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INTRODUCTION: THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF A TALE OF THREE KINGS BY GENE EDWARDS

Few books in the Christian literary canon manage to strike a chord as deeply and persistently as **A Tale Of Three Kings** by Gene Edwards. First published in 1980, this slender volume has been quietly transforming the lives of pastors, church leaders, and everyday believers for over four decades. At first glance, it appears to be a simple retelling of a familiar Old Testament story—the rise of David, the decline of King Saul, and the tragic rebellion of Absalom. But Edwards, a gifted storyteller and seasoned Christian thinker, weaves these biblical accounts into a profound allegory about submission, suffering, leadership, and the often painful process of being broken by God.

This article dives deep into the themes, narrative style, and spiritual lessons found in **A Tale Of Three Kings**. Whether you are encountering this classic for the first time or returning to it after many years, we will explore why it remains one of the most influential works on biblical leadership and the human heart. We will also look at how Edwards' unique perspective on the dynamics between King Saul, David, and Absalom challenges modern ideas about authority, power, and the cost of following God's call.

WHO IS GENE EDWARDS? THE AUTHOR BEHIND THE ALLEGORY

To fully appreciate **A Tale Of Three Kings**, it helps to know a little about its author. Gene Edwards (1932–2019) was a prolific Christian writer and a key figure in the "house church" movement. He wrote more than thirty books, many of which explore the nature of the church, the life of the apostle Paul, and the deeper spiritual life. Edwards was known for his narrative style that brought biblical characters to life, making ancient passages feel immediate and personal.

His background as a church planter and his own experiences with relational conflict and suffering undoubtedly shaped the raw honesty found in **A Tale Of Three Kings**. Edwards did not write from a detached academic perspective; he wrote from the trenches of Christian community, where issues of authority, submission, and betrayal are painfully real. This gives the book an authenticity that resonates with readers who have struggled with difficult leaders or found themselves in impossible situations.

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS: THE STORY OF SAUL, DAVID, AND ABSALOM

For those unfamiliar with the biblical narrative, a quick recap is in order. The book draws from the accounts found in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel. King Saul, chosen by God to lead Israel, becomes proud and disobedient. God then chooses David, a young shepherd, to be the next king. But instead of immediately taking the throne, David spends years being hunted by a jealous and mentally unstable Saul. David has several opportunities to kill Saul and end the conflict, but he refuses, saying he will not touch “the Lord’s anointed.”

Later, after Saul’s death, David becomes king. His own son Absalom rebels against him, raising an army and forcing David to flee Jerusalem. David again refuses to retaliate against his son, even when his generals offer to strike down the rebel. The story ends in tragedy as Absalom is killed despite David’s orders to spare him.

Edwards retells this story with dramatic flair, but he does more than simply paraphrase Scripture. He enters the minds of the characters—their fears, their pains, their moments of faith and failure. The result is a deeply emotional narrative that forces the reader to confront uncomfortable truths about power, suffering, and the sovereignty of God.

THE DEEPER MEANING: A ALLEGORY FOR TODAY’S LEADERS

The Three Kings as Archetypes

The genius of **A Tale Of Three Kings** lies in its use of archetypes. Saul represents the flawed, sometimes tyrannical leader who has lost his spiritual footing. David, in his pre-king years, represents the suffering servant who trusts God even when human logic says to take matters into his own hands. And Absalom represents the charismatic rebel who believes he can do a better job than the current leader—but whose pride leads to destruction.

Edwards does not shy away from the messiness of these characters. Saul is not simply a villain; he is a tragic figure. David is not a perfect hero; he is a man who suffers deeply and sometimes makes mistakes. Absalom is not just a rebellious son; he is a man with legitimate grievances who nevertheless lets bitterness consume him. This nuanced portrayal is one of the book’s greatest strengths.

The Lessons of Suffering and Submission

Perhaps the central theme of the book is the necessity of suffering in the formation of a leader. David spends years in caves, fleeing from a man who wants to kill him. He loses his wife, his home, his reputation. Yet Edwards argues that this brokenness is God’s training ground. He even suggests that David’s refusal to kill Saul is not just an act of moral purity but a profound spiritual principle: when we try to take matters into our own hands, we

short-circuit the work God wants to do in us.

This is a radical message in a culture that celebrates assertiveness, quick fixes, and taking charge. Edwards challenges readers to consider that God sometimes allows us to suffer under imperfect authority to teach us humility and dependence on Him. He writes that we must learn to "let God be God" and trust His timing, even when it seems like the bad guy is winning.

The Danger of Rebellion

The third king, Absalom, serves as a sobering warning. He was handsome, charismatic, and popular. He had a genuine concern for justice—he would sit at the city gate and listen to people's grievances. But his motivation was poisoned by ambition and bitterness toward his father. Edwards shows how easily good intentions can become twisted when the heart is not right. Absalom's rebellion started with a small seed of discontent and grew into a full-blown insurrection that cost thousands of lives, including his own.

For leaders today, this is a crucial lesson. There is a difference between righteous protest and ambitious rebellion. Edwards does not condone abusive leadership—he carefully balances the call to submit with the recognition that no earthly leader is perfect. But he warns that the impulse to tear down a flawed leader, even a very flawed one, can lead to spiritual disaster if our hearts are not first submitted to God.

WHY THIS BOOK HAS BECOME A CLASSIC

Timeless Wisdom for Church Leaders

The reason **A Tale Of Three Kings** has endured is that it addresses a universal problem: how do we respond when we are hurt by those in authority? Church leaders, in particular, have found the book invaluable. Pastors who have been mistreated by denominational heads, elders who have been marginalized, missionaries who have been abandoned—all have found solace and direction in Edwards' pages.

The book offers no easy answers. It does not say, "Just forgive and move on." Instead, it walks through the dark valley of confusion and pain, acknowledging that it is okay to struggle. But it also points to the example of David, who, even in his darkest moments, refused to take shortcuts to the throne. That is a powerful model for anyone who feels called to lead but is currently sitting in a cave.

Psychological and Spiritual Depth

Edwards masterfully blends psychological insight with spiritual truth. He does not shy away from showing David's depression, fear, and loneliness. He also depicts Saul's madness with empathy. This makes the book accessible to readers who may not be familiar with theological jargon. It is a work of art as much as it is a work of theology.

Many have used **A Tale Of Three Kings** as a tool for counseling and spiritual direction. It is common to hear testimonies of people who felt that the book "saw into their soul" and helped them navigate seasons of betrayal or unjust suffering. That is the mark of a truly great book: it heals while it teaches.

KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

- **The Sovereignty of God in Suffering:** God does not waste pain. He uses difficult circumstances to shape character and deepen trust.
- **The Danger of Taking Matters into Our Own Hands:** David’s refusal to kill Saul teaches us that God’s timing is better than our solutions.
- **The Nature of True Authority:** True authority comes from God, not from force or popularity. Both Saul and Absalom ultimately lost their authority because they did not submit to God.
- **The Cost of Brokenness:** Becoming a leader after God’s own heart often requires a long season of suffering and anonymity.
- **Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** David’s grief over Absalom’s death shows the depth of a father’s love—and the agony of broken relationships.

HOW TO READ A TALE OF THREE KINGS FOR MAXIMUM BENEFIT

This is not a book to speed-read. It is short (around 100 pages) but dense with meaning. Many readers find it helpful to read slowly, maybe a chapter a day, and spend time reflecting on how each king’s story relates to their own life. Journaling can be especially powerful, as the book tends to surface buried emotions and questions.

It is also a great book to read with a small group. The stories provoke rich discussion about leadership, submission, and the nature of God. Because Edwards uses narrative rather than direct instruction, different readers will pick up on different nuances. That makes for lively conversations.

CRITICISMS AND CAUTIONS

While **A Tale Of Three Kings** is widely beloved, it is not without its critics. Some argue that Edwards takes too soft a stance toward abusive leadership. The call to "suffer under an ungodly leader" can be misinterpreted as a call to endure abuse passively. Edwards himself, however, distinguished between suffering for righteousness' sake and enabling sin. In later writings and interviews, he clarified that he was not against confronting evil, but against taking revenge or acting from a proud heart.

Another criticism is that the book simplifies complex biblical narratives for the sake of the allegory. Edwards is not a biblical scholar in the academic sense, and he takes poetic license. Readers should always go back to the biblical text itself. But as a devotional and inspirational work, the book is not meant to replace Scripture but to illuminate it.

CONCLUSION: A BOOK FOR ALL SEASONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Few books have the power to meet a reader right where he or she is. **A Tale Of Three Kings** is one of those rare works. It speaks to the leader who feels like David in the cave—frustrated, targeted, and waiting. It speaks to the person who is tempted to become Absalom—angry, ambitious, ready to tear down a flawed system. And it speaks to the person who has watched a Saul-like figure self-destruct and wonders why God allows it.

Gene Edwards gave the church a gift: a story that does not preach at us but invites us to sit with the pain and the mystery of God’s ways. In a world that constantly urges us to fight for our rights and take immediate action, this book whispers a different, harder truth: sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is to trust the hand that allows us to be broken.

If you have not yet read **A Tale Of Three Kings**, I encourage you to pick it up. But be warned—it is not a comfortable read. It will challenge you, convict you, and perhaps even change the way you see authority, suffering, and the God who works through both.