

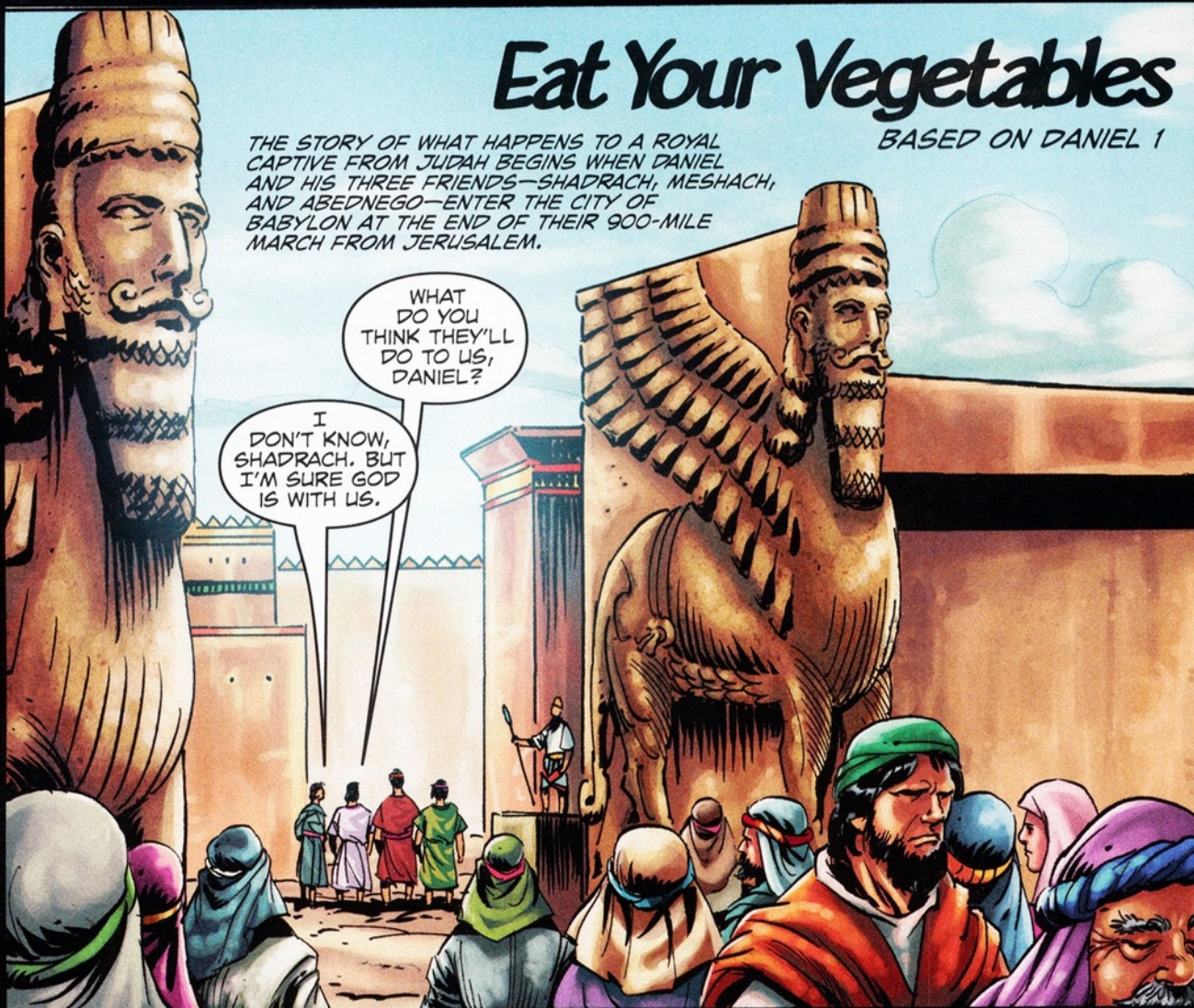
The
Action
Bible

The
Exiles

Eat Your Vegetables

BASED ON DANIEL 1

THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENS TO A ROYAL CAPTIVE FROM JUDAH BEGINS WHEN DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS—SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO—ENTER THE CITY OF BABYLON AT THE END OF THEIR 900-MILE MARCH FROM JERUSALEM.



WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY'LL DO TO US, DANIEL?

I DON'T KNOW, SHADRACH. BUT I'M SURE GOD IS WITH US.

SOON AFTER THE PRISONERS REACH THE CITY, DANIEL AND SEVERAL OTHERS ARE BROUGHT BEFORE AN OFFICER OF KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

AS NOBLES FROM JERUSALEM, YOU WILL BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO TRY OUT FOR POSITIONS IN THE KING'S COURT. BUT I WARN YOU—YOU MUST BE STRONG, SMART, AND HANDSOME.



THE CHIEF OFFICIAL MOVES THROUGH THE RANKS OF EXILES. HE STOPS IN FRONT OF DANIEL.

IF YOUR GOD IS SO POWERFUL, WHY DID HE LET YOU HEBREWS BE CONQUERED?

DOESN'T A FATHER SOMETIMES NEED TO PUNISH HIS OWN CHILDREN?



HMMPH. GOOD ANSWER.

THE NEXT DAY ...

YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN! NOW YOU'LL BE GIVEN THREE YEARS TO STUDY UNDER OUR WISE MEN. AFTER THAT, THE KING HIMSELF WILL CHOOSE THOSE BEST QUALIFIED TO BE HIS ADVISERS. AS A BONUS, YOU WILL GET TO EAT THE EXTRA FOOD FROM THE KING'S TABLE!



THE YOUNG MEN ARE ASSIGNED A ROOM AT THE PALACE TO BEGIN THEIR STUDIES. EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE TECHNICALLY CAPTIVES, THEY RECEIVE THE BEST OF EVERYTHING—INCLUDING THE KING'S FOOD.



HERE YOU GO, THE BEST FOOD IN THE KINGDOM. IT'S EVEN BEEN BLESSED BY OUR GOD MARDUK.

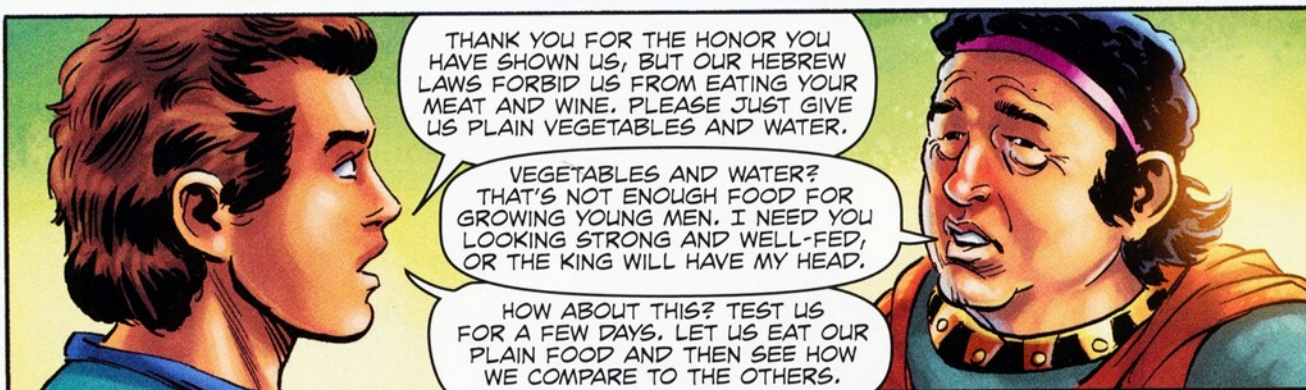
WE CAN'T EAT THIS! IT'S BEEN DEDICATED TO THE BABYLONIAN IDOLS.



THANK YOU FOR THE HONOR YOU HAVE SHOWN US, BUT OUR HEBREW LAWS FORBID US FROM EATING YOUR MEAT AND WINE. PLEASE JUST GIVE US PLAIN VEGETABLES AND WATER.

VEGETABLES AND WATER? THAT'S NOT ENOUGH FOOD FOR GROWING YOUNG MEN. I NEED YOU LOOKING STRONG AND WELL-FED, OR THE KING WILL HAVE MY HEAD.

HOW ABOUT THIS? TEST US FOR A FEW DAYS. LET US EAT OUR PLAIN FOOD AND THEN SEE HOW WE COMPARE TO THE OTHERS.



FOR TEN DAYS, THE OTHER TRAINEES EAT THEIR STEAK AND FINE WINE TAKEN FROM THE TEMPLE OF MARDUK. DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS EAT NOTHING BUT BOILED VEGETABLES AND WATER.



AT THE END OF TEN DAYS, THERE'S NO DOUBT—DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS NOT ONLY LOOK BETTER, BUT THEY ARE CLEARLY STRONGER AND FASTER THAN THEIR PEERS.



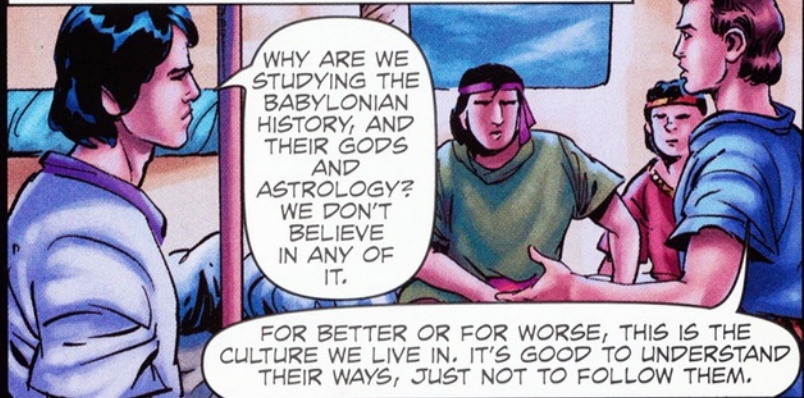
FINE! EAT WHATEVER YOU WANT.



AFTER THIS, THE FOUR YOUNG HEBREWS BUSY THEMSELVES WITH THEIR STUDIES, LEARNING EVERYTHING THEIR BABYLONIAN TEACHERS CAN TEACH.



BUT EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE KEEPING THEMSELVES PURE FROM UNGODLY FOOD, THEY WORRY ABOUT THEIR UNGODLY STUDIES AS WELL.



WHY ARE WE STUDYING THE BABYLONIAN HISTORY, AND THEIR GODS AND ASTROLOGY? WE DON'T BELIEVE IN ANY OF IT.

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, THIS IS THE CULTURE WE LIVE IN. IT'S GOOD TO UNDERSTAND THEIR WAYS, JUST NOT TO FOLLOW THEM.

THE FOUR YOUNG MEN CONSISTENTLY PRAY TO GOD THREE TIMES A DAY. IN ANSWER TO THEIR FAITHFULNESS, GOD GIVES THEM KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM. TO DANIEL, GOD EVEN GIVES AN UNDERSTANDING OF DREAMS. AT THE END OF THE THREE YEARS, THE YOUNG MEN ARE TAKEN BEFORE THE KING. HE TALKS WITH EACH ONE, THEN MAKES HIS DECISION.

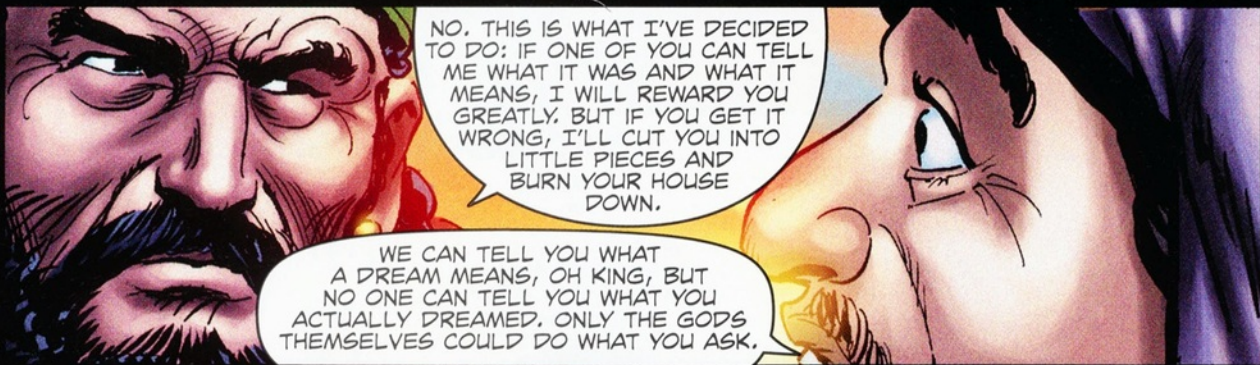


I HAVE CHOSEN THESE FOUR—DANIEL, SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO—TO SERVE IN MY GOVERNMENT. THEY ARE TEN TIMES BETTER THAN ALL MY MAGICIANS, ENCHANTERS, AND ADVISERS!

A Deadly Dream

BASED ON DANIEL 2

DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS BECOME POPULAR MEMBERS OF THE KING'S COURT. BUT ONE DAY, THE KING HAS AN UNUSUALLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM AND HE CALLS FOR HIS OLDER, MORE EXPERIENCED ADVISERS.



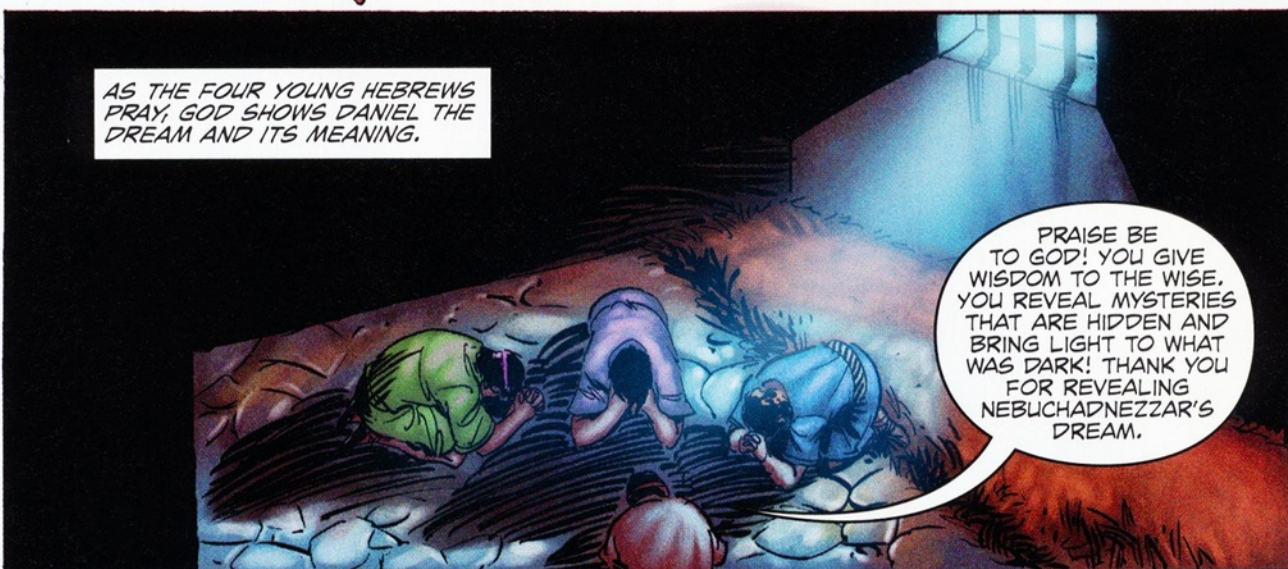
WHEN THE GUARD EXPLAINS NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S ANGER, DANIEL REACTS CALMLY AND WISELY. HE ASKS FOR PERMISSION TO SPEAK TO THE KING.



DANIEL RUSHES BACK TO HIS FRIENDS WITH THE NEWS.



AS THE FOUR YOUNG HEBREWS PRAY, GOD SHOWS DANIEL THE DREAM AND ITS MEANING.



THE NEXT DAY ...

HAVE YOU COME TO ASK FOR MORE TIME—OR CAN YOU TELL ME MY DREAM?

NO MAN CAN DO WHAT YOU HAVE ASKED. BUT THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN WHO HAS SHOWN YOUR DREAM TO ME.

YOU SAW A MIGHTY STATUE. ITS HEAD WAS MADE OF GOLD, ITS SHOULDERS OF SILVER, AND ITS LEGS OF BRONZE AND IRON. BUT ITS FEET WERE MADE OF CLAY. THEN YOU SAW A LARGE STONE STRIKE AT THE FEET OF THE STATUE AND BREAK IT INTO MANY PIECES.

YES! THAT'S RIGHT! BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

THE HEAD OF GOLD STANDS FOR YOU AND YOUR GREAT KINGDOM. OTHER LESSER KINGDOMS WILL FOLLOW, BUT AFTER THEY FALL, GOD WILL SET UP A KINGDOM THAT WILL NEVER BE DESTROYED.

YOUR GOD IS A GOD ABOVE ALL GODS. AND YOU SHALL BE RULER OF THE PROVINCE OF BABYLON OVER ALL THE WISE MEN WHOSE LIVES YOU SAVED TODAY.

Facing the Heat

BASED ON DANIEL 3

THANKS TO DANIEL'S MIRACULOUS INTERPRETATION OF THE KING'S DREAM, NEBUCHADNEZZAR PROMOTES HIM AND HIS THREE FRIENDS TO HIGH POSITIONS IN GOVERNMENT. YEARS PASS, AND THE FOUR HEBREW MEN RULE WISELY AND WELL. BUT THE NEWS DOES NOT MAKE THE KING'S OTHER ADVISERS VERY HAPPY.



WHY SHOULD FOREIGNERS GET POWER AND HONOR INSTEAD OF US? WE HAVE TO GET RID OF DANIEL.

NOT NOW—HE'S TOO POWERFUL. BUT IF WE CAN TURN THE KING AGAINST DANIEL'S FRIENDS, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO CAUSE TROUBLE FOR DANIEL.

THEIR OPPORTUNITY COMES WHEN NEBUCHADNEZZAR CONQUERS JERUSALEM. THE KING DECIDES HE'S GREATER THAN ALL GODS AND BUILDS A STATUE OF HIMSELF. ALL OF HIS OFFICIALS MUST WORSHIP IT—OR BE THROWN INTO A FIERY FURNACE.

THE KING IS PLAYING RIGHT INTO OUR HANDS. HE DOESN'T KNOW THAT THE HEBREWS WILL ONLY WORSHIP THEIR GOD.

DANIEL HOLDS TOO HIGH A POSITION FOR ANY ONE OF US TO REPORT HIM—BUT NOT HIS FRIENDS.



RIGHT! AND TOMORROW WHEN THE TRUMPET SOUNDS FOR ALL PEOPLE TO BOW BEFORE THE STATUE, WE'LL KEEP OUR EYES ON SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO.



AT KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S COMMAND, A GIANT STATUE—90 FEET HIGH—HAS BEEN BUILT ON THE PLAINS OF DURA. ALL OF THE OFFICIALS OF BABYLON ARE ORDERED TO WORSHIP IT. THE HOUR OF WORSHIP COMES—THE MOMENT THE KING'S JEALOUS ADVISERS HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR ...

THE MUSICIANS HAVE TAKEN THEIR PLACES. THE SIGNAL WILL COME SOON—THE ONE THAT MEANS DEATH TO DANIEL'S FRIENDS.

MUSIC FILLS THE AIR. THE OFFICIALS OF BABYLON BOW DOWN AND WORSHIP THE GOLDEN STATUE—ALL BUT SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO.

SEE?
THEY REFUSE
TO BOW
DOWN!

EAGERLY, THE JEALOUS ADVISERS REPORT TO THE KING.

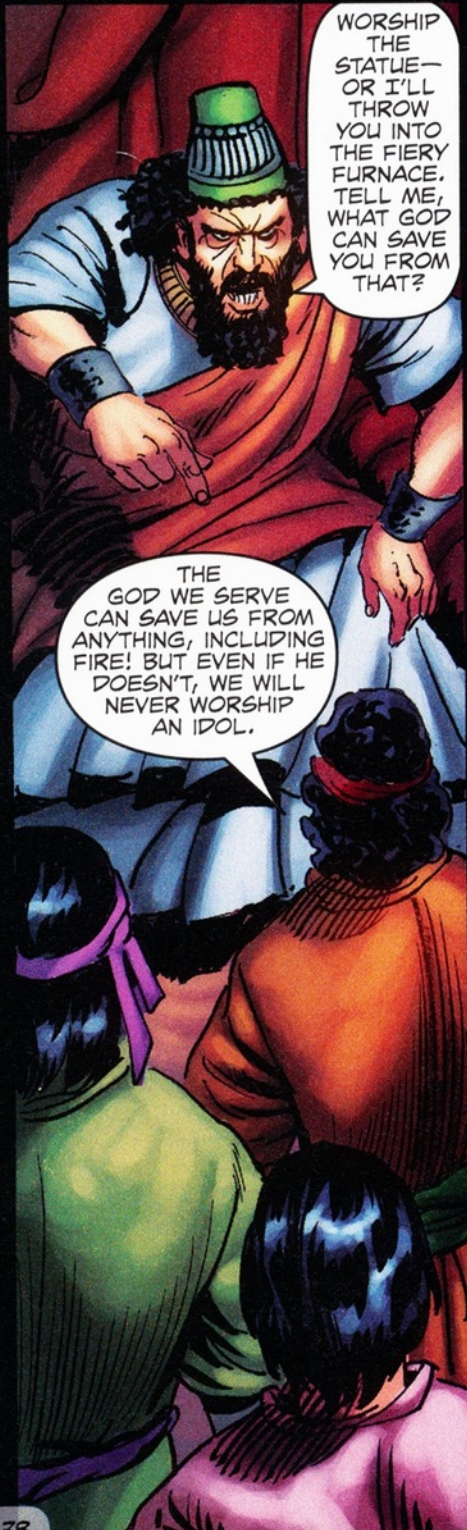
O KING, THREE OF YOUR HEBREW OFFICIALS HAVE DEFIED YOU. THEY REFUSE TO WORSHIP YOUR STATUE.

WHAT? BRING THEM TO ME AT ONCE!



WORSHIP THE STATUE—OR I'LL THROW YOU INTO THE FIERY FURNACE. TELL ME, WHAT GOD CAN SAVE YOU FROM THAT?

THE GOD WE SERVE CAN SAVE US FROM ANYTHING, INCLUDING FIRE! BUT EVEN IF HE DOESN'T, WE WILL NEVER WORSHIP AN IDOL.



HEAT THE FURNACE SEVEN TIMES HOTTER THAN EVER BEFORE—AND THROW THEM IN!



THE THREE HEBREWS ARE QUICKLY BOUND AND THROWN INTO THE RAGING FIRE.

AAAH! IT'S TOO HOT. I'M BURNING!



BUT WHEN THE KING LOOKS INTO THE FURNACE ...

THEY'RE ALIVE! THE FLAMES HAVEN'T EVEN TOUCHED THEM. DIDN'T WE THROW THREE MEN INTO THE FIRE?

WE DID, O KING.

BUT I SEE FOUR! AND THE FOURTH LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE FROM HEAVEN.

SHADRACH! MESHACH! ABEDNEGO! COME OUT!

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR IS STRUCK WITH AWE AND WONDER.

BLESSED BE THE GOD OF SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO, WHO SENT HIS ANGEL TO SAVE THEM. FROM NOW ON, ANYONE WHO DARES TO SAY A WORD AGAINST THEIR GOD WILL DIE!

WE SHOULD PROBABLY NOT MAKE ANY MORE ATTACKS ON THE HEBREWS.

The Four Beasts from Below

BASED ON DANIEL 7

ONE NIGHT, DANIEL HAS A DREAM. FOUR BEASTS RISE OUT OF THE SURGING SEA ...



FIRST, A LION WITH EAGLE'S WINGS.

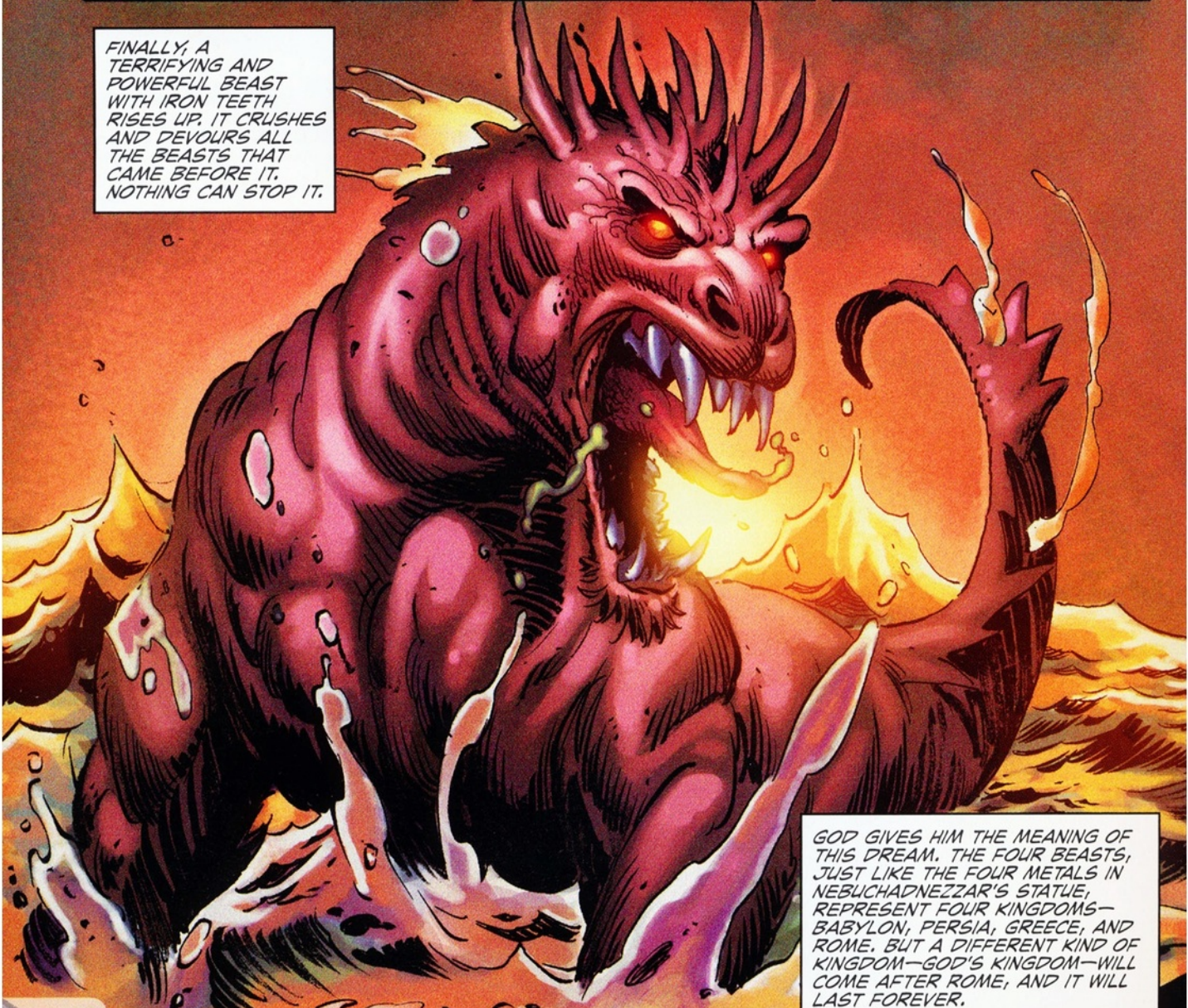
THEN, A FEROCIOUS BEAR COMES FORTH.



THIRD, A BEAST LIKE A LEOPARD WITH FOUR HEADS AND FOUR WINGS.



FINALLY, A TERRIFYING AND POWERFUL BEAST WITH IRON TEETH RISES UP. IT CRUSHES AND DEVOURS ALL THE BEASTS THAT CAME BEFORE IT. NOTHING CAN STOP IT.

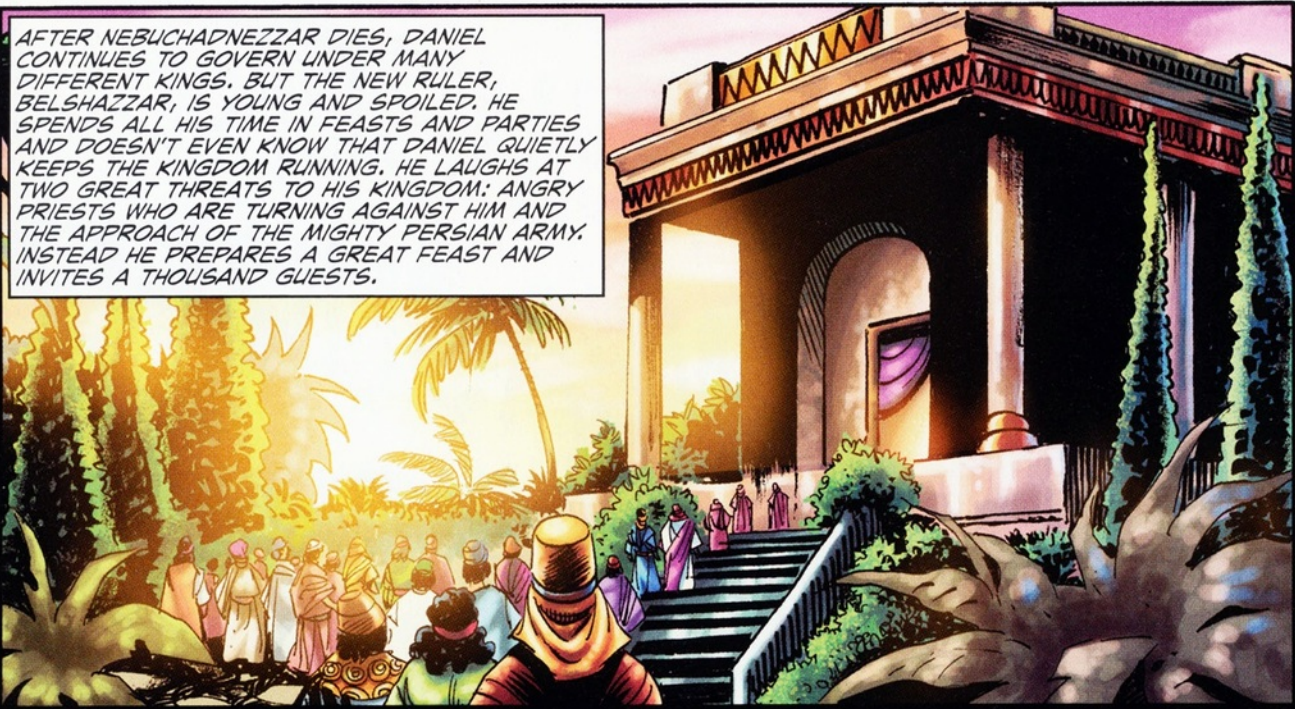


GOD GIVES HIM THE MEANING OF THIS DREAM. THE FOUR BEASTS, JUST LIKE THE FOUR METALS IN NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S STATUE, REPRESENT FOUR KINGDOMS—BABYLON, PERSIA, GREECE, AND ROME. BUT A DIFFERENT KIND OF KINGDOM—GOD'S KINGDOM—WILL COME AFTER ROME, AND IT WILL LAST FOREVER.

The Writing on the Wall

BASED ON DANIEL 5

AFTER NEBUCHADNEZZAR DIES, DANIEL CONTINUES TO GOVERN UNDER MANY DIFFERENT KINGS. BUT THE NEW RULER, BELSHAZZAR, IS YOUNG AND SPOILED. HE SPENDS ALL HIS TIME IN FEASTS AND PARTIES AND DOESN'T EVEN KNOW THAT DANIEL QUIETLY KEEPS THE KINGDOM RUNNING. HE LAUGHS AT TWO GREAT THREATS TO HIS KINGDOM: ANGRY PRIESTS WHO ARE TURNING AGAINST HIM AND THE APPROACH OF THE MIGHTY PERSIAN ARMY. INSTEAD HE PREPARES A GREAT FEAST AND INVITES A THOUSAND GUESTS.



HE GIVES NO THOUGHT TO THE ENEMY AT HIS GATES OR THE GOD HE HAS OFFENDED.

BRING THE GOBLET AND PLATES THAT WE TOOK FROM THE HEBREW TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM!



I'D LIKE TO GIVE THANKS TO THE GOD OF GOLD FOR MAKING THIS CUP!

AND TO THE GOD OF SILVER FOR MAKING THIS PLATE.

AND TO THE GOD OF WOOD FOR MAKING THIS WALL ... OR ELSE I'D FALL DOWN.



BUT THEIR DRUNKENNESS AND BLASPHEMY IS CUT SHORT. SUDDENLY BELSHAZZAR STARES AT A PLACE HIGH ON THE BANQUET WALL. HE TURNS PALE AND HIS HANDS TREMBLE ...

LOOK! ON THE WALL! WHAT IS IT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



KING BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST HAS BEEN DISRUPTED BY A SUPERNATURAL SIGHT. A GHOSTLY HAND WRITES THREE WORDS ON THE WALL.

NUMBERED MEASURED DIVIDED

ENCHANTERS!
ASTROLOGERS!
WHOEVER CAN TELL
ME THE MEANING OF
THIS WRITING WILL
HAVE RICHES AND A
PROMOTION.

BUT NONE OF
HIS ROYAL WISE
MEN CAN EXPLAIN
THE MEANING.
AT THIS,
BELSHAZZAR
BECOMES EVEN
MORE TERRIFIED.
WHEN THE KING'S
MOTHER HEARS
THE EXCITEMENT
IN THE BANQUET
HALL, SHE
RUSHES TO
HER SON.

MY SON, DON'T BE ALARMED! THERE
IS A MAN IN YOUR KINGDOM WITH THE POWER
OF THE GODS. THIS MAN DANIEL IS WISE—

—WITH THE ABILITY TO
INTERPRET DREAMS
AND EXPLAIN RIDDLES.
CALL FOR DANIEL, AND
HE WILL TELL YOU
WHAT THE WRITING
MEANS.

DANIEL! YES!
BRING HIM HERE
AT ONCE.

THE BANQUET HALL IS SO QUIET YOU CAN HEAR A PIN DROP UNTIL DANIEL APPEARS BEFORE THE KING.



TELL ME WHAT THOSE WORDS MEAN AND YOU WILL BE THE THIRD HIGHEST RULEER IN BABYLON. I'LL GIVE YOU HALF MY WEALTH!



KEEP YOUR RICHES TO YOURSELF AND GIVE YOUR PROMOTION TO SOMEONE ELSE. YOUR ANCESTOR NEBUCHADNEZZAR MADE MISTAKES, BUT AT LEAST HE LEARNED FROM THEM AND GAVE HONOR TO GOD. BUT YOU ARE ARROGANT. YOU ATE AND DRANK OUT OF THE SACRED TREASURES OF GOD'S TEMPLE. YOU PRAISED THE GODS OF GOLD AND SILVER AND WOOD—WHICH DON'T EVEN EXIST! BUT YOU HAVE GIVEN NO HONOR TO GOD.

THESE WORDS ARE GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU. THEY MEAN THIS: YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED! YOU'VE BEEN MEASURED AND FOUND WANTING! AND YOUR KINGDOM WILL BE DIVIDED AMONG THE PERSIANS!



WELL, THAT SOUNDS A LITTLE FARFETCHED, BUT I'LL KEEP MY PROMISE. HERE, THIS CHAIN MAKES YOU NEXT TO ME IN ALL THE KINGDOM.

NOW, ON WITH THE FEAST!

AS BELSHAZZAR SPEAKS, PERSIAN SOLDIERS SUDDENLY FILL THE HALL AND TAKE HIM PRISONER.



SOLDIERS? WHERE DID THEY COME FROM? WHERE ARE MY GUARDS?

BEFORE MORNING, THE CITY IS IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY. BELSHAZZAR IS EXECUTED BY THE CONQUERING PERSIANS.

Lion Taming

BASED ON DANIEL 6

BABYLON, WHICH HAD CONQUERED JUDAH, HAS NOW BEEN CONQUERED BY DARIUS, THE PERSIAN KING, JUST LIKE DANIEL'S DREAMS PREDICTED. DARIUS NEEDS TRUSTWORTHY OFFICIALS TO HELP HIM RUN HIS NEW EMPIRE. EVEN THOUGH DANIEL IS QUITE OLD, DARIUS SEES THAT HE HAS INTEGRITY.

YOU WILL HELP RULE OVER MY NOBLES AS LONG AS YOU OBEY ME. MAKE SURE THAT TAXES ARE PAID AND NOBODY CHEATS ME OUT OF MY MONEY.

DANIEL DOES SUCH EXCEPTIONAL WORK THAT DARIUS DECIDES TO PROMOTE HIM TO RUN THE WHOLE KINGDOM BY HIMSELF. THIS DOES NOT PLEASE HIS YOUNG OFFICIALS.

WE'LL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO MAKE MONEY OFF OF BRIBES IF DANIEL IS WATCHING US.

IF WE COULD ONLY CATCH HIM IN SOME CORRUPTION ... BUT DANIEL IS TOO HONEST.

WE'LL NEVER FIND ANY DIRT ON DANIEL, UNLESS WE CAN TRAP HIM WITH SOMETHING ABOUT THE LAWS OF HIS GOD! HE WILL NEVER DISHONOR HIS HEBREW GOD.

O KING, YOUR EMPIRE IS EVEN LARGER THAN THE BABYLONIANS'. YOU DESERVE HONOR AND PRAISE. YOUR NOBLES, WHO HONOR YOU ABOVE ALL, HAVE AGREED THAT YOU SHOULD SIGN A LAW SO THAT EVERYONE WILL HONOR YOU. NO ONE MAY PRAY OR BOW DOWN TO ANY GOD OR MAN BUT YOU FOR 30 DAYS. ANYONE WHO PRAYS TO SOMEONE BESIDES YOU WILL BE THROWN INTO THE LIONS' CAGE!

WELL, IF YOU REALLY THINK I DESERVE SUCH HONOR ... OKAY, IF ALL OF YOU WANT SUCH A LAW, I'LL SIGN IT.

AS YOU KNOW, ONCE THIS LAW IS IN WRITING, IT CANNOT BE TAKEN BACK OR CHANGED. THAT IS THE RULE OF PERSIAN LAW.



OH, LORD, HOW THE WICKED TRY TO DISHONOR YOUR NAME AND DISCREDIT YOUR SERVANTS. OH, WELL. I HAVE PRAYED TO YOU, AND NOBODY BUT YOU, FOR MY WHOLE LIFE. I'M NOT ABOUT TO STOP NOW.



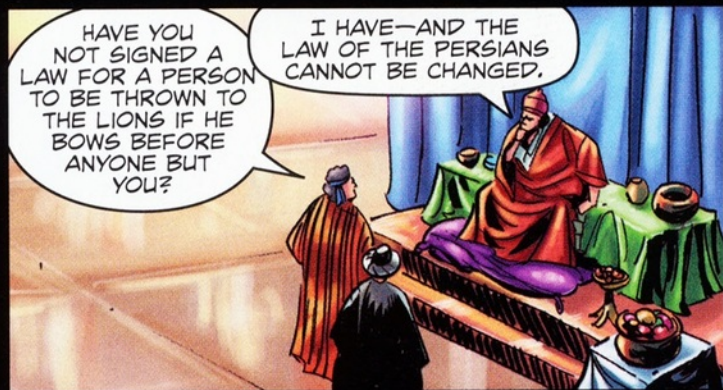
DANIEL MAKES HIS WAY HOME ...

... AND GOES TO THE UPSTAIRS ROOM, WHERE THE WINDOWS FACE JERUSALEM. THERE, LIKE HE'S DONE EVERY DAY FOR THE PAST 70 YEARS, HE PRAYS.



SEE— DANIEL PRAYS TO HIS GOD JUST LIKE WE THOUGHT HE WOULD.

GOOD. NOW WE'LL TELL DARIUS.



HAVE YOU NOT SIGNED A LAW FOR A PERSON TO BE THROWN TO THE LIONS IF HE BOWS BEFORE ANYONE BUT YOU?

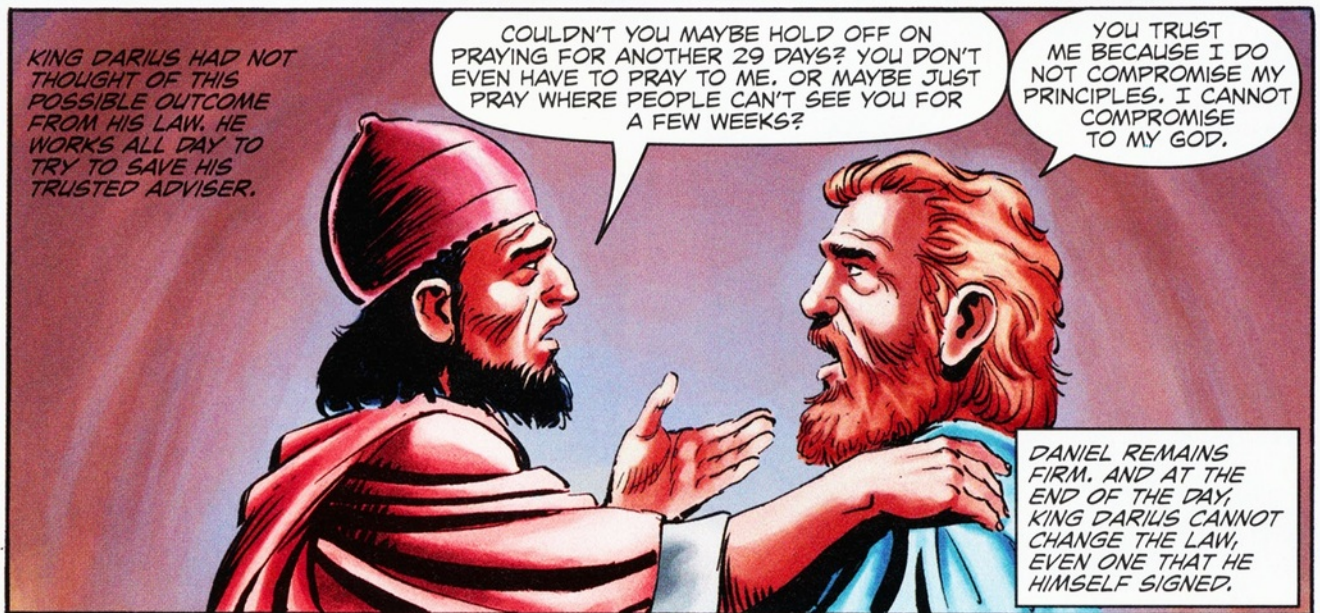
I HAVE—AND THE LAW OF THE PERSIANS CANNOT BE CHANGED.



DANIEL HAS BROKEN YOUR LAWS. THREE TIMES A DAY HE PRAYS TO HIS GOD—IN FRONT OF A WINDOW WHERE EVERYONE CAN SEE.

DANIEL, MY FRIEND!

I SEE IT NOW. MY ADVISERS TRICKED ME INTO SENDING DANIEL TO HIS DEATH.



KING DARIUS HAD NOT THOUGHT OF THIS POSSIBLE OUTCOME FROM HIS LAW. HE WORKS ALL DAY TO TRY TO SAVE HIS TRUSTED ADVISER.

COULDN'T YOU MAYBE HOLD OFF ON PRAYING FOR ANOTHER 29 DAYS? YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO PRAY TO ME. OR MAYBE JUST PRAY WHERE PEOPLE CAN'T SEE YOU FOR A FEW WEEKS?

YOU TRUST ME BECAUSE I DO NOT COMPROMISE MY PRINCIPLES. I CANNOT COMPROMISE TO MY GOD.

DANIEL REMAINS FIRM. AND AT THE END OF THE DAY, KING DARIUS CANNOT CHANGE THE LAW, EVEN ONE THAT HE HIMSELF SIGNED.



RELUCTANTLY, HE ORDERS HIS GUARDS TO TAKE DANIEL TO THE LIONS' DEN AND THROW HIM IN.

LOOK! DANIEL DOESN'T SEEM TO BE AFRAID.

HE WILL BE WHEN HE GETS TO THE LIONS' DEN. OUR PLAN TO GET RID OF HIM IS WORKING PERFECTLY.




A FEW MINUTES LATER, DANIEL, WHO BROKE THE KING'S LAW BY PRAYING TO GOD, IS THROWN IN WITH THE LIONS.

SEAL THE DEN WITH A STONE SO THAT EVERYONE WILL KNOW I AM ENFORCING THE LAW.


MY OWN PRIDE AND THIS STUPID LAW HAVE COST ME MY ONLY TRUSTED FRIEND.



MY ONLY HOPE NOW IS THAT YOUR GOD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO SAVE YOU!



THAT NIGHT THE KING
CAN'T EAT OR SLEEP.
HE PACES BACK AND
FORTH THINKING
ABOUT DANIEL.



AT DAYBREAK, THE
KING RUSHES TO
THE LIONS' DEN.

ROLL
AWAY THAT
STONE!



O KING,
MY GOD SENT
AN ANGEL WHO SHUT
THE MOUTHS OF THE
LIONS! MY GOD FOUND
ME FAITHFUL. JUST LIKE
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
FAITHFUL TO YOU,
MY KING.

DANIEL!
DID YOUR
GOD PROTECT
YOU?

THE KING IS OVERJOYED AND ORDERS A ROPE THROWN DOWN INTO THE DEN. DANIEL IS PULLED OUT.



THEN THE KING SENDS FOR THE NOBLES WHO PLOTTED DANIEL'S DEATH.



THE LIONS, WHO HAD SEEMED SO TAME JUST A MOMENT BEFORE, IMMEDIATELY DEVOUR THE WICKED ADVISERS.

KING DARIUS MAKES A DECREE ...

I, DARIUS, COMMAND ALL PEOPLE IN THIS KINGDOM TO HONOR THE GOD THAT DANIEL WORSHIPS AND SERVES.



AND FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE, DANIEL HELPS THE PERSIANS RULE BABYLON, THE COUNTRY HE ENTERED AS A CAPTIVE. AGAINST ALL ODDS, HE BOLDLY STANDS FOR GOD—AND GOD REWARDS HIM.

A Pair of Queens

BASED ON
ESTHER 1:1-2:18

IN THE YEARS SINCE THE PERSIANS CONQUERED BABYLON, THE PERSIAN EMPIRE HAS BECOME THE MOST POWERFUL IN ALL THE WORLD—REACHING FROM INDIA TO ETHIOPIA. KING XERXES NOW SITS ON THE THRONE AT SUSA. TO CELEBRATE HIS GREATNESS, HE THROWS A PARTY FOR HIS NOBLEMEN—A BIG, EXPENSIVE, AND LONG PARTY.

THE KING HAS BEEN ENTERTAINING HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS FOR SIX MONTHS NOW! HOW MUCH LONGER WILL THIS FEASTING GO ON?

UNTIL HE THINKS HE HAS IMPRESSED ALL OF HIS SUBJECTS WITH HIS WEALTH AND POWER.



XERXES' HUGE PARTY FINALLY COMES TO AN END. TO CELEBRATE, HE THROWS ANOTHER PARTY, THIS ONE FOR HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OF DRINKING, THE KING BEGINS HIS BOASTING.

YOU KNOW, I'M NOT JUST THE RICHEST AND THE STRONGEST. I ALSO HAVE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WIFE IN THE EMPIRE. YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, DO YOU? NO, NO, THAT'S OKAY. I'LL PROVE IT TO YOU.

SEND FOR QUEEN VASHTI!



JUST YOU WAIT. SHE'S STUNNING.

UMM ... YOUR HIGHNESS? THE QUEEN REFUSES TO COME.



WHAT???



THIS IS HORRIBLE. MY WIFE DOESN'T OBEY MY COMMANDS. MY NOBLEMEN, YOU MUST HELP ME. ACCORDING TO PERSIAN LAW, WHAT CAN I DO TO UNDO WHAT SHE DIDN'T DO?

AFTER PUZZLING THROUGH THE KING'S QUESTION, ONE OF HIS ADVISERS STANDS UP AND POINTS OUT THAT THE CONSEQUENCES ARE MUCH WORSE THAN THEY EVEN REALIZE ...

SHE HAS NOT JUST OFFENDED YOU, O KING. SHE HAS BROUGHT DISASTER UPON ALL THE MEN IN THE KINGDOM! ONCE WOMEN HEAR THAT QUEEN VASHTI HAS DISOBEYED YOU, THEY WILL START DISOBEYING THEIR OWN HUSBANDS. THEY'LL DO WHATEVER THEY WANT. THEY MIGHT EVEN TALK TO US! IT WILL BE CHAOS!

NOW IF I UNDERSTAND THE KING RIGHTLY, AND I THINK I DO, THEN THE KING SHOULD DO WHAT I WOULD DO.

WHICH IS?

FIRST, ANNOUNCE THAT VASHTI IS NO LONGER THE QUEEN. THEN, SEARCH THE COUNTRYSIDE LOOKING FOR THE MOST BEAUTIFUL, YOUNG, AND QUIET WOMEN IN THE LAND. YOU CAN PICK OUT A NEW WIFE. A **BETTER** WIFE!

THEN WOMEN WILL KNOW NOT TO TALK BACK TO THEIR HUSBANDS. AND WE'LL HAVE PEACE.

BRILLIANT!

HE'S SO RIGHT.

WE'LL MAKE OUR WOMEN RESPECT US!

SO THE KING BANISHES HIS QUEEN AND SENDS OUT A DECREE. "VASHTI IS NO LONGER THE QUEEN, AND I THINK EVERY MAN SHOULD BE KING IN HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD!"

AFTER HIS RAGE—AND THE WINE—WEARS OFF, KING XERXES STARTS TO MISS VASHTI. THEN HE REMEMBERS WHAT SHE HAD DONE—AND WHAT HE HAD DONE.

I DON'T HAVE A BEAUTIFUL QUEEN ANYMORE! AND I CAN'T BRING VASHTI BACK BECAUSE I CANNOT UNDO THE NEW LAW.

I KNOW WHAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER. WE'LL BRING YOU ALL THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN IN THE KINGDOM. YOU CAN PICK YOUR FAVORITE TO BE YOUR NEW QUEEN. AND THE ONE YOU PICK WILL BE EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN VASHTI.

THE SHALLOW KING AGREES.

NOW THERE IS A JEWISH MAN NAMED MORDECAI WHO WORKS IN THE COURTS OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF SUSAN. HE HAS A COUSIN NAMED ESTHER. ESTHER'S PARENTS DIED WHEN SHE WAS VERY YOUNG, SO MORDECAI HAS RAISED HER LIKE HIS OWN DAUGHTER. NOW THAT SHE'S GROWN UP, ESTHER IS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WHO IMPRESSES EVERYONE SHE MEETS.

WHEN ALL THE BEAUTIFUL WOMEN IN THE LAND ARE BROUGHT TO THE KING'S PALACE, ESTHER IS AMONG THEM.

DON'T BE AFRAID, YOU WILL BE TREATED WELL IN THE PALACE. BUT DON'T LET ANYONE KNOW THAT YOU ARE JEWISH!

IN THE PALACE, THE YOUNG WOMEN ARE BROUGHT BEFORE HEGAI, THE HEAD SERVANT IN CHARGE OF MAKING SURE ALL THE CANDIDATES ARE AS BEAUTIFUL AS CAN BE.

YOU GIRLS MAY HAVE BEEN PRETTY ENOUGH FOR THE PIG HERDER IN YOUR TINY TOWN. BUT NONE OF YOU IS PRETTY ENOUGH FOR THE KING! AT LEAST, NOT YET. NOT UNTIL I'VE WORKED MY MAGIC. YOU WON'T EVEN GET TO SEE THE KING UNTIL I'VE POLISHED YOUR LOOKS LIKE A JEWELER POLISHING A BEAUTIFUL GEMSTONE.



FIRST, WE'RE GOING TO TAKE SIX MONTHS TO TREAT YOUR SKIN WITH THE FINEST LOTIONS AND OILS. KING XERXES CAN'T STAND THE SIGHT OF PIMPLES.

THEN WE'LL TAKE ANOTHER SIX MONTHS FINDING EXACTLY THE RIGHT SCENT OF PERFUME FOR YOU. WE'LL ALSO TEACH YOU HOW TO APPLY MAKEUP TO BEST SHOW OFF YOUR FACE. THEN, AND ONLY THEN, WILL YOU GET TO SEE THE KING. AT THAT POINT, IF THE KING LIKES YOU AND REMEMBERS YOUR NAME, YOU WILL BE OUR NEXT QUEEN.



BUT I MUST TELL YOU—EVEN AFTER ALL MY BEAUTY TREATMENTS, THE KING HAS NEVER REMEMBERED ANY OF THE CANDIDATES' NAMES.



IN SPITE OF HIS LOW OPINION OF THE YOUNG WOMEN, HEGAI IS IMMEDIATELY CHARMED BY ESTHER.

YOU HAVE GRACE AND INTELLIGENCE LIKE NONE OF THESE OTHER GIRLS. I'M GIVING YOU SEVEN MAIDS TO ATTEND TO YOU PERSONALLY. YOU WILL HAVE THE BEST ROOM IN THE PALACE.

MEANWHILE, MORDECAI HAS BEEN WORRIED ABOUT HIS ADOPTED DAUGHTER. EVERY DAY HE HANGS AROUND THE OUTSIDE WALLS OF THE HAREM HOPING TO HEAR NEWS OF ESTHER. THERE HE MAKES FRIENDS WITH THE GUARDS, WHO LET HIM HANG OUT NEAR THE WOMEN'S SECTION OF THE PALACE.



DON'T WORRY. EVERYONE IN THE PALACE LOVES ESTHER.

YOU'RE A GOOD FATHER TO CHECK ON HER, BUT SHE IS WELL TAKEN CARE OF.

FINALLY, AFTER 12 MONTHS OF BEAUTY TREATMENTS, HEGAI THINKS ESTHER IS READY TO BE PRESENTED TO THE KING.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANT TO BRING WITH YOU, ESTHER?



THE NEXT DAY, HEGAI IS CALLED BEFORE THE THRONE.

IT'S BEEN THREE YEARS, HEGAI! THREE YEARS OF YOUR BEAUTY TREATMENTS AND HO-HUM VILLAGE GIRLS. AND IN ALL THAT TIME, I HAVEN'T FOUND ANYONE WHO COULD COMPARE TO VASHTI. YOUR JOB IS FINISHED! DON'T BOTHER BRINGING ME ANY MORE GIRLS.

YES, YOUR HIGHNESS.

INSTEAD, BRING ME BACK THAT GIRL ESTHER TO BE MY NEW QUEEN.

Persian Politics

BASED ON ESTHER 2:19-3:15

FOR MONTHS, ESTHER—ALONG WITH HUNDREDS OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN OF PERSIA—HAS LIVED IN THE PALACE WAITING FOR THE KING TO CHOOSE ONE OF THEM TO BE HIS WIFE. THE KING HAS FINALLY MADE HIS CHOICE ...

ESTHER, YOU ARE NOW MY WIFE, QUEEN OF ALL PERSIA.

I AM HONORED, MY LORD.

BUT ESTHER HAS KEPT HER FAMILY A SECRET. SHE HASN'T TOLD ANYONE ABOUT HER ADOPTED FATHER, MORDECAI, A JEWISH CITY OFFICIAL. LATE THAT NIGHT, HE GOES TO THE WALLS OF THE HAREM TO CHECK ON ESTHER, THE NEW QUEEN.



I AM SO PROUD AND HAPPY FOR YOU! BUT REMEMBER, EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE THE QUEEN NOW, DON'T LET ANYONE KNOW THAT YOU'RE JEWISH.

AS HE'S LEAVING ESTHER'S GARDEN, MORDECAI OVERHEARS TWO OF THE KING'S SERVANTS ...



OUR PLAN CANNOT FAIL.

NO, BY THIS TIME TOMORROW, THE KING WILL BE DEAD. AND NO ONE WILL KNOW WHO KILLED HIM.

MORDECAI QUICKLY SENDS WORD OF THE PLOT TO ESTHER. THAT VERY NIGHT, THE KING CALLS FOR HER.

WHY DO YOU LOOK TROUBLED, MY LOVELY? IT GIVES YOU WRINKLES.

MY KING, TWO OF YOUR SERVANTS PLAN TO ASSASSINATE YOU!

KING XERXES INVESTIGATES AND FINDS OUT THAT ESTHER'S REPORT IS TRUE. HE HAS GUARDS BRING HIS TRAITOROUS SERVANTS BEFORE HIM.



ACCORDING TO PERSIAN LAW, WHAT IS THE PUNISHMENT FOR ATTEMPTING TO KILL THE KING?

DEATH BY IMPALING, SIRE.



GOOD! DO THAT. NOW, MY CHARMING QUEEN, HOW DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS PLOT?



MORDECAI, ONE OF YOUR COURT OFFICIALS, TOLD ME. HE OVERHEARD BIGTHANA AND TERESH TALKING.

YOU HEAR THAT? MORDECAI SAVED MY LIFE. YOU, SCRIBE! WRITE THAT DOWN IN THE OFFICIAL BOOK OF RECORDS BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO FORGET IT. I SHOULD REWARD HIM SOMEHOW.



SOON AFTER THIS, THE KING NEEDS TO PROMOTE SOMEONE TO BE THE NEW PRIME MINISTER ...



HAMAN, YOU WILL BE ABOVE ALL THE PRINCES OF MY COURT. PEOPLE WILL BOW TO YOU LIKE THEY DO TO ME.

YOU HAVE HONORED ME VERY MUCH, MY LORD.



HAMAN IS VERY PROUD AND ENJOYS HAVING PEOPLE IN THE CITY COURT BOW BEFORE HIM. BUT MORDECAI REFUSES TO BOW WHEN HAMAN WALKS BY.



WHO IS THAT MAN WHO DOES NOT SHOW PROPER RESPECT FOR ME?

THAT'S MORDECAI—A JEW. AND JEWS WILL NOT BOW TO ANY MAN.



ALRIGHT, MORDECAI, YOUR DAY WILL COME. YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS—AND SO WILL EVERY JEW IN PERSIA!

HAMAN GOES HOME AND CASTS LOTS—CALLED "PURIM"—TO DECIDE WHICH DAY HE WILL SET FOR THE JEWS' PUNISHMENT.



LET'S SEE WHAT DATE AND MONTH I WILL EXTERMINATE YOU ... AHA! THE 13TH DAY OF THE MONTH OF ADAR.

ANGERED BECAUSE MORDECAI WILL NOT BOW BEFORE HIM, HAMAN PREPARES HIS REVENGE. BUT FIRST HE MUST TRICK HIS FOOLISH KING.

MY KING, THERE'S A RACE OF PEOPLE IN YOUR KINGDOM WHO DO NOT OBEY YOU. FOR YOUR SAFETY, THEY SHOULD BE DESTROYED. GIVE ME PERMISSION TO MAKE A LAW THAT WILL GET RID OF THEM IN PERSIA.

OH, WOW! I'M GLAD YOU BROUGHT THIS TO MY ATTENTION, HAMAN. DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO PROTECT ME. USE MY RING TO SEAL THE NEW LAW. THEN EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOUR LAW IS MY LAW.



HAMAN'S LAW IS QUICKLY DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE KINGDOM OF PERSIA.



LET US CELEBRATE YOUR GOOD DECISION. TO MY LOYAL PRIME MINISTER!



WHY WOULD THE KING DO THIS TO US? WE HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING WRONG!

If I Perish, I Perish

BASED ON ESTHER 4

WHEN MORDECAI HEARS THE ORDERS, HE DRESSES IN SACKCLOTH AND POURS ASHES OVER HIS HEAD TO SHOW HIS GRIEF. THEN HE VISITS ESTHER, WHO HE HOPES WILL BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE IN SACKCLOTH? DON'T YOU KNOW IT'S AGAINST THE LAW TO SHOW MOURNING IN THE KING'S PALACE? YOU COULD BE KILLED!

I AM TO BE KILLED ANYWAY—ALONG WITH ALL OF OUR PEOPLE.



WHAT?
WHY?



THE KING HAS PASSED A NEW LAW ORDERING THAT ALL JEWS ARE TO BE KILLED. IT MUST BE HAMAN'S DOING. HIS PEOPLE HAVE HATED OUR PEOPLE EVER SINCE THE TIME OF KING SAUL.



YOU MUST GO TO THE KING AND ASK HIM TO SPARE THE JEWS.

I SHOULD GO SEE THE KING? THE KING HAS ONE RULE ABOUT ANYONE WHO APPROACHES HIM WITHOUT BEING INVITED: DEATH! UNLESS HE DECIDES TO HOLD OUT HIS SCEPTER. AND THE KING HASN'T CALLED FOR ME IN A MONTH. IF I GO TO KING XERXES UNINVITED, I FACE THE DEATH PENALTY!





IF YOU
DON'T GO, YOUR
WHOLE PEOPLE
FACE THE DEATH
PENALTY.



WHO KNOWS?
MAYBE YOU HAVE
BEEN PUT INTO THIS
ROYAL POSITION
FOR A TIME JUST
LIKE THIS.

TODAY, YOU MUST
BE MORE THAN A
QUEEN—YOU MUST
BE A JEW. AND TO
SAVE US, YOU MUST
BE MORE THAN A
JEW—YOU MUST
BE A QUEEN.



GO, GATHER ALL THE JEWS IN THE CITY. FAST
AND PRAY FOR ME. DON'T EAT OR DRINK FOR
THREE DAYS. I WILL DO THE SAME. AFTER
THREE DAYS, I WILL GO TO THE KING
UNINVITED. AND IF I PERISH, I PERISH.

Who Will Be Hanged?

BASED ON ESTHER 5-10

QUEEN ESTHER BREAKS A LAW BY APPEARING BEFORE THE KING WITHOUT AN INVITATION—SHE COULD BE PUNISHED BY DEATH. BUT THE LIVES OF HER PEOPLE, THE JEWS, ARE IN DANGER, AND SHE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO MAY BE ABLE TO SAVE THEM.



ESTHER! I DIDN'T INVITE HER TO COME BEFORE ME!

BUT AS XERXES LOOKS AT HIS BEAUTIFUL NEW QUEEN, HE DECIDES HE DOESN'T MIND THE INTRUSION. HE HOLDS OUT HIS SCEPTER TO SHOW HIS FORGIVENESS.



WHAT IS IT, MY BREATHTAKING BEAUTY? WHAT IS YOUR REQUEST? EVEN IF YOU WANTED HALF OF MY KINGDOM, I WOULD GIVE IT TO YOU.

THE MOMENT HAS COME WHEN ESTHER CAN ASK KING XERXES TO SPARE HER PEOPLE.



I ... REQUEST ... THAT YOU AND HAMAN ... COME TO A PRIVATE PARTY. JUST THE THREE OF US.

A PARTY WITH YOU? ABSOLUTELY! FIND HAMAN NOW!

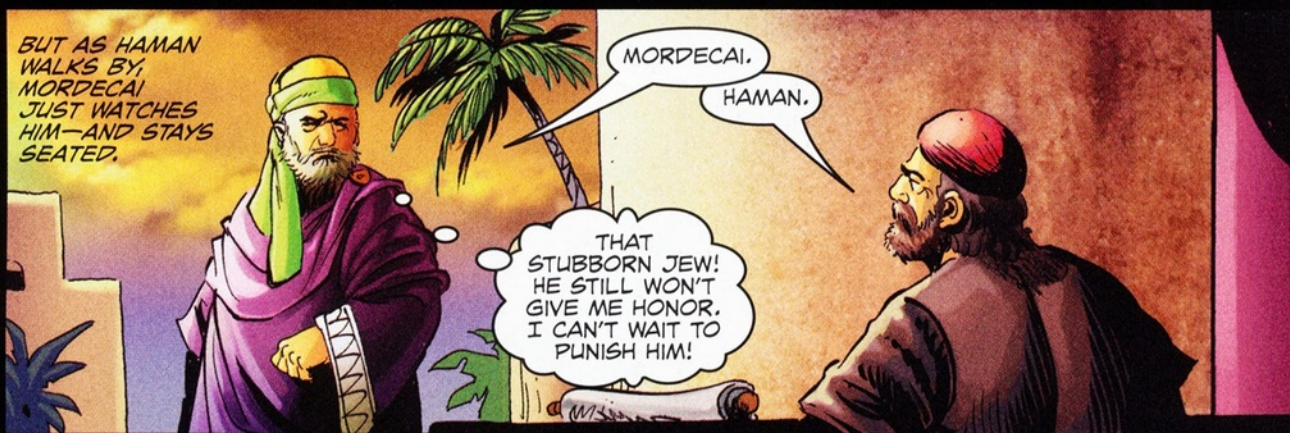
ESTHER ENTERTAINS THE KING AND HAMAN IN HER OWN PRIVATE GARDEN. BUT SHE STILL DOESN'T TELL XERXES HER REAL REQUEST. INSTEAD, SHE INVITES HIM AND HAMAN TO COME TO ANOTHER PARTY TOMORROW. THEN, SHE PROMISES, SHE'LL TELL HIM HER TRUE REQUEST. THE KING ACCEPTS, AND SO DOES HAMAN, WHO IS OVERJOYED TO BE INCLUDED.



HAMAN LEAVES HIS MONARCHS' PRESENCE IN A GREAT MOOD. THE HONOR AND THE WINE HE HAS BEEN GIVEN MAKE HIM VERY HAPPY—UNTIL HE LEAVES THE PALACE.



BUT AS HAMAN WALKS BY, MORDECAI JUST WATCHES HIM—AND STAYS SEATED.



AT HOME, HAMAN BOASTS ABOUT HIS SUCCESS TO HIS WIFE.

THE KING HAS GIVEN ME GREAT WEALTH AND HONOR. AND THAT'S NOT ALL! THE QUEEN INCLUDES ME IN HER PRIVATE BANQUETS.

BUT NONE OF THAT GIVES ME SATISFACTION WHEN I SEE THAT JEW, MORDECAI, DISHONOR ME.



YOU KNOW WHAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER, HAMAN? YOU SHOULD BUILD A GALLOWS TONIGHT. THEN, FIRST THING IN THE MORNING, ASK THE KING TO HAVE MORDECAI HANGED ON IT. THEN YOU'LL BE ABLE TO ENJOY YOUR DINNER WITH THE QUEEN.



HEE HEE HEE! WAIT UNTIL MORDECAI SEES WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HIM TOMORROW.



THAT SAME NIGHT, THE KING CAN'T SLEEP.

I'LL HAVE A SERVANT READ ME THE PUBLIC RECORDS. THAT WILL PUT ME TO SLEEP.

THE SCRIBE READS TO THE KING UNTIL THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING. WHEN THE READING REACHES THE STORY OF MORDECAI, THE KING INTERRUPTS.

STOP! WHAT REWARD DID MORDECAI RECEIVE FOR SAVING MY LIFE?

NONE, MY LORD.

WELL, THAT'S NOT GOOD. I REALLY OUGHT TO DO SOMETHING FOR HIM.

AT THAT MOMENT, HAMAN ENTERS THE COURT TO REQUEST MORDECAI'S HANGING.

AH, HAMAN, YOU'RE JUST THE PERSON I NEED TO SEE. IF I WANTED TO HONOR YOU FOR PLEASING ME, WHAT WOULD YOU PREFER I DO?

OH! WELL, I'D WANT TO WEAR ONE OF YOUR ROBES—AND RIDE YOUR HORSE! THEN HAVE ONE OF YOUR NOBLES LEAD ME THROUGH THE CITY TELLING EVERYONE, "THE KING RESPECTS THIS MAN!"

I KNEW YOU'D HAVE A GREAT SUGGESTION! GET THE ROBE, AND GET THE HORSE. DO EXACTLY WHAT YOU SAID—FOR THAT JEW MORDECAI WHO WORKS AT MY GATES.

MORDECAI! BUT I—YES, SIRE.



ANGRY AND HUMILIATED, HAMAN IS FORCED TO PERFORM FOR HIS ENEMY, MORDECAI, THE CEREMONY THAT HE PLANNED FOR HIMSELF.

THE KING RESPECTS THIS MAN ...



WHEN HE IS FINISHED, HE BARELY HAS TIME TO MAKE IT TO THE PALACE FOR HIS DATE WITH ESTHER AND THE KING. HE ARRIVES IN A FOUL MOOD.

AS DELIGHTFUL AS THESE PARTIES ARE, MY LUSCIOUS QUEEN, YOU MUST HAVE HAD A DIFFERENT REASON TO SEEK ME OUT. I PROMISE TO GIVE YOU ANYTHING YOU ASK FOR.

MY KING, IF YOU HAVE ANY LIKING FOR ME, SAVE MY LIFE! THAT IS MY REQUEST. AND SPARE THE LIVES OF MY PEOPLE. BY THE CRUEL PLAN OF A CERTAIN MAN, WE ARE TO BE PUT TO DEATH.



THE WICKED HAMAN!

PUT YOU TO DEATH? WHO WOULD DARE DO SUCH A THING?



THE KING STORMS OUT OF THE GARDEN IN A RAGE. HAMAN REALIZES HE HAS MADE A HUGE MISTAKE.

PLEASE—
WHEN HE COMES
BACK—TELL THE
KING TO SPARE
MY LIFE!



BUT THE KING
HAS ALREADY
RETURNED.

AND NOW
YOU'RE ATTACKING
MY QUEEN IN MY
OWN PALACE???



YOUR HIGHNESS, HAMAN
WAS INTENDING TO HANG
MORDECAI, WHO SAVED
YOUR LIFE. HE HAS JUST
BUILT A GALLOW'S NEAR
HIS HOUSE.

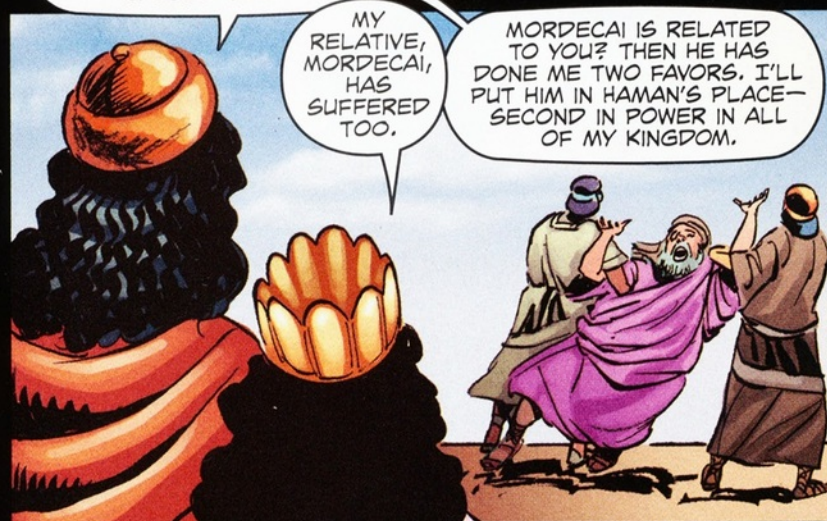
OH, WHAT
GOOD TIMING.
HANG HAMAN ON
THAT! TAKE HIM
AWAY!



YOU SHALL HAVE
HAMAN'S WEALTH BECAUSE
OF THE SUFFERING HE HAS
CAUSED YOU.

MY
RELATIVE,
MORDECAI,
HAS
SUFFERED
TOO.

MORDECAI IS RELATED
TO YOU? THEN HE HAS
DONE ME TWO FAVORS. I'LL
PUT HIM IN HAMAN'S PLACE—
SECOND IN POWER IN ALL
OF MY KINGDOM.



BUT ESTHER KNOWS THIS IS NOT ENOUGH.

IF I HAVE PLEASED YOU, I BEG YOU TO TAKE BACK THE ORDER HAMAN SENT TO KILL ALL THE JEWS.

I WISH I COULD. BUT ACCORDING TO PERSIAN LAW, NO ONE—NOT EVEN THE KING—CAN CANCEL AN ORDER THAT HAS BEEN SEALED WITH THE KING'S RING.

BUT I CAN SEND A NEW ORDER!

THE ORDER IS WRITTEN AND RUSHED TO GOVERNORS THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE.

LISTEN—THE KING SAYS THE JEWS MAY CARRY WEAPONS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THAT MORDECAI, A JEW, HAS BEEN MADE PRIME MINISTER.

AH! THE KING IS ON THE SIDE OF THE JEWS! WE'D BETTER BE TOO.

MAYBE I SHOULD BECOME JEWISH.

HAMAN CAST LOTS—PURIM—TO DESTROY US, BUT INSTEAD WE HAVE BEEN SAVED FROM OUR ENEMY. I'VE WRITTEN AN ORDER THAT EVERY YEAR ALL JEWS MUST CELEBRATE THIS DAY. THERE SHOULD BE MUCH REJOICING AND GIVING OF GIFTS. IT WILL BE CALLED THE FEAST OF PURIM.

ON THE 13TH DAY OF THE 12TH MONTH, THE JEWS THROUGHOUT THE PERSIAN EMPIRE GATHER TOGETHER TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. WITH THE HELP OF THE KING'S GOVERNORS, THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL. AND AT THE PALACE ...

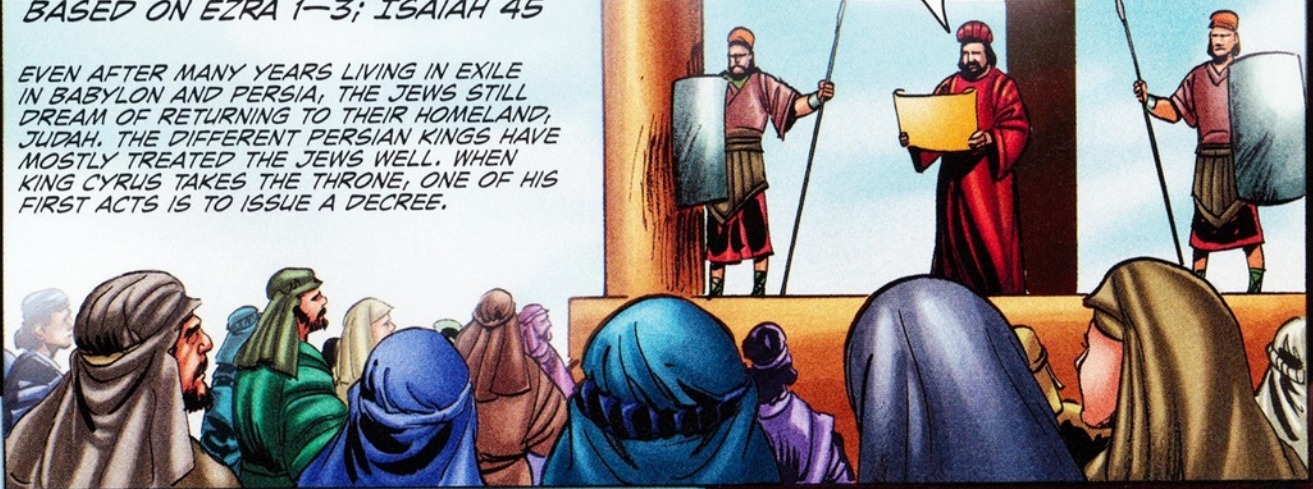
JEWISH PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD STILL CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF PURIM.

The Captives Return

BASED ON EZRA 1-3; ISAIAH 45

EVEN AFTER MANY YEARS LIVING IN EXILE IN BABYLON AND PERSIA, THE JEWS STILL DREAM OF RETURNING TO THEIR HOMETLAND, JUDAH. THE DIFFERENT PERSIAN KINGS HAVE MOSTLY TREATED THE JEWS WELL. WHEN KING CYRUS TAKES THE THRONE, ONE OF HIS FIRST ACTS IS TO ISSUE A DECREE.

THESE ARE THE WORDS OF KING CYRUS: "THE GOD OF ISRAEL COMMANDS THAT A HOUSE BE BUILT FOR HIM IN JERUSALEM. ANY OF HIS PEOPLE WHO WANT TO DO SO MAY RETURN."



THE JEWS REJOICE THAT THE KING IS ALLOWING THEM TO RETURN TO THE LAND GOD PROMISED THEM.

I AM TOO OLD TO MAKE THE JOURNEY. BUT HERE, TAKE THESE GOLD PLATES THAT MY FAMILY HAS PASSED DOWN FOR GENERATIONS. AND HERE IS SOME MONEY AND EXTRA FOOD.



GIFTS OF MONEY, HORSES, MULES, CAMELS, GOLD AND SILVER, FOOD AND CLOTHING POUR IN. AT LAST THE DAY COMES WHEN THE GREAT CARAVAN IS READY TO LEAVE.

THANK GOD I'LL SEE MY HOMETLAND!



ON THE LONG ROAD HOME, THE JEWS FOLLOW THE SAME ROUTE THAT ABRAHAM, THE FATHER OF THE JEWISH NATION, TRAVELED 1,500 YEARS BEFORE WHEN HE OBEYED GOD'S COMMAND TO LEAVE UR AND MAKE A NEW NATION IN PALESTINE.

WHEN WE LEFT JERUSALEM, IT WAS IN FLAMES. I WONDER WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE NOW.

NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR THE RUINED CITY, THEY ARE BROKENHEARTED WHEN THEY WALK THROUGH THE RUBBLE OF JERUSALEM.

SOLOMON'S BEAUTIFUL TEMPLE STOOD OVER THERE.

WITH THE LORD'S HELP, IT WILL BE REBUILT.

OUR FAMILY BUILT THIS HOME WITH THEIR OWN HANDS. LOOK AT IT NOW—IT'S A HOME FOR WILD DOGS.

MAYBE WE SHOULD NOT HAVE COME BACK. MAYBE ...

OUR FOREFATHERS BUILT MUCH OF THIS CITY. WE'LL REBUILD IT! JERUSALEM WILL RISE AGAIN—YOU'LL SEE!

ALTHOUGH THE CITY OF JERUSALEM IS IN RUINS, THE JEWS WHO HAVE RETURNED FROM CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON SET TO WORK TO REBUILD IT. JESHUA AND ZERUBBABEL START BY REBUILDING THE ALTAR ON ITS OLD SPOT IN FRONT OF THE TEMPLE.

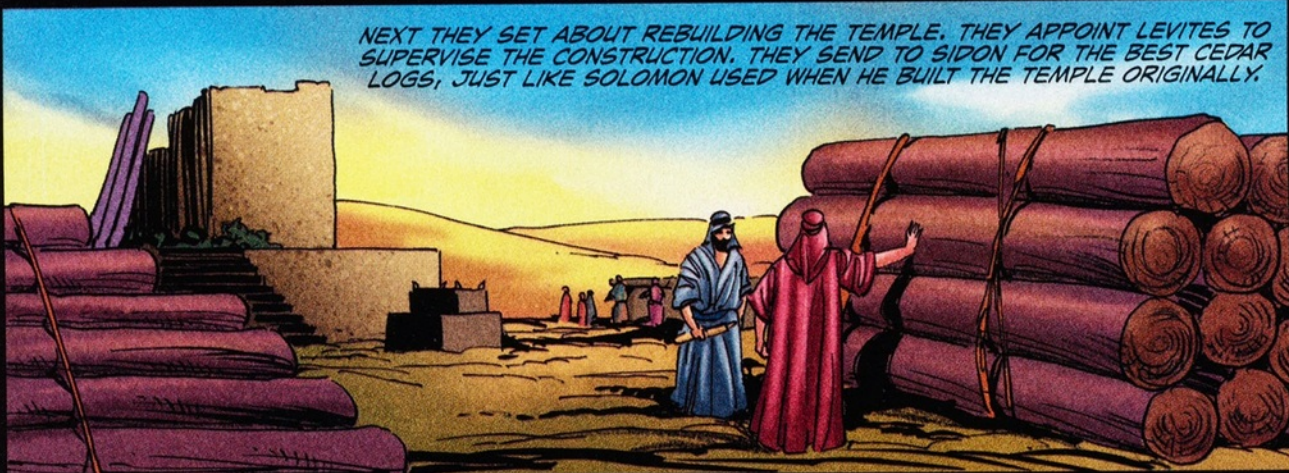


IN THE MIDST OF THE RUINS, THE JEWISH PEOPLE CELEBRATE THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY YEARS.



IT IS GOOD TO FINALLY BURN OFFERINGS TO THE LORD IN JERUSALEM, EVEN THOUGH THE TEMPLE IS NOT REBUILT YET.

NEXT THEY SET ABOUT REBUILDING THE TEMPLE. THEY APPOINT LEVITES TO SUPERVISE THE CONSTRUCTION. THEY SEND TO SIDON FOR THE BEST CEDAR LOGS, JUST LIKE SOLOMON USED WHEN HE BUILT THE TEMPLE ORIGINALLY.



WHEN THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE IS IN PLACE, THE HIGH PRIEST LEADS THE PEOPLE IN A SERVICE OF WORSHIP AND REJOICING.



GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD. HIS FAITHFUL LOVE LASTS FOREVER.

THE NOISE FROM THEIR CELEBRATION IS SO GREAT THAT IT CAN BE HEARD FROM MILES AWAY.

Temple Troubles

BASED ON EZRA 4-6;
HAGGAI; ZECHARIAH

BUT THE SOUND OF THE JEWS' REJOICING BRINGS TROUBLE. THE SAMARITANS WHO LIVE NEAR JERUSALEM COME WITH A REQUEST TO HELP BUILD THE TEMPLE.



OH, I GET IT! YOU THINK YOU'RE TOO GOOD FOR US.

WE'RE SORRY, BUT GOD PUNISHED US 70 YEARS AGO BECAUSE WE RELIED ON OTHER PEOPLE'S HELP, INSTEAD OF TRUSTING IN GOD ALONE. THIS IS SOMETHING WE MUST DO OURSELVES.



IF YOU WON'T LET US HELP BUILD THE TEMPLE, WE'LL MAKE SURE YOU DON'T BUILD IT AT ALL ...

THE SAMARITANS SEND A LETTER TO KING CYRUS.

DON'T YOU KNOW THAT JERUSALEM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A REBELLIOUS AND WICKED CITY? IF YOU LET THEM REBUILD THEIR CITY AND THEIR TEMPLE, THEY WILL EVENTUALLY REVOLT AGAINST YOU AND MAKE YOU LOOK WEAK.



CHECK THE HISTORY SCROLLS.

IT'S TRUE, SIRE. JERUSALEM HAS ALWAYS REBELLED AGAINST THE POWERFUL EMPIRES.



ORDER THEM TO STOP REBUILDING IMMEDIATELY! I WILL NOT LET THIS THREAT RISE FROM THE ASHES.

FORCED TO OBEY, THE JEWS TURN TO WORK ON THEIR HOMES AND GARDENS. SEVERAL YEARS PASS. CYRUS DIES, AND NEW KINGS COME TO THE THRONE OF PERSIA, BUT STILL THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM IS NOT COMPLETED.

HAGGAI

ONE DAY, HAGGAI, ONE OF THE PROPHETS IN JERUSALEM, RECEIVES A WORD FROM THE LORD. HE IMMEDIATELY GOES TO ZERUBBABEL AND JESHUA.

THE LORD WAS WONDERING: WHY HAVE YOU FINISHED BUILDING YOUR HOUSES, WHILE GOD'S HOUSE IS STILL IN RUINS?

ZERUBBABEL TRIES TO DEFEND HIMSELF.

WE WERE FOLLOWING THE LAW OF PERSIA. WE HAVE TOO MANY ENEMIES WHO DON'T WANT US TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE.

GOD SAYS, "DO NOT BE AFRAID OF YOUR ENEMIES. FINISH MY TEMPLE, FOR I AM WITH YOU."

WITH HAGGAI'S PROPHETIC ENCOURAGEMENT, THE JEWS RESUME WORK ON THE TEMPLE.

BUT THE GOVERNORS IN THE AREA ARE CONCERNED BY THE SUDDEN REBUILDING.

WHO GAVE YOU PERMISSION TO BUILD THIS FORTRESS?

IT'S NOT A FORTRESS, IT'S THE TEMPLE TO OUR GOD THAT WAS DESTROYED BY THE BABYLONIANS MANY YEARS AGO. AND KING CYRUS HIMSELF GAVE US PERMISSION TO REBUILD IT—HE EVEN PAID FOR IT OUT OF THE ROYAL TREASURY.

WE'LL SEE IF THAT'S TRUE.

EVERYONE IS AGAINST US. WE'LL NEVER FINISH THE TEMPLE.

BUT ZECARIAH, ANOTHER PROPHET AMONG THE RETURNED EXILES, COMES TO ZERUBBABEL WITH AN ENCOURAGING WORD.

EVEN IF YOUR OWN STRENGTH FAILS YOU, DO NOT LOSE HOPE. THE TEMPLE WILL NOT BE REBUILT BY STRENGTH OR POWER, BUT BY THE LORD'S HOLY SPIRIT.



WHEN THE GOVERNORS RETURN, THEY COME WITH GOOD NEWS FOR THE JEWS IN JERUSALEM.

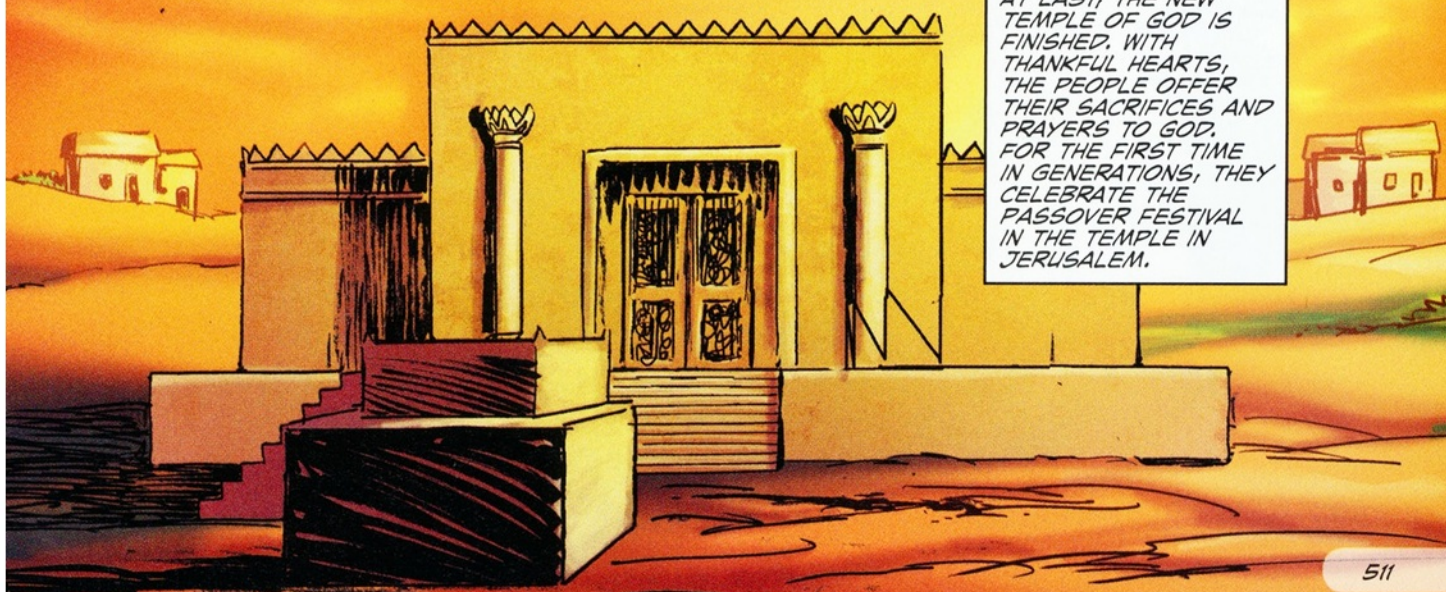
IT TURNS OUT THE PERSIANS REALLY DID MAKE A LAW THAT YOU COULD REBUILD YOUR TEMPLE. AND PERSIAN LAW CANNOT BE CHANGED. THE NEW KING EVEN SAID THAT HE WOULD PAY FOR ALL THE SUPPLIES YOU NEED.



THANK YOU, LORD, FOR FULFILLING YOUR PROMISE!



AT LAST, THE NEW TEMPLE OF GOD IS FINISHED. WITH THANKFUL HEARTS, THE PEOPLE OFFER THEIR SACRIFICES AND PRAYERS TO GOD. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN GENERATIONS, THEY CELEBRATE THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL IN THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM.



Enter Ezra

BASED ON EZRA 7-10

THE JEWS HAVE NOW BEEN BACK IN JERUSALEM FOR 80 YEARS. EVEN THOUGH THE NEW TEMPLE IS FINISHED, THE CITY—AND MORE IMPORTANT, THEIR WORSHIP—STILL HAS NOT BEEN REPAIRED.

ONE DAY, A FINE PROCESSION APPROACHES THE CITY. THE JEWS SWARM THE ROAD TO MEET THIS RICH PARADE.

WHO ARE YOU?

I AM EZRA, A PRIEST WHO SERVED THE LORD IN BABYLON. THE GOOD HAND OF THE LORD WAS UPON ME, AND SO KING ARTAXERXES HAS GIVEN ME AUTHORITY IN JERUSALEM.

YOU HAVE BEEN TOO LONG WITHOUT SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP. YOU MAY HAVE REBUILT THE TEMPLE, BUT NOW WE MUST REBUILD THE PURITY OF WORSHIP AND GOD'S LAW.

YOU ARE RIGHT. WE HAVE NOT WORSHIPPED GOD LIKE WE SHOULD. HELP US RENEW OUR FAITH IN GOD!

I WILL. REMEMBER, WE MUST BE HOLY BECAUSE OUR GOD IS HOLY.

UNDER EZRA, JERUSALEM GROWS IN SIZE AND SPIRITUAL STRENGTH, BUT THE CITY IS STILL WITHOUT WALLS AND SURROUNDED BY HOSTILE NEIGHBORS.

Wall Warriors

BASED ON NEHEMIAH



THE JEWISH EXILES WHO HAVE RETURNED FROM PERSIA TO JERUSALEM HAVE FINALLY SETTLED IN THEIR OLD CITY. THEY'VE BUILT HOUSES AND NEIGHBORHOODS FOR THEMSELVES, THEY'VE REBUILT THE TEMPLE TO MATCH ITS FORMER GLORY, AND UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF EZRA, THEY'VE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO FOLLOWING GOD'S WORD. BUT THEY HAVE NOT YET HAD THE CHANCE TO REBUILD THE OLD WALLS.

THAT NIGHT, WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS, A STRANGER AND HIS GUARDS RIDE AROUND JERUSALEM. THE STRANGER EXAMINES THE WALLS.



THE CITY COULD BE WIPED OUT IN ONE QUICK ATTACK.

YOU'RE RIGHT, NEHEMIAH. BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN A GREAT FORTRESS AT ONE TIME. THESE WALLS ARE AS THICK AS ANY WE HAVE IN PERSIA.

THE NEXT DAY NEHEMIAH CALLS ON THE PRIESTS AND RULERS OF THE CITY.

I HAVE EXAMINED THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM. THEY ARE JUST HEAPS OF BROKEN STONE. THE CITY IS DEFENSELESS.

YOU'RE RIGHT, BUT WHY—

WHY HAVE I COME? BECAUSE I, TOO, AM A JEW. AND WHILE I WAS SERVING THE KING OF PERSIA AS HIS CUP-BEARER, I LEARNED THAT JERUSALEM WAS WITHOUT ANY DEFENSE. I PRAYED TO GOD, AND THE KING GAVE ME PERMISSION TO COME AND BUILD UP THE WALLS. ARE YOU WITH ME?

WE ARE! WE'LL GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY.

THE WORK BEGINS. EVERY ABLE-BODIED MAN AND BOY DOES HIS PART. THE WOMEN HELP ...

... AND SLOWLY THE WALLS BEGIN TO RISE.



BUT SOME OF THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES DO NOT WANT TO SEE JERUSALEM PROTECTED.

IF THE JEWS FINISH THOSE WALLS, THE CITY WILL BE TOO STRONG TO ATTACK.

WE MUST STOP IT NOW!

DOWN WITH THE WALLS!



BUT WHILE THE ENEMIES OF JERUSALEM PLAN TO TAKE THE CITY, NEHEMIAH PREPARES TO DEFEND IT.

WE DON'T HAVE AN ARMY—ONLY OURSELVES. FROM NOW ON, YOU MUST HOLD YOUR HAMMER IN ONE HAND AND A SWORD IN THE OTHER. AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE, WE MUST BE ABLE TO DEFEND OUR CITY. DON'T EVEN TAKE A WATER BREAK WITHOUT YOUR WEAPON.



THE ENEMY APPROACHES—BUT TO THEIR SURPRISE ARMED WORKERS RISE UP, THEIR SPEARS RAISED AND THEIR BOWS PULLED.



THEY'RE ARMED?

RUN AWAY!

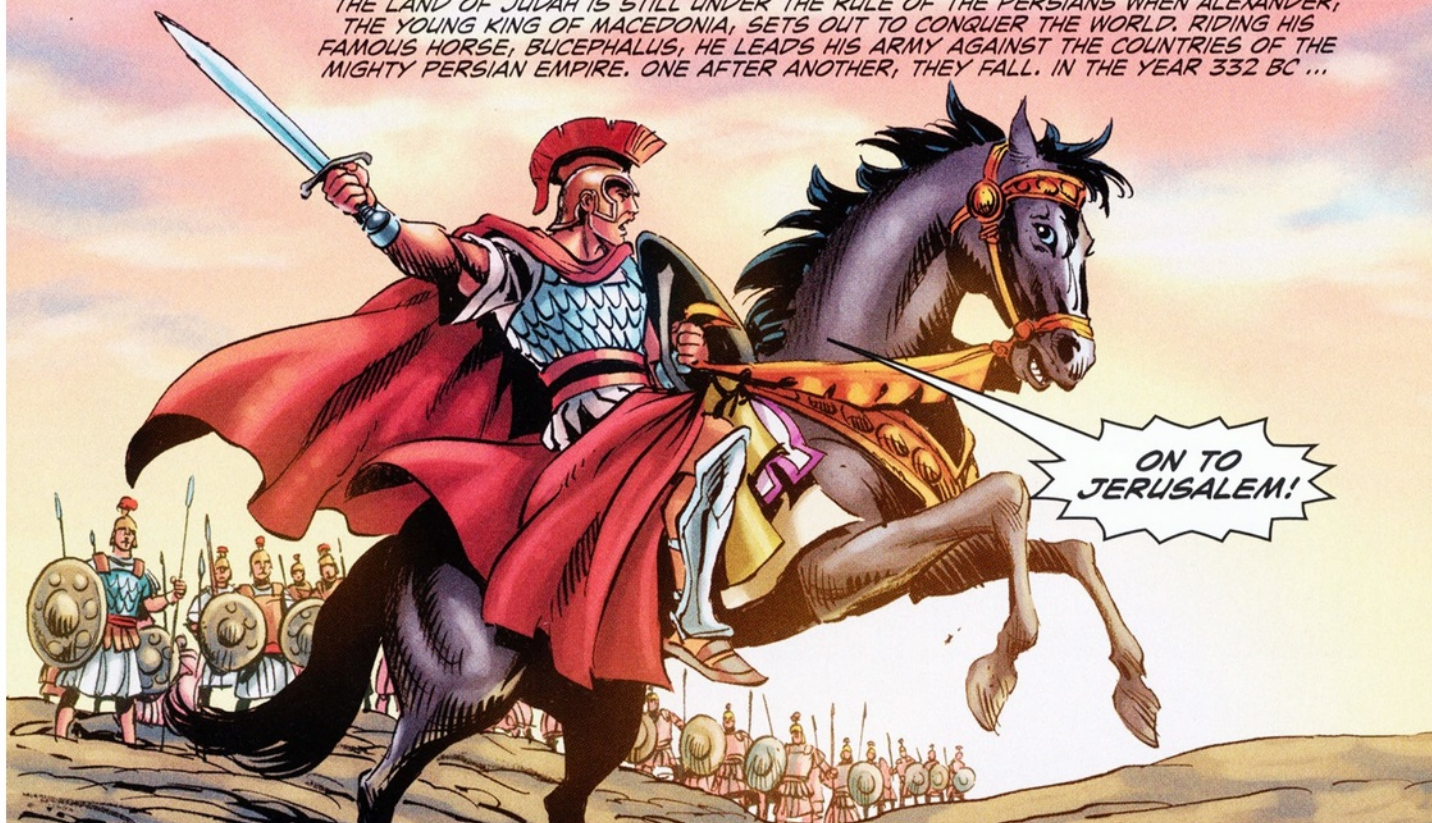


THE WORKERS GO BACK TO THEIR JOBS, AND SOON STRONG WALLS AND HEAVY GATES AGAIN PROTECT THE CITY OF JERUSALEM. BUT INSIDE THERE IS AN EVEN STRONGER LINE OF DEFENSE—A NATION LED BY EZRA AND NEHEMIAH TO LOVE AND OBEY GOD!



Years of Waiting BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE LAND OF JUDAH IS STILL UNDER THE RULE OF THE PERSIANS WHEN ALEXANDER, THE YOUNG KING OF MACEDONIA, SETS OUT TO CONQUER THE WORLD. RIDING HIS FAMOUS HORSE, BUCEPHALUS, HE LEADS HIS ARMY AGAINST THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIGHTY PERSIAN EMPIRE. ONE AFTER ANOTHER, THEY FALL. IN THE YEAR 332 BC ...



WHEN THE HIGH PRIEST IN JERUSALEM HEARS THAT THEY ARE THE NEXT STOP IN ALEXANDER'S CONQUERING JOURNEY, HE PRAYS TO GOD IN DESPERATION. AND GOD GIVES HIM A DREAM.

PUT ON YOUR FORMAL ROBES. WE ARE TO MEET ALEXANDER OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

BUT HE'LL BE ABLE TO KILL ALL OF US IF WE DON'T EVEN HIDE BEHIND THE CITY WALLS!

BUT EVERYONE OBEYS THE HIGH PRIEST. ON THE DAY ALEXANDER ARRIVES, ALL THE PRIESTS OF ISRAEL STAND TO GREET HIM. THE HIGH PRIEST WEARS HIS PURPLE ROBE AND OFFICIAL HAT.





... AND ALEXANDER KNEELS BEFORE THE PRIEST!

PRAISE THE GOD OF THE JEWS!

YOU WORSHIP OUR GOD??



NO, BUT HE CAME TO ME IN A DREAM AND SHOWED ME A VISION—OF YOU! WEARING YOUR PURPLE ROBE AND CROWNED HAT. THEN GOD TOLD ME TO SEEK YOU OUT, AND HE WOULD HELP ME CONQUER ALL OF PERSIA.

IT'S TRUE.

FETCH THE BOOK OF DANIEL!



SEE? OUR OWN PROPHET DANIEL FORETOLD THAT A GREEK WARRIOR WOULD CONQUER ALL PERSIA.

WONDERFUL! UNDER MY REIGN, ALL YOU JEWS WILL LIVE IN PEACE AND WORSHIP YOUR GOD HOWEVER YOU WISH.

BUT—SUDDENLY—ALEXANDER DIES, AND THE GIANT EMPIRE IS DIVIDED AMONG HIS GENERALS. THEY APPOINT FOREIGNERS TO BE PRIESTS IN JERUSALEM AND COMMAND THEM TO WORSHIP ALL GODS. BUT THE LAST STRAW COMES WHEN THE PAGAN PRIEST MAKES A SACRIFICE TO ZEUS IN GOD'S TEMPLE—WITH AN UNCLEAN PIG! MATTATHIAS, A LOCAL PRIEST, CANNOT STAND THIS BLASPHEMY.



NO ONE IS LIKE OUR GOD!

THIS BOLD ACT STIRS ALL JUDAH TO REVOLT!

IN THE WILDERNESS, MATTATHIAS AND HIS SONS PLAN THEIR STRATEGY.

HOW CAN WE FIGHT THE WHOLE SELEUCID ARMY?

WE MUST FIGHT DIRTY—IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP THE TEMPLE CLEAN.

THE FAITHFUL JEWS FOLLOW JUDAH MACCABEE'S ORDERS. THEIR SMALL FORCE IS ABLE TO CATCH THE LARGER ARMY BY SURPRISE AND DRIVE OFF THE FOREIGN PEOPLE WHO DON'T WORSHIP THE TRUE GOD.

JUDAH FALLS ON US LIKE A HAMMER!

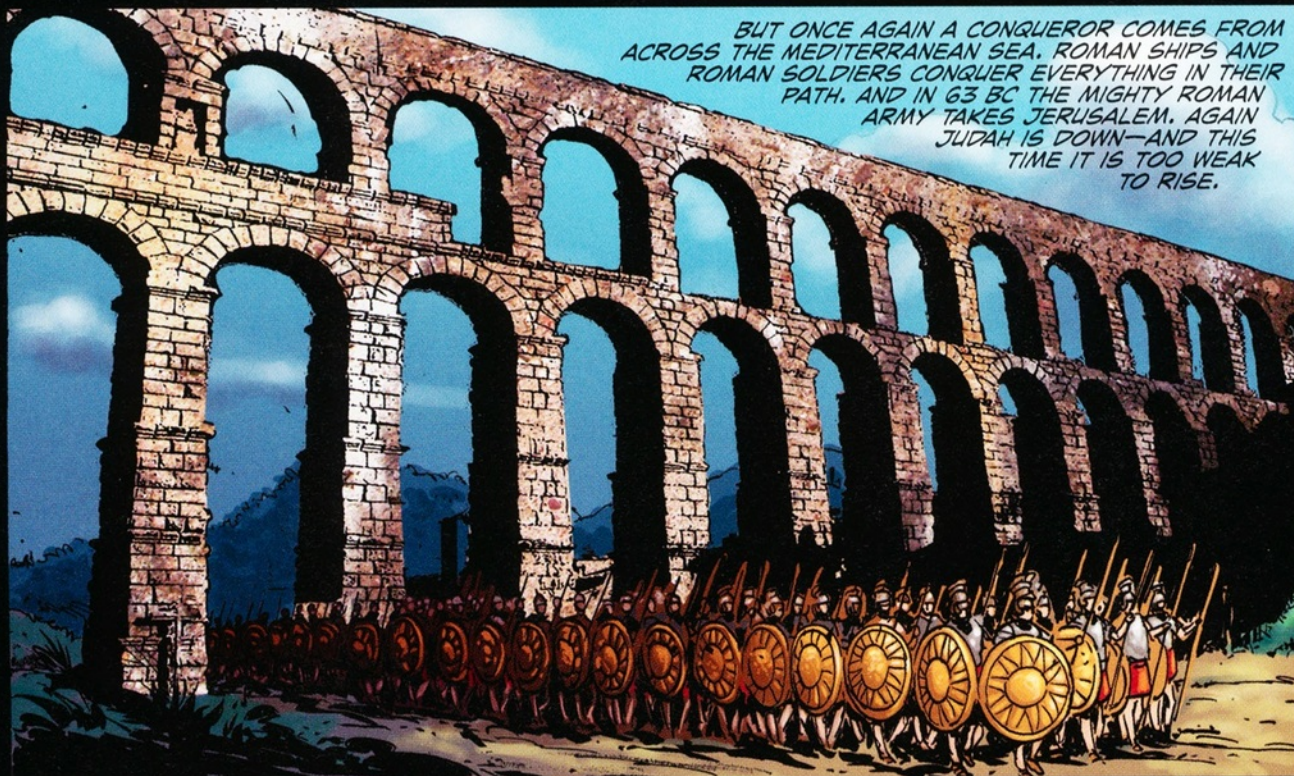
THE ETERNAL FLAME IS ALMOST OUT OF OIL! AND IT WILL TAKE US EIGHT DAYS TO PURIFY MORE OIL FOR IT. WE ONLY HAVE ENOUGH TO LAST THE REST OF THE DAY.

NOW WE CAN CLEANSE AND REDEDICATE OUR HOLY TEMPLE!

BUT THE LIGHT FOR THE ETERNAL FLAME KEEPS BURNING ... AND BURNING ... AND BURNING ... FOR EIGHT DAYS AND NIGHTS—LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE MORE OIL!

THE TEMPLE IS PURIFIED, AND FOR 100 GLORIOUS YEARS, JUDAH IS FREE!

BUT ONCE AGAIN A CONQUEROR COMES FROM ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA. ROMAN SHIPS AND ROMAN SOLDIERS CONQUER EVERYTHING IN THEIR PATH. AND IN 63 BC THE MIGHTY ROMAN ARMY TAKES JERUSALEM. AGAIN JUDAH IS DOWN—AND THIS TIME IT IS TOO WEAK TO RISE.



A FEW YEARS LATER, HEROD BECOMES A GOVERNOR IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE. A JEW BY BACKGROUND, HE'S ALWAYS WANTED TO RULE OVER HIS PEOPLE. HE GOES TO ROME TO APPEAL THEIR SENATE FOR A PROMOTION.



IF YOU MAKE ME RULER OF THE JEWS, I WILL ENSURE THAT THEY NEVER REVOLT AGAINST YOU.



THE ROMANS LIKE HIS PROMISES AND VOTE TO MAKE HEROD THE KING OF THE JEWS.

THOUGH HE'S A CRUEL MAN BY NATURE, HEROD IS ALSO A CRAFTY POLITICIAN. HE TRIES TO WIN THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S FAVOR BY BUILDING THEM A NEW AND MORE BEAUTIFUL TEMPLE. BUT THEY DESPISE HIM. BITTERLY, THE JEWS CRY OUT: "WHEN WILL GOD SEND THE DELIVERER THE PROPHETS PROMISED WOULD COME?"



BUT GOD WAS SILENT UNTIL ...