

FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES
REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS
OFTEN-OVERLOOKED LIVES OF SIGNIFICANCE
2 SAMUEL 23; 1 CHRONICLES 11-12



The Heart of the Matter

Somewhere back in time, you and I were given a faulty set of instructions. Somewhere we learned that only the most famous or the star athlete or the most publicly gifted individual is worth our time and attention, our respect, and our loudest applause. But in reality, if it wasn't for the people who surround them, these well-known individuals would quickly fade in popularity and become among the most commonplace. This was never truer than in the days when the Bible was being written! We all know of the apostle Paul, but who has heard of Stephanas, Fortunatus, or Achaicus? And who hasn't heard of King David? But it's doubtful that many Christians could name the warriors who made it possible for him to become king, such as Eleazar, Benaiah, or Asahel. The truth remains—it's all the unknowns who make a few well known!



Discovering the Way

1. The Men Who Made David King (2 Samuel 22:1–2; 23:8–14; 1 Chronicles 11:9)
Even though God anointed David as king of Israel, a group of loyal and unknown mighty men protected David and eventually set him up as king.

2. The Outstanding Résumé of David's Mighty Men (1 Chronicles 12:22, 38–40)
Learn how qualified these men were back then, how obscure they are to this day, how rarely they were mentioned even in their day, and how devoted they were to their calling.



Starting Your Journey

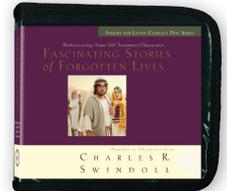
Remember these four unwritten rules for true servants. When you don't care about the credit, you don't complain about the role you play. When you focus on the right objectives, you don't waste your time in wrong pursuits. When you're surrounded by giving servants, a spirit of unity naturally emerges. And when you blend unity and humility together, contagious joy results.



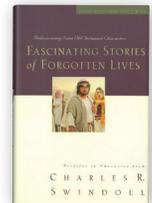
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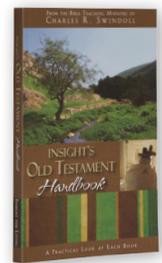
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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

CAIN: THE FARMER WHO MURDERED HIS BROTHER
GENESIS 4:1–15



The Heart of the Matter

The story of Cain and Abel is tossed around rather generally in both Christian and non-Christian circles. Many folks are aware of the big-picture aspect of the account—namely, that the older brother murdered the younger—but beyond that, little is known and even less is applied to everyday life today. But woven within and between the lines of this amazing story are several insights that await our discovery. The setting is simple. The events are ancient; in fact, they are among the earliest scenes ever recorded. Yet everything throbs with such relevance that you would think you were reading from a report filed by the local police homicide department yesterday afternoon. As we uncover the truth and analyze the evidence, let's not miss what all of this is saying to people living in the modern era—an era plagued with the very same nature as the one of the farmer who murdered his brother.



Discovering the Way

1. A Brief Survey of Scriptural Tragedies

The human race is strewn with the litter of murder. But a person is not a murderer because he or she murders. A person murders because he or she is a murderer at heart. In other words, we are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners, deep within our inner being.

2. A Careful Study of the First Homicide (Genesis 4:1–15)

Learn about the first homicide in the Bible: the background, the warning, the act, the investigation, and the punishment.

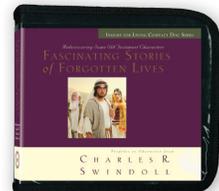


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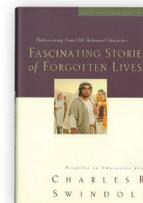
Although you may not be a murderer, take some time to search your own heart. Admit that God's way is the only acceptable way. Recognize that jealousy is a sin that can't be hidden and must not be tolerated. And realize that when anger is ignored, it never corrects itself. Anger never vanishes but multiplies and often comes out in a violent manner.



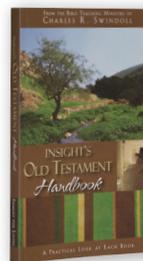
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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

ABRAHAM: THE FATHER WHO RELEASED HIS SON
GENESIS 22:1-14



The Heart of the Matter

Letting go is always difficult. And the closer we are to the thing (or the person) being released, the more difficult it is to let go. We must hold everything loosely. Some of the most poignant examples of letting go come in the context of parent-child relationships. Upon receiving God's command to offer his son as a sacrifice, Abraham let Isaac go and obeyed without resistance, illustrating his allegiance to God above all. When God sought to redeem humanity, He let go, allowing His Son to die at the hands of unworthy men. When we are faced with letting go, we must not only remember Abraham's story as inspiration but also remember that God would never ask more of us than He was willing to give Himself.



Discovering the Way

1. Releasing Valuable Things

There are four general categories of things that we must hold loosely: possessions, occupations, dreams, and relationships.

2. When a Father Released His Son (Genesis 22:1-14; Hebrews 11:17-19)

God gave a command to be obeyed. Abraham responded with swift and complete obedience.



Starting Your Journey

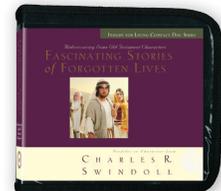
Remember these three analogies. God the Father showed us how to *give* when He released His dear Son to us at Bethlehem. God the Son showed us how to *die* when He released Himself to the Father on Calvary. God the Spirit will show us how to *live* when we release whatever has us in its grip.



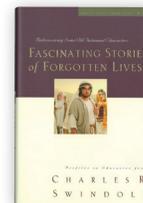
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ESAU: THE SON WHO COULDN'T WIN

GENESIS 25:20–34; 26:34–35; 27:5–46; 28:1–9; ROMANS 15:4



The Heart of the Matter

Tucked away in numerous folds of the Old Testament are stories that have held the attention of Bible readers for centuries. Some intrigue us, and others encourage us. There are stories of heroism and incredible accomplishments along with stories of disappointment, sadness, and tragedy. If ever a book contained a human-interest emphasis, it's the Bible. This series uncovers some of those stories, including this one about a young man who seemed born to lose. Though a twin, he was quite the opposite of his younger brother and ultimately became the heartache of the family. Ripped off by his brother and rejected by his family, he couldn't win, no matter how hard he tried. As we shall soon discover, the Bible pulls no punches. And you may find several places in this story where you can identify with "the son who couldn't win."



Discovering the Way

1. Some Thoughts about a Story (Romans 15:4)

Study the components of a good story and what makes the story of Esau so interesting.

2. Some Observations of a Rejected Son (Genesis 25:20–34; 26:34–35; 27:5–28:9)

Learn about Esau's birthright and perspective, his struggles and marriages, and his relationships and reactions.

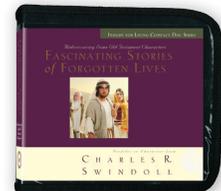


Starting Your Journey

Keep in mind these lessons from a wounded struggler: instant gratification is a dangerous basis for making decisions; parental favoritism has a damaging effect on the whole family; unconditional acceptance is a longing in every child's heart.



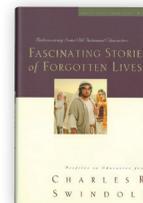
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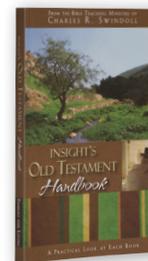
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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES
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ACHAN: THE MAN WHOSE SIN BROUGHT CALAMITY
JOSHUA 7



The Heart of the Matter

Some of the stories in Scripture bring us great joy as we enter into the triumphs and delights of those whose lives we have cause to celebrate. On other occasions we are gripped by agony as we read accounts where some go through times of tragedy, especially when the tragedy is self-inflicted. The story of Achan falls into the latter category. Two things make Achan's story especially sad. First, it occurred so suddenly on the heels of an incredible victory—the miraculous invasion of Jericho—and second, it resulted in such a devastating toll on so many others. If ever Hosea's words regarding “sow the wind and reap the whirlwind” were ever enacted, it was in the Hebrews' defeat at Ai. One man—a single, isolated individual—deliberately chose to disobey, yet numerous innocent victims fell in the wake of his sin, bringing calamity to a nation. As James later wrote: “See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire” (James 3:5).



Discovering the Way

1. Some Sins Are Silent . . . Others Shout (1 John 1:5–9)

Some sins impact others. All sin damages our relationship with God.

2. Some Days Are Glorious . . . Others, Grim (Joshua 6:15–21; Joshua 7:1–15)

Following their glorious success at Jericho, Joshua's army fell at Ai.

3. Some Lessons Are Clear . . . Others, Confusing

How could one man's sin affect an army of righteous men?

4. Some Consequences Are Personal . . . Others, Public (Joshua 7:22–25)

Many sins are private, but sometimes one act brings about scandalous consequences.

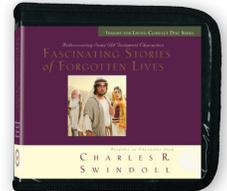


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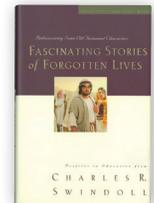
Several lessons linger: there is a unique stench connected with suspicion; an absence of peace accompanies hidden sin; when wrong is uncovered, God honors swift and thorough action.



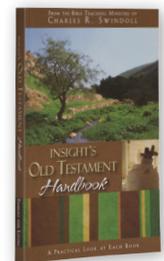
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SAMUEL: THE BOY WHO HEARD GOD'S VOICE

1 SAMUEL 3:1-18



The Heart of the Matter

Most of us can remember the pictures that hung on the walls of our Sunday school classrooms when we were children. They were usually portraits of biblical characters at crucial moments in their lives: Daniel in the lions' den, David and Goliath, blind Samson standing between the temple pillars, Moses leading the Hebrews across the Red Sea, Jonah being thrown into the stormy seas, and other familiar scenes. Almost without exception, there was another . . . perhaps the most familiar of all: the boy Samuel as he heard God's voice in the middle of the night. Have you ever wondered why God spoke to the lad? Or what God said to him that night? The scene may be familiar, but what it represents is not. Too bad. It is a message as relevant today as it was when the Lord first spoke it.



Discovering the Way

1. Still Frames . . . Significant Events

The Bible is full of good stories that include suspense, discovery, and a dramatic climax.

2. God's Voice . . . Samuel's Response (1 Samuel 3:1-9)

God spoke to Samuel in the middle of the night with an audible voice. And Samuel listened.

3. God's Warning . . . Samuel's Reluctance (Deuteronomy 21:18-21; 1 Samuel 2:27-36; 3:10-18; Proverbs 19:18; Galatians 6:1)

God warned Samuel that He planned to judge Eli for Eli's sons' sin. Samuel hesitated but told Eli all of God's words.

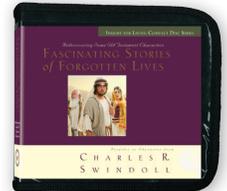


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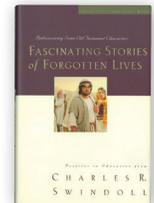
Two morals emerge from our look at Samuel and Eli. First, remember! Any family can disintegrate when it neglects God's Word or excuses sin. And second, hearing the truth isn't enough. Action is essential.



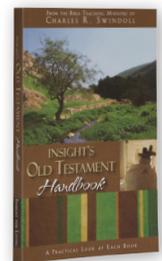
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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

SAUL: THE KING WHO REFUSED TO BOW
1 SAMUEL 13–15



The Heart of the Matter

Back in biblical times, when kings reigned and kingdoms grew, all sorts of characters emerged who wore crowns. Some were loud, boisterous, brutal, and ungodly, while others were quiet, weak-willed, and even humble. A few on record were godly and teachable, many were stubborn and arrogant, and still others were young, impressionable, and easily misled. But of all the studies we could make of those ancient monarchs, not one of the kings provides more intriguing food for thought than the ones who began their reigns one way and ended them another. In the process of the passing of years, they changed. Such was the situation with the king we meet in this study. When he became king, he was “little in his own eyes” (see 1 Samuel 15:17), but some time later all that changed drastically. The erosion of his character left him proud, impatient, and downright rebellious . . . a man who refused to bow even to the Lord his God. A serious failure, well worth our attention.



Discovering the Way

1. A Brief Study of Hebrew Life Before Saul Became King

Before Saul, the Israelites had no king. God primarily used judges and prophets to lead the people.

2. A Tragic Analysis of Saul’s Character Erosion (1 Samuel 13–15)

First, Saul made an impatient offering, an act of irreverent presumption. Second, Saul made a rash vow, an irresponsible and unwise decision that almost cost the life of his son, Jonathan. And third, Saul engaged in a disobedient act, where he heard one thing and did another.



Starting Your Journey

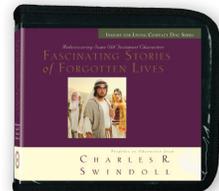
Saul’s life offers four reminders for all who walk with God. First, to assume you will end strong because you started strong is foolish. Second, to presume into inappropriate areas because circumstances are uncomfortable is dangerous. Third, to jeopardize another’s well-being because you’re unwilling to alter an unwise decision is unfair. Fourth, to rationalize your disobedience because you wanted *your way* is rebellion.



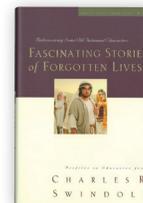
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ABIGAIL: THE WOMAN WHO SAVED HER HUSBAND'S NECK

1 SAMUEL 25



The Heart of the Matter

Tucked away in the folds of Scripture are numerous human-interest stories that are not known by most. Although unknown, they hold within them principles and insights and lessons that are timelessly significant. Even those stories whose origins are multiple centuries old sustain a relevance that is remarkably up to date. We have no difficulty stepping into the scene and identifying with the characters involved in the plot. Such is the case in the story we discover recorded in 1 Samuel 25. It is amazing—change a few particulars, the geography, and the date in which it first happened, and we find ourselves reenacting a series of events as modern as today's news. As we shall see, it is the story of an unfair boss, a strained marriage, and a greathearted woman whose act of unselfish bravery saved her husband's neck! Its fairy-tale-like ending makes the story one of the most memorable in all the Old Testament.



Discovering the Way

1. The Main Characters (1 Samuel 25:1–3)

David, not yet king, was the “watcher” of Nabal's sheep. Nabal was a stubborn and rude man who owed David for David's protection. And Abigail was the intelligent and beautiful wife of Nabal.

2. Following the Plot (1 Samuel 25:4–42; Romans 15:4)

David requested remuneration from Nabal, and when Nabal refused, David took his troops on a quest for retaliation. Abigail stopped David and his troops and begged for mercy to save her husband's life.

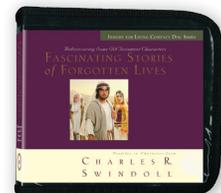


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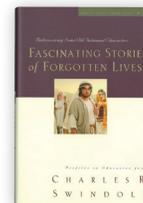
We learn three key lessons from this story. We learn from David that rash reactions never pay off. We learn from Nabal that insensitive husbands always leave unknown heartaches in their wake. And we learn from Abigail that wise wives seldom miss the best use of timing and tact.



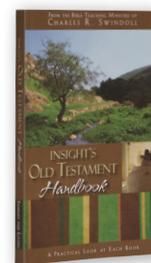
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ABSALOM: THE REBEL PRINCE CHARMING
2 SAMUEL 12:7–25



The Heart of the Matter

There is no pain harder to bear than domestic difficulty. We can bounce back from blows at work or recover fairly rapidly from problems at school. Even physical infirmities or emotional battles—as hurtful as they may be—can hardly be compared to the devastating impact brought on by trouble in the home. Family feuds, wayward kids, parent-child clashes, husband-wife disagreements, and other in-house pressures have a way of breaking our spirits and stealing our joy. And no one is immune who compromises with God’s standard—not even a king such as David. In this study we will witness the monarch’s misery as the sword of consequences falls on David and his family. As we watch it happen, let’s take heed!



Discovering the Way

1. Statement from Scripture (Galatians 6:7–8; 2 Samuel 12:10–11)

David reaped the familial consequences of the sin he sowed with Bathsheba and, as a result, Absalom rebelled. The sword did not depart from David’s family.

2. Problems in the Palace (2 Samuel 13:1–14; 2 Samuel 13:21–30; 2 Samuel 16:20–22)

The prophet Nathan made a general prediction of trouble for David’s household. The specific results were devastating: tragic death, marital unfaithfulness, hatred within the family, and murder, among others.

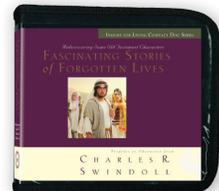


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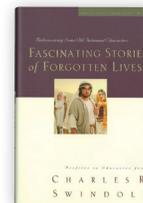
How can we handle the consequences of sin? We can pray, face the consequences squarely, lean hard on the truth, and persevere.



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REHOBOAM: THE RECKLESS PHONY

1 KINGS 12:1-16



The Heart of the Matter

Movies and TV shows have two different sides: the camera side seen by the viewers, and the other, hidden side seen only by those who go behind the scenes. From the camera side, buildings and landscapes and luxurious living rooms and even campfires at night look absolutely real. But behind the scenes, the whole thing is exposed as nothing more than a thin veneer of plastic, wood, and metal, held together with flimsy, temporary materials and made to look real with the art of lighting and the tricks of the trade. On the surface, everything seems genuine and sturdy. But behind the big front, there's hardly anything there! It's all a big, painted, professional show! This perfectly describes Rehoboam, who lived in the days of the kings. He is a rather obscure character, but one who illustrates the principle that what appears on the surface doesn't always match what lies under the surface. We can learn many lessons about integrity from his life!



Discovering the Way

1. Rehoboam *Appeared to Be a Good Leader . . . Not So!* (1 Kings 12:1-17; 2 Chronicles 10:15-19)

In order to win votes, Rehoboam sought wise counsel to help him lead well, but he had no intention of following the advice he received. Rehoboam's decision to oppress the people led to civil war!

2. Rehoboam *Appeared Obedient . . . Not So!* (2 Chronicles 11:1-12, 18-23)

Rehoboam, now king of Judah, faked obedience to the Lord's command not to attack Israel. But really, he fortified cities and assembled troops to fight against Israel.

3. Rehoboam *Appeared to Worship God . . . Not So!* (1 Kings 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 12:1-3, 9-11)

Rehoboam really worshiped the detestable Ammonite gods of his mother.

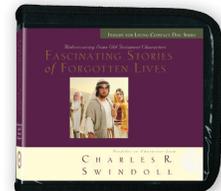


Starting Your Journey

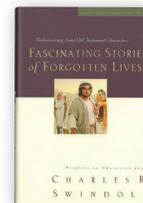
Are you a phony like Rehoboam? Read Ezekiel 33:30-33 and examine your heart. Ask God to show you where what is perceived doesn't match what's in your heart. Seek His forgiveness.



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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

JABEZ: THE UNKNOWN WHO BECAME WELL KNOWN

1 CHRONICLES 4:9–10



The Heart of the Matter

The old, familiar proverb “The best things come in the smallest packages” is often true, not only in life but also in Scripture. Tiny, one-line verses or simple, uncomplicated truths are frequently the most profound. The story we are considering in this study is a classic case in point. Like a falling meteor in the night sky, the main character of the story, Jabez, is ablaze for only a few moments, but the memory of his life leaves us with a marked impact. Jabez emerges in the midst of epitaphs on tombstones as the Spirit of God is pleased to hover over his life a bit longer than any other mentioned in this context. Because God singles out Jabez, we are wise to pause and learn the truth of the story. By doing so, many who feel their lives are marked by obscurity and insignificance can gain fresh courage to excel.



Discovering the Way

1. A Background of Darkness and Death

Learn about the fearful times in which Jabez lived, as well as why his unique prayer appears in the middle of a long genealogy.

2. A Story of Faith and Hope (1 Chronicles 4:9–10)

Examine the meaning of Jabez’s name, the circumstance of his birth, the content of his prayer, and God’s answer.



Starting Your Journey

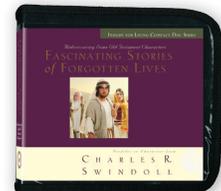
Three lessons and a question emerge from our study of Jabez. A struggling start doesn’t necessitate a limited life. No measure of success is safe without the presence of God’s hand on a life. When God blesses a life, there’s no room for shame. What large thing are you asking of God these days?



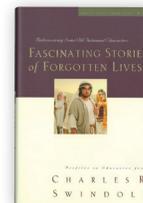
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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES
REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS
NAAMAN: THE OFFICER WHOSE LEPROSY WAS CLEANSED
2 KINGS 5:1-14



The Heart of the Matter

Old Testament stories often revolve around its heroes of faith. The men and women who walked with God and trusted Him to get them through a challenging situation are usually at the heart of each interesting plot. In the story we are about to uncover from 2 Kings 5, that is not the case. The prominent person in this particular story was neither a preacher nor a prophet but an officer in the Syrian army. Though not strong in faith, the man was nevertheless greatly respected as a leader of troops and as a military warrior. One day all that was put on hold. None of his trophies seemed important any longer. His heroic war stories faded from conversation, and his presence in full-dress uniform was no longer high profile at parades and banquets. He was unclean . . . he had become a leper. This is a story about a man, who was once proud and self-sufficient, finally humbling himself before the only One who could cleanse his leprosy . . . and did.



Discovering the Way

1. A Bit of History to Reconstruct the Setting

This story took place during a civil war in Israel and stars a prophet at odds with his culture.

2. The Story of a Miracle (2 Kings 5:1-14)

Get to know proud Naaman and his disease, an Israelite servant girl and her advice, Naaman's desperate search and its results, and the humble prophet and his cleansing of Naaman.



Starting Your Journey

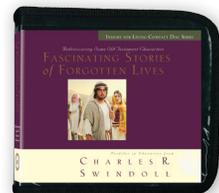
We can learn four lessons from Naaman's story. It's not until we accept the fact that we are diseased that we seek cleansing. It's not until we hear the truth that we discover the way to find relief. It's not until we come to the end of ourselves that we are ready to go God's way. And it's not until we actually *do* as God requires that our cleansing takes place.



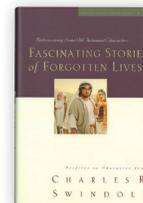
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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

GEHAZI: THE SERVANT WHO GOT GREEDY
2 KINGS 5:15–27



The Heart of the Matter

We just considered the story of Naaman, who was cleansed of leprosy. It is a wonderful, miraculous story of God's power and grace at work through Elisha in the life of a man who knew nothing of the Lord's presence. This story comes on the heels of that one. Actually, it is a sequel to that account . . . the flip side of God's working in that man's life. As we shall see, deep in the heart of Elisha's helper, Gehazi, were smoldering embers of greed. Silently, secretively, they remained hidden. No one could tell by looking. Words never passed from Gehazi's mouth, admitting such sin, but it was there nevertheless. Through a series of events, those embers burst into full flame. As we recount the story, we want to take sufficient time to examine our own hearts and determine if we suffer from a similar malady.



Discovering the Way

1. An Analysis of Greed

Greed is an inordinate desire to acquire more and more, by any means possible. It expresses itself in the appetite for money, possessions, fame, and pleasure.

2. An Account of Greed (2 Kings 5:15–27)

Naaman offered Elisha a very valuable gift—"ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes" (2 Kings 5:5). Elisha refused it, but Gehazi wanted that stuff! Gehazi pursued the goods, lied to Naaman, and deceived Elisha to cover his tracks.



Starting Your Journey

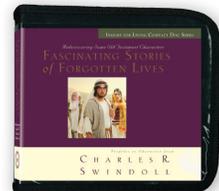
Remember four lasting lessons about secret greed: imagination allows greed to grow; rationalization encourages greed to surface; deception gives greed courage to persist; and confession brings greed to a necessary and abrupt end.



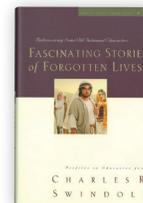
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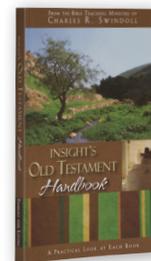
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FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES REDISCOVERING SOME OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

UZZIAH: THE LEADER WHO BECAME A LOSER
2 CHRONICLES 26:1-21



The Heart of the Matter

No matter how gifted we may be, no matter how valuable others may think we are, we have no right to take God's name lightly, eclipse His glory, or rob Him of praise. As soon as we do that, the movement of God halts and a monument to our glory is erected. Regrettably, these selfish monuments tend to crash to the ground quickly, often taking us with them. Tragically, King Uzziah didn't learn well enough what it meant to fear and worship God. He had a good start. He walked humbly with God, pursued the disciplines of godly living, and sought wise counsel. But when he achieved military prowess and gained notoriety, his heart became proud. He built monuments to himself. Then his fear of God waned, and he sinned against Him. And Uzziah's sin had lifelong consequences.



Discovering the Way

1. Everything Depends on Who Gets Glory (Isaiah 42:5-8)

When Christians focus on God and give Him honor, adoration, and admiration, true success can be achieved.

2. Pride Results in Disaster (2 Chronicles 26:1-20)

When King Uzziah hit the pinnacle of his power and fame, pride invaded his heart and he forgot God.

3. The Consequences of Sin Should Result in Repentance (2 Chronicles 26:21-23)

King Uzziah lived the rest of his days as a leper, separated from his people, his kingdom, and God's house. And when he died, he was buried apart from other kings because he was a leper.

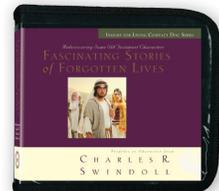


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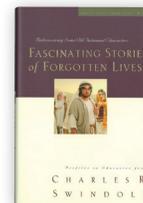
Watch for these signs of ministry slippage: when greater battles are fought within than without; when more attention is directed to the leader than to the Lord; when God's help is nice but not absolutely essential for survival; when worthwhile reproofs are resisted rather than received; and when the consequences of sin are ignored rather than feared.



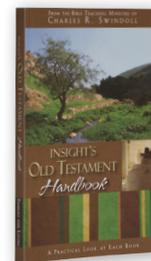
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