

dwell[®]



Dear Family,

I'm really looking forward to getting to know the members of our group this year—including your child. During the first six weeks we're going to be exploring stories about David—giant-killer, warrior, king. We're going to find out why God called David “a man after his own heart.”

I challenge you to take time to marvel at these stories with your child at home too—to wonder what they mean for your lives, to live into them together. Your set of God's Big Story cards will help you do that.

Here is a glance at the upcoming sessions with suggested questions to talk about as a family each week:

Date: _____ David and Goliath 

What do you suppose gave David, a boy, the courage to face a giant? What giants do we need to face?

Date: _____ David and Jonathan 

What's the deepest friendship you have ever experienced? What's involved in being a really good friend?

Date: _____ David and Saul 

Put yourself in David's shoes. What might he have been thinking as he approached Saul in the cave?

Date: _____ David and Mephibosheth 

Why was Mephibosheth hidden from David? How might he have been surprised about the way he was treated in the palace?

Date: _____ David and Bathsheba 

Think of a time when you did wrong and then tried to cover up what you did. How did that feel?

Date: _____ David and Absalom 

Where do you see God in this story?

Our Memory Challenge for this unit is Psalm 51:10-12, words David wrote after repenting of his sin with Bathsheba. You can download a Scripture song version of this Memory Challenge, “Create in Me a Clean Heart,” at www.DwellCurriculum.org. Or consider purchasing a copy of the DwellSongs CD, Year 2, at www.faihaliveresources.org. You may also want to listen to our other unit song “You Never Let Go,” (also available on the CD or for download), based on another psalm of David.

I look forward to continuing this exciting faith journey with your child!

Sincerely,

Memory Challenge

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
—Psalm 51: 10-12, NIV

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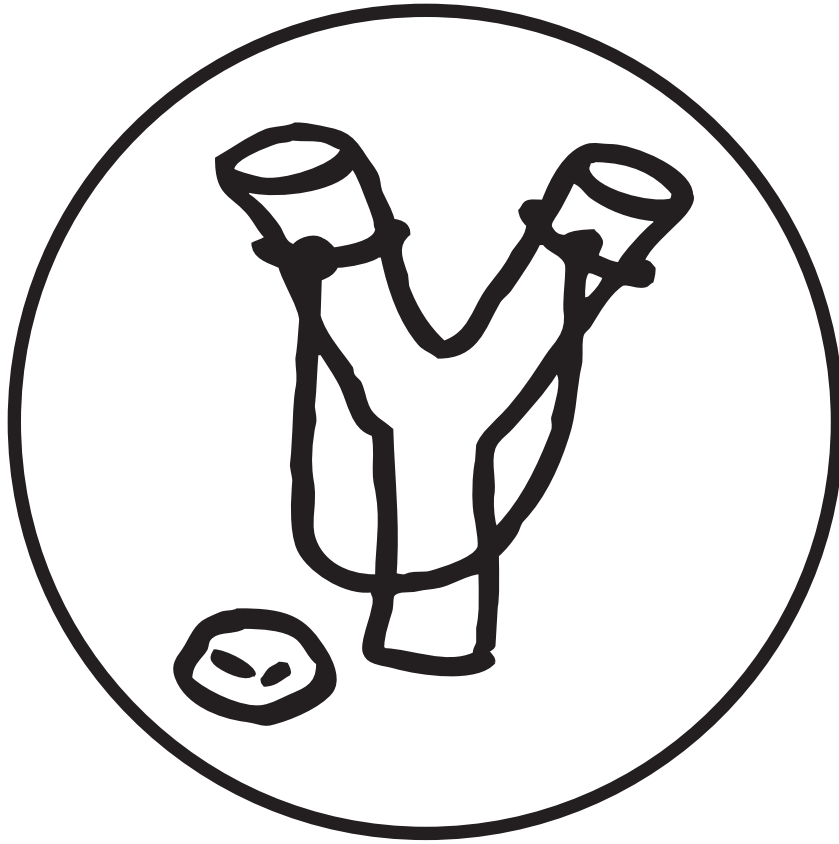
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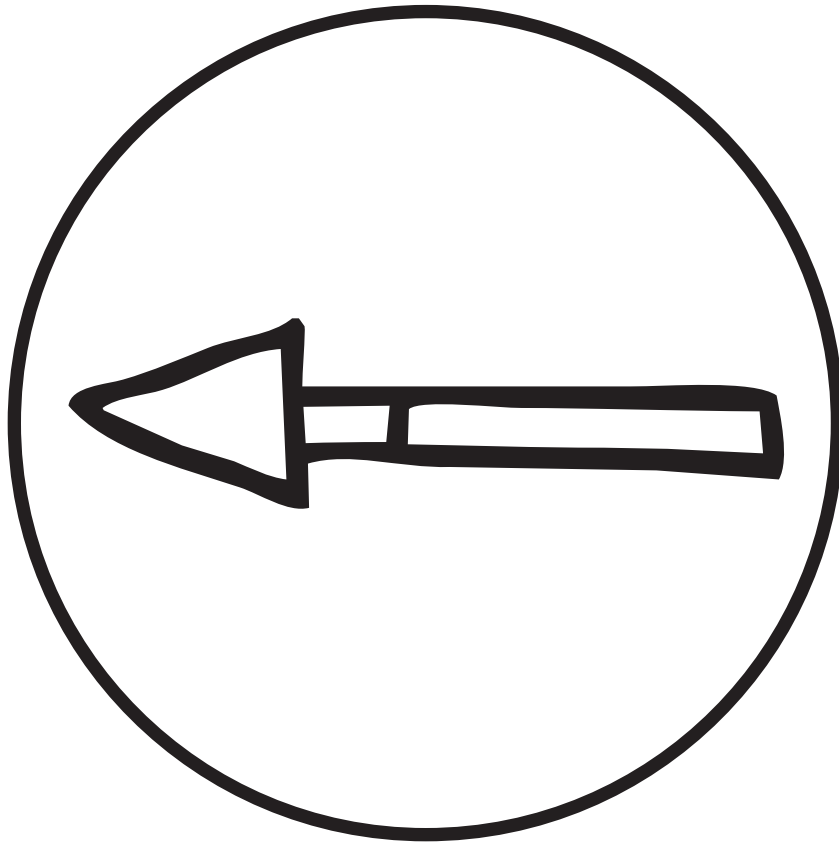
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Year 2, Unit 1, Session 1



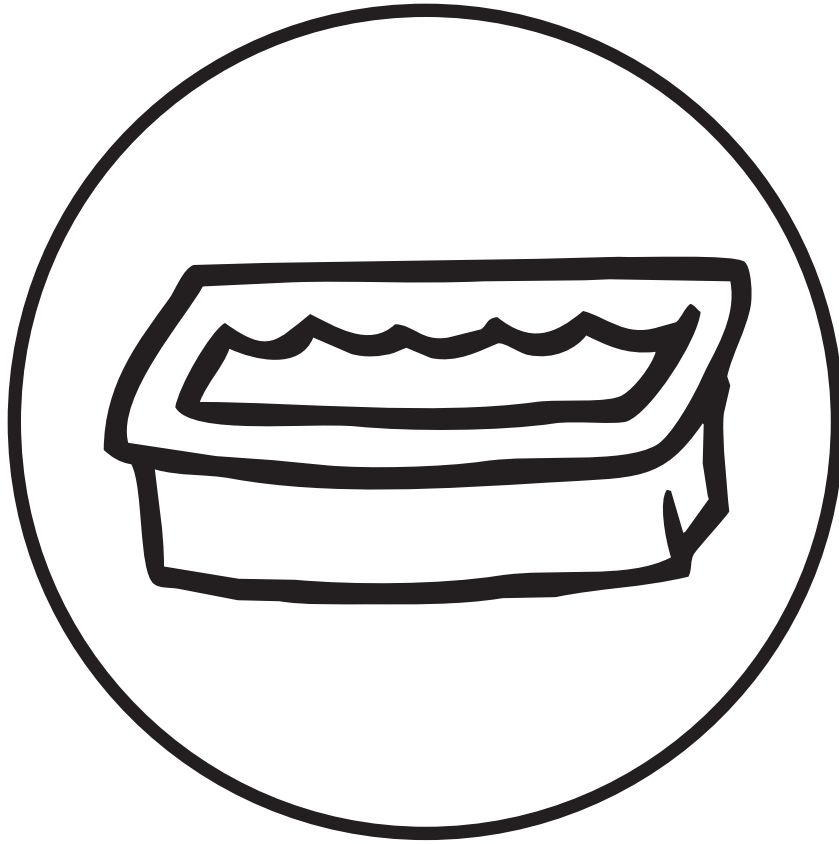
Year 2, Unit 1, Session 2



Year 2, Unit 1, Session 3



Year 2, Unit 1, Session 4



Year 2, Unit 1, Session 5



Year 2, Unit 1, Session 6

David and Goliath: A Rap

*Listen up! Gather 'round,
Let me tell you the tale of how a giant came down.*

The Israelites had a large army
and stood before their enemies.
They shook, trembled, and quivered in fear
at the sight of a giant with a great big spear.
Goliath stood over 9 feet tall.
In his bronze armor he began to call:
“Send a soldier out here to fight with me!
Send your biggest and your best, and then we’ll see—
You might be the winner if you have the nerve—
But if you lose, it’s us you’ll serve.”

*Listen up! Gather 'round,
Let me tell you the tale of how a giant came down.*

For 40 days Goliath boasted and raved.
The Israelites cowered—they were not very brave.
Then a young shepherd boy, a very strong lad,
was asked to run an errand for his dad.
“David, my boy, take some grain and bread
to your brothers in the army so they’ll be well fed.
Send a letter my way when you get there, please,
so I know how they’re doing in the king’s army.”
As David approached the army camp
He heard loud boasting from the Philistine champ.

*Listen up! Gather 'round,
Let me tell you the tale of how a giant came down.*

David shouted out loud, “Who is this man
That he dare insult the God of our land?”
David’s brothers were embarrassed and mad
at the things their mouthy young brother said.
“What are you doing? Get back to your sheep!”
“What?” David said, “Can’t I even speak?”
The servants brought word back to Saul, the king,
of this brave young man saying crazy things.
Saul asked to see David—for he wanted to hear
why this strange young man seemed to have no fear.

*Listen up! Gather 'round,
Let me tell you the tale of how a giant came down.*

“Don’t worry, O king,” young David said,
“I’ll fight this giant until he’s dead.”
“You can’t,” said Saul, “you’re just a young man.
Goliath will kill you with his big bare hands!”
“I’ve killed a lion and a ferocious bear,
while flocks of sheep were in my care.
God will be my help—that’s the thing.
Then everyone will know our God is King.”

*Listen up! Gather 'round,
Let me tell you the tale of how a giant came down.*

“Very well,” said Saul, “If you insist,
at least wear my armor; see if it fits.”
In Saul’s armor and helmet, David walked around
but it was way too big—he collapsed to the ground.
He took them off—because here’s the thing:
he knew that all he needed was a stick and a sling.
David grabbed his sling and five smooth stones
and headed out to face that old giant alone.
When he saw the boy coming, Goliath just sneered.
He said, “I’ll feed your body to the birds!”
But David didn’t fear Goliath’s spear and sword;
he said “I come against you in the name of the Lord!”
Goliath moved in, and David ran
swinging his sling and stone with his hand.
The rock hit Goliath in the middle of his head
and the huge giant fell to the ground—quite dead.

*Listen up! Gather 'round,
Let me tell you the tale of how a giant came down.*

David and Goliath Story Cards



Interview Cards

Philistine Soldiers

David has just killed Goliath, and the Philistine soldiers are on the run. A reporter catches you just as you're trying to escape. Think of how you will answer these questions:

What do you Philistines have against the Israelites?

What do you know about this giant Goliath?

What happened here today?

Where are you running to now?

What happened here today?

Who is David's God, anyhow?

Israelite Soldiers

David has just killed Goliath, and the Israelite soldiers are ready to chase the Philistines out of the land. Think of how you will answer these questions:

Why was your army afraid to fight Goliath?

Who is this kid who took on the giant?

What happened here today?

Who is David's God, anyhow?

What did you think when David went after Goliath without Saul's armor?

Saul's Servants

David has just killed Goliath. You've watched the battle from King Saul's tent. Think of how you will answer these questions:

Why did King Saul let this shouting giant scare the wits out of his army day after day?

What did you think when Saul put his armor on David?

What did you think when David went after Goliath without Saul's armor?

Any idea who this David kid is?

David's Brothers

You've been terrified of Goliath for days, but when you heard David talking about going after him, you told him he was just a show-off. Now your kid brother has just killed a giant! Think about how you will answer these questions:

Why were you so angry with David when he asked why Goliath was allowed to defy the armies of the living God?

What do you think of your kid brother now?

Do you have any idea what God has planned for this shepherd boy?

Got any bread and cheese to share with a tired and hungry reporter?

I'm King Saul

[paces back and forth with anger and pride]

I can't believe what this kid David has done to my kingdom. He's been walking around thinking he's such a big shot ever since he killed Goliath! All of Israel thinks he's such a hero. They practically kiss the ground he walks on! I remember what happened on the way home from the battlefield after we won the great victory over the Philistines. The women of Jerusalem came out of the city. They were dancing, playing their tambourines and flutes, and singing,

“Saul has killed his thousands,
David his tens of thousands.”

Can you believe that? They honored David more than they honored me! I'm the king—not this pathetic shepherd boy. Ever since that day, I've been afraid that David will become the next king. The thought of losing my kingdom torments me day and night. I cannot rest until David is dead.

I've tried killing him a couple of times, but he always manages to escape. Once he was sitting in the palace with me, playing the harp. I've always enjoyed his beautiful playing—but suddenly I felt a dark, piercing anger come over me. I was filled with such hatred for him that I hurled my spear at him, attempting to pin him to the wall. He got away, though. I know that God is with him, which makes me even more afraid of him.

It's also difficult to kill David when my son Jonathan is such good friends with him. They are as close as brothers. How can my dear son turn his back against me and love the very man I hate? When I see them laughing and talking together, my heart burns with hatred. Can't Jonathan see that he will never become king as long as David is alive?

Another time I tried to kill David by using my daughter Michal as bait to catch him. I saw that she was in love with him, so I thought that if I gave her to him in marriage, I could easily get him. That plan failed too. When I sent some of my men to bring David to me, Michal lied and said he was sick in bed. But she helped him escape through a window, put a wooden idol in his bed, and covered the top of it with goat's hair. When my men came back to kill David in his bed, he was gone. My own daughter betrayed me!

I must stop David before he ruins my kingdom. . . . I will do whatever it takes!

[strikes hand in fist; moves to another side of the room, pacing back and forth, muttering threats against David]

I'm Jonathan

[enters the scene sadly shaking his head at Saul, then turns to audience]

That's my father, Saul, over there. I love him dearly, but sometimes he frightens me. He has a violent, angry temper—especially when he sees my best friend, David.

I love David as a true friend. I know that I can talk to him about anything and he always understands. We share our joys, frustrations, and sorrows with one another. I know that I can always go to him when I need help. Now it's my turn to help *him* with something—to protect his life from my father, Saul.

I know that God has chosen David to be king after my father. That doesn't bother me at all. David will be a great king for Israel and will continue to give us great victory over our enemies. I'm glad David will be king, but my father doesn't understand this.

So when my father told me and all his servants to kill David, I told David to hide in a field. I tried to talk my dad out of doing such a terrible thing by pointing out all of David's great qualities. My dad seemed to listen, and he even promised before God that he would not harm my dear friend. I breathed a sigh of relief and went to tell David. Things were peaceful in the palace for a while, but while I was gone, my father tried to kill David with his spear!

I had no idea that my dad would go back on his promise and try to take David's life again. I didn't believe David when he told me at first, because I trusted my dad's word. It was devastating to know that my own father, the man I love and respect, would do such a horrible thing to my friend. So David hid in the field again, this time during a very important feast in our city.

On the second day of the feast my father asked me, "Why hasn't David come to the feast?" I calmly told him that David asked to be excused from the feast to visit his family in Bethlehem. My father was furious! "Don't you think I know you have sided with David, to the shame of your whole family?" he shouted at me. "Don't you know that as long as David lives, you will never be king? Now bring him to me, for he must die!"

Then my father, wild with rage, threw a spear at me! At that moment, I knew that David was in danger. My father's words pierced me like a sword. I couldn't eat anything because I was so grieved and ashamed of his ruthless hatred toward my dearest friend.

When I met with David in the field, we wept together. Neither of us could understand why things had to end this way. We both knew David would not be safe if he stayed—and we didn't know if we would ever see each other again. We made an oath before God to be friends forever—no matter what. Then David left. Wherever my best friend is now, I know that God will keep him safe. I pray that we will meet again someday.

Situation Cards

The most popular kids in your class have dared you to steal a couple of candy bars from your teacher's desk.

A group of older kids have been picking on you during recess and telling other kids they'd better not play with you.

You flunk a math test and everyone hears about it.

You find out your parents are getting a divorce.

Today is your first day at your new school. It's lunchtime, and you're wondering if someone will talk to you.

I'm David

After I killed Goliath, the people . . .

But King Saul . . .

That's especially hard because Jonathan . . .

A couple of times King Saul tried to . . .

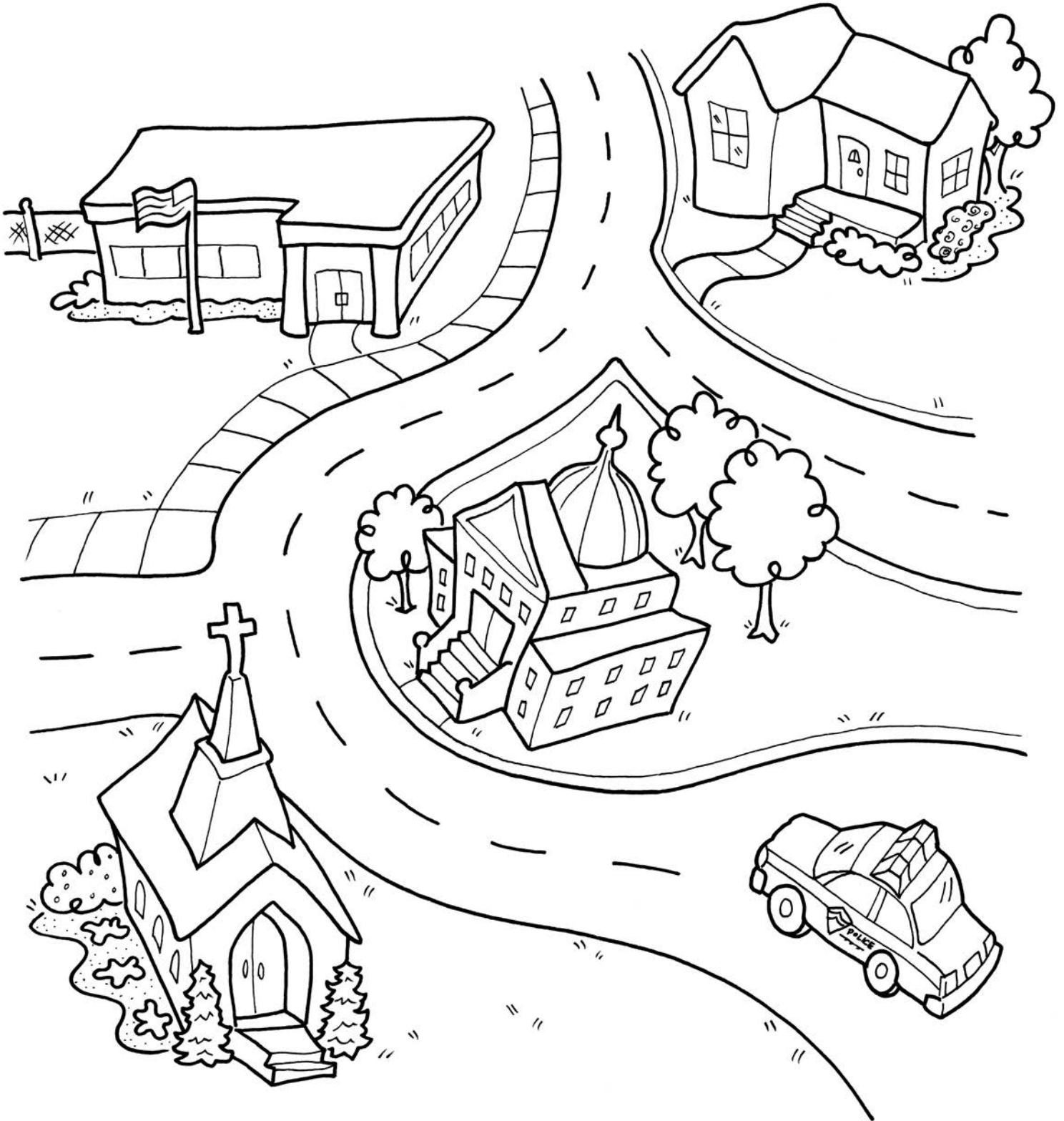
So Jonathan and I made a plan about the coming feast . . .

When we met in the field . . .

I know that God . . .

Who's in Charge?

God has placed people in authority over us. And God wants us to respect our leaders, just as David did. Travel through the map and write down the names of the people in authority for each box.



A Chance to Get Even

Based on 1 Samuel 24:1-4a

It's hot, and I don't think we can go on much longer without a stop for food and water. This desert is nothing but barren rock and sand. My throat is dry and my feet are burning. Oh, how I miss the cool fountains of Jerusalem!

We're running from Saul. God has warned David that Saul is coming after us. If anyone finds out where David is, they'll turn him in. David tells us that God will be with him, but sometimes God feels as far away as the twinkling stars in the midnight sky.

Wait—danger! David's guards have spotted a cloud of dust in the distance. It could be Saul. David is motioning for us to follow him into a cave—just a small hole in the hillside. How can he fit all six hundred of us inside there?

Ooh, it's dark. . . . Say, this cave goes back farther than I thought. We've all squeezed through a narrow opening into a big, cool room that reaches far back into the cave. It's the perfect place to hide—but we've had so many narrow escapes from Saul that we'd better not be too sure of ourselves.

The guards say they saw an army of three thousand men with Saul. He really wants to get David this time—dead or alive. The man next to me says he will never let Saul capture David; he will give his own life first before letting David die. I guess we all feel the same way. David *will* be king, no matter how much Saul lies about him.

Shhhhh! What's that? Listen . . . there are footsteps coming up into the opening of the cave! The men around me are taking out their swords. I'm standing closest to the narrow passage that leads to the opening of the cave. David motions me to peek around the corner to see who's there.

I expect to see a whole group of soldiers entering the cave but all I see is one man standing in the mouth of the cave, dark against the bright light of the sunshine outside. He looks tired and he's dressed in armor—wait, isn't that the royal crown on his head? It is! That must be King Saul, though I can't see his face clearly.

He squats down heavily on the floor of the cave. I hear no marching or movement outside the cave. He must have ordered his men to wait outside while he is in the cave.

I turn back to David and whisper softly, "Now's your chance, sir. Remember that God promised you, 'I will give you your enemy into your hands, to deal with as you wish.' This must be that day!"

David looks puzzled for a minute. He grips his sword tightly. Some of us give him the thumbs-up sign. Then he creeps silently toward the mouth of the cave. King Saul doesn't notice him. I can see David moving his sword. And now . . .

Design: please add some lines for kids to write on.

God's Choice

Based on 1 Samuel 24: 4b-13, 16:22

The silence is unbearable. We keep waiting to hear Saul's death cry. But suddenly David returns, trembling. He holds up a jagged piece of cloth that looks like a corner of Saul's robe.

"How could I kill the man whom the Lord himself chose and anointed to be king of Israel?" David asks quietly.

Then we stand silent, because we hear Saul moving around. No one breathes. Saul's footsteps move out of the cave, and we hear him half-sliding down the rocky hill. We are safe—he still doesn't guess that we are here.

But what is David doing now? He's stepping out through the opening of the cave into the broad daylight! "If he were not my leader, I'd call him a fool," whispers one man standing beside me.

"My Lord the king!" we hear him shout. I peek around the corner. David is bowing face down on the ground. "I could have killed you, but I chose not to hurt the man whom God has anointed king. See this piece of cloth in my hand? I cut it off your robe while you were in the cave. Now do you believe me when I say I won't hurt you? Why are you trying to kill me?"

I can hear Saul's voice now, trembling, full of surprise: "Is that you, David my son?"

And what's that sound of sobbing? The king is crying!

The men around me push and shove to hear what Saul will say. "You are better than I am," he shouts to David. "May the Lord reward you for how you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king. Only promise me that you will not kill my family when you are king."

David gives his promise, and King Saul turns away. The army of three thousand men follows him. We stand and watch at the opening of the cave until they have disappeared from sight. "We are safe at last," says one of the men. "God be praised!"

A King with a Heart

Based on Acts 27, NIV

Scene 1: King David's Palace

Narrator 1: After King Saul and Jonathan were killed in a battle, David was anointed king, just as God had promised.

Narrator 2: Unlike most kings of his day, though, David didn't get rid of Saul's family. Some people said it was because of a promise he made.

House Servant: [*talking to other servants in the palace hall*] Did you hear the king asking if any of Saul's family are still alive? I hope he's going to get rid of them.

Gardener: I didn't know anyone in Saul's family was still alive.

House Servant: One of Jonathan's sons is around somewhere. Seems like he could be big trouble for David—even though he can't walk.

Gardener: What do you mean, can't walk?

House Servant: His nurse dropped him when he was little—hurt his legs and they never healed. Apparently she was trying to run away and hide him after she heard Saul and Jonathan were dead. She thought he would be killed. They've been in hiding ever since, hoping David won't come after him and kill him. He must be grown up by now.

Kitchen Servant: [*angry*] Why does anyone think David would try to kill someone from Saul's family? The king is a good and kind man. He obeys the God of Israel. Plus, David and Jonathan were good friends, and David promised to take care of Jonathan's family if he died.

House Servant: I don't know anything about a promise. But any new king who knows what's good for him will try to kill off everyone—man, woman, or child—from the old king's family. And after the way Saul treated David, his family deserves what's coming to them. That's what I think.

Gardener: We'll find out soon enough which of you is right. For now, we'd better get back to work or we'll be the ones in trouble.

Scene 2: The House of Mikir, where Mephibosheth Lives

Narrator 1: That same day Mephibosheth is sitting in his room in the house of Mikir. He hears a horse coming up to his house. Then a loud knock.

Mephibosheth: Who's there?

Messenger: I'm a royal messenger from King David. We're looking for a man named Mephibosheth.

Narrator 2: When Mephibosheth hears those words, he begins to tremble. He has been found! He tries to get up, but his legs lie helplessly underneath him. He pushes himself farther back on his bed as the king's messenger comes into the room.

Messenger: Are you Mephibosheth?

Mephibosheth: [*afraid*] I am.

Messenger: Then come with me. The king wants to speak with you as soon as possible.

Mephibosheth: What does the king want with me?

Messenger: [*impatiently*] I don't know. I've been told to bring you back to Jerusalem. Come, I'll carry you to the wagon. It's a long way to the palace.

CHARACTERS

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

House Servant

Gardener

Kitchen Servant

Mephibosheth

Messenger

King David

Ziba

Scene 3: King David's Palace

Narrator 1: The messenger brought Mephibosheth into the splendid throne room of King David. He placed Mephibosheth in a chair, bowed low to the king, and left. Mephibosheth hardly dared to look up. He bowed his head low before the king.

King David: Mephibosheth!

Mephibosheth: [*whispering*] Your servant.

King David: [*kindly*] Don't be afraid. I promised your father, Jonathan, that I'd take care of you, and I'll keep that promise. I will give you back all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always be welcome at my table.

Narrator 2: Mephibosheth looks up for the first time. He sees King David in all his splendor, sitting on a golden throne. Mephibosheth bows down again.

Mephibosheth: [*still afraid*] Why should you notice a dead dog like me?

Narrator 1: Looking up, Mephibosheth sees another man come forward. It is Ziba, King Saul's old servant! Mephibosheth can hardly believe his eyes.

King David: Ziba, I have given Mephibosheth everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him so that he may be well provided for. And Mephibosheth will always eat at my table.

Ziba: Your servant will do as you command.

Narrator 2: Mephibosheth shakes his head in wonder. What a kind man King David is! And what a good friend he was to Mephibosheth's father! Because David trusts in God, he can show kindness—even to his enemy's family.

Ziba's Story

Greetings. My name is Ziba. I was a servant in Saul's household before he died in a battle against the Philistines years ago. Now my family and I are servants of Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth—Jonathan's only surviving son.

When news of Saul and Jonathan's death spread throughout the land, Mephibosheth was only five years old. The nurse who took care of him was afraid the new king would try to kill the child, so she ran away to find a safe place to hide the boy. She was in such a hurry that she accidentally dropped the little boy, and he became crippled in both feet.

Years later, when David became king, he wondered if there were any members of Saul's family still alive. Since I used to work for the household of Saul, David thought I might know. He called me to the palace.

"Are you Ziba?" David asked me.

I humbly bowed before him. "At your service," I replied.

"Are any members of Saul's family still living?" he asked. "I promised Jonathan I would care for them and I want to keep that promise."

I immediately thought of Mephibosheth. I hadn't seen him since he was a little boy. He must be a young man now.

"One of Jonathan's sons is still living," I told him. "He lives in the household of Mikir."

King David summoned his servants. "Please bring Mephibosheth to me."

So Mephibosheth was brought to the palace. When he arrived, I'm sure he was gripped by fear. He must have thought David meant to kill him! But the king was very generous to Mephibosheth. He invited him to eat at the palace table like one of the king's own sons, and he gave him all the land that had belonged to Saul's family.

"Who am I, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" Mephibosheth asked the king. He was overwhelmed by David's kindness.

King David appointed me to take care of Mephibosheth from that day on, and my entire family was put in charge of farming Saul's land to produce crops for Mephibosheth.

"I will do whatever you would like for me to do," I told his majesty. It is an honor to work for such a kind and generous king.

A Big Cover-Up

CHARACTERS

Reader 1

Reader 2

Reader 3

David

Nathan

Servant

Messenger

Uriah

Reader 1: King David yawned and stretched his arms.

Reader 2: It was springtime, but instead of marching off to war with his army, David stayed in bed, relaxing in his palace bedroom.

Reader 3: He decided to let his army commander, Joab, lead his troops into war this time.

Reader 1: He rose from his bed and slowly walked out on the roof of his magnificent palace.

Reader 2: He leaned against the smooth stone rail and took a deep breath of the warm evening breeze. He could see the entire city of Jerusalem as the sun gently settled beyond the horizon.

Reader 3: His eyes scanned a cluster of houses below the palace until he saw a sight that caught him by surprise.

Reader 1: King David saw a young woman bathing. He was stunned by her beauty, and immediately asked his servant about her.

David: Who is that woman bathing over there?

Servant: She is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

Reader 2: David sent his messengers to invite her to the palace. When Bathsheba was brought to the king, he saw that she was even more beautiful in person.

Reader 3: At that moment David forgot about God. He did not think about Bathsheba's husband, but instead asked Bathsheba to stay for dinner. And then he slept with her.

Reader 1: A few weeks later, David was lounging in a chair in his royal courtyard when a messenger bowed and approached him. The messenger was sent by Bathsheba.

Reader 2: Her message turned David pale with fear: "I am going to have a baby—and you are the father."

Reader 3: David felt as if a stone had been dropped into his stomach. His mind began to spin in a thousand directions.

David: What am I going to do? I'm the king—no one can know that the king has committed such a terrible sin. I know—I'll summon Uriah and his troops back to Jerusalem. Then he can spend time with his wife, and he will think the baby is his.

Reader 2: So he called for Uriah to come. Uriah and his men came and pitched their tents in Jerusalem. But Uriah didn't spend any time at home. David summoned Uriah to the palace.

David: You've just had a long journey, Uriah. Why aren't you spending time at home? You deserve it.

Uriah: I'd love to go home. But Joab and all the rest of the men are camping out in the fields. I wouldn't feel right going home and enjoying myself while they're living in tents.

Reader 3: David tried once more to trick Uriah into going home. But Uriah stayed with his men.

Reader 1: So David came up with a new plan, even more evil than the first one.

Reader 2: David wrote a letter to Joab, the commander of the Israelite army:

David: Send Uriah to the front lines of battle to where the fighting is fiercest. Then move away and leave him there so that he will die.

Reader 3: About a week later, a messenger sent word to David that Uriah had been killed in battle.

Reader 1: David acted as though he was concerned, but in his heart, he breathed a sigh of relief.

David: Now that Uriah is dead, I can marry Bathsheba, and no one will know about the sin I've committed!

Reader 2: After Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband, she became the wife of David, and a few months later she gave birth to a son.

Reader 3: David had forgotten God—but God did not forget about the wrong David had done.

Reader 1: One day, a prophet of the Lord named Nathan came to visit David in the palace.

Nathan: Let me tell you a story, O King. There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had lots of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little lamb. He raised it and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup, and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. One day, a traveler came to visit the rich man, but the rich man did not want to take one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for his guest. Instead, he took the lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the traveler.

Reader 2: When he heard the story, King David was furious.

David: That man deserves to die! How dare he do such a selfish thing!

Reader 3: Then Nathan pointed at the king.

Nathan: You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I saved you from the hand of Saul. I gave you a palace, many wives, and the entire land of Israel. If this had not been enough, I would have given you even more. Why did you ignore my commands by doing this evil thing? You had Uriah killed and took his wife to be your own. This wrong you have done will not go unpunished!"

Reader 3: King David bowed his head in shame.

David: I have sinned against the Lord.

Reader 1: Nathan put his hand on David's shoulder.

Nathan: The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because you have done these terrible things, the child born of Bathsheba will die.

Reader 2: Shortly after Nathan the prophet returned home, the child of David and Bathsheba became very ill. King David wept and prayed and cried out to God. He asked God to spare the life of their son, but the child died a week later.

Reader 3: In spite of the pain and sorrow David felt after losing his son, he worshiped God. David understood that he had been forgiven by God. He wrote a song asking God to cleanse his heart from his sin. God heard his cry for mercy and gave him a pure heart.

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David and Absalom

[David is sitting in a chair with his head hanging down. Then he stands and addresses the audience.]

Hello. I am King David. I am so very sad about the loss of my son, Absalom. If only I had died instead of him! My heart is filled with pain.

Here's how it happened . . .

Absalom was a very handsome young man. In fact, he reminded me of myself when I was his age. He had broad shoulders and long, thick hair. No man in all of Israel was as fine-looking as my son. But his heart was far from the Lord. He devised a plan to steal my kingdom from me—even though he knew I was God's anointed king.

Gradually he worked out his plan. In the mornings he'd get up early and greet the Israelites at the gates as they headed into the city to talk with me. He'd listen to their problems and complaints—even though that was supposed to be my job. Before I had a chance to speak to them, Absalom would say, "Where are you from? What is your problem? The king is too busy to listen to your problems. But I'll listen. If only I were made judge of the land, I could help everyone with their problems."

After a while, the people of Israel started to like Absalom more than they liked me. He was winning his campaign. And that's when Absalom made his move. He asked me if he could go to the city of Hebron to worship God. Little did I know that he had sent secret messengers throughout the city who loudly declared, "Absalom has become king at Hebron!"

Because Absalom had won favor with so many Israelites, many people in the land wanted Absalom to be their new king!

When I heard the news of what my son was doing, I knew my family and I had to leave the palace at once or else we would all be killed. I couldn't believe that my own son would do such a cruel thing to me. But I had to put aside my sorrow and get moving. So we left—thousands of my soldiers and officers, my wives and children.

It was a sad day. Many of the Israelites who were still loyal to me wept as we headed into the wilderness. We cried together and covered our heads in mourning. I even walked barefoot along the road we traveled on because I was in such despair. "How could my son do this to me? Does he have no love and respect for his own father?" I wondered. Running from my son Absalom painfully reminded me of the times I had fled from the clutches of Saul so many years ago.

I waited in the wilderness with my troops and my family, and I sent my trusted friend Hushai as a spy to pretend to be on Absalom's side. He went to Jerusalem, where my son had gone to plan a war against me. Hushai went to Absalom and said, "Long live the king!"

"Aren't you loyal to my father?" Absalom asked him.

"I belong to the one chosen by the Lord and by all his people." Hushai replied. "I will serve you now." My son didn't know that Hushai was only pretending to be loyal to him.

Ahithophel, one of my best counselors, had betrayed me and sided with Absalom. He had always given me good advice, and it pained me to know that he had turned his back on me. I prayed and asked God to turn Ahithophel's advice into foolishness and to lead Absalom to listen to Hushai instead.

Soon Absalom asked Ahithophel what he should do. "Gather twelve thousand soldiers and attack your father tonight while he is weary and tired from traveling. Kill him and bring all his family and soldiers back here to you." If Absalom had listened to his advice, I might not have survived.

But God heard my prayer. Absalom asked Hushai what he thought about Ahithophel's plan. Because Hushai was secretly on my side, he told Absalom that Ahithophel's advice was not good. "Your father is a very skilled

fighter,” he said. “He and his troops will put up a strong fight. You should wait and gather as many Israelites as you can to defeat your father; then victory will be yours!” Hushai said these things to give me and my army more time to gather our strength to fight against Absalom.

“I like Hushai’s advice better than Ahithophel’s,” Absalom concluded. Hushai then sent secret messengers to tell me what Absalom was planning to do. God was taking very good care of me.

Absalom gathered a huge army, and I sent my troops out to fight under three of my greatest army commanders. As they left, I told them not to harm Absalom. Despite all the terror and hardship he brought to my life, he was still my son whom I loved very much. The war against my son was brutal. More than twenty thousand men were killed that day—including my dear Absalom.

I was told that he was riding his donkey under an oak tree when his hair got caught in the branches of the tree, leaving him hanging there for all to see. Some of my men struck him and killed him. How my heart aches for my son! [*pauses, hangs head before continuing*] Despite the terrible tragedy, I know that God has continued to be faithful to me. I was able to return to Jerusalem and resume my position as king. God protected me, my family, and my kingdom from Absalom.



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ISBN 978-1-59255-636-6



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