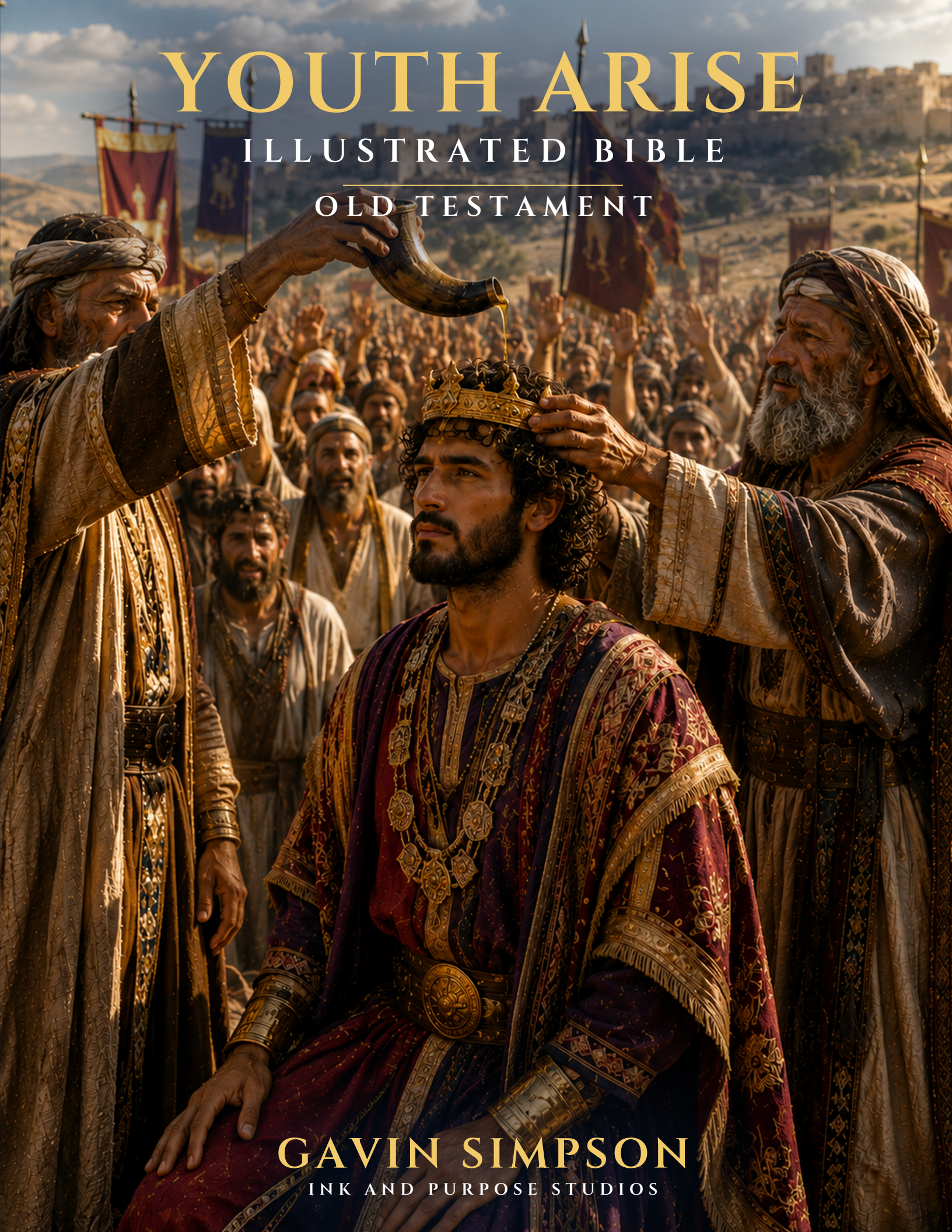

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Story 21

Joseph the Dreamer

Based on Genesis 37

Jacob had twelve sons. But he loved one more than all the rest.

Joseph was the son of Rachel, the wife Jacob loved most. So Jacob spoiled him. He gave Joseph a beautiful coat, a robe of many bright colors, the kind a prince might wear.

The brothers saw it. And they hated him for it.

Then Joseph had a dream.

"Listen to this," he told his brothers. "We were tying up bundles of grain in the field. Suddenly my bundle stood up straight. And all your bundles gathered around it and bowed down to it."

The brothers glared at him. "So you think you will rule over us?" They hated him even more.

Then Joseph dreamed again. "The sun and the moon and eleven stars were all bowing down to me," he said.

This time even his father frowned. "What kind of dream is that? Will your mother and brothers and I really bow to the ground before you?"

But Jacob kept the dream in his heart and wondered.

One day the brothers were far off, tending the flocks. Jacob sent Joseph to check on them.

The brothers saw him coming from a long way off, that bright coat shining in the sun.

"Here comes the dreamer," they sneered. "Let's kill him. We'll throw him in a pit and say a wild animal ate him. Then we'll find out what his dreams are worth."

The oldest brother, Reuben, did not want murder. "Don't kill him," he said. "Just throw him in this empty pit." He planned to come back later and rescue him.

So when Joseph arrived, they grabbed him. They ripped off his beautiful coat. And they threw him down into a deep, dry well.

Then they sat down to eat, while their brother cried out from the pit.

Soon a caravan of traders came by, heading for Egypt with their camels.

One brother had an idea. "Why kill him? Let's sell him."

So they pulled Joseph up out of the pit and sold him to the traders for twenty pieces of silver. The men chained him and carried him off toward Egypt, a slave.

Seventeen years old, sold by his own brothers.

To cover it up, the brothers killed a goat and dipped Joseph's coat in its blood. They brought the torn, bloody coat to their father.

"We found this," they said. "Is it Joseph's?"

Jacob recognized it at once. "A wild animal has eaten my son," he cried. He tore his clothes and wept and could not be comforted.

He thought Joseph was dead.

But Joseph was alive, riding toward Egypt in chains.

His brothers meant to destroy him.

But God was about to use even this — the betrayal, the pit, the slave chains — to save them all.

The dreams were not finished. They were only beginning.



Story 22

Joseph in Egypt

Based on Genesis 39–50

Joseph arrived in Egypt as a slave. But God was with him.

He was bought by Potiphar, a powerful official. Joseph worked so well and so honestly that Potiphar put him in charge of everything he owned.

Then trouble came. Potiphar's wife lied about Joseph and had him thrown in prison for something he never did.

But God was with him in the prison too.

Soon the jailer trusted Joseph with everything. And one day, two of Pharaoh's servants had strange dreams. God gave Joseph the meaning of each one. He told one man he would go free. He told the other the bad news. Both came true.

"When you are free, remember me," Joseph asked the freed man.

But the man forgot. And Joseph stayed in prison two more years.

Then Pharaoh himself had a dream that no one could explain. Seven fat cows swallowed by seven thin cows. Seven full heads of grain swallowed by seven dry ones.

At last the freed servant remembered Joseph.

They rushed Joseph out of the dungeon and stood him before the king.

"God is showing you what is coming," Joseph said. "Seven years of plenty are coming. Then seven years of famine so terrible the good years will be forgotten. Store up grain now, and Egypt will survive."

Pharaoh was amazed. "Can we find anyone wiser than this?" he said. And he put Joseph in charge of all Egypt — second only to the throne.

The slave from the pit now ruled the most powerful nation on earth.

For seven years Joseph stored grain. Then the famine came, and it spread far beyond Egypt — all the way to the land of Canaan, where his family was starving.

So Jacob sent his sons down to Egypt to buy food.

They bowed low before the governor of Egypt, not knowing he was the brother they had sold. But Joseph knew them.

He tested them. He watched them. And he saw that their hearts had changed.

At last he could hold it in no longer.

"I am Joseph," he said, weeping. "I am your brother — the one you sold into Egypt."

The brothers were terrified. Now he could destroy them.

But Joseph wept and pulled them close.

"Do not be afraid," he said. "You planned to hurt me. But God had a plan of His own — a good one, to save many lives. Come, bring our father. Bring everyone. I will take care of you."

So Jacob, old and gray, came down to Egypt and held the son he thought was dead.

The whole family was saved.

Years later, when Jacob died, the brothers were afraid again. But Joseph only forgave them once more.

"You planned evil for me," he told them. "But God turned that evil into good."

The dreamer in the bright coat had become the savior of his family.

And God had been with him every step of the way — in the pit, in the prison, and on the throne.



Story 42

Balaam and the Donkey

Based on Numbers 22–24

Israel was camped on the plains of Moab, a huge nation on the move. And the king of Moab, a man named Balak, was terrified of them.

So Balak sent for a man named Balaam. Balaam was known for his words — people believed that when he blessed someone they were blessed, and when he cursed someone they were cursed.

"Come and curse this people for me," Balak begged. "I will pay you well."

Balaam asked God about it. And God said clearly, "Do not go. Do not curse them. They are blessed."

But Balak offered more money and higher honor. And Balaam wanted it. He wanted it so badly that he saddled his donkey and went anyway, his heart set on the reward.

So God sent an angel to block the road, with a sword drawn in his hand.

Balaam could not see the angel. But his donkey could.

The donkey saw the angel standing in the path and turned aside into a field. Balaam, seeing nothing, beat the donkey to force it back onto the road.

Further on, the angel stood again in a narrow place between two walls. The donkey pressed against the wall to avoid him, crushing Balaam's foot. Balaam beat the donkey again.

Then the angel stood in a place so narrow there was no room to turn at all. The donkey simply lay down beneath Balaam. And Balaam, furious, beat her a third time.

Then God did something no one expected.

He opened the donkey's mouth, and she spoke.

"What have I done to you," the donkey said, "that you have beaten me three times?"

Balaam was so angry he did not even seem surprised that his donkey was talking. "You are making a fool out of me!" he shouted. "If I were holding a sword, I would kill you this minute."

"But I am your donkey," she answered. "You have ridden me all these years. Have I ever treated you this way before?"

"No," Balaam admitted.

Then God opened Balaam's eyes.

And Balaam saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, sword drawn. He fell facedown in terror.

"Your donkey saw me and turned away three times," the angel said. "If she had not, I would have killed you and spared her."

A donkey had seen more clearly than a famous prophet. The animal had more sense than the man.

Balaam went on, but now he understood. He could only say what God told him to say.

And when he opened his mouth to curse Israel, blessing came out instead. Again and again. Balak fumed, but Balaam could not help it.

"How can I curse those God has not cursed?" Balaam said.

No payment, no king, no clever words could undo what God had blessed.

God's people were safe — protected by a God they could not even see.



Story 62

David and Goliath

Based on 1 Samuel 17

The armies of Israel and the Philistines faced each other across a valley. And every day, a giant came out to mock them.

His name was Goliath. He was over nine feet tall. His armor weighed more than a grown man, and the iron point of his spear alone weighed fifteen pounds. He was a walking nightmare.

"Send out a man to fight me!" Goliath roared across the valley. "If he wins, we will be your slaves. If I win, you will be ours. I dare you! I laugh at the whole army of Israel!"

For forty days he came out, morning and evening, and shouted his challenge. And every day, the soldiers of Israel — including King Saul — shook with fear and ran away. No one would face him.

Then David arrived, just a shepherd boy, bringing food to his older brothers at the battle line.

He heard the giant's mocking. And while everyone else trembled, something rose up in David. Not fear. Holy anger.

"Who is this man," David said, "that he dares to mock the army of the living God?"

Word reached Saul, and he sent for the boy.

"You can't fight him," Saul said. "You're only a boy. He's been a warrior his whole life."

But David was not afraid.

"When I watched my father's sheep," David said, "a lion and a bear came and took a lamb. I went after them, struck them down, and rescued the lamb. The same God who saved me from the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine."

Saul tried to dress David in his own armor. But it was far too big and heavy. David took it off.

Instead, he picked up his shepherd's staff, chose five smooth stones from the stream, took his sling, and walked out to meet the giant.

Goliath looked at the boy coming toward him and laughed with contempt. "What am I — a dog? Is that why you come after me with a stick?"

But David called back, strong and clear.

"You come at me with a sword and a spear. But I come at you in the name of the living Lord, the God who commands Israel's army — the God you have mocked. Before this day ends, the Lord will put you in my hands. And the whole earth will know that Israel has a living God. This battle is His."

The giant lumbered forward.

David ran toward him. He reached into his bag, took out a stone, and slung it.

The stone flew through the air and struck Goliath square in the forehead. The giant crashed face-down to the ground.

The mighty Philistine, defeated by a shepherd boy and a single stone.

When the Philistines saw their hero fall, they turned and ran, and Israel chased them in victory.

David had no armor, no sword, no size, no experience.

He had something better.

He had a God bigger than any giant.