



GOD KING



ALSO BY JOANNE WILLIAMSON

Jacobin's Daughter
The Eagles Have Flown
The Glorious Conspiracy
Hittite Warrior
The Iron Charm
And Forever Free
To Dream Upon a Crown

GOD KING



JOANNE
WILLIAMSON

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Introduction

THE PERIOD of Egyptian history (around 710-702 B.C.) depicted in *God King* is pretty obscure to the average person. We tend to study “Ancient Civilizations” during the mid-to-late elementary years. The typical unit on Egypt emphasizes the time between the unification of the Two Kingdoms through the Age of the Pyramids (The Old Kingdom: about 3100-2600); then the heights of Egypt’s political power during the reign of Thutmose III (1504-1450 B.C.*). Akhenaton (1379-1362 B.C.) and his interesting but failed attempt to impose monotheism on Egypt is studied next. His successor, the very weak Pharaoh Tutankamon, is only mentioned in conjunction with the modern recovery of his tomb and its spectacular treasure.

From around 1100 B.C. Egypt’s national power degenerated, due to the kinds of cutthroat political power struggles that seem inevitable to every large empire. So it is easy to see why this is the place where many teachers and textbooks give a brief summary of Egypt’s decline, and move on to the more interesting things happening in Ancient Greece. Egypt

* Egyptian dates in this introduction are from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*

doesn't reappear on the scene until Alexander the Great's conquest of it in 332 B.C.

God King fills in this gap. What is even more valuable, it helps us connect various ancient cultures in our minds—Kush, Egypt, Assyria and Judea. Too often, we study one culture or country in isolation from others. A novel such as *God King* breaks through this narrow focus and builds a more unified sense of ancient history, and along with it, a sense of the historicity of Sacred Scripture.

As our story opens, Egypt has been under the rule of Kush (located in what is at present northern Sudan) for several generations. The New Kingdom with its long series of dynasties had collapsed. First Libyan princes from the west, and now Kushite leaders from the south had each succeeded for a time in imposing their own dynastic rule on Egypt. But as the rapidly expanding Assyria in the north absorbs one nation after another, Egypt is very interested in maintaining a buffer zone between itself and these latest invaders. Thus it is supporting Palestine and Phoenicia in their doomed efforts to ward off the Assyrian threat. Now the king of Judea hopes for that same support.

Since the death of King Solomon around 922 B.C., Israel had been divided into two kingdoms, Israel in the North, and Judea in the South. Both kingdoms had been weakened by conflict with one another. Worse still, as the Old Testament Scriptures relate, God's chosen people in both kingdoms had largely turned to idolatry, often with the en-

couragement of their kings. The Northern Kingdom had fallen to Assyria in 721—less than a generation before the events of our story. Over her history, only eight of Judea’s twenty kings worshipped the true God, and even these did little or nothing to abolish idol worship among the people. It was during these centuries that great prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Joel called upon the people and their rulers to reform. Hezekiah, the King of Judea whom we meet in this book, was one of those few whose faith in God was rewarded. His kingdom, although much reduced, was not annihilated by the Assyrians. This story speculates about the persons and events through which God arranged this.

Well-researched, well written fiction like *God King* opens our mind and imagination to the past. We learn about a people’s everyday customs—how they ate, dressed, conducted business, worshipped, etc. We pay better attention to such a presentation of customs than we would by simply reading about it in a textbook, for now we care about the characters who use these customs. It all comes alive. Because these fictional characters are given real personalities, we see them reacting to various situations with anger, humor, fear, embarrassment, or affection—just as we would. We can gaze across enormous chasms of time and culture and look into the eyes of friends. Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. Human nature, for better or worse, hasn’t changed. This is one of history’s greatest lessons.

NOTES TO THE HOME EDUCATOR

Integrating *God King* into your curriculum is as simple as reading it aloud in the evening, a chapter or two per night. Later on, show your children where this story takes place on a timeline (around 710-702 B.C.), in comparison to other events you have studied in Egyptian, Greek, Roman, or Bible history. Read the biblical passages mentioned in the author's afterword. Compare a map of ancient Egypt and its surroundings with a modern globe. Locate Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan (where ancient Nubia and Kush were located) and Iraq (Assyria). Look at a map of biblical Palestine and locate the kingdoms of Judah and Samaria.

Fans of the classical or Charlotte Mason method will want to have the children re-tell sections of the story after it is read to them. This may be done orally or in writing, depending on the child's abilities or the homeschool's time constraints. Another approach is not so much to re-tell the story in detail as to summarize each chapter, trying to determine the main point or action that occurred. Although some reluctant student writers need to be encouraged to give detailed descriptions, others have the tendency to cover sheets of paper with needless and repetitive detail. This latter group must learn to reflect, and then to determine what is the essence of the story they have heard. Students like this may be challenged to tell or write in a single sentence the most important event of each chapter.

Depending on your student's age or interest, look up several sources that deal with this period of Egyptian history, and see what is said about Taharka and Shabataka. You will find that they conflict with this book (again, see Author's Note) and probably with one another. Little is known about this time, and scholars have to guess from the small amount of information and legends that exist. Differing viewpoints often turn on the author's recognition or lack of recognition of the Bible as a source of historical information (yet Bible scholars also may differ). If archaeology fascinates your student, you may wish to go to the library to find books and magazines which tell about discoveries in the Middle East. Many of them present facts that strengthen our knowledge of the historical reliability of Scripture.

God King may also be studied as literature. It is a historical novel. Although at its core is a real event, much of the story, in its small events, minor characters, and indeed the personalities of its major characters, is invented. You may wish to compare it in discussion with your student to other historical novels he has enjoyed. Some of these propose to shed light on a real event or person; others dwell mainly on a fictional subplot, with the historical event merely as background. A comparison essay along these lines on two historical novels may be a worthwhile project for an older student.

If your child excels in creative writing, *God King* may inspire him to try his own hand at historical

fiction. Find some other event and person in history about whom only a few bare facts are known. Have fun brainstorming possible situations that lead up to the event. What was this person's childhood like? Did he or she, like Taharka, wish at times to escape his role in life and be someone else? Were there any particular strengths or flaws in his personality that affected his future? Who were his best friends in times of trouble? Would you like to work an animal (like Taharka's donkey) into the story? One word of caution. Do not try to do ALL of the above-mentioned activities. A mother's runaway enthusiasm may become a student's overkill. Select one or two activities that seem to fit with your child's abilities. The main event should always be parent and child enjoying a wonderful, memorable story together.

Daria Sockey

SOME OTHER HISTORICAL FICTION RELATED TO EGYPTIAN HISTORY

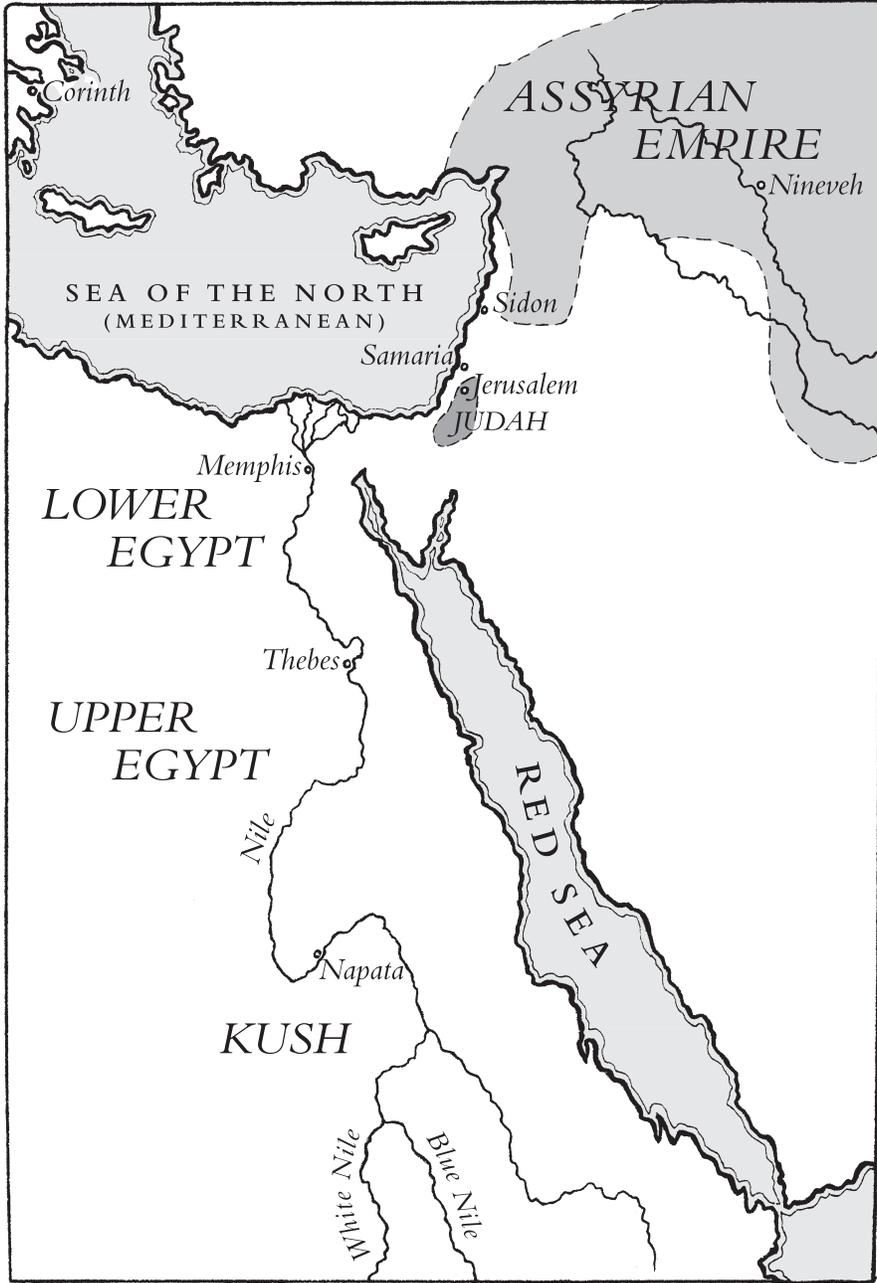
Shadow Hawk, Andre Norton. Nubia, 1570 B.C.: end of rule of Hyksos and dawn of the 18th dynasty.

Mara, Daughter of the Nile, Eloise Jarvis McGraw. Time of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III around 1480 B.C.

Scarab for Luck, Enid La Monte Meadowcroft. Time of Amenhotep II, son of Thutmose III, 1450-1425 B.C.

The Lost Queen of Egypt, Lucille Morrison. Time of Akhenaton and Tutankhamon, 1350 B.C.

A Camel for a Throne, Eloise Lowensbery. Time of Pharaoh Amenemhet, founder of 12th Dynasty of Middle Kingdom, about 2000 B.C.



701 B.C.

Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him.

Hezekiah, King of Judah
Bible, II Chronicles 32:7

In the days of Assyria's might even Egypt feared her aggressions. Egypt was then ruled by Kushite princes, around whom one of them, Taharka, this story unfolds.

Prologue

IT WAS CHILDREN'S nap time in the women's quarters, but the boy and the girl in the garden were not asleep.

"Hold him still," said the boy.

The girl held hard to the injured lamb while the boy bound splints to the broken leg, as they had taught him at scribe school.

"Where did you find him?" he asked her.

"In the main kitchen. I was stealing a honey cake."

The boy laughed. "And you came out with this instead?"

"They were going to cook him. Well, they won't cook him now."

He laughed again, patted the animal and watched it hobble off.

"You're good at this," said the girl. "Just like a doctor."

"That's what I would like to be. That, or maybe a soldier. They say I'm good with the staff and the spear, and it would get me out of here." They gazed around at the high walls hemming them into the garden with the lotus pool.

"I'd be anything, to get out of here. Except," the

girl looked suddenly into his eyes. "Except that I wouldn't see you again."

After a moment he looked away. He caught a glimpse of a tall, handsome youth crossing the garden, followed respectfully by two priests. The girl saw him too.

"At least," she said, "I'd never have to see *him* again."

"You'd better get used to him," said the younger boy, soberly. "Someday—"

"Never," said the girl. She rose. "They're calling me. I'll have to go now." She walked slowly toward the door of the Great House where the head nurse awaited her, frowning angrily.

The boy stared up at the high sandstone walls. A prison, he thought. It's like a prison. Except that sometimes they let him out. Like tomorrow. The hunt. He brightened a little at the thought of tomorrow.

He glanced toward where the handsome youth had disappeared around a corner.

At least, he thought, I'll never have to be king.

Crocodile!

“GET BACK in the boat, Lord Taharka! Back! You must be ready when he comes!”

The boy Taharka stood ankle deep in the thick black mud of the great river. It was hot, hot, hot. Not far away, across the lush green banks, the sun shimmered on sand and rock. The boy’s skin, black as the rocks on the bank of the Nile, was protected by a loose white cloth that beat back the wicked rays. Already it was soaked with sweat.

“He’s slow. He’s lazy,” said the boy, though his heart was beating very fast.

“Don’t count on it. He can move like the rapids downstream, and you won’t hear a sound.”

For the first time in his twelve years, Taharka had been brought out on a crocodile hunt. The crocodile was sacred to Sebek, the crocodile god, of course, but that was all right for Taharka was a prince. Not a very important prince, but a prince, one of the many sons of Shabaka, king of Kush, who ruled as a god in the Kushite city of Napata.

He had no quarrel with Sebek (he had been taught that all the gods were his cousins) and was not really looking forward to the killing. But Embutah had said it was a lesson—something that must be learned.

“Don’t play games,” said Embutah grimly. “This isn’t the day for it.”

Embutah was his uncle, once a slave, now a high captain in the army. Taharka had always followed his orders without question, so now, heat or no heat, he got back in the boat. He leaned back to gaze at the shimmering blue sky, at the water birds passing overhead. A flock of storks beat by, up river from the great sea of the north, so far away that he did not believe it really existed, though his own grandfather had once seen it. He bowed his head in respect as the sacred ibis skimmed majestically by.

“Look!” said Embutah.

Taharka’s heart jumped, for he thought that the crocodile had come. But it was the kingfisher, hovering still as death above them. It dove as he watched, plummeting down like a rock from the sky. The three of them—Taharka, Embutah and Net the boatman—watched spellbound, as if it had been the first time they had seen it.

So they did not realize that the crocodile was really there.

He had come swiftly, as Embutah had warned, only his dark green back showing above the water. He was very hungry and very silent and the first

they knew of his presence was the shock to the boat as he struck it with his tremendous tail.

And then the scream. A heart chilling scream, despairing and wild.

Net, the boatman, had fallen into the water.

Taharka had once seen a condemned criminal thrown to the crocodile. He had often dreamt of it. But this was real. This was Net. There was only one thing to do.

He scrambled to the spot from which Net had fallen, seizing the spear with its iron head. Embutah was shouting at him.

“No, Lord, no! Let him go! Get back!”

Sebek was already upon the boatman. Those terrible teeth were closing on his arm. Taharka struck the beast with the spear and, at the same time, saw the water redden with blood—Net’s or the crocodile’s, he didn’t know which. But the flat head was driven aside. And suddenly Sebek had turned on him, the great jaws opened wide as in his dreams, ready to seize and crush him and drag him down.

Something struck him and threw him flat. The jaws had snapped shut, but on the empty air. Embutah was leaning over the side, his powerful hands clamped around the ugly snout, squeezing it shut.

“The spear! The spear! Remember what I taught you!”

His great muscles were trembling. The sweat was pouring down his arms.

Suddenly Taharka was very calm. He grasped the spear, positioning his hands just as Embutah had shown him. He fixed his eyes on the thrashing back of the beast, on the spot where the spear must enter, at the base of the ugly head.

He drove down the spear.

The waters churned. There was a great cry from Embutah, thrown back into the bottom of the boat. Then the waters were dyed red as Taharka had never imagined, and began to grow still.

They dragged the boatman over the side. Blood was spurting from an ugly wound in his arm where the beast's teeth had grazed him. He was trembling with pain and shock.

Taharka could see that the man might bleed to death. He knew a little of what must be done. All the children of the god were instructed in the sacred medicine at their scribe school—the formulas, the prescriptions, the magic spells. The bleeding must be stopped with a tight binding above the wound.

"I can stop the bleeding," Taharka said.

"How? We have no cloth," said Embutah.

Without thinking, Taharka tore off the fine cotton cloth—the sacred cloth, so it was said—that shielded him from the sun. He looked defiantly at Embutah. Embutah was silent. Taharka hesitated, holding it out to the aging warrior, for Embutah had stanching the blood of many battle wounds.

Embutah shook his head.