

God King

Introduction and Education Suggestions

©2002 Daria Sockey

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 Tutankhamen, 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 cut-throat 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 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 encouragement 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 for worse, hasn't changed. This is one of history's greatest lessons.

NOTES TO THE EDUCATOR

Integrating *God King* into your curriculum is as simple as reading it aloud, a chapter or two at a time. 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 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 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. Your 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 enjoying a wonderful, memorable story together.

(Egyptian dates in this introduction are from the Encyclopedia Britannica)

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 Lowmsbery. Time of Pharaoh Amenemhet, founder of 12th Dynasty of Middle Kingdom, about 2000 B.C.