

Choices in the Desert

by Joyce Strong



The number of his followers grew almost daily as word spread among the discontented and those outlawed by King Saul—in debt to the government or to society—that David was alive and well in the desert. They came alone and they came in small bands—renegade soldiers, thieves and murderers. Some were unjustly accused, other deserved every invective ever hurled at them by those they had wronged. All wanted to be with David who had become something of a folk hero to them.

Even his parents and brothers sought him out. But, as Eliab was quick to sarcastically point out, it was not because being on the run with David was so alluring, but because their lives were worth nothing now that their brother was out of favor with the king. His family was being terrorized.

While the others slept that night, Eliab cornered David.

“You owe us, kid,” Eliab said in a forced whisper, through clenched teeth. “Our property has been seized and our flocks slaughtered, all because of you and your ‘anointing’!”

David said nothing, only his eyes registering the misery of the moment.

“What a laugh!” Eliab muttered in derision. “King of Israel! Well, ol’ Saul’s got your number, and it’ll soon be up, as I see it.”

Still David said nothing.

“Look at the way you’re living! The son of Jesse, a cave dweller and vagabond. And now we’ve been reduced to the same lot!” Eliab’s anger mounted.

Without a word David took his brother firmly by the shoulders and pulled him suddenly toward himself until their faces were only inches apart. This surprised Eliab, checking his anger for the moment.

Finally David spoke. “Eliab, I’m sorry,” he said in a hoarse whisper. “I’m sorry you’ve gotten dragged into my grief. I would never have wished it upon you.” As he finished speaking, he gently released his brother.

Then nodding toward his worn and exhausted mother and father who were asleep on a mat in a corner of the cave a few yards away, “Last night I spoke with the king of Moab about them. He is a compassionate man. He has consented to take Mother and Father into his home for protection,” David continued in a whisper so as not to wake them. “I’ll take them to Mizpah in the morning.”

Eliab shot back, “What about the rest of us?”

“That’s up to you,” David said matter-of-factly. “You are welcome to stay here with me, or you can set out on your own.”

Eliab sat stiffly, trying to think.

“Life takes some strange twists sometimes, doesn’t it?” David selected quietly. “Our God’s plans are often beyond our understanding.”

“Leave God out of this!” Eliab seethed.

His eyes wet with tears, David said softly, “I can’t.”

Eliab grabbed his bedroll and knapsack and stormed out of the cave. He did not return.

Each day, to relieve boredom and to prepare for possible combat with Saul’s troops, David drilled his band of misfits which now numbered four hundred. They must be in prime physical condition; able to fight hard without faltering; loyal to one another to the death, if necessary; full of spirit; and highly skilled in their weaponry. They became protectors of villages within Judah against the Philistine invaders. In return, they were given food and plunder.

During the day, they were continually moving from one desert stronghold to another to evade Saul and his men.

But at night, no matter where they were, they begged David for music. Sometimes he made up jolly tunes that made them laugh, but

mostly he taught them of the love and faithfulness of God through the poignant verses he so easily set to music. It was contagious—this love of David for His God—and it spread unresisted through the hearts of his men.

Above all, the men loved David. He cared for them as a shepherd would care for his sheep. To a man, they knew that he would lay his life down for them. They knew that he considered them first when he made decisions. They knew that he was straight with them, so they were straight with him.