

A Letter to My Son

JLSParaphrase
by Jerry L Simms

Chapter 1 The Childhood of Solomon

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Son,

A long, long time ago there lived a man named Solomon. Not much is known about his childhood or teen years, but there is a detailed record of his life and accomplishments after he turned twenty years old. He grew up as the son of a king and had all the training and refinement one would expect of royalty. Once he became king his life was filled with wisdom, power, possessions, and passion. From a strictly human standpoint he had everything any man could ever want, but these things did not produce lasting satisfaction. Although he possessed and experienced everything a man could ever hope for in this life, in the end he found that all these things were empty pursuits. He was never content with what he had done or acquired, so he was always looking for something new or greater to acquire or experience. The book of Ecclesiastes is Solomon's own testimony about that truth. Exactly who was this man Solomon, what made him tick, and how did he look at life when he was by himself where he could seriously contemplate where life had taken him? I would like to take you on a journey into what Solomon might have been like as a child and what the Scriptures say about the wisest man who ever to live aside from Christ Himself.

Most men lead an ordinary life, but a few men in each generation seem destined for greatness. Solomon was one such man in his generation, and he will be remembered as long as the sun rises and sets. Remember, though, that had it not been for the Scriptural record of this man, his name would have passed into obscurity a thousand years before the time of Christ. The Lord knew that this man's life, including all of its successes and failures, would be of benefit to others for centuries to come, so He included the record of Solomon's life and writings as part of the Scriptures. Solomon was indeed a great man. He was extremely wealthy and powerful, but he is best known for his great wisdom. God gave him more wisdom than anyone in the world in his day, but in the end his great wisdom did nothing help him learn the lessons he sought to teach others.

Solomon wrote most of the book of Proverbs, and in order to help you gain an appreciation for who this man was and where life took him, I have written an overview of Solomon's life. The first part covers his childhood, and the second part covers his years as king. As you read, imagine being a fly on the wall listening to Solomon as he shared the events of his life with his best friend, Zabud. Try to put yourself in Solomon's shoes as he watched his family make disastrous decisions and reap devastating consequences as a result of them. Try to imagine during his adult years the thrill of success, the exhilaration of prosperity, and the frustration of failure. As you read, remember that Solomon was a real man with flesh and blood like you and me. He had real fears, real aspirations, and an immense appetite for learning new things. His hunger for passion drove him to acquire 700 wives and 300 play things called concubines. No doubt he had a photographic memory, because I doubt I could even remember the names of a thousand women, let alone put the right name with the right face for more than a hundred or so women. That must have been a tremendous feat in itself.

Both the childhood and adulthood of Solomon have been written as monologues depicting Solomon explaining to his friend Zadub what he had seen his dad do and what he had learned from those observations. You may be asking yourself, "Who is Zabud?" The answer is simple. First Kings 4:5 is part of a list of Solomon's officials, and right in the middle of the list we are told, "*and Azariah the son of Nathan was over the deputies; and Zabud the son of Nathan, a priest, was the king's friend.*" The King James version states it, "*And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend.*" For the sake of this discussion it doesn't matter whether Zabud was a priest or a chief officer. What does matter is that he was the only one I can find in Scripture who was specifically called Solomon's friend. I would like to assume for the sake of our discussions that Zabud was Solomon's friend in early childhood. That may not have been the case, but I believe that approaching this discussion from that perspective will give you more insight into the man Solomon.

Before we dive into the childhood of Solomon it will be necessary to explain where we are going. I believe Solomon was a bright young man with a keen mind and large appetite for learning. I based this on what king David said to Solomon just before he died. David said in First Kings 2:5-10, *Now you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner, and to Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed; he also shed the blood of war in peace. And he put the blood of war on his belt about his waist, and on his sandals on his feet. So act according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to Sheol in peace. But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for they assisted me when I fled from Absalom your brother. Behold, there is with you Shimei the son of Gera the Benjamite, of Bahurim; now it was he who cursed me with a violent curse on the day I went to Mahanaim.*

But when he came down to me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD, saying, 'I will not put you to death with the sword.' Now therefore, do not let him go unpunished, for you are a wise man; and you will know what you ought to do to him, and you will bring his gray hair down to Sheol with blood. Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. As you can see, David affirmed that Solomon was a wise man even before God gave him all that wisdom. Since Solomon was a wise man at the age of twenty, I feel that he was bright, intelligent, and not only eager but quick to learn new things. With this in mind, I have tried to imagine how Solomon might have viewed the situations his family faced as he was growing up and what he would have learned from those situations that would help him when he became king. Therefore, at the end of each major event I have tried to state what I believe Solomon would have learned and how he might have intended to use that understanding in the future. I hope this will give you some insight into the man we call Solomon.

As we proceed, my goal is not merely to share facts with you but to help you understanding a little bit about the man. Please keep in mind that this discussion is in no way intended to be an exhaustive look at Solomon but rather an overview. Once you have an elementary understanding of the man, you will more fully appreciate the proverbs he shared. Seek to gain knowledge and discernment from Proverbs, but always remember that although knowledge is good it accomplishes little without the discernment to use that it wisely. Hopefully this commentary will help you gain the kind of knowledge, understanding, and discernment that will ultimately lead you to real wisdom.

Details surrounding Solomon's birth

Second Samuel 12 records a tragic incident. It tells how one day king David laid down to take a nap but couldn't sleep. So, he got up and took a stroll around the roof of his palace. As he walked he happened to look down and saw a woman named Bathsheba taking a bath on the roof of her house. She was an absolutely beautiful woman, and just the sight of her naked body immediately incited him to lust after her. Without hesitation or considering the consequences of his actions, he had her brought to the palace and committed adultery with her. His lust was so strong that he didn't even care about the fact that he was sinning against a holy God by doing such a thing. Not too long afterwards Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant and immediately sent word to the king. This unwelcome news made him feel trapped by his sin, so he formulated a scheme to cover up the whole thing. David wanted her husband, Uriah, to think the baby was his own and not David's, so he sent word for her husband to return to Jerusalem from the battlefield. David tried everything he could think of to get Uriah to sleep with his wife, but when nothing worked he ordered Joab to have Uriah abandoned in battle so that he would die. Of course this was nothing short of murder. Shortly after Uriah's death David married Bathsheba, but all did not go well. Since David had sinned against God by committing adultery and murder, God sent Nathan the prophet to confront him about his sin. David readily admitted his wrong and repented of his sin, but God required the death of their firstborn son as retribution for their sin. This punishment was not only to show the people of Israel that sin must be punished, but it was also necessary to show the nations around them that the God of Israel will not tolerate sin. Not only was David punished in this way, but in the years that followed, his kingdom would be plagued by problems that were a direct result of his sin with Bathsheba. Within his own family Absalom raped David's 10 concubines in broad daylight, Amnon raped Tamar, and Absalom killed Amnon. These are but a few examples of the results of David's sin.

When their first child died, Bathsheba was heartbroken. Second Samuel chapter twelve tells how David comforted her by having sexual relations with her again so that she would conceive another child. The offspring of this second union was Solomon. By the time Solomon was born David knew that the Lord had forgiven him personally, and the Lord affirmed His forgiveness by giving Solomon the name of Jedidiah, which means "beloved of Jehovah." If environment and circumstances were the determining factors as to what a child would become when he grows up, Solomon would not have had a chance. His whole family was dysfunctional and filled with murder, rape, adultery, and insurrection. Fortunately for Solomon, external things do not make the man. His father had taught him as a small child to love and fear the Lord, and the things he learned sustained him up until his old age. David saw that Solomon was well-educated and placed him under the tutorage of a man named Jehiel, the son of Hachmoni (2 Chron. 27:33).

For purposes of discussion I am going to assume that Solomon became friends with Zabud when Solomon was quite young (1 Kings 4:5). I cannot help but think that Zadub was a positive influence on

Solomon during those formative years. The rest of the discussion of Solomon's childhood and youth will be illustrated as a one-sided conversation between Solomon and his friend Zadub. The Scriptures do not say how old Solomon was at any particular point in his childhood, but they do mention periods of years between major events in David's life. For purposes of illustration in this discussion, I have taken the liberty of placing him at the oldest possible age for each major incident discussed.

Solomon at About Seven Years of Age (2 Samuel 13:1-21)

Hi Zadub. I just finished today's lesson with Jehiel. He is very strict teacher, and I had to complete all of my school work before he would let me come outside to play. I really do like to learn new things, and he makes learning easy for me. He is rough on me at times, but deep down inside I know he really cares that I learn. He wants my brothers to learn the material well too.

After school yesterday my father had another session with me, just the two of us. He has been teaching me how to become a wise man and love God. This is what he taught me:

"Son, please stop what you are doing, and come sit down next to me. There is something very important I need to share with you. It is so important that I must have your undivided attention. Listen carefully to what I have to say, and you will gain accurate and trustworthy understanding. Please do not disregard it as being unimportant, and do not give up on it without giving it a chance to work for you.

Son, my teachings will direct you to wisdom, so master them with the intent of obeying them. If you are faithful in doing this, you will live a long and full life. Take advantage of every opportunity to find wisdom, and work as hard as you can to gain understanding. Don't ever forget them or turn away from following them. If you continue to pursue wisdom, she will guard you so that no evil takes control of your life, and if you love her, she will watch over you as a mother hen cares for her chicks.

Work hard at gaining understanding, but remember that wisdom is the most important thing you can ever find. Search diligently for her, and as you gain understanding, God will give you wisdom. This is the only way you can ever acquire her. Once you have found her, consider her the most valuable prize you could ever possess. When she is yours, she will cause people to look up to you. Hold her close as in a loving embrace, and she will elevate you to a place of honor. She will crown you with a heart that displays a kind and generous spirit, and she will make you a lovely person on the inside as well as on the outside. (Proverbs 4:1-9 JLS Paraphrase)

What he told me sounds good, but it also sounds pretty hard to do. I just hope I can live up to his expectations. I do love the time my father spends alone with me, because it seems like I have him all to myself during those times. Usually, most of the time I feel like just another one of his many sons, and during those times I feel so distant from him and unloved. Father has so many wives and sons that sometimes I feel lonely when I cannot be with him. Do you ever feel that way about your father? Oh that's right, I forgot. You only have one mother, so you don't have brothers from another mother vying for you father's attention. It must be nice.

Several Days Later :

Zadub, I knew I didn't like Amnon's cousin Jonadab (2 Samuel 13:32). The evil thing he encouraged my brother to do has convinced me that I was right about him. My half-brother Amnon wanted very badly to lie with Absalom's sister, Tamar, so Jonadab told Amnon to pretend he was sick and ask permission from my father for Tamar to bring lunch to him in his own bedroom. Father allowed her to do so, and when she did, he grabbed her, pulled off her clothes, and did something terrible to her. I know, because I overheard my mother talking to some of the other women about it. To make matters worse, after Amnon had hurt her, he told her he hated her and had his servants throw her out of his house. Now Tamar is at Absalom's house, and all she can do is cry. She keeps saying that no one will ever marry her now, because no man would have her after Amnon had raped her. I also heard that Absalom is hoping mad. In

fact, he's angry enough that he just might try to kill Amnon. My father is angry with Amnon too, but he doesn't seem to care enough about the whole matter to punish Amnon for his evil deed. What has my family come to anyway? I can't believe all this is happening. One thing is certain: if dad really loved Amnon he would discipline him. If I was king I certainly would.

I feel sorry for Tamar, because none of this was her fault. I am never going to mistreat a woman, because I have seen how much it hurts her and everyone else in the family. Amnon hates Tamar, Absalom hates Amnon and will not say a word to him, Tamar's future is ruined, and I am afraid of both Amnon and Absalom. When I become king I am going to punish anyone who commits such an evil deed, even if the guilty one is my own son. Father made a big mistake by not disciplining Amnon, and I am afraid it will come back to haunt him someday.

Solomon About Nine Years of Age. (2 Samuel 13:22-39)

Hello my friend. I'm very glad to see you because I really need to talk to someone. Absalom has invited all of my brothers to a party at his tent where he pastures his sheep. I feel badly because I was the only one he didn't invite. I don't understand why I can't go. I think I am old enough to be part of the celebration. Father was reluctant to let my brothers go at first, but Absalom pressed the issue, and father finally said yes. It sounds like a really fun party; I wish I could go too.

The Next Day :

Hi Zadub. Do you remember what I told you yesterday about Absalom throwing a big party for all of my brothers? Well, I'm so glad now that I was not invited. I knew that Absalom was still angry with Amnon for raping Tamar, but I really didn't think he would do anything drastic about it. Was I ever wrong. The party got under way and all went well for awhile, but after everyone had drunk enough to start feeling pretty good, Absalom and his servants attacked Amnon and killed him. All of my other brothers ran for their lives and rode their mules back to Jerusalem as fast as they could. They were afraid they would be killed too.

Do you remember me telling you about Amnon's cousin, Jonadab? He was the one who told Amnon how to go about raping Tamar. Well, this same guy had the nerve to tell my father not to worry about the rumor that Absalom had killed all of my brothers. He said, "Don't worry, your majesty, because Amnon is the only one that is dead." He said it like it was no big deal that Amnon had been murdered. I can't understand how my father didn't see through Jonadab and punish him for his part in Amnon's sin. At any rate, Absalom ran away to Geshur to live with a friend so that father wouldn't punish him. This just goes to show you that if dad had punished Amnon for his sin in the beginning, Absalom would not have felt the need to take matters into his own hands. Come to think of it, I cannot remember a single time when father disciplined Amnon, Adonijah, or Absalom for anything they had done wrong. When I become king, I am going to discipline my children and see that justice is administered swiftly even if it involves my own family. It is the only way to see that bad people will fear being caught. Otherwise, people will sin without any restraints. I also intend to be more discerning of any undesirable attitudes and actions of people in my kingdom so that I can stop potential problems before they can get out of hand.

Solomon About Twelve Years of Age. (2 Samuel 14:1-27)

Good to see you, Zadub. I am always glad to spend time with you. Have you heard what Joab did to my father? That man is a shrewd one for sure. He hired a wise woman of Tekoa to go before my father and tell him a sob story about how her sons were being mistreated and really needed his help. She told him that he was "as an angel of God and quick to discern good and evil." Boy, did she ever butter him up. She was very persuasive, but it was all a ploy to get my father to allow Absalom back into Jerusalem. It didn't take long for him to figure it all out, so he dismissed her and called for Joab. When Joab arrived, he bowed before my father, and after they talked for awhile, the king told Joab to locate Absalom and bring him back to Jerusalem. Personally I think it was a big mistake, but I have to hope my father knows what he is doing. Anyway, Joab has gone to bring Absalom home.

A Few Weeks Later :

Thanks for coming, Zadub. Have you seen Absalom parading around the city? He appears quite at home in Jerusalem again. He is living in his old house, and his whole family is here with him. It does seem odd though that my father would allow Absalom to come back to Jerusalem but refuse to meet with him personally. I don't understand how father could mourn so intently over Absalom when he had run away and then not even allow Absalom to come into his presence now that he is living in the city again. In spite of my father's response, Absalom struts around town like he is really somebody important. I have noticed that he is a very proud man and is especially proud of his long, flowing hair. I must admit that he is rather impressive, but I am not at all impressed with his sons. I just wonder how the people of Israel are perceiving all of this. Even though father has allowed Absalom back in Jerusalem I still don't feel comfortable around him nor do I trust him.

Solomon About Fourteen Years Old. (2 Samuel 14:28-20:26)

Oh hi Zadub! I need to talk to you. I don't quite know what to think about what has happened lately. Absalom has been back in Jerusalem for about two years now without talking to my father one time, and now he is demanding to meet with the king face-to-face. Joab wouldn't listen when Absalom sent a message asking him to be a go-between for him to the king, so Absalom burned Joab's grain field. That little trick got Joab's attention all right. I would not have had the nerve to do something like that to the commander of the king's army, but Absalom didn't even give it a second thought. Joab would normally have been angry enough to kill another man for doing such a thing, but he didn't seem to care after Absalom explained why he did it. Joab even agreed to ask my father to have a personal audience with Absalom. I don't know how Joab did it, but dad agreed to see Absalom. Boy, that was a switch from the attitude dad had before. I have been told that my father not only talked with Absalom, but he kissed him too. I am glad that they have reconciled their differences, but even so, I don't trust Absalom.

Some Months Later :

Oh Zadub, I'm so glad you happened to come along right now because I really am concerned and confused! My father is king and judge over Israel, but it seems Absalom is going around Israel telling people that he can do a better job of leading and judging Israel than the king. I am afraid that many of the people are starting to believe him. He is stealing the hearts of the people away from the king, and dad is either unaware of what he is doing or just plain doesn't care. How can he let Absalom get away with this? I know that father has never reprimanded Absalom or Adonijah, but I am afraid that if he lets this continue, it will end up as a full blown insurrection. I really am concerned.

A Few Weeks Later :

Zadub, Absalom is up to something, I know it. He asked my father for permission to leave on a trip to Geshur, supposedly to fulfill a vow he made there. Father was somewhat suspicious, but after some discussion he let Absalom go. Well, he acted like he was leaving town, but he came right back. He quickly gathered hundreds of people and conspired against the king. Most of these people were innocent because they didn't know what Absalom was about to do. Even dad's trusted advisor Ahithophel has joined with Absalom, and he offered burnt sacrifices to God before the people. It appears an insurrection has started, and I am fearful of how it will turn out. If he does succeed in becoming king he could have all of us killed, and it doesn't make sense that my father is doing nothing to stop it.

Later That Day :

Oh Zadub, he has actually done it. Absalom has proclaimed himself king, and my father has said that we are all leaving Jerusalem to go into the wilderness. We have to go, because if we don't, Absalom will have us all killed. I will be travelling with my mother, but we will be close to my father. Six hundred well trained men of Gath have sworn allegiance to my father, and they will be coming with us to fight for him. I

was afraid this kind of disaster would happen, but I feel better knowing all of those seasoned fighting men are coming along to protect us. A valiant soldier by the name of Ittai has convinced dad that he is loyal to him, and even though he is a foreigner, dad has allowed him to come along. I have heard good reports about this man, and I am glad he will accompany us. I knew Absalom was up to something sinister, but I really didn't think he would try something so bold. I hope you will be able to come with us too, my friend, because I really want you to be there with me. Father has decided to leave ten of his concubines in Jerusalem to care for the palace while he is away, but everyone else is leaving. We are going to assemble on the other side of the brook Kidron since it is just outside the city wall, and once everyone is there we will start the trip to the wilderness. I really hope you can come with us.

Later Yet That Day :

Hi Zadub, am I glad to see you came. I watched Zadok and all the priests carry the Arc of the Covenant to the brook Kidron so that they can escort us to the wilderness, but there seems to be a problem. Oh no, I don't believe it. Dad is sending them all back to Jerusalem. I know that your father is a prophet, and that means you will have to go back with them too. I am going to miss you, my friend. Pray for me while we are apart, and I will pray for you. Father has talked with Zadok and Abiathar, and they have agreed that their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan will be runners to bring important news to the king in the wilderness. Pray that Jehovah God will bring us back safely to Jerusalem and that my father will be able to get the kingdom back. Until then, goodbye, my friend.

Many Months Later :

Well, Zadub, it is so good to see you again. We were in the wilderness for many months, but in some ways it seemed much longer. I have really been looking forward to the day when we would be together again so I could share with you all the things that have happened while we were apart. Where should I begin? I know, I'll begin with what happened immediately after you and the priests were told to returned to Jerusalem.

Not long after you were out of sight, my father and the rest of us walked up to the top of the Mount of Olives to sacrifice to our God. Father had heard that his former counselor, Ahithophel, was now loyal to Absalom, and he prayed that somehow the Lord would cause Absalom to find this man's advice unacceptable. We had not even finished the climb to the top of the mountain before father ran into an old friend Hushai as he was descending from the top. It was obvious that this man was burdened with grief over the whole affair, and when they met, father asked him if he would be willing to return to Jerusalem and act as counselor to Absalom for my father. Hushai agreed and said he would be glad to communicate whatever he heard to Zadok the priest. Zadok would then send word to David by the hand of Ahimaaz and Jonathan. I was absolutely amazed at how the Lord had answered my father's prayer before he had even finished asking it. Jehovah certainly showed Himself awesome that day, and I will never forget it.

After coming down from the mountain, we returned to the brook Kidron. Everyone was ready to move out for the wilderness when Ziba, the head servant for Mephibosheth, arrived. He had brought donkeys for us to ride and enough provisions for everyone for several weeks. He told father about how his master Mephibosheth was glad that Absalom was now on the throne and how that he himself was still faithful to David. In his haste, father told Ziba that everything Mephibosheth owned was now his. Well, Ziba thanked father profusely and went on his way. I wasn't sure what to think about what Ziba had claimed, but my father seemed to believe him. We discovered later that Ziba had slandered his master Mephibosheth.

Well, we finally set out for the wilderness. As soon as we started moving, some crazy man named Shimei appeared and started cursing my father, the king. I was afraid of that man, but my father didn't seem overly concerned about him. This man's actions were a very serious crime against the king, so Abishai, Joab's brother, offered to kill the man. To my surprise, father said no. He said that someday the Lord would repay him for his error. Father didn't want to do anything harsh because he was hoping that the Lord would somehow allow him to come back to Jerusalem and sit on the throne where he belonged. Well anyway, this man cursed and yelled at us while we traveled and finally went his way shortly before we stopped for camp later that day. I was never more glad to see a man leave our presence than when this man left.

For several more weeks we traveled toward the wilderness, but we didn't stop for long at any one place until we were about fifty or sixty miles from Jerusalem. Father stopped to make camp several times, but each time we stopped, we would get word that Absalom was following us. So, we would quickly move on. Father would not allow us to make permanent camp until we got to the wilderness where he knew we would have a good fighting advantage over Absalom and his army. This is where he had lived while Saul was chasing him, and he knew this area like the back of his hand.

A few days after we had left the city word came to us through Ahimaaz and Jonathan that Absalom had entered Jerusalem and had taken his place on my father's throne. Shortly afterward, Hushai arrived in Jerusalem and was able to convince Absalom that he would be a faithful advisor. Amazingly, Absalom believed him. Then Absalom asked Ahithophel what advice he would give. Up to this point in time Ahithophel was viewed as an angel of God in the eyes of both the people and Absalom. Without hesitation, Ahithophel advised Absalom that in order to show the people of Israel how much contempt he had for David, he should have sexual relations with the ten concubines dad left behind. It took a couple of days for him to lie with all of them, but after he had raped these women, all Israel knew that Absalom hated and despised his father. This act was a literal fulfillment of what your dad Nathan prophesied to my dad when he confronted dad about his sin with Bathsheba. God certainly kept his word by allowing Absalom to do such a thing. I found the record of Nathan's rebuke in 2 Samuel 12, and you will be interested to read it. It states,

⁷ Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. ¹⁰ Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹ "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. ¹² 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" (Underlining added for clarity.)

After Absalom had finished his evil deed with father's concubines and was once again seated on the throne, Ahithophel asked permission to lead Absalom's army in a campaign to find and kill my father. Fortunately, Absalom asked for the advice of Hushai also. He suggested that Absalom lead his army against David himself. He apparently liked the advice of Hushai better than that of Ahithophel, so he made arrangements to lead his army into battle. After leaving Absalom's presence, Hushai immediately sent word to Zadok, and his sons warned us of Absalom's plans. We immediately broke camp and moved over the Jordan to camp in a place called Mahanaim which is on the way to the wilderness. It was only God's goodness that Ahimaaz and Jonathan were not killed trying to get word to us, because a young lad had seen them running and told Absalom of their whereabouts. Soldiers came to arrest the two men, but a maid had hidden them in a well. The maid told the soldiers that the men had already left her home, and when the soldiers were gone Ahimaaz and Jonathan left a different way to come to us. By the time Absalom reached our old camp there was nothing left but cold ashes. Hushai had indeed saved our lives that day. Something else good happened once Ahithophel realized that Absalom no longer valued his advice. He committed suicide, and father was so relieved when he heard the news.

Absalom set out again to find us, but he stopped to make camp in Gilead. While there, he made Amasa the captain of his army. He is the one who had raped Abigail, a relative of Joab. When Joab heard about Amasa's promotion he could hardly wait to fight against him, and it seems certain to me now that he had intended for some time to kill Amasa. Anyway, there was some good news at the same time, because Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai brought enough supplies for our people for several more weeks. It sure is good to have friends like that right when they are needed.

After we made camp in the wilderness, father called his officers together and chose three men to lead his army. These men were Joab, Joab's brother Abishai, and the man named Ittai. When the time came

to go out and fight against Absalom and his men, our men demanded that David stay in camp while they went out to fight. If one of his soldiers was killed it would be no big loss, but if father was killed all would be lost. My father didn't like the idea, but he let them have their way. Then he said something that didn't make any sense. He commanded Joab and the other leaders to be gentle with Absalom. I am a little confused. How can soldiers be gentle with a mortal enemy who will do anything necessary to kill my father? He certainly wasn't thinking straight when he gave that command, and I am sure the soldiers didn't know what to think about it either.

As soon as the battle started, dad's men quickly gained the upper hand. Many of Absalom's men were killed, and the rest ran away. It was said that twenty-thousand men of Israel died that day, but most of them died trying to escape through the forest. It seems odd to me that the Lord would slay most of them in the forest instead of in battle, but either way, it was a great victory. Afterward, all the men of Israel who were left fled to their tents. During the battle Absalom happened upon a patrol of father's men and tried to run away. His donkey ran under a tree, and a branch caught his hair so that he was left hanging from the tree while his donkey kept on going. It must have been an odd sight to see him hanging there by the very hair in which he took such pride. One of dad's soldiers told Joab about Absalom's predicament, and this was just the kind of news Joab was waiting to hear. Immediately he found Absalom and killed him with a spear. Joab and the men who were with him threw Absalom's body into a ravine and covered it with stones. Since Absalom was so proud of his hair, it certainly seems appropriate that his hair was the very thing that brought about his demise. This was bad enough, but he was proud in other ways too. I saw the monument he built to himself in the Kidron valley. He dedicated it to himself because he didn't feel his sons were worthy of his name. His whole life was such a waste. When I become king I will be careful to perceive adverse attitudes and actions that could lead to an insurrection. I want to stop that sort of thing before it has a chance to build into something dangerous.

After killing Absalom, Joab knew that sooner or later he was going to have to tell my father what he had done. Ahimaaz asked Joab if he could run to tell the king the news of Absalom, but Joab didn't want a man so dedicated to my father delivering such an unwelcome message. Obviously Joab had to be very careful, because he had purposely defied the king's command. Even though killing Absalom was for David's own good, the king could have Joab executed for disobeying a direct order. As a precaution, Joab selected a Cushite runner to take the news of his son's death to the king. When the runner told my father about the news, dad broke down and cried like a baby. He kept saying that he wished he had died instead of his son. How is it that he had so soon forgotten that Absalom was determined to kill him? His response didn't make any sense, and it made even less sense when he spent the next several days mourning for my brother, the enemy.

Dad's weeping over the loss of Absalom created a very serious problem. Men were deserting his army at an alarming rate. They were leaving because they thought the king loved his dead son more than he loved those valiant men who fought for him against their enemies. As soon as Joab realized what was happening he confronted my father and told him that if he ever wanted to return to Jerusalem as king he had better get his act together. Father understood what Joab was saying, and he immediately went out and assured the people of his devotion to them and thanked them for their faithfulness to him. I am so grateful to the Lord that the plan worked. Men started returning from their tents, and he was able to rally his men. I have no doubt that the whole thing would have ended in disaster if my father had not responded so quickly.

Within a few days we were ready to start back for Jerusalem, and I was so eager to get home again. Father had sent Zadok and Abiathar ahead to rally the men of Israel who had fought with Absalom. He wanted them to receive him back in Jerusalem as their king too. He even made Amasa commander of his army. I understand why father would be angry with Joab, but I think he gave Amasa the position primarily to appease the men of Israel. Even so, father had underestimated Joab's resourcefulness. In a few minutes I will tell you why I said that. Anyway, it was not long before all Israel assembled to escort dad home. Those people were such a welcome sight. They escorted us almost to the Jordan river, but that was when the fireworks started. The men of Judah met us there to help escort us to Jerusalem. It was a sweet reunion when all the people of Judah and Israel first got together, but things turned ugly in a hurry. A big argument ensued, and part of the people angrily went home leaving the rest to escort us on to Jerusalem.

The first individuals to meet us on our way home were Shimei and Ziba. Boy, was Shimei ever humble now. He quickly admitted that he had sinned against my father and asked the king to forgive him. Abishai

offered once again to kill the man, but to my surprise dad let Shimei live. After father had finished with Shimei, Ziba was about to say something when Mephibosheth appeared. Father asked Mephibosheth why he came since he was a traitor. Mephibosheth confessed that he had been tricked. Ziba had convinced him to stay in the city and then slandered him to the king. It was obvious to me that Mephibosheth was telling the truth, but father hesitated for some reason. Instead of reprimanding Ziba, my father told the two men to split the properties between themselves evenly. That was not a very wise decision, but regardless of my father's poor judgment, Mephibosheth declined. He merely said, "I don't want or deserve any of those things. I'm just glad that you are back home safely." Wow, my father sure missed the truth on that one! When I become king I will take care of Mephibosheth the way he deserves. In the future I always want to hear both sides of a story before making a decision on the matter.

As we approached the Jordan river Barzillai was waiting for us. He had come to welcome us home. Father tried to convince him to come to Jerusalem and live with us for the rest of his life, but Barzillai said that he didn't want to be a burden. I somewhat understand why he would say such a thing, because he was already eighty years old and had some major physical problems. Although he could not be convinced to come with us, he did allow his servant, Chimham, to come live with us in the place. Father was more than happy to show favor upon Chimham because of the generosity of his master.

After leaving Brasilia, we crossed the Jordan river and came to Gilead. All of Judah and half of Israel crossed over with us to escort us home, and I felt safe with all our people supporting us. I was afraid of Absalom while he was still alive, but now we were safe and almost home. I really enjoyed the trip from that point on. I thought all of our troubles were behind us, but we didn't even get all the way home before a really heated argument broke out between the men of Judah and the men of Israel. Judah was more vocal than Israel, but in the end, the men of Israel abandoned my father and returned to their tents. I still don't completely understand why they left, but they were dissatisfied with the way Judah and my father were treating them. If that was not bad enough, a scoundrel named Sheba got all worked up and started another insurrection right then and there. He was so vocal that the people tried to make him king over Israel in my father's place. I am amazed how capricious the Jews can be. Sheba left with the others, and Judah escorted us all the way back to Jerusalem. Once in the palace, father located the ten concubines that Absalom had defiled, and he shut them up by themselves as widows for the rest of their lives. I feel sorry for them since it was not their fault, but father wanted to be sure that the people of Israel did not mistake compassion for acceptance of Absalom's defiance.

Even after father was back on the throne there were a couple of important things he needed to do. First he needed to get rid of Sheba before the man started another war, and the second was to gain the allegiance of the men who fought with Absalom. Father had already made Amasa captain of his army, and although the news made Amasa happy, such was not the case with Joab. Remember that Amasa had raped Joab's relative, and Joab had vengeance in mind. It wouldn't be long before Joab got his chance.

Father instructed Amasa to assemble all the men of Judah in three days to go after Sheba, but he took longer than instructed. My father was angry when he procrastinated, so he told Joab and his brother to go after Sheba. On their way, they met Amasa and his men. To make a long story short, Joab murdered Amasa right then and there. Then he and his men rode off to fight against the city where Sheba was hiding. They surrounded the city, and once the people of that city knew what Joab wanted, a wise woman convinced the men of the city to kill Sheba and throw his head over the wall. Joab took the head and returned to Jerusalem. Thus the insurrection was ended. Now Joab was once again commander of father's army, and dad had no choice but to let Joab have his way in the matter. Father was afraid to do anything else at the time.

Well Zadub, a lot has happened since we parted company several months ago, but all of that is over now. I'm so glad to be home and spend time with you again. Thanks for praying for us throughout this whole ordeal. I have certainly learned some valuable lessons during these past several months. If father had paid more attention to Absalom's actions and attitudes he could have stopped this whole insurrection before it got started. If he had set aside his sentimental longing for Absalom in favor of fulfilling his responsibilities to his people, he could have avoided the whole problem of the division between the men of Israel and the men of Judah. Then too, Sheba would not have had a platform from which to rebel, and the kingdom would have been at peace. When I become king, I am going to be more discerning of any signs of an insurrection before things can get out of hand. These have been hard lessons to learn, but they will be invaluable in the future.

Solomon About Seventeen Years Old. (2 Samuel 21:1-23:39)

Zadub, did you hear what my father and I have done? No? Well, let me tell you. Yesterday he spent most of the day telling me about the details of building the temple. He reminded me that someday I will be king in his place and that I will be the one to build the temple for our God. Jehovah had told dad that He didn't want him to build the temple since he had shed so much blood in battle. The Lord wanted someone who was pure to do the work, so the Lord chose me to build it in my father's place. Father tried to explain everything that he had done to gather materials for the construction, and even though I understood most of it, there is just a lot to remember. At any rate, he has been collecting materials for some time, and they will be used in the construction process. He said it would take several years to gather all the materials I would need to construct the temple, so he started while I was still young in order to be able to finish his part before he surrenders the throne to me. It sounds like a big job, but father said the Lord would give me all the strength and abilities I would need when the time comes. Besides, there will be a lot of good people helping with the work. That will make the whole job easier. I sure hope he is right.

A Few Days Later :

Hi Zadub. Do you remember when we came back to Jerusalem after Absalom was killed? Doesn't it seem like it all happened just yesterday? It is hard to believe that it has been three years now. It is interesting that this famine has ravaged our land since shortly after that time. My father doesn't understand why the Lord has sent the famine, but maybe God will tell him soon.

A Few More Days Later :

Oh, good to see you Zadub. Well, the Lord finally told my father why the plague was sent. It was the result of king Saul's cruelty toward the Gibeonites. I don't understand why it happened now because his cruel acts took place long before I was even born. My father has gone to talk with the Gibeonites to see if something can be done to end this dry spell. I sure hope they can come up with a workable solution.

The Next Week :

Hello again, Zadub. Well, what do you think of all this rain? Isn't it nice to know that the famine has ended? By the way, did your father tell you how the drought ended? Oh, he didn't. Well, let me tell you. During my father's trip to Gibeon, he learned that the famine was sent as retribution for the way Saul had been so cruel to the Gibeonites years before. The Gibeonites agreed that father would give them seven sons of Saul, and they would hang them by the neck before the Lord. They had no desire to do such a thing at first, but father persuaded them to do it. He gave them seven men who were descendants of Saul, but he spared Mephibosheth's life. I was glad to see him show such kindness to Mephibosheth. I hated to see innocent men killed, but immediately after the executions took place the rains started. The Lord was very kind to end the famine for Israel. The sad part about the whole matter is that the mother of the sons executed was seen mourning in sackcloth and ashes. When father heard about her grief, he sent some of his men to Gibeon to retrieve the bodies of these boys, the bones of Saul, and those of Jonathan, Saul's son. They will receive a proper burial here in Jerusalem. I feel sorry for the mother, but it sure is easy to see how sin has devastating effects on people even years after the sin was committed. Sin always costs more than a man wants to pay. When I become king I will never resort to cruelty. I will rule in justice, but I will always do it in a humane way.

About a Year Later : (1 Chron. 20:1-8 also)

Hey Zadub! Its the time of year when kings go out to battle. Did you hear how my father's army under the leadership of Joab whipped the Philistines? They started a war with us, and the Lord delivered them into our hands, including the second son of Goliath. My father was victorious. Actually, his faithful men killed the philistines and the giant, but the victory belongs to the king. I am a little concerned though,

because Abishai had to kill the giant when my father became tired. He is apparently too old to go out to battle any more. I knew he was getting older, but the thought that he is an old man had never crossed my mind until now. I hope he will use good judgment in the future.

A Few Months Later :

Well Zadub, I am amazed. Those Philistines just don't know when to quit. Goliath's third son Sibbecai started another war with Israel, and this time our army whipped not only him but the rest of his men too. It was such a sweet victory for the king, and we owe a hearty thank you to the Lord. I hear, though, that Goliath has two more sons. I hope they don't get any bright ideas about going to war with us again.

Some More Months Later :

Hey Zadub, can you believe the nerve of those Philistines? They tried to go to war with Israel again, and my father and his army whipped them again. This time Elhanan killed Goliath's fourth son and Jonathan, the son of Shimei, killed the fifth. The Lord has indeed brought about a great victory for Israel. Now all the sons of Goliath are dead, and maybe the Philistines will live at peace with us. I certainly hope so. Isn't it fascinating how far-reaching the results of one man's sin can be? It is too bad that Goliath taught all of his sons to hate both us and our God like he did.

By the way, were you there to hear my father's prayer of thanks to God for His great deliverance? It seem that all Israel was there. He prayed for a long time, and it sounded so sincere. I wish I had the same kind relationship with the Lord as my father. I believe in God and love Him, but it just isn't the same. Just today father gave what appears to be his last public address to the people of Israel. He is getting so old, yet he needed the people to remember how good God is at keeping His promises. Father even prayed to the Lord for me not long ago, and he asked God to bless me more than He had blessed my father or anyone else before me. A scribe recorded the prayer, and father suggested that I include it in the book of Psalms for posterity. I think I will do that after I become king. (see Psalm 72)

Solomon About 19 Years Old. (1 Chron. 21:1-30)

Well, my friend, it is so good to see you again. It seems like we don't have as much time to spend together now that we are approaching adulthood. My father has met with me again to share more about what I will do when I become king. I love my dad, but he is getting so old. I am afraid it won't be many more years before he will have to step down from the throne. I'm not even twenty years old yet, but he tells me that God will give me all the abilities I will need when the time comes.

But this is not why I wanted to talk with you. It appears my father has ordered his commanders to count all the able-bodied fighting man of Israel. The commanders know God has forbidden such a thing and are opposed to the idea, but my father will not be persuaded to abandon the idea. I hope this doesn't backfire on him. He is older now, and sometimes I'm not sure his thinking processes are in good working order.

About Ten Months Later :

Oh Zadub, what has my father done? People are dying everywhere, and this plague has already killed seventy thousand men. I don't know what to do, because any one of us could be the next one to get sick. My father has been talking with your father, Nathan the prophet, and apparently a sacrifice must be made for my father's sin of numbering the people. His commanders tried to warn him, but he would not listen. Father is on his way to talk with Araunah. He must make arrangements to buy the man's threshing floor as the place to build an altar and offer a sacrifice to God. I am going there and watch. Do you want to come along with me? Good! Let's go right now.

Well, it didn't take long to get here. It looks like father and Araunah have already agreed to make the transaction for the property, and father's men have already started building the altar. Let's stand over here out of the way where we can watch everything.

After the Sacrifice was Made :

Hey Zadub, wasn't that amazing? As soon as the sacrifice was completed people started getting well. It had to have been the hand of God. Father has talked with me many times about his God, but this is only the second time in my life that I have seen God work in a way that clearly shows His direct intervention in our lives. Father has believed so sincerely in Jehovah, and now I see that he has good reason to do so. I will look into trusting Jehovah more myself in the future. Well, thanks for being here with me, my friend. I appreciate you. Goodbye for now.

Some Months Later : (1 Chron. 22:1-19)

Hello again Zadub. Some time ago my father spent time talking with me about what I need to do when I become king. He prayed that God would bless me and give me good ability to judge the people of Israel, but lately he doesn't seem to care about anything. He is too old.

I know you have heard about how the king's servants have been searching the whole kingdom for a beautiful young virgin to be my father's nurse. He is so old that he cannot stay warm at night. Someone suggested that a young woman be found to sleep with him in order to keep him warm. Well, a woman named Abishag has been selected, and she is already at the palace ready to take her place with my father. I have not met her yet, but she sounds nice enough. I have not seen my father much lately either. It seems he doesn't care about me or the kingdom now that he is old. Since he is not aware of things going on in the kingdom, I hope he doesn't let anything happen that will cause trouble for all of us in the future. I sense that my brother Adonijah is getting ideas about becoming king in my place. I hope I am mistaken. At any rate, it is father's place to squelch that kind of thing. It is not for me to do. Goodbye for now, my friend.

This ends the discussion of the childhood of Solomon. Everything that transpires beyond this point in Solomon's life will be discussed in the chapter two. Up to this point, Solomon has been a quiet, submissive son pretty much staying in the background. All of that changed when he was thrust into a place of leadership and authority.

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