with all formalities, and even pleasantries, Joab said, “Today you have shamed all your servants, who have saved your life this day, and the lives of your sons and daughters, and your wives, and your concubines... for you show greater love for your enemies than your friends. You have declared today that you have no regard for princes or servants, for it is plain to me that if Absalom had lived and the rest of us died you would be well pleased!

“Now rise up,” Joab commanded his king, “go forth and speak comfort to your servants, for I swear by Yahweh, if you do not go forth not one will remain with you this night, and it will be worse for you thereafter than any evil which has befallen you from your youth until now!”

Joab, for all his many flaws, was a shrewd tactician, and he knew well that if David did not praise his troops for their work in his name, it would not be long before another, and likely greater, rebellion would spring up and consume the kingdom. The king of Israel set aside his grief, at least the public display thereof, and sat in the gate and spoke to his people all that would be expected by a victorious army. Before he went, however, he said to Joab, “You will remember, cousin, that I am the king, and you are my servant. From our youth you have been standing as one above me, and I know that the pride of your office has come into your head. This will not remain so for long.”

In short order, the Tribes of Israel sent representatives to David, assuring the king that the leaders among them who had joined themselves to Absalom had been held accountable for their actions, and that they desired the anointed king of Israel to once again reign over them. David sent messages back, expressing his acceptance of their request, and sent messengers to find Amasa, whom he knew had survived the battle in which Absalom had been slain. "Say to him," he instructed his messengers, "'Are we not relatives, bound by flesh and bone? Elohim do so to me and more, if I do not set you as captain over my armies in the room of Joab, whom I shall thereby replace.'"

As David made the return journey to his throne, he saw once again the two familiar faces from his past that had met with him on his way into hiding from Absalom's rebellion. Ziba, the servant of Saul's son came to him, but this time he was not alone. Mephibosheth, the son of Saul of whom Ziba had been servant, came also, with his clothing torn and his hair and beard unkempt.

Remembering the report that Ziba had brought to him, David asked Saul's son, "Why did you not go over with me, Mephibosheth?"

"My lord the king," he replied, "my servant Ziba deceived me, for your servant said, 'I will saddle my donkey that I may ride thereon and go to the king,' for my lord must remember that his servant is lame, and cannot walk. And I know that he has slandered your servant before my lord the king, but my lord is as an angel of Elohim, therefore let him do as seems good in his eyes. All my father's house were as dead men before my lord the king, yet you set your servant among those that eat at your own table. What right, therefore, do I have to ask any more of the king?"

David, who had already received Ziba's testimony and consented to give it to him instead of Mephibosheth for the latter's alleged treason, said, "What shall we do, then, but divide the land? For Ziba's sons are fifteen, and ought not to suffer for the father's transgression. Shall we not be content with this, or will your servant return to you all?"

"Let him rather keep all of it," Mephibosheth said, "it is enough for me that my lord the king has returned in peace."

The other who came to him was Shimei, the relative of Saul who had thrown stones at him during his departure from Jerusalem. Shamed, he came before David to ask forgiveness, but Abishai again said to the king, as he had the first time they encountered him, "Shall not Shimei be put to death? He has cursed the king of Israel."

David responded, "Shall any man be put to death this day, seeing that it is a day of joy, and I am reaffirmed as king over Israel?" To Shimei he said, "Go your way, for as Yahweh lives I shall not put you to death."

As David's journey to Jerusalem drew to an end, there was a dispute between his Tribe of Judah, and the other Tribes of Jacob regarding who would be the ones to conduct the king into the capital and establish him there once again as king. In this Judah prevailed, but the warm welcome that all were showing to their king that day was not to be a perpetual state.

A very short while after David's return, a man named Sheba, an Ephraimite, emboldened by Absalom's rebellion, attempted to rebel, but could not gather an army large enough to attempt what David's son had attempted. Instead, he called those who were loyal to him together, and they separated themselves from their brethren without warfare or immediate violence.

The king of Israel immediately embarked upon the task of setting his house in order. He removed the ten concubines with whom Absalom had lain, and established them elsewhere. He cared for their needs, but he did not again have any intimate relations with them, for they had been defiled by his son. He went into the housing area of the Ark of the Covenant, and there he worshipped IaHWeH before all Israel, with Zadok and Abiathar attending him.

Asheriel and I drew near, and the guardian said to me, "I know that my charge shall never again know true peace in this life, but I have been instructed to keep him from all harm from this day of his return to Jerusalem to the day of his death."

Kehreniel, who had been nearby, approached also and said, "You shall not keep him from me. David fled before the face of Absalom for the sake of fear, and will yet do other things because of my influence. The temptations before this have laid the foundations, and the Houses of Lust and Envy have crushed him low. Greed and Gluttony have prepared the way for the destruction of his legacy, for Absalom's rebellion has greatly weakened the house of David. And should these others depart, and all demons flee Israel, yet would I remain to tear this king from his trust in Elohim, and his place among the saints."

"All this you have leave to attempt," Asheriel admitted, "but his flesh you shall not touch, not so much as a hair upon his head."

"The Chalkydri and I will make certain of this," I said, deliberately stating this in the hearing of both David's guardian and the fear demon. "You had your chance to destroy David for fear in the days of his youth, when he stood before the great Goliath, and you failed."

"You well know, Seraph," the fallen Throne hissed, "that this David and that David are two different men. We will yet break him!"

“You have said that the kingdom will be compromised, and that David’s legacy is weakened over Israel. Why, then, do you think to lift your hand time and again against this current king?”

“For I shall not fail,” Kehreniel said simply.

“You should have been placed in the House of Pride,” Asheriel said. The four-winged demon gave David’s guardian an evil look, and flew off without giving an answer.

When he arose from his worship, David had a renewed zeal for his position as king of Israel, despite Kehreniel’s ominous promises. He called Amasa, the new captain of his army, and sent him out after the rebel Sheba, saying, “If this matter is allowed to continue, he will do more harm to Israel than even my son Absalom would have done.”

With Amasa went several divisions of David’s military forces, including Joab and the men loyal to him. The former captain had received the news of his replacement with apparent acquiescence, but the actions to follow dramatically demonstrated his mind on his cousin’s decision.

As the men were going forth to pursue Sheba, Joab drew near to Amasa, and the two men made as if to join their companies together. They went over to Gibeon, and both men were separated from the main body of their warriors. As they searched the region the two became separated from one another, but Joab, more interested in Amasa than Sheba, kept watch over the man, and followed him secretly. When Amasa stopped for a rest near a main road, Joab stood up and tied the sheath of his sword to his leg so that it would move with his body rather than hanging free.

Stepping out from concealment, Joab pretended to notice that it was Amasa for the first time. He stepped forward with a joyful look on his face and, feigning tripping, he let his sheath tip forward so that his sword fell out unto the ground. Joab smiled as if in embarrassment, and stumbled forward to collect his sword; but then seeing that he was near to Amasa, decided (or pretended to decide) to greet his cousin instead before retrieving his fallen weapon. Taking him by the beard to give him a kiss of greeting, Joab asked, “Are you in health, my brother?”

Amasa suspected nothing, and would not have imagined any violence, for Joab’s sword lay on the ground, so he leaned in to receive the greeting, only to find the point of a dagger at his chest. Joab unceremoniously plunged the little knife into Amasa’s heart, and he fell to the ground and lay still.

Joab left the body where it was and went to rejoin his men. He met his brother Abishai and they went off again in pursuit of Sheba. One of Joab’s men saw

what had been done, however, and being more cautious than his captain, he removed Amasa's body from plain sight and covered it up that it should not be found.

When Joab, Abishai and their troops found Sheba, he was hiding in a city called Abel, and the men of David besieged it. One of the women of the city, seeing that their walls were surrounded, cried out and said, "Are you Joab, of the armies of Israel?"

"I am," the warrior replied.

"Hear the words of your handmaid," she replied, and when Joab answered that he was listening, she continued to speak. "There was a time when the wisdom of Abel was known in Israel, for they said of old, 'They shall seek counsel at Abel, and as they said, so ended the matter.' I am one who faithfully seeks peace in Israel, but you seek to destroy this city, and this mother of Israel. Why will you swallow up the inheritance of Yahweh?"

"Far be it for me that I should swallow up or destroy! The matter is not as you imagine, for a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against the king, even against David. Deliver him only unto us and I will depart from the city."

There was silence for a few moments as the woman spoke with those who had obviously known of Sheba's entrance, and had been deceived by the tale he told them of his flight from David's army. It was not too long, however, until the reply came back, "His head shall be thrown to you over the wall!" As it was spoken, so it was shortly thereafter done, and Joab returned to Jerusalem in triumph with his forces. David, upon hearing of Amasa's demise (at the hands of Sheba's warriors, he was informed) had little choice but to reappoint Joab into the office from which he had been so recently removed.

* * * * *

The years that followed appeared to be relatively calm ones. David quelled a few more minor rebellions, defended his borders against foreign invaders, and dealt with matters of state. In the course of time, he avenged a people known as the Gibeonites for the violence that Saul had done unto them, by taking his sons and slaying them before the wronged people; but Mephibosheth was spared, for David was convinced of his innocence in all matters, and because of the covenant that he had made with Jonathan many years before.

In his last battle against the Philistines, David, now getting older, almost fell from his horse for weariness, and Joab and his soldiers said to him, "My lord the king, you must not go out in battle with the armies of Israel any longer, for you will leave the nation desolate without cause." As before when his men

overruled his plan of action, David saw the wisdom in their words and, knowing his limitations, said only, "As it seems good to you, so I shall do." But his men did great works, and were valiant in battle, and slew many Philistines, including the sons of Goliath the giant. Though they were not so tall as their father, they were nevertheless fierce in battle, and those who slew them won names for themselves in Israel.

Your History next records that David wrote psalms of praise to IaHWeH, and so he did. Now removed from the active battles, David was the strategist, and with the counsel of his wise men, and the priests, and the prophets of IaHWeH, David overcame all his enemies, and devoted himself to the Almighty in prayer and songs, even as his men continued to grow powerful and famous in the heathen nations for their strength.

And yet even in this, Kehreniel, Oliel and Chereshiel moved in to strike him. Under the orders of their dark commanders, they moved David to consider, "As I am old, and no longer with my troops, and as we have all the heathen round about for enemies to Israel, what shall we do, if they gather together as one man to attack us?"

There was no war at hand, and all the enemies of Israel were silent for the moment, but the demon of fear said to David, "What shall we do indeed, if they rise up as one against us? Let us destroy them, ride out against them and subdue them completely. It is not tribute we seek in Israel, but safety and peace... and how can this be done, but by the end of a sword?" Greed's agent said, "And why should Israel be content with tribute? Shall we not have the wealth of the lands, to hire horses and buy chariots, so that we shall spread the glory of... IaHWeH... over all the earth?" It was not IaHWeH's glory that this voice was seeking, but so it was justified to the mind of the king. Finally, the demon of Gluttony came and, though he never had a great influence over either David or Absalom, he "sealed" the matter in the king's mind by saying, "Is it ever enough for IaHWeH? Is it ever enough for you? Take, more and more, and fill your treasury. Has not the prophet said to you that you shall not be the one to build the Temple of IaHWeH? And yet, for all the goods you have provided for when your son shall build the Temple, is it enough? And are the treasures of Israel enough?"

David called Joab unto him and said, "Assemble the armies of every Tribe of Israel. Take a small tribute of them and number the men, that we may know what forces are under us."

"What warfare, my lord the king?" Joab asked, eager at the idea of riding forth again in battle. Age had not diminished the son of Zeruah's desire for bloodshed, and he was never so content as when riding out against the Philistines to battle.

“There is no war,” David said, “nevertheless I wish to have Israel numbered, from Dan even to Beersheba, that we should go forth and take spoils of the countries around us.”

Joab hesitated, “Has my lord sought the counsel of the priests and the prophets on this matter?”

“The priests and the prophets do not rule Israel,” David retorted. “Neither, my cousin, my nephew, do you. Let it be even as I have said.”

“May Yahweh add unto the people of Israel – however many there may be – an hundredfold, and may they be great in the eyes of my lord the king, but why does the king delight in this thing? War without cause, and the numbering of Israel shall not surely be pleasant to the people as they enjoy this season of rest.” Joab was uncharacteristically thoughtful this day, and as it was, Asheriel was allowing the warrior to pour forth the wisdom of Heaven in an attempt to check the action of his charge. The numbering of Israel was no great sin of itself, but the Virtue who had guardianship of his soul had heard every word the foul demons had spoken into his mind, and had noted with disappointment that David had not resisted their urges.

“Would that Amasa had not died,” David said to Joab, “for he would have served better than you. Go and do as the word of your king directs you, and stand not against me this day, or once more, lest it go ill for you.”

Joab, seeing that he would not prevail, bowed himself and said to his men as they went out, “In truth, I have no wish to see the king’s armies at peace, for we are strongest in war, but I would have us await a true enemy, lest the people be stirred up by nothing, and then calm in the face of danger.”

After almost ten months of labor, during which the borders of Israel were silent, Joab returned to Jerusalem with his report, finding there a leaner David, and more troubled in his eyes, than when he had left. Kehreniel, having secured his aim in getting David to send for the numbering of Israel, immediately reversed his words, and said, “What faith, king of Israel, seeks to destroy a people not bent on your destruction? IaHWeH defends you in battle, but He has not sent you forth to make war on the nations round about! What faith, king of Israel, has been denied you since you lay with that woman Bathsheba, and what assurance was given you by the prophet, but his word that, ‘Your sin has been put away?’ Shall one word erase the bloodguilt for Uriah? Shall one word remove the stain between you and Israel? You will die, king of Israel, and lie in the dust and rise not up again, and your name shall be held in shame for this forever!”

Had David been diligent in his faith from the day of his youth until the days of his gray hair, he would have known what he himself sang about in his happier

years, that one word of IaHWeH is indeed sufficient to cleanse away guilt and sin. And yet, so diligently did the demons work upon the mind of the king, and so remiss was he to speak unto his priests but at the set times of worship, that sleep was taken from his eyes, and thus began the greatest battle of David's life. It was not against the Philistines, and not against Goliath, but against the fear that came to him in his old age that very nearly caused a fatal breach in the champion's heart. What followed within the mind of David is not explicitly written in the Histories of Israel, but it was open before the twelve Seraphim guardians, before Asheriel, and before the princes of Heaven.

"They have told me," Kehreniel had said to David's guardian while Joab was away, "that the work in Israel is ended for the moment. My dark lords say, "Cease," yet I remain. I shall not be deprived of my prey! Let all depart from Israel, but never shall my sword be lifted from the house of David."

Joab saw on the throne of Israel a man who had a demon spirit curled all around him. The spirit could not enter him, as it had entered Saul, but it nevertheless set down thick dark roots over the house, as a massive tree, and there the four-winged Throne expanded himself, as Petahel had years before, and anchored himself over the capital of Israel.

Joab said nothing about his cousin's appearance. Instead he began to read his report, with subtotals from each Tribe, and as he concluded he said, "Let therefore my lord the king surely know that in Israel there stands ready eight hundred thousand valiant men of the sword, and your own Tribe of Judah possesses a great multitude, numbering five hundred thousand men."

"You have my thanks for your labors, my cousin," David said in a voice more tired than Joab remembered. "The scribe Sheva shall see to your comfort, and that of your men, and deliver unto you the reward of your labor." With these few words Joab was dismissed, and David himself retired to his own chambers. This was a most troubling time in David's life, spiritually speaking. His angel was given charge over him to keep him from harm, which he had accomplished to a great degree by inspiring his men to convince him to stay out of battle. The demons of violence were banished from the house, and no accidents would befall him. His prayers ascended daily to IaHWeH, yet we all knew that things were not perfect in his heart, for his thoughts troubled him, and the fear of death began to draw over him. Furthermore, as he read the report of Joab, he knew that he had done wrongly, and that he ought to have seen more of his spiritual advisors in the months that had passed than the casual contact he had allowed.

The holy men of Israel had not pressed David in any matter, but they kept to their own counsels and prayed for him. The prayers were certainly not without effect, for because of this Kehreniel could not win a complete dominance over the king's heart. He kept his mind filled with darkness and gloom, but he could

not get him to despair, nor to consider his life without purpose, for all the shadows that seemed to hang over it.

And there, as David's conscience burned within him at the thought of the reason why he had sent for Israel to be numbered, he wept on his bed, and said, "Oh, Yahweh, I have sinned before you!" The king rose up and went forth to the resting place of the Ark, and there he called for Zadok and Abiathar, and said to them, "You, who have been my brothers from the day I was installed in Jerusalem, and you," turning to Abiathar, "to whom I owe much for the death of your family, I confess that I have done folly in Israel, running where none pursued, and setting up defenses against an army of my own fears.

"What shall I do," he asked them, "to cleanse my guilt?"

"We have been praying for my lord the king," Zadok said. "Let him spend this night in prayer, and then go forth unto the seer, that he may tell you what shall be done."

David did as the men instructed him, and in the morning he rose up and went to Gad, and said to him, "I have sinned before Yahweh." David, like Moses, was a man raised to great heights before the Almighty. He had been anointed king over Israel by the prophet Samuel, my former charge, but more importantly he had been filled with the Holy Spirit of wisdom and love, and much had been expected of him. Just as Moses struck the rock in anger and it caused him to stand apart from the people of Israel while they entered the promised land, so for his sins David would indeed taste the sting of death, and not enter Heaven but through the grave. Furthermore, so great was his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, and so public was the crime, that even to this day – to this very generation – there are men who claim loyalty to IaHWeH yet use his actions as an example, and an excuse for their own shortcomings. For this, David would not even be raised with many of the Old Covenant saints upon the day that the Messiah broke forth from his tomb a thousand years after his reign. Yet it would be written of him, for his confession, and for his softness of spirit, and for his readiness to turn to IaHWeH, that he was truly a man after Elohim's own heart.

Evidence of this was revealed to the on looking universe in how he dealt with the prophet Gad's words to him that very day. Gad had received a vision from Elohim of a mighty angel standing over Jerusalem with a sword in His hand. This Angel was none other than El Michael, the Second Elohim and Angel of the Covenant. This Firstborn of the Almighty was the Keeper of the agreement between Elohim and His people, and His was the right to execute judgment when iniquity filled the land. In times past He would send forth other angels to stir a people up against them when they fell into sin, such as the Philistines or the Amorites, but for this sin of the king He Himself was coming to visit the anger of Elohim.

Gad said, coming over to the sorrowing monarch, "Thus says Yahweh, 'I offer you three things. Choose one of them that I may do it unto you: Shall seven years of famine come unto the land? Or will you flee for three months from your enemies as they pursue you? Or will there be three days of pestilence from Yahweh in the land?' Now advise your servant, and see what answer I will receive from Him that has sent me."

David said to Gad, "I am in a narrow place with these! Yet let it be so, that we fall into the hand of Yahweh, for His mercy is great, and let us not fall into the hands of men."

"Shall it then be the famine, or the plague?" the prophet asked.

"Let it be the plague," David said, "for the suffering seems less than seven years of famine, and let the people suffer less for my sins."

The very next morning messengers came into the house of David, saying, "My lord the king, the people die! A great pestilence has broken forth in Jerusalem, even from the gates of the house of my lord the king, and goes forth. It spreads quickly, and will soon be over all Israel!"

David, seized by sudden inspiration, ran up to the roof, and stood there looking out over Jerusalem. As he beheld, Asheriel opened his eyes, and he saw the brightness of El Michael, tremendous in size and glowing with the Union of the Shekinah, with His hand and His sword stretched out over Jerusalem as the plague went forth. David fell on his face in terror, and cried out to IaHWeH for himself and for his people.

"I have sinned," he said, more earnestly than the day before, "and have done wickedly in the sight of Elohim. But these sheep, what have they done? Lift your hand, I pray, from off of them and direct it to me, and my father's house."

As he looked up again, he saw that the Angel had ceased to move, and had put His sword back in his place. El Michael stood above Jerusalem looking at the king, and David stood transfixed, looking at the Angel of the Glory of Heaven. He was like this for some time, unable to speak or to move, and then the prophet Gad came up to the roof. He was not able to see the vision, but he spoke to the king, saying, "Go up, raise up an altar to Yahweh in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, for thereupon stands the Angel of Yahweh, to stay the plague."

David immediately tore his eyes away from the vision and said, "I will go myself." This he did, riding out with his guards to Araunah, who fell on his face before the king of Israel.

When David left the palace, he kept his eyes fixed on the sky, but Michael's form had vanished. Even now, when Araunah began to speak he glanced upward to see if He had returned. "Why has my lord the king come unto his servant?" the Jebusite, who had not been in Salem at the time of its retaking by Israel, asked.

"We have come to buy your threshing floor," David replied, "to build an altar to Yahweh that He cease the pestilence that has come upon Israel."

"But let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him! Behold, I have oxen here for the sacrifice, and threshing instruments, even the yoke of the oxen for wood. May Yahweh accept you for your faith and protection of Israel!" Araunah was only partially motivated by relief that the king had not come to him for any ill intent. He had indeed heard of the plague destroying Jerusalem, and his heart was soft toward the people of his adopted homeland. Araunah was a true worshipper of IaHWeH, and the sacrifice of some of his goods seemed a small price to pay to please his king and his God.

The Jebusite, David quickly realized, was trying to give David all these things he was offering freely, but the king said, "Let it not be so. I will surely buy it off of you for a proper price." Seeing that Araunah was about to say something, and sensing that he would either be offended or downcast by the king's refusal of his gifts, he hastened to add, "Is not this to be my sacrifice to Yahweh? How then can I offer a sacrifice of that which costs me nothing?" The answer comforted Araunah, and David bought from him all the things that he mentioned at the price of fifty shekels of silver.

There the altar was built, and there the prayers were offered to Elohim, and there the plague stayed. El Michael returned to Heaven, and I went up with him.

"My Elohim," I said to him as we ascended, "What benefit was it for the altar to be raised on the land of this Jebusite?"

"Jehuel," He said to me kindly and patiently, as was always His manner, "Perceive you not, brightest of angels, how my servant Araunah has, by his willingness to please Elohim, touched the heart of my poor David?"

"It is even so!" I said, wisdom filling my eyes. "Not the altar at all, but the servant, that has stayed the plague over Israel, by bringing faith to the king!"

"Men rarely know what good they do in their little acts of kindness," El Michael said to me, "or what evil by their neglect or malice. They shall be a great people, and worthy to command my angels, when they are finally redeemed from the plague of their enemy." It was on that day also that Kehreniel's power over David, so thick and dark in the months while Joab was away, began finally to crack.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

SECTION 3: THE KING OF SCORCHED EARTH CHAPTER 13: THE NEW KING

Zion, the mountain upon which lay Jerusalem, and the scene of some of Israel's greatest and worst moments, was the home of David, the king of Israel. Its name, in Hebrew, means "Scorched Earth," and it is a fitting name for this location, that was scorched by the fires of war between the Israelites and the Heathen, that was scorched by the fire of combat in the earlier centuries after the coming of the Messiah, and that will be scorched by the very light of Elohim's presence when the judgment of this world finally unfolds.

It is also a fitting name for this location because it was the home of David himself who, after his years of ups and downs, of great victories and great sin, found his later life filled with the ashes of promises that could have been his. After Araunah's words to the king, and his willingness to give of himself for the sake of his people Israel, David was reminded of what it truly was to be a "shepherd" over the flocks of IaHWeH. Even so, the consequences of his poor choices of earlier times had been disastrous, and were it not for his son Solomon and the friendship of his wife Bathsheba, who was his favored companion after the death of his beloved Abigail, he would truly have feared for the future of his kingdom.

Kehreniel's influence over the house of David was cracked, but not yet broken. The dark Throne had cursed and roared when David's repentance for numbering Israel filtered up through his dark clouds and found a place in the records of Heaven, and he threatened all the host of Heaven when the king returned to his house in joy after offering sacrifice on Araunah's threshing floor. The other demons all forsook him, and even Oriel and Chereshiel departed, saying to him, "Waste not any more time on David. We will have his offspring, and we will have his kingdom. There are other works to do in the land!"

But Kehreniel, true to his promises to Asheriel and myself, said to them, "Go as you must, but I will remain, and wring the life out of this creature of earth! His soul shall be mine, and there will be one more failed life in the nation that IaHWeH has taken unto Himself!"

David had survived a barrage of attacks by the nine houses of sin that no human being had yet had to bear in such intensity since the days of Enoch. He had,

alas, not borne up so well as that Antediluvian saint, but he was nevertheless a victor in the eyes of Heaven. Kehreniel might have done well to leave him be, but his own pride, and his own sense of purpose, would not allow him to surrender his post. The demon who thought to use the giant Goliath to his own ends would remain there, he vowed by all that was unholy, until the son of Jesse closed his eyes in his final sleep.

In truth, although David was a relatively young man of seventy in those days, the weight of the demons' attacks, and the gravity of his troubled life, had left him prematurely "old and stricken in years" as your History records.

It was at that age that the king of Israel collapsed one day while walking about the palace, and was taken up to his bed, from which he was not again to rise. Knowing that he had not many days left, David called his sons before him and said to them, "The kingdom of Israel is soon to be taken from me, and given unto you, my princes. Each of you is a mighty man, and placed over fields, and flocks, and much wealth. You rule also, the cities in your regions, and are above all the people of Israel. Let it be known, therefore, that I have spoken unto Yahweh, the Almighty of Israel, though the mouth of Nathan the prophet, and it is my son Solomon that will be king in my room after I am gone."

This news was not welcome to several of David's princes, including Adonijah, the son of Haggith, who was oldest. This was something that was easily seen in the younger man's eyes, and Kehreniel, David's constant companion, said to him, "Remember your son Absalom, how he nearly tore the kingdom away from you. Shall he not now try to raise rebellion and split Israel after your death?"

Far from merely using words, however, the evil angel tried his very best to make the matter a reality. Kehreniel summoned to himself eleven other mighty demons from the House of Fear, and they began to work on the trusted members of the king's court. Joab was an easy target, for his dissatisfaction had never been assuaged, as was Abishai his brother. It soon became apparent, however, that the tempter was not content to abide by the instructions his superiors in Satan's kingdom had given him, but was seeking to go beyond what he was allowed in the winning of champions to Adonijah's side for the day when he would make his intentions known.

There was actually a rare skirmish between the Host and Kehreniel's forces as they, following his orders, attempted to invade the dreams of David's consellers, giving them visions of a broken kingdom under Solomon. By doing so they hoped to get them to cast their support on the side of Adonijah and, defying their current king's instructions, establish upon the throne of Israel one far easier to manipulate than the son of Bathsheba. Five of the demons had descended upon the sleeping quarters of Zadok the priest, and were attempting there to influence his rest, when they suddenly found themselves surrounded by

six of Israel's tribal guardians. Though it was rare, and short in duration, I record this particular confrontation, as I had a part in its resolution, and it contained elements that would become very important later on.

Rather than flee on this occasion, as the Chalkydri had come to expect of these spirits, the demons drew their dark kherevs, and thrust the burning blades outward in a threatening manner. The five fear demons consisted of a Throne, two Cherubim and two Seraphim: powerful spirits indeed, and they seemed determined to stand their ground against the Israelites' protectors.

"You may summon your fellows," one of the demons snarled, "but so may we, and the match shall be even. Let us therefore settle this amongst ourselves."

"Let it be so," one of the mighty Seraphim said, and burst into bright, red flame.

The other five guardians did likewise, and as the dark spirits rose up into the air they followed, trailing golden flames after them. Though slightly outnumbered, the evil spirits did not complain, but they dove right in and attacked the Chalkydri, using all their strength in an attempt to push the holy angels backward.

The conflict quickly drew the attention of the spirits that were nearby, including Asheriel and myself, and also the guardians of the royal priests and prophets of Jerusalem. It soon became apparent, however, that the five demons from the House of Fear were using rather unusual tactics. Instead of each taking one of the Seraphim as a primary opponent, which would not have been easy to do under the circumstances anyway since the fight was balanced in the guardians' favor, they wove in and out, switching enemies, and trying to keep their unfallen counterparts off guard.

Farther and farther they pushed and led the holy angels, until they were fighting in the air some distance away from the house of the king, and the attention of the nearby spirits followed. One of the evil Seraphim leaped in front of the Cherub that was fighting on his side and covered him with his wings just as two of the Chalkydri threw their swords at him. The whirling disks of fire glanced off of the protective feathers and spun away. When their kherevs returned to their hands, the two defenders of Israel swooped in closer and forced the six wings apart, but the Cherub that had been within them was already gone and attacking another one of their allies.

The Cherub had united with the other of his fallen Order, and they caught one of the Seraphim within a cage of perverted spiritual energy. Descending quickly, they dissipated their captive's bonds, sending the six-winged warrior plunging through the earth like a rock from a catapult. He burst out the other side, spinning a great distance away into space. As he flew back to Israel as quickly

as he could, the demons were attempting to make the most of their momentarily even numbers.

The Throne angel, surrounded by a wheel of black flames, was continually moving about and trying to strike at the unguarded backs of Israel's defenders. He knew that he was not as powerful in head-to-head combat as either his companions or his opponents, but by his blazing appearance, and by constantly shifting from place to place, he was an effective distraction that allowed his allies some room to maneuver.

Had the fallen angels been fully committed to the struggle, none of the observers had any doubt that they would quickly have been defeated by the powerful Seraphim that protected the spiritual borders of the twelve Tribes of Jacob, but it began to occur to me that the dark ones were merely playing for time. Tearing my attention away from them (and noticing that several other angels were doing the same) I looked in again at the chambers of Zadok, and was startled at what I saw there. While five of the demons had engaged the Chalkydri, three more of them, including Kehreniel, were attempting to attack the priest.

"Cease from your works!" I cried, as I descended. Drawing near to them I said, "This is a priest of Israel; he is shielded from such actions as you now think to do by the authority of the King of Heaven!"

"What does the authority of the King of Heaven have to do with me?" Kehreniel asked.

"Know you not what happened to your fellow Och?" I asked, reminding the demon of an incident that had taken place not too long ago, during the time of the Judges of Israel. The Cherub Hiel, or Och as he wished to be known, had slain a man that was under the protection of the holy angels, and after the defeat of his forces by one of the Cherubim and these very Chalkydri that were now struggling with Kehreniel's demons, he had been placed under judgment, bound up and helpless until the time of trouble that will precede the end of human history. "You also will be placed under *charam* at the Euphrates if you harm but a hair of this priest's head!"

"There are greater things at work here than you have been told, Seraph," Kehreniel replied. "The holy ones are not the only creatures that know the meaning of sacrifice! This one will turn away from David, even as he lies dying, and break the king's will and his faith. This is no small act we now do, subtle though it may be."

"Foolish judgment!" I reproached the demons. "You would ruin the rest of your dark existence for an act of revenge? Such reasoning is not worthy of even those humans whom your tempters have managed to turn from the path of

righteousness.” In retrospect, I suppose I should have been grateful that Kehreniel was proposing to take himself out of further useful service to Lucifer, but at the moment I was too shocked to formulate such a thought – and my only intent at the moment was to defend the house of David and its servants, including the man that lay sleeping below us.

As I drew nearer still, I cried out to the holy angels that had withdrawn their attention from the fight between the Chalkydri and the demons above, and said, “Drive them off!”

I drew my sword, the phantom of the injury across my midsection stinging slightly, and I swooped in to defend the priest. Kehreniel met me with his own dark blade, withdrawing his influence from the House of David so that he could give me his full attention. I pushed forward with all six of my wings, gathering such speed that I knocked him backward despite his blocking my attack, and I perceived behind me that the holy angels were also keeping the other fear demons from their intended prey.

Up and down Jerusalem the wicked Throne and I fought each other, spiritual weapons clashing in a flurry of wings, light and shadow. As we separated ourselves in the air, Kehreniel extended his left hand and a blast of black and purple flames roared toward me. The blast enveloped me, and although they did me no harm, I was momentarily unable to see. I felt a sting of the demon’s weapon in my leg, and across a wing, and I quickly dropped downward, landing on a rooftop in the city.

It would be a little while before my wing would heal, so I folded in the pair that included the injured appendage, and I rose again to confront my enemy. As I did so, two glowing spears struck me from behind, one on my left wing and the other on my right. Now, each pair contained an injured part, and I quickly fell back unto the roof from which I had been rising. I looked up and saw that the demons who had once plagued King Saul were there, having never truly departed from Jerusalem. They may not have been able to do much damage to David himself, but they were certainly having sway over Adonijah even as the demons of Greed and Gluttony had once had on the young man’s older brother.

Two of the angels that had been fighting with Kehreniel’s other demons soared in and engaged Edrael and Neshephiel, but there were none to stand between the evil Throne and myself. “Fall, prince of Heaven!” he shouted as he came toward me. I held my blade up and parried his passing blow, striking his sword away from me. He rose up into the air and came at me again, and for a second time I turned his attack aside.

Finally, the weapon in Kehreniel’s hand sparkled and stretched, becoming a long and sharp-tipped spear. Instead of throwing it at me as his two companions had done, however, he dove in holding the weapon in front of him. Moving as

quickly as I could, I struck the weapon downward with my kherev. Kehreniel, thrown off balance, whirled toward me as I pushed myself upward on my painfully burning wings, and delivered a mighty kick to his body. I saw, as my foot connected with his chest, what I thought was a bright flash of golden light. The force of my blow was so great that both of us went flying off of the roof, and I spread the uninjured wings in order to slow my descent. Hitting the ground would not, of course, have caused any damage, but I did not wish to go spinning downward and leave my enemy unguarded for even a moment.

I had no need for concern on that point, however, for Kehreniel was entirely unconscious due to my blow and whatever strange effect it had caused within him. One of the angels that had driven Edrael or Neshephiel away was nearby, and he pointed back toward Jerusalem and said, “The other priest!”

I looked, my angelic vision spanning the miles in an instant, and saw that while five of Kehreniel’s demons were dueling with the Chalkydri, and three of them had gone after Zadok, two more were left, and these were attacking Abiathar, David’s other priest. I knew that the angel with me was not fast enough to drive them away by himself, and I could see that with my wings in their current state I could not get there in time to prevent them from doing damage. I considered throwing my sword, but it would go little faster than my form.

I thought then about the spears that the demons held, and I knew that there were faster weapons than this placed in the hands of men. As I pondered these things, I held my kherev in front of my face, and I prayed for wisdom.

As my brothers before me have explained to you, the words that I am using to describe the actions and weapons of angels and demons is largely metaphoric in nature. When we speak of spears, and shields, and swords, it must be understood that these are weapons of spirit, designed to influence the actions of those against whom they are used. Often, the actions that the targets are influenced to make are somewhat against their “wills,” and it is for this reason that they are to be considered as weapons. It is a weapon of the spirit in the hands of an angel that slew a hundred and eighty thousand human warriors in one night – this was certainly against their will. It was a weapon of the spirit that drove the demons out of the Heavenly kingdom, for they would not have gone of their own accord. It was a weapon of the spirit that caused the plague that had so recently claimed many lives in Jerusalem, and it was a weapon of the spirit that I held in my hand that night as I watched the demons prepare to violate their agreement and take Abiathar’s mind prisoner despite the promise of IaHWeH’s protection.

I took the blade in my left hand and it burst into flame, hilt and all, stretching upward and growing to more than twice its length. I placed my other hand between the two curved ends and drew backward, feeling a tension that built as I continued to separate my hands. I turned toward the two demons, now sure of

their prey, and I released my right hand's hold on the filament of glory that it held. With a snap I saw a thin shaft of light speeding toward the dark angels, faster than any but El Michael Himself could have moved. It blazed over the head of one of the spirits, who took notice of me for the first time.

As they spread their wings and began to close the distance, I drew back again, and this time my aim was sure. The divine arrow struck the very center of one of the advancing devils. A second followed, and the wicked spirit fell out of the air. A third shaft caught the shoulder of the remaining tempter, who by that time had come close enough that the angel with me flew upward and engaged him. Already wounded, the demon from the House of Fear could do little to defend himself, and he soon he joined his companion in unconsciousness.

As I looked at the weapon in my hand, one of the psalms that King David had written but a short time ago came into my head, and the music that he played with the words filled all my being:

They encourage themselves in an evil matter; they commune of laying snares privily. They say, 'Who shall see them?'

They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search, both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep. But Elohim shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded.

Another, written earlier, also came to me:

My defense is of Elohim, which saveth the upright in heart. Elohim judgeth the righteous, and Elohim is angry with the wicked every day.

If he turn not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; He ordaineth His arrows against the persecutors.

"Prince Jehuel," the angel at my side said to me, "what was that weapon with which you struck this demon?" He indicated Kehreniel lying at my feet.

"It was no weapon," I replied. "I struck at him with my foot, and there was a flash of golden light that I did not anticipate."

"I saw no light, prince of Heaven," the angel said, "but I saw a gleam, as if of polished metal, at your feet when you struck him down. And this one now in your hand? It appears as the bows of the sons of men!"

* * * * *

Kehreniel recovered and, as we had no authority or instructions to drive him off, he again entrenched himself in the House of David. Yet now he was weaker than ever before, having lost some influence when the king raised up the altar at the threshing floor, and now that his summoned helpers had been driven away. When the holy angels nearby saw what I had done in striking down Kehreniel and shooting at his two companions, they quickly realized that the fight going on above them was no fair match, but only an intended distraction. Outraged, they rose up into the air, and two of the five wicked spirits fell immediately. The other three departed as quickly as they could fly, and were not seen again in Israel for many years.

It was with great sorrow that the Host learned that, despite my driving off the fear demons from Abiathar's chamber, and my singing over him once my wings had recovered to remove what little influence the demons had been able to generate, the priest was nonetheless taken prisoner by other, legitimate temptations of lesser spirits than those Kehreniel had summoned. A creature much like Chereshiel from the House of Greed had been able to convince the priest that he would fare better under Adonijah than Solomon, and when Joab approached him with enticements to rebellion against David's choice of a successor, the priest (though somewhat reluctantly) agreed.

Most of David's followers, warriors and sacred laborers including Zadok, Gad and Nathan, remained loyal, but in the day that Adonijah spoke openly of opposing his father's choice of an heir, Joab, and Abiathar, and a great many others, withdrew themselves from the house and went out to where Adonijah had summoned them. He held there a feast, believing that his actions would win the hearts of the people, for he was the firstborn, and that those who wished Solomon to be king would either be easily convinced, or quickly overpowered.

"Shall you not anoint me here, even now, as king of Israel?" Adonijah asked those who had come out with him. "My father shall not rise again from the bed into which he has gone up, and who can tell if the Philistines, or the Amorites, or some other people will come against us and take away our borders?" Kehreniel's voice was in the speech that the prince then began to give, and he fed such force into the human's words that soon all assembled were eager to appoint Adonijah king, that he might protect them from their enemies as soon as possible.

But Nathan, knowing that these things were so, went to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, and said to her, "Have you heard, my lady, that Adonijah the son of Haggith reigns over the people, and our lord David knows nothing of it?"

"How has Adonijah come to reign?" Bathsheba asked, confused. There they were in the house of David, with the throne of Israel occupied by no one, now that David was too old to sit thereupon.

“He has taken away the support of your husband, the king, and with him are Joab the captain of the armies, and Abiathar the priest. If the people are not moved, they will indeed sway all Israel after them, for Adonijah is known as a good man, and strong, to the people of Jerusalem, and your son, whom David has promised the throne, is yet a boy.

“Now therefore come, and let me counsel you that you may save your own life, and the life of your son Solomon, for be under no thought of safety should Adonijah come to be king in the room of David.” Bathsheba, knowing Nathan’s words to be right, listened.

As the prophet had instructed, Bathsheba went in to David’s chamber and saw the king lying there, aged and tired, and being cared for by Abishag, his handmaid. She dutifully bowed before him, and David said to her, “What may I do for you?”

“My lord,” she said, “you swore by Yahweh your Almighty One unto your handmaid that, ‘Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne.’” Bathsheba quoted David’s promise word for word, and she said, “But now, Adonijah reigns over your people, and my lord the king, you know it not. And he has slain oxen and cattle and sheep in great abundance, and called all the princes, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of your host... but Solomon your servant only has he not called.”

David sat up at this news, angered that Joab and Abiathar had departed from faith with him, and distressed that his other sons had thought so little of his judgment as to go along with this action.

Bathsheba continued, “And you, my lord the king, all the eyes of Israel are upon you, for yours is the choice of who shall sit upon the throne after you. Otherwise it will come to pass that after my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted criminals!”

As she said this, and on cue, the prophet Nathan came into the room and bowed before the king. When the attendant announced him David gave him leave to speak, dismissing Bathsheba for the moment. He said, “My lord, O king, have you said, ‘Adonijah shall reign after me, and shall sit upon my throne?’ For he is gone down this day, and slain animals in abundance, and called all the princes of Israel, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest. And how they drink before him at his feast, and say, ‘Elohim save king Adonijah.’ But I, even I your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Beniah the son of Jehoiada whom you have placed over your personal guard, and your servant Solomon... these he has not called.

“Is this thing done by my lord the king? And have you done this and not showed it unto your servant who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?”

“Call unto me Bathsheba,” David said to his attendant, and she returned and stood before him. “As Yahweh lives,” he said to her, “who has saved me from all distress, even as I swore unto you by Yahweh Elohim of Israel, saying, ‘Surely Solomon your son will reign after me, and shall sit upon my throne in my stead,’ so now will I surely do this day!” As Bathsheba bowed before him in relief, he said to his attendant, “Assemble for me Zadok the priest, and this prophet Nathan, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.”

When they had come in, David gave them some very specific instructions.

Benaiah and David’s personal guard called for Solomon, and they set him upon David’s mule, and they surrounded him with drawn weapons and high banners. Then Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet went before him and conducted the entire company down to the waters of Gihon, and there Zadok took a horn of oil brought with him from the Tabernacle. Just as David had been anointed by Samuel so long ago in human reckoning, so now Solomon was anointed as king of Israel, despite all that the demons had done in an attempt to avoid it.

Seeing that this was done, the people came up from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, and – before they even heard of Adonijah’s feast – threw their support behind their newly anointed monarch. There was a great celebration, far greater than Adonijah’s gathering, and the people played instruments, and shouted for joy, and animals were brought by the people to match those David had sent from the royal flocks and herds, and all Jerusalem was filled with the sound of their festivities.

Those who were more conscientious came up to Nathan and asked, “What of David the king, has he gone, then, to sleep with his fathers?” The prophet assured them that David was yet alive, but had decided that very day that Solomon should sit on the throne and come in and go out before the people, as he could no longer do.

Naturally, the sounds being made by the crowd were carried on the winds of Israel, and soon those who were gathered with Adonijah heard it. At the sound of the trumpets’ blasts, Joab said, “Why is this noise of an uproar in the city?”

As he spoke, the son of Abiathar came up to the company, and said, “Our lord King David has made Solomon king! The king sent with him Zadok, and Nathan, and Benaiah, and the Cherethites and Pelethites of David’s royal guard, and they had him ride on the king’s mule. And the priest and the prophet anointed him king in Gihon, and they have come up again to Jerusalem rejoicing, and this is that which you now hear.

“Solomon now sits on the throne of the kingdom, and those who know King David have come forth to bless him, and I heard some saying, ‘May Elohim make the name of Solomon better than your name, and his throne greater than your throne,’ and the king was pleased by these words, saying, ‘May it even be as you have spoken.’”

At this, the sounds of joy at Adonijah’s feast were turned to silence, and then to fear. Without warning some fled away, back to their homes, and hoped that none would know of their presence with David’s firstborn. Others went more slowly, not wishing to appear fearful, but nevertheless they went. Joab and the captains of the host were among these.

As for Adonijah, he knew that his words of rebellion were known to Solomon and, fearing for his safety, he went to the housing of the Ark of the Covenant and caught hold of the horns of the altar before it, a sign of pleading for mercy. An attendant of the Ark went to Solomon and told him what Adonijah had done, and Solomon said, “If he will show himself to be a worthy man, he will not die, and not a hair of him will fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, and any further rebellion, he will surely die.”

The new king of Israel sent a messenger back with the temple attendant to tell his brother these words, and when he heard it Adonijah rose up, went to Solomon, and bowed himself before him. “Go to your house, brother,” the king said. “I seek not your life.”

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 14: THE GREATEST WARRIOR

David lay in his bed, and Asheriel stood over him. The king of Israel, for so he was and will always be considered by Heaven, knew that his time was short. Above him, and all his house, Kehreniel held his cracked shadows together as best he could, and forced unpleasant, gloomy, and fearsome thoughts into the mind of the king his every waking moment. By Asheriel's actions, and the instructions of Elohim, his dreams were, for the most part, peaceful, but his daylight hours were the more fearsome for it.

The demon from the House of Fear knew that his hold on the king was tenuous at best, for the Spirit of Elohim with which he had been anointed so long ago was there with him. It had been dampened during his adultery, and all but extinguished when David had ordered Uriah slain, but he had experienced a true conversion from his path of sin when Nathan the prophet rebuked him, and the fires of hope and life burned brightly within him.

Unfortunately, from David's point of view, the ill man could not feel this. With his own past brought fully into view, many incidents passed before him (Kehreniel saw to this) including not only the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba, but also fleeing from Absalom, the madness he feigned before the Philistine king during the time he was an outlaw, and his more recent numbering of Israel for an improper purpose. These scenes the fear demon played out time and again, but his favorite "button to push," as it is said, was not for anything that David had actually done.

"Remember, O King," the wicked Throne whispered, "the rejection you received, when seeking to construct the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Remember the desire you felt toward the Almighty, yet He said to you, 'A man of blood shall not build my Temple.' If a man of blood cannot build His Temple, shall a man of blood be received into His Kingdom?"

"Away from me!" David would cry out at such thoughts, for it was he who had written with confidence:

*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness;
I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.*

Yet the demon that stood above him, in defiance of his holy guardian, was telling him on the one hand that he would not awaken at all, “for who can see beyond the grave?” and on the other that he was rejected by the Almighty, and would awaken to rejection (further rejection) and not love and acceptance.

In the days when David cried out against these vile thoughts, Kehreniel’s fellow demons would counsel him, saying, “You push too hard. Can you not see that his faith will hold firm?”

The vengeful Throne would retort, “I will not so easily lose this soul!”

The time drew near when David would die, and all who stood guard over Israel knew it. The king himself felt that his final hours were upon him, and Asheriel was determined that they would be peaceful, if not pleasant, ones. As the loyal Virtue prepared for the final watch of his ministry to David, I heard the whisper of Israfael, the Chief of the Order of Seraphim, my superior in the structure of Heaven, and my fellow Prince of the sacred Twelve that had been Sealed.

“Jehuel,” he said to me in his gentle, musical voice, “Asheriel, like his charge, has stood firm against many dangers, and the time of his release from this work draws near.”

“Asheriel wishes he were not to be released so soon,” I replied, thinking of how much the Virtue cared for the human committed to his care.

“Even so, David is being called to rest with his fathers, and it is known that he will be called forth to life when the power of death is broken.”

“This is cause for greatest rejoicing,” I said, pleased that David’s victory had been complete, although like many who awaken to the face of Elohim he may be surprised because of his thoughts near the very last. “Kehreniel’s work has failed again, and I am relieved and joyful to know this.”

Israfael said, “Like the Ark that weathered the flood, David cannot withstand the storms without our help. Kehreniel believes that he has won, but he will not allow anything to stand between him and his intended prey until the hour of death has come and gone. Indeed, there is wisdom in his caution, for that extra push he thinks to give at the end would indeed have broken the king’s trust, but for the help that you will offer him.”

“I will offer him?” I asked, surprised.

The mightiest of the Seraphim appeared before me, and then he turned and looked downward, his six fiery wings shifting with his posture. “Kehreniel, for his actions against the priests of Israel, is but a step away from being bound until the judgment of the world. He shall not be placed under this binding, but

he will never again be given leave to tempt mankind without the sternest of opposition. The cup of IaHWeH's patience with him has been filled, and he is to be driven off even before David passes from this world, as a sign of his defeat before the Host of Heaven and his dark masters."

"And I am needed to do this?" I asked again, still not sure why Asheriel was not sufficient to the task. If Kehreniel was to be driven away from David, I was sure that his guardian would be ready, willing and able to act upon these instructions from Heaven.

"The demon of the House of Fear has been whispering," Israfel said. "Though he acts outside the authority, such as it is, of Lucifer and the other Ba'alim, he is not without powerful friends, and those who would risk the displeasure of both angels and demons for an opportunity to strike out at David once more."

"What demons would dare?" I asked, but then suspicion dawned in my mind. "The agents of the Houses!"

"Even so," Israfel confirmed. "Kehreniel, though he is the most prideful and stubborn, is not unique in his desire to be avenged for the king's defeat of Satan's Houses. He has convinced many of the other eight agents to return to Israel, to drive off David's guardian, and to attack the soul of the ailing king one final time."

"This is nonsensical!" I shouted. "They will gain nothing, and perhaps lose all, by this desperate act, for may we not simply tell them that David is lost to them, and won by IaHWeH of Hosts?"

"They are not going to be inclined to hear you, or any of us," said Heaven's chief singer. "The darkness of rebellion has filled them, and the sins of the generations have stopped their ears. It is by the blade, and by the arrow, that they will learn."

I glanced at the Seraph as he said this. Since the night I had discovered the "bow," a significant number of angels had stepped forward to learn this new skill, and as they came to me for instruction they became known as Jehuel's Archers. We had discovered by analyzing their first use in battle, that these new manifestations of our kherevs cast forth arrows that were weaker, but much faster and longer-ranged, than our swords, even when they were thrown.

"You will take your archers," Israfel said, "and give aid to Asheriel in this last struggle. Kehreniel has with him five others: Negaiel of Wrath, Kishael of Pride, Chathiel and Chartsubbael of Envy's Houses, and Oliel of Gluttony. Petahel, of course, would not stoop to trying again, and the others are convinced that Kehreniel is wasting his time. Saul's two tempters, who helped Kehreniel

the night of the attack upon the priests are also with him, therefore watch, and be careful.”

“I will go gladly,” I said, and sent a whisper to four of those who had learned the use of the bow.

I descended and approached the House of David, where Kehreniel’s dark roots, like a tree of shadows, stood over the walls, and over the people. I approached the demon and said, “The thing that you do is known to Heaven. You have called to your aid the spirits that once fought against the king of Israel, and were defeated by him, and the defense has been set. I tell you truly, David’s victory is assured, and your desire for revenge has brought you low indeed. Let us rest from battle for a season; withdraw to your dark masters, and led the king pass on to his fathers in peace.”

Kehreniel, tired of defending his decision to stay from even those of his own kind, said nothing to me, but glared at me with hatred. “Very well, then,” I said, as I sensed Asheriel drawing near from within the house.

“What news have you brought from Heaven?” David’s guardian asked.

“A final struggle for David,” I replied. “Elohim has sent you help, however.” As I spoke, my four archers descended, and with them a number of other angels with drawn blades. I turned to Kehreniel and said, “We are here to drive you away, demon of fear. If your allies are truly on your part, now would be the time for you to send for them.”

I had no necessity to wait for Kehreniel’s reinforcements, or even to warn him to withdraw, but I did not lose anything by these actions, and I wished to give him, even then, a witness of the difference between us. The demon needed little warning, however. Soon seven more spirits (the five house agents and the two tempters that had been attached to Saul) streaked in, and prepared to make for themselves a final “stand” for the king of Israel’s soul.

In all great tales, there is inevitably a climactic battle at the end, great tension, great victory, and great emotion. For the angels of IaHWeH, many of our events are like that, and there is no lack of sensation that comes with the victories over the forces of Satan as they attempt to break the earth apart piece by piece. Yet histories, genuine histories, don’t always work that way. The driving off of Kehreniel was no grandiose event; the attack upon the priests some time before was by far the more “interesting” conflict, yet that, like the incidents that led up to it, served to weaken the hold that the demon from the House of Fear had on the dying king of Israel, and without the previous encounters the struggle that took place that day may well have been more difficult.

As the wicked spirits flew in to the aid of their summoner, the archers that had descended with me loosed their arrows. Oriel fell immediately, struck by three arrows. The demons had obviously been surprised by the attack, having not been as diligent to study my previous actions as Heaven had been. The others spun away, with only one more arrow finding its mark in the demon from the House of Wrath.

More arrows flew, and another demon fell. At that point the others were upon us, and so our weapons became swords once again, and we soared forward to confront them. The Chalkydri, ever diligent, appeared before us, all twelve of them in their fiery glory, but when they saw how poorly these enemies of righteousness were faring they merely stood in observance as we finished them off.

My blade cut down Chathiel, and my fellow angels dispatched the other agents. Asheriel, wishing to be involved – as I imagined he would be – sped back toward the house now that he knew Kehreniel’s right of persistence had been removed.

“Depart from my charge!” the Virtue bellowed at the stubborn demon.

“If I have defied my own superiors to remain here,” Kehreniel said, strengthening his hold as much as he could, “I will assuredly not heed the commands of a guardian, nor of the King of Heaven!”

“For your defiance,” Asheriel said, “you will surely be cast into the flames of destruction on the day that this world is remade new.”

“Maybe so,” Kehreniel replied, “but today is not that day.” As Asheriel’s blade flared to life upon clearing the sheath, and as he drew near to strike at the agent of fear, the evil Throne said, “There are two whom your companions have forgotten!”

As he said this, as if they had been waiting for this moment, Edrael and Neshephiel, the long-time enemies of Israel, the tempters of Saul, and they who defied the armies of IaHWeH Elohim leapt forward with ready weapons, and moved in to attack the Virtue.

Asheriel swung aside to dodge their initial charge, but he would not have been successful at this had I not seen his danger and readied my bow. In rapid succession I sent arrows of light speeding toward the tangle of fighting spirits, and I noted that one of my other archers had done the same. Two of our projectiles struck Edrael, and he cried out as stolen fire sparkled from his wounds. The arrows vanished an instant later, but the injuries he had sustained sent him spinning to the earth, his essence temporarily subdued.

David's guardian lost no time in taking advantage of the situation, and he charged at Neshephiel with all the fury of Heaven. Neshephiel was a Cherub, and a reasonably powerful one at that, yet while Asheriel was a Virtue, and therefore of an ostensibly "lower" Order, he was the rightful guardian of King David, and under the full authority of Heaven in his attack on the invader.

Around and around the house they went, one charging the other and the other responding in kind. They exchanged several minor injuries, and while I saw during their struggle several opportunities in which I could have sent an arrow in to aid my friend, I felt certain that this was his place. For years Asheriel had stood silently by as Kehreniel had assaulted his charge. He felt the pain every holy angel knows at seeing a human being abused by those who are far older and more knowledgeable. This was an opportunity for him to visit a small measure of judgment upon two enemies of human souls.

The Cherub resisted Asheriel for a very long time, but the weight of the wounds that he had received appeared to sap his strength more than they did the Virtue. Eventually, seeing that his efforts were getting nowhere, Neshephiel arched back into the air as two more pairs of wings flashed out from his back. Before Asheriel could throw his sword, or react in any other way, the demon – now bearing six wings – had sped upward so quickly that even to angelic eyes it appeared as though he had simply vanished.

Without even so much as a pause, Asheriel turned to Kehreniel and said, "You have no defenders left." He then swooped in and began to cut away the roots of the fear demon's influence. Thus far I have spoken of the roots that Kehreniel had set down in the house of David as merely a shadow of his presence, or something that he had caused. The truth of the matter is that these roots were a part of the essence of the demon himself in a way that has no true analog in the material world.

When Asheriel began to strike at the tendrils of the wicked angel's power, Kehreniel shook with fear and rage, and withdrew them, becoming fully "himself" again, and standing in dark majesty before David's guardian.

"I will not fight you today," he said to the Virtue. This would not have been a wise choice, considering the fire in the guardian's eyes, my archers and myself standing just beyond him with glowing bows ready, and the twelve Chalkydri lighting up the sky for all with spiritual vision just beyond us. "Yet this will not be the last time our paths cross in Israel!" Kehreniel did not leave as quickly as Neshephiel had, for he wished to give off an impression of control, but no witness to those events that day could fail to realize the truth of the matter: the demon of the House of Fear had been defeated once again. He was also quite wrong in his last statement to Asheriel, for although he was neither reserved for judgment by Heaven nor stripped of his rank by Satan's forces, he was nevertheless forbidden by both sides of the conflict from ever entering the

borders of the chosen people again. The twelve blazing Seraphim would make certain of this, even should he think once more to disobey his instructions.

* * * * *

David awoke the next morning from a dreamless sleep, but something was different that day. It was not his health, for if anything he knew that this was the day when he would pass from the world – that had not improved. It was not the weather, for David had not seen the outside of his room for some time, and had been too week for many days to even go over to the window. It was something subtler, more internal. The king bowed his head as best he could and thanked the Almighty for granting him another day, and when he arose there were tears in his eyes, for he knew what the difference was.

David felt clean. On some fundamental level that he had not understood until just that moment, the champion who had stood up to Goliath, and who had faithfully defended his people against the attacks of the heathen nations for many years felt more at peace than he ever had before, since before he fell sick, since before his repentance of the sin with Uriah the Hittite and his wife, even before he had moved the Ark to Jerusalem. Suddenly, he felt himself the shepherd boy again, playing songs of praise upon his harp, and trusting in the Almighty to deliver him from the mouth of the lion and the paw of the bear. Heaven's victory, the angels' victory, had become his.

No, there was no dramatic "breaking point" when David knew that his faith was accepted, and that his constant resistance to the feelings of fear, and doubt, and despair had prevailed. It was a gentle realization, the reward of his diligent efforts, and that he never once entertained the notion that Kehreniel was trying desperately to inspire within him: that he was forsaken by IaHWeH, unchanged in heart from the days of his transgressions, and that he was beyond hope.

Calling for Abishag his maiden, David dictated to her a psalm that suddenly sprang to his mind. This one never made it into the histories that you have with you, but it was worthy of a place in the record books of Heaven. Then, knowing his duty all too well, David called for his boy, the new king of Israel. He had some things that he needed to say to the young man.

When Solomon arrived, David laid his hand upon his head and blessed him in the name of the Holy One of Israel. Solomon looked at his father, knowing the awful truth that he was going the way of all flesh. "I go now to my fathers," King David said, confirming his son's thoughts. "Be strong, therefore, and show yourself to be a man. Keep the instructions of Yahweh, your Almighty. Walk in His ways, and keep His statutes and commandments, and judgments, and testimonies as they are written in the Law of Moses. By these you will prosper in all that you do, and to whatsoever you turn yourself. Do this so that Yahweh will continue in that which He spoke concerning me. Yahweh said to me, 'If

your children take heed to their way, and walk before me in truth wholeheartedly, there shall not fail to be a man among them upon the throne of Israel.’

“But know, son, what you ought to do to preserve peace within the kingdom of Israel. Hear now what I have to say to you.” David then proceeded to speak words that only Solomon heard, and that would not be known until later, when the latter wrote his own history of Israel. Shortly after he spoke to his son Solomon, David closed his eyes, and the shepherd boy of Israel slept on, drifting away to awaken no more until the blast of the trumpet, and the voice of the Archangel shall call him forth from his place of rest.

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

CHAPTER 15: RESTORING THE PEACE

The angels were little more than observers during the earliest part of King Solomon's reign. The demons believed that they had already made inroads into David's legacy – a belief that later events would confirm to some extent – and they were content to let Solomon have a period of peace before they came at him with a storm as they had his embattled father. The new ruler of Israel used this time wisely, and one of the first things he wished to do was to deal with the two men whom his father David had told him about.

These were two individuals of whom his ailing father had said, "As long as they live, Israel shall not know peace, my son. In years past, Israel was greatly troubled with a famine because of the injustice of King Saul; he had greatly wronged a people who dwelt in peace within our borders. These people, the Gibeonites, cried out for judgment, and judgment was denied them, for there was wickedness in Israel.

"I called them unto me and said, 'What will I do for you, that the smile of Yahweh may again rest upon Israel?' And they said, 'We desire no gold, nor silver, from your house, or the house of Saul, but blood for blood, for they have made us desolate, and would have cut us off from the earth had not providence intervened, and we bless Yahweh for preserving his servants, even those who are not of the line of your father Abraham. And now, O king, we desire that seven of those who remain of the house of Saul be delivered unto us, and we will shed their blood as it is written in the law, and hang them as a testimony before Yahweh in Gibeah from where Saul ruled.'

"My son, hear my words, for it is written in the Law that blood shall be for blood; and though it is not best for the sons to die for the father's sins – I think here of Jonathan, my fast friend, of whom I have told you much – I consented unto their request. Thus deals Yahweh with us in this time of great trouble, for I myself am a man of blood, as I have rightly been judged..." David caught himself wandering here, and returned to his instruction.

"Now therefore, my son, know that the famine in Israel was stayed after the sons of Saul were delivered, therefore I know that Yahweh will bless Israel when the two men of whom I tell you shall be cut off from among the living."

Before he could act on these instructions after the death of his father, however, another matter arose that demanded his immediate attention. Adonijah, the one who had thought to place himself on the throne of David, began to think within himself, "Shall I not greatly gain influence over Solomon if I establish myself in the palace? And shall I not take the hearts of the people, even as Absalom sought to do? Only I shall succeed where he has failed, for my brother Solomon has not the resourcefulness, nor the skill, to evade me should I rise up against him."

Adonijah took his thoughts to Joab and Abiathar, and spoke with them concerning his plans, saying, "I may yet be established over Israel, if we are wise to do all that I think to do this day." Joab was eager to participate, for his last memories of his cousin David were not pleasant ones, and he cherished much anger in his heart for the way that Adonijah's first attempt to take the throne had gone. The priest Abiathar, however, was not so willing.

"I can have nothing further to do with this matter," he said to Joab and Adonijah. "Solomon is king of Israel, anointed by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet of Yahweh. Let me in peace to minister in unto the Ark, and come no more before me to speak of these things."

Joab's hand went down to his sword, but Adonijah, knowing what the warrior was thinking, took him by the hand and led him away from the priest.

"My lord Adonijah," Joab said, "he is not a safe one to leave alive, knowing as he does our counsels."

"I know your mind concerning him," the younger man said, "but let him in peace. He will not speak a word against us, for it is known that he was with us from the first. And after I am established over Israel, shall Zadok consent to serve us? It is better that we leave him alive, that he may minister unto us for Yahweh when I am king." Joab accepted the words of Adonijah, and the two departed. As they were going, however, a thought struck the warrior of Israel.

"If you wish to turn the hearts of the people away from Solomon, as your brother Absalom did, it would be well for you to start more subtly than he did. Absalom stood in the gates of Jerusalem and heard the troubles of Israel, and to every man he said, 'I am on your part.' Such a thing will not go unnoticed again, but if you would be close to the throne, you must do as Absalom also did, and lay with your father's concubines in the sight of Israel."

"My father David put away those women that Absalom lay with, knowing that they were defiled, and that if he took them again he would be exposing his son's nakedness in the sight of Israel. Were I to do so, it would indeed speak unto Israel of my taking my father's place, but they are shut away under guard, and I

know that Solomon, who knows of these things, will not consent for me to be among them.”

“There is one who ministered unto your father,” Joab replied, “who was brought to the palace but recently, after your brother’s rebellion was ended.”

“Of course,” Adonijah said, “Abishag the Shunnamite!” This young woman had been brought to the king, judged the fairest woman in all of Israel, to give the ailing man comfort in his infirmity. It was known to the family of David that though Abishag was considered a concubine, the king had not lain with her in intimacy, and she was yet a virgin.

“Better, Joab, the woman is yet a maiden. I will ask for her as a wife, and thus establish myself in the house of David. But I must ask it subtly, lest my brother think anything amiss in my request.”

Instead of going, therefore, to Solomon, Adonijah went to his father’s wife, Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. As they spoke, he said to her, “I have a matter to discuss with you.”

“Speak it,” she replied.

“You know that the kingdom was mine by birth, for I am the oldest of my father David’s remaining sons, and that all Israel set their faces on me, expecting that I should reign in my father’s place. Howbeit now the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother’s, for Yahweh gave it instead unto him.

“And now,” he said, “considering all these things, I have but one request to ask, and I pray you deny me not, for I will not oppose my brother’s rule over Israel.”

“Say on,” Bathsheba said, hoping that Adonijah’s words were sincere. She remembered all too well Absalom’s attempts to take the throne, and if granting a request to this potential usurper would secure his peace, she was eager to hear what it was that he desired.

“Speak, I pray, unto Solomon the king, for he will not deny you anything you ask of him, and ask that he give me Abishag the Shunammite as a wife.”

“You favor this girl?” Bathsheba asked.

“How could a man of Israel not?” Adonijah said, with no need for pretense. “She is the most beautiful in all the land, and worthy of...” here he almost said, “a king of Israel,” but stopped himself and added instead, “a prince of this mighty kingdom of Yahweh’s people.”

“As these are your thoughts,” Bathsheba said, “I will speak on your behalf to the king.”

Solomon, upon hearing his mother’s “small petition,” as she termed it, was immediately suspicious of his brother’s motives. With divine insight, and with the memories of his brother’s recent actions still fresh in his mind, Solomon asked her, “What, in detail, did he say to you? Let none of his words fall to the ground, but tell me all.”

His mother repeated Adonijah’s request as best she could remember, and immediately Solomon knew that his thoughts were confirmed. “So,” he said, “he believes that the kingdom ought to be his ‘by right.’ Does not my brother know that the Kingdom of Israel was first given unto the house of Saul? And that if it were by right, without Yahweh’s working, or that the house of Saul had any place to speak of such things, I might well make my father’s friend Mephibosheth king over the people of Yahweh?”

“And why have you asked for Abishag the Shunnamite on behalf of my brother Adonijah? Do you not know what intent he has in this act? Ask for him the kingdom also, for he is my older brother, and let him have it, along with Abiathar the priest and Joab the son of Zeruiah.”

Bathsheba said nothing, beginning to understand the wisdom of her son’s words. “As Yahweh lives,” Solomon declared, “Elohim do so to me and more, if Adonijah has not spoken these things against his own life. I have said to him that if rebellion were found in him again, his life would be forfeit, and now, do not imagine that any such thing but this is now within him. As Yahweh lives, who has established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who has made me an house in Israel as He has promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this very day!”

The king called for Benaiah, the captain of his armies, (although Joab was still “officially” the captain of Israel’s hosts) and said to him, “Rebellion rises again in the heart of the prince Adonijah. By the command of your king, fall upon him, that he die, and that Israel may have peace.” Without question, the soldier went forth to perform this act. To his mother, Solomon said, “See that you mourn not for the son of your husband David, for he is my brother, and see that I also sorrow for him. But what shall I say to the people of Israel, if I do not cut off at the roots this rebellion, and thus lose the lives of many Israelites in the conflicts that will surely arise?” In this, as Solomon’s Guardian, the Dominion Zadikiel, (Righteous One of El) reported to me, the new king of Israel showed greater wisdom than his father.

Later that very day, after word came to him that Benaiah had done as he was instructed, Solomon called Abiathar the priest. The Levite, now aged and given to illness, appeared before the king, expecting to have done to him what he

already knew had been done to Adonijah. When Solomon began to speak, he thought with assurance that his life also was forfeit.

“You are worthy of death,” Solomon said, “yet because you bore the Ark of Yahweh faithfully, and was with my father in his time of trouble, and for the destruction of your entire immediate family, and for your many afflictions, your life shall not be taken from you at this time. But go over unto Anathoth, to your own fields, and those of your remaining relatives.” Gratefully, Abiathar left the office of the priesthood to another, and did not return to Jerusalem thereafter.

“And now,” Solomon said to Zadok, and to Nathan, and to Benaiah, “my father David has given me instructions concerning two men, that Israel may be at peace. For the first, go forth, Benaiah, and fall upon Joab, for one came to me after the death of Adonijah, and the exile of the priest Abiathar, and said to me, ‘Joab has fled to the tabernacle of Yahweh, and he is by the altar of mercy.’ But my father, when he was yet living, said that I must not allow him to grow old in Israel, lest in his idleness he devise some worse thing for the people of Yahweh. For his many crimes, and for much shedding of innocent blood, the altar of mercy shall grant him no protection.”

Benaiah faithfully went forth. If he had felt any hesitation about falling upon Adonijah, because he did not know the prince that well, and because he was indeed a prince of Israel, he had no such qualms about this present task. He knew Joab to be a dangerous and violent man, and he had grown more volatile in his later years. Benaiah came to the tabernacle of Yahweh and called out, saying, “The king of Israel commands you to come forth!”

“Not so,” Joab replied, “for if the king desires my death, let me die here at the altar!”

“Will you die, then, grasping an altar, and not your sword?” Benaiah asked, wishing to grant a hero of Israel a final consideration, though he was confident of his own victory.

“I stand where I am,” came the reply.

Benaiah went his way to the king, for he did not wish to shed blood upon the very ground of the tabernacle, and before the altar of IaHWeH. He quickly returned, however, and said, “The king has said to me, ‘Do as Joab has said,’ and that your guilt will be on your own head for all that you have done, and so peace will be brought to Israel.”

“Do as the king of Israel commands,” Joab said, with a sneer. And so Benaiah struck him there, before the altar, and so Joab died. Thus Benaiah was now officially placed at the head of Israel’s forces, and Zadok became the high priest in the room of Abiathar.

There was one final matter to deal with before the instructions given by David to his son were complete. The king summoned before him Shimei, the man from the house of Saul that had mocked the king of Israel when he fled from his son Absalom, and that had pled for mercy when David had once again been established in Jerusalem. Of this one the dying king had said to Solomon, "He has cursed me with a grievous curse in the day that I went to Mahanaim, but I swore by Yahweh that I would not put him to death with the sword. Yet I know that he has influence with the Tribe of Benjamin, and holds hatred toward the house of David. He will be a troubler of Israel all his days, therefore deal with him according to your wisdom, but let not his gray head go down to the grave without blood."

Solomon had no desire to take the life of this individual, whom he did not know, but if his father's words were true, that he would ever be a trouble of Israel, there was a simple way to settle the matter. To the trembling Benjaminite, Solomon said, "Build a house here in Jerusalem, and dwell therein. Go not forth again in Israel, either to Benjamin your Tribe, or to any other people, but that dwell here in the king's presence."

Relieved, Shimei said, "The saying is good. As my lord the king has said, so will your servant do." And so he built his house, and remained there many days.

It was not three years hence, however, when two of Shimei's servants, ill-treated due to the poor character of their master, escaped and fled into Gath, the land of the Philistines. In fury, Shimei set out from Jerusalem, and left not only the city, but also the country, in an effort to retrieve his workers. Finding them there, he brought them back to his house with much violence, but the thing was known in Jerusalem.

When Solomon heard it, he called Shimei before him again, and said, "Did I not make you swear by Yahweh, and declared unto you, saying, 'Know for certain, that on the day you go out and walk abroad anywhere, you shall surely die?' And did you not say unto me, 'The word that I have heard is good?' Why, then, have you not kept the oath of Yahweh, and the commandment that I charged you with?"

Shimei began to protest concerning his servants, but Solomon said, "A vow made unto Yahweh, and an agreement unto Elohim, is not so changeable as this, as you must know, or will know shortly. As your faith, so you know all the wickedness that is within your heart, which you have done unto David my father, and since his day. Therefore Yahweh shall return your wickedness upon your own head. And I shall be blessed for carrying out His instructions, and the throne of David will be established forever." With that, the king instructed Benaiah, "Take him out and fall upon him."

In the matter of Shimei, that Solomon did not slay him immediately, but gave him a space to see what he would do, Zadikiel said to me again, "He has shown greater wisdom than his father.

And so the early days of Solomon's rule were peaceful ones, as befits his name, "Man of Peace," and the angels ministered unto him, and Yahweh gave him great wisdom, and as it is written, "the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon."

THE ROYAL CONFLICT

EPILOGUE: ON THE SEASHORE

Thus I stand on the seashore, watching the waves of the waters, and the light reflecting off of them in patterns like music, and hear the breeze, and allow myself to feel the air flowing through my wings. And whenever I look out over waters such as this I think of prince Moses, how he parted the waters for Israel to depart from Egypt, and I remember the pillars that King Solomon established on either side of that crossing to commemorate the passing of his people from slavery into freedom. And then I remember Solomon himself, and his father David, and his predecessor Saul... and then I remember my old friend Samuel, who never saw my form, but often felt my presence, and the presence of IaHWeH in which I ministered unto him.

As I said in the beginning, this was not Samuel's story, but he had a great part in it, and thus my own attention became involved. By Heaven's grace, I was not recalled to any other work but Israel after Solomon became king, and thus I remained with the Chalkydri as a defender of the borders of the chosen people. For all the wonders that the twelve burning Seraphim did to protect the country, the days that followed upon Solomon's reign were not easy ones for either the humans or the angels of the Most High.

While that is a record for the one who will come after me to tell, it should be known that the demons looked upon Solomon with hatred all the days of his life. They hated him for the promises that were his by his father David, and by the promises that were his by his own prayers, for Solomon asked very early on in his reign for divine wisdom above that of other men, that he might know how to stand before the people of Israel and do well, better than Saul and even David his father had done. To a great extent, the blessings that IaHWeH gave unto him as a result of this prayer were utilized, and Israel became a great nation. Solomon's life was nevertheless a troubled one, and in the aftermath of his rule the inheritance of Jacob suffered a split into the northern and southern territories from which it never truly recovered.

In those days I worked intensely with Zadikiel, Solomon's guardian, and with the twelve guardian spirits of Israel, and with my archers, and with the other divine warriors sent down to help establish the name of IaHWeH upon the earth, and the extent of the things that the angels did in Israel will not fully be known

until the history of all the earth is seen in review, and through the lens of the Sacrifice that was to come a thousand years after the reign of King David.

But it is here that my record ends, with words of love, and words of caution. With each testimony my brethren and I bring forth, we reveal more light. We thereby also make you, who read these words, more accountable, and more responsible for that which you know. With prayer, and with thanksgiving, seek what wisdom you can find from the history of David, and how he lived his life, and how he stood before the giant Goliath. Learn from him when he resisted the attacks of the demons of all nine Houses in a way never before seen upon the earth. Learn with tears what has been done to the name of IaHWeH for the king of Israel's great act of transgression in that he committed adultery and murder, and see that no such thing be done among those who claim to follow the ways of the Creator and the Redeemer in this final generation.

Finally, learn that forgiveness is at the right hand of Elohim, and that He will set again upon the path of righteousness those who receive His grace and seek after Him, for He has promised that they shall find Him. But there are consequences for every act of iniquity and of love, however large or however small; and for a witness unto the world, take the lessons of Saul and David to heart.

And be comforted, I pray, in this, that though mount Zion means "Scorched earth," and though it still burns in the spirit from the things witnessed there, and the things done upon it... and though it will burn once more when the foot of Messiah stands upon it in the latter days, it will not always be so, and a new name will be given to it in the day that all things are made new.

As it is written in the words of David's songs, forever cherished by the Seraphim in glory:

*Because of thy Temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee.
Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto
Elohim.*

*Sing unto Elohim, ye kingdoms of the earth; O, sing praises unto Adonai.
To Him that rideth upon the Heavens of Heavens of old; lo, He doth send out
His voice, and that a mighty voice.*

*Ascribe ye strength unto Elohim; His excellency is over Israel, and His strength
is in the clouds.*

*O Elohim, thou art terrible out of thy holy places. The Elohim of Israel is He
that giveth strength and power unto His people.*

Baruk Elohim!