

# MEFIBOSET CRIPPLED PRINCE

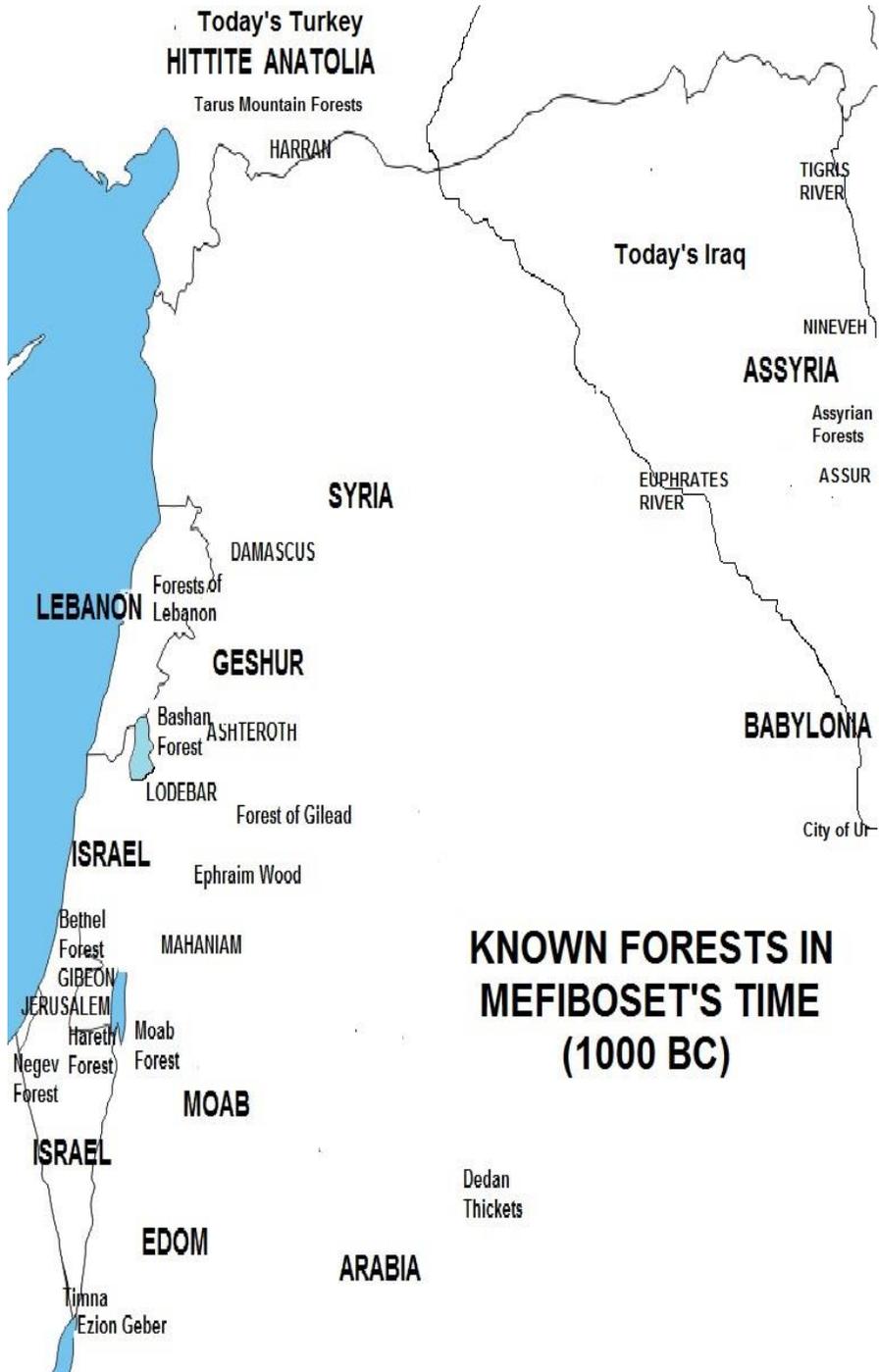
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**A Commentary In Narrative Form**

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**KNOWN FORESTS IN  
 MEFIBOSET'S TIME  
 (1000 BC)**

## 1 ~ RETREAT

“All dead! They’re all dead! Get out of here! Run for your lives!”

The youngest and now the only legitimate son of King Saul rushes through the opened palace gates. He pulls on the reins and jumps off his chariot. Blood is spattered across his face, his limbs, his uniform. The prince stands, legs apart, his eyes wild while he warns his family.

“Hurry!” His husky voice echoes around the courtyard and up the walls of each of the three floors surrounding it. “Mother. Where are you?”

“Both Saul and Jonathan?” The now widowed queen screams.

“Yes, both of them. Father and all the sons but me. Their army is after me now. Hurry!”

“Mefiboset, where are you?” Nurse Fadia screams from a third-story balcony where the heirs’ apartments are.

“I right here,” five-year-old Sett giggles. “Come ‘n find me,” he sings.

Petite Arabian Fadia rushes into her charge’s room and hears another giggle. *Be calm*, she tells herself, *or he will never come out*. “Oh, my, I must give up. You win,” she says playfully, hoping little Sett does not sense the trembling in her voice.

She hears another giggle behind her, turns, and sees Sett standing in full view, wagging his head back and forth, his little white teeth showing his delight.

With all the strength she can muster, she grabs up the husky and tall-for-his-age boy and stumbles out of his apartment to the three flights of stairs.

Starting down the steps, her entire body trembles. She tries to will her knees to not buckle and her tears to not come. Sett pushes at her chest. “I don’t wanna go down

there,” he objects, as he continues to twist in her arms. “I wanna stay here and play.”

Fadia’s dark hair falls in front of her eyes and she clings to the boy, hoping this time he does not get his way. Less and less she can see the next step below her.

Two more rush in from the battle—King Saul’s illegitimate sons and the last of the survivors.

Sett continues to wiggle and fight his nurse to free himself of her grasp. “Lemme down. Lemme down. I wanna play.”

She clings hard. “Oh, Jehovah God. Give me strength.”

“Mother, where are you?”

The queen shouts, “I’m over here.”

The boy screams in the nurse’s ear. The sound mingles with the shouts of others in the household scrambling to the family chariots now pulled into the courtyard below.

Another scream from Sett. Fadia’s heart pounds and her weakening arms strain.

She hears the husky voices in the courtyard of the king’s illegitimate sons as they rush toward the steps to get to their mother.

“Help me,” Fadia calls out to the one closest to her. “Help me!”

Mefiboset, the boy’s namesake uncle, climbs two steps at a time toward them.

“Help me!”

“I don’t wanna go. I wanna play. Lemme go.”

“Mother, where are you?”

“Help me!”

“Are all the chariots out?”

“Help me!”

“Hurry everyone.”

“I’m coming.”

“Help me!”

“I don’t wanna go.”

“They’ll be here any moment.”

“Help me!”

“I’m coming.”

“I wanna play.”

“Help me!”

Before the uncle and nurse can reach each other, the boy breaks free of his nurse's weakened arms and tumbles feet first.

"No!" Fadia screams, tears rushing down her face, her eyes wide.

The uncle, still bloodied from battle, lunges toward the boy, arms stretched in front of him.

It is not enough.

Little Sett lands two steps below the nurse, his feet hitting the sharp outer edge, his arms flailing. He screams and tumbles toward his uncle. He bounces onto his back, and is swept up into awaiting strong arms that have arrived too late.

Uncle Mefiboset hugs the screaming boy to him, pivots, and heads back down toward the courtyard.

Servants scramble to hitch awaiting chariots to horses. Guards rush up to the four palace watchtowers with bows and arrows, and shout down for more ammunition.

"Mother, there you are," the prince calls out.

"Is the boy okay?" the queen screams. "Where is Fadia?"

They look up and see the young lady, barely out of her teens, slumped half way down the lowest flight of stairs, face in her lap, hands over her head, screaming.

"Hurry, Fadia. We've got to go now."

The queen mother rushes up the steps, puts her arm around the nurse, and coaxes her down to an awaiting chariot. "We can't wait any longer. You must come now."

Ziba, steward of the house, appears. He shouts to the royal family.

"My sons and I will stay behind to take care of things. Go. Go!"

The family now all accounted for, five chariots rush out of King Saul's palace and head east toward Jericho and the Jordan River.

The horses snort and pant, pulling their cargo down the hill that is Gibeon, over rocks and bumps on the road. The passengers hang on to the sides of the chariots to keep from falling out.

Fadia sits in the bottom of her chariot, screaming Sett

in her lap. She takes a deep breath, puts her head down onto his and whispers a song. She prays he can hear it despite the screaming and yelling and galloping and wheels bouncing on the road.

They come to Jericho. The men guide their horses around the city, turning the chariots so sharply, they are momentarily only on one wheel.

Still the shouting and screaming and snorting and scraping and bouncing and escaping.

“Hurry! They’re right behind us. Hurry!”

The royal family arrives at the Jordan River. It is low. They do not let up. The horses and their cargo plunge down the embankment, into the knee-deep water and push against its resistance until they are on the other shore. Back up the other side, they head farther east.

Into foothills. Higher. Still struggling to stay alive.

The men snap their whips above the horses’ heads. The horses push on, straining, eyes wide, mouths agape, white sweat forming on their bodies.

On higher and higher. Keep running. Running from death. Running from doom. Running from what once was.

They see it ahead of them—Mahanaim. The royal stronghold. They do not try to slow the horses. They know they have been spotted from the watch towers and the gates swung wide for them.

They rush inside the fortress and toward the palace within it which Saul had built as a duplicate of his palace back in Gibeon. Once inside, the experienced drivers slow their horses gradually, taking them in circles around the coral-and-black tiled courtyard until they can come to a halt.

By the time the royal family members begin to tumble out of their chariots, the gates have been closed and barred, and stronghold soldiers have rushed up to the parapet along the top of the wall.

Queen Mother Ahinoam hurries over to the chariot where her injured grandson lies, still screaming. Nurse Fadia looks up, trembling, tears streaking her now dusty face.

“My lady. My lady” is all she can say.

The queen mother calls over to Prince Isboset, now her only son, “Come get Mefiboset and take him up to his room.

Quickly.”

Princess Merab, Sett’s aunt, rushes over to Barzillai her father-in-law. “They were after us, and little Sett has been injured. Help us.” She has her five young sons in tow.

“Grandfather. Grandfather,” her sons call out.

Barzillai, overseer of the stronghold and self-made physician to the soldiers on duty, calls for his assistant. They follow the grandmother, son, and grandson up the steps.

Little Sett is laid on a bed and Barzillai moves into place. Barzillai is thin, has a round face, pointed nose, and a deep voice.

The room is large, being one of the royal apartments for the grown children and grandchildren of the king. It is plain with only beds, a table with two benches, and rugs on the coral-and-black tiled floor. Colorful cushions for sitting and baskets for storing personal items are scattered helter-skelter on rugs. Hooks on the plain wall hold robes and tunics.

“Where is he hurt?” he calls out over the boy’s continued screaming.

“His legs,” still-bloodied Prince Isboset shouts back, holding onto the boy to keep him from squirming.

For the first time, they see it. Sett’s little feet are turned out sideways and a bone is protruding from each ankle.

“Lemme up!” Sett shouts. “Daddy. Daddy. Lemme up. Hurt, Daddy. Hurt. Help me, Daddy. Daddy....”

The boy goes silent. The adults look at each other in horror.

“No!” Queen Ahinoam shouts, her bow-shaped mouth twisted. “Not him too.” Her screams fall into an abyss of shrill muttering. “Not our Sett. Please, not our little Sett.”

“He’s not dead, Your Majesty,” Barzillai says with his bass voice, touching the woman’s arm. “Your little prince is asleep.”

She wipes her tears with her handkerchief and tucks it back in the scarlet belt around her gold tunic. She lets her green robe slide off her shoulders.

We must do something about those feet while we can,”

Barzillai continues.

From his kneeling position by the bed, Barzillai looks around and motions to his assistant standing by. The assistant sees the boy's feet and knows what to do. He walks around to the other side of the bed, hangs on to the boy with sure grasp, looks up at Barzillai, and nods. Barzillai pushes the bones back through the skin, and the servant wraps the legs as tight as he dares.

That done, the two men signal each other once again, the servant's hands once more grasping the boy's torso. Barzillai forces one of the feet to the front position. The boy groans but does not open his eyes. He does the same with the other foot. Then he and the servant each wrap a foot in strong linen.

Barzillai stands and wipes his brow. Prince Isboset stands by his mother who is leaning her head against him.

"I will go down and tell the others that we have everything under control," Barzillai says. He makes his way back down into the courtyard. "Prince Mefiboset will be fine," he says in a low tone. Standing before him are the boy's uncle and namesake, another uncle, and the queen mother's rival, Rizpah, the delicate redheaded mistress.

He looks around the courtyard. "Where is the nurse?" he asks. An uncle signals with his eyes toward one of the chariots.

Fadia slumps still on the floor of the chariot, bent over into a ball and trembling.

"Come," Barzillai says, touching the young lady's shoulder.

"He stopped crying," she whimpers, raising her head. "I killed him."

"Come out of the chariot now," Barzillai assures. "The boy is going to be just fine."

He holds out both hands, she unrolls, takes them, and climbs out of the chariot.

"Why don't you go up and see him? He will need you when he wakes."

Fadia makes her way up the steps to the apartment used formerly by Sett and his now-dead parents. She pauses in the doorway. As she does, she hears the men down in the

courtyard.

“Now what? With Father dead, who will be king? His only, but youngest son, or his oldest grandson?”

“Be quiet,” she hears a woman’s voice say. “Do you want them to hear you?”

From within the child’s room, Queen Ahinoam looks over at the nurse and forces a smile.

“I’m so sorry, my lady. It’s all my fault.”

“Shhh, child,” Aninoam, says, briefly forgetting the loss of her husband and three of her sons.

“Come, Mother,” Isboset finally says. “We need to make some decisions.” He gently helps her up and walks beside her as they descend the steps into a new world.

The large courtyard is now empty and silent. The horses have been unhitched and put in their stalls on one side and the chariots on the other side.

The two turn now and walk to another set of steps, the imposing steps leading from the ground to the open second-floor throne room, and begin their ascent. Soldiers stand by and open the doors into the grandest room in the kingdom, and close them as the two enter.

Holding on to each other, they look before them at the empty throne. They look at the smaller thrones on each side—one for crown prince Jonathan, and one for the queen mother.

Ahinoam walks forward one small step at a time, her delicate frame still being supported by Isboset who is head and shoulders taller than her. When they arrive at Saul’s throne, she kneels before it, bows her head, and silently weeps.

When she finally looks up, she sees her youngest son, thirty-seven years old and as big as his father, sitting on the throne. Gone are his tears.

“Mother. What do you think?”

She looks away from her son over to a blank wall.

“Where are they now?” she whimpers. “Are the vultures on them yet? Do you think you could go back and find their bodies?”

“It is too dangerous, Mother. It is Philistine territory now. Everyone knows Father is gone. Jonathan too. Our

army is gone and the enemy has taken over.”

“Yes, I suppose you’re right,” Ahinoam says so low he can just make out what she is saying.

“Mother, we need to make some decisions before the kingdom falls apart. I must take my place as king immediately.”

He sits with his hands on both ivory-inlaid arms, feet apart, and looking around the room, his head held high as though surveying his kingdom.

She looks back at him and now realizes what he has done.

“Son, let’s not think about that right now. Let us mourn your father and your brothers. Come now. Come down from there. I need you.”

The son obeys and lets her guide him to a bench along a side wall. They sit in silence. After a long while, the main door is opened and they realize it is growing dark. A servant enters with a torch to set on the wall for them.

“The evening meal will be ready shortly. Is that your pleasure, Your Majesty?” the servant asks.

“Where is she?” Ahinoam asks the servant.

The servant understands. “Rizpah and both her sons are in her apartment.”

By this, Ahinoam knows her husband’s mistress is not far away, the apartment for the king and his two women being behind the throne room.

“Well, I suppose they deserve to eat too. But why? Why do her sons get to live, while all but one of mine have to die?”

No one answers. She rises from the bench and slowly heads back down the grand staircase to the dining hall.

She and Isboset seat themselves at the front table where the royal family normally sits. Her daughter, Merab, and her five sons sit with them.

There are four empty chairs at the table. Chairs of the king and his sons who will never return.

Mistress Rizpah and her two sons sit away from them in a front corner.

After eating the little they can, they each walk slowly to their apartments. Queen Ahinoam does not go directly to hers. She walks to the apartment of her grandson.

Fadia has scooted around so that little Sett's head is in her lap. He is whimpering, and she is brushing the hair off his forehead. She hears the queen enter, stands, curties, and returns to her place next to Prince Sett.

"The physician brought me some tea to give him for pain whenever he wakes up," the nurse says, her voice low and scratchy.

"Take extra good care of him, Fadia. You may just have the next king in your lap." Just as quickly she turns and closes the door behind her.

Sleep does not come that night to the household of King Saul, the king that used to be.

Everyone imitates what they believe to be sleep, but no longer are sure. Everyone imitates a rest they do not feel. Everyone imitates a reality they struggle to find, then wish away.

Morning comes. The servants stir and go to the apartments of the royal family and the family of the other woman. One by one those King Saul has left behind go to the dining hall, make a pretense of eating, then go to the courtyard to find a bench and resume their mourning.

Prince Isboset goes to his normal bench, but instead of sitting, he stands on it.

"Attention, everyone," he announces. "As your new king, I will be holding an audience in the throne room later today for any problems the people here in Mahanaim have."

Heads jerk up.

"What?"

"What is he saying?"

Ahinoam stands. She purses her lips, glares, and calls over to her son.

"Get down from there, Isboset. No one said you were king. The oldest son is always the king. You are the youngest son. You know that."

"But Mother, the oldest son of the oldest son is unfit to rule. He is too young and too lame. Who ever heard of a crippled king?"

"As for him being too young, I will rule until he is old enough to take over. As for him being too lame, give it time. His feet will heal and he will walk as erect and proud as any

king ever did.”

“No, Mother. You are wrong. With too much delay the kingdom will fall apart.”

“We shall wait as long as it takes. Say no more.”

They hear feet on the steps leading to the children’s apartments on the third floor. Everyone looks up and sees a servant carrying little Sett down, the nurse behind them.

The conversation comes to a halt as the child is set on a mat on the tiled pavement. His nurse sits beside him. “Fadec, my legs hurt,” he whimpers.

“Then we shall get your mind off your legs. Did I ever tell you about a crippled prince? He lived a very long time ago. He was the grandson of Prince Abraham, just like you are the grandson of King Saul. One day, this big man wrestled an angel and injured his thigh. His leg never healed.

“Then, guess what? God gave him a new name—Isra-El. Do you know what that means? It means Prince of God. As soon as he became crippled, he became the crippled prince.”

Sett giggles. “Like me?”

“Yes. Kind of like you.”

Sett giggles again and brings smiles to the rest of the family listening in.

“But being crippled did not hold him back, for crippled Prince Isra-El had twelve sons, and all of us descend from one of those sons. Do you know which son of crippled Prince Isra-El you descend from?”

Sett tips his hands and shrugs his shoulders.

“Benjamin.”

Sett giggles, then his eyes change as he remembers his pain. He tries to be brave. Fighting back returning tears, he looks up at his nurse.

“Did crippled Prince Isra-El ever become a king?” he asks.

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