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The Tale Of Three Kings

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Introduction: The Enduring Power of The Tale Of Three Kings

Few books have resonated as deeply within the Christian community as **The Tale Of Three Kings** by Gene Edwards. First published in 1980, this slim, enigmatic volume has become a classic work on the subject of spiritual leadership, suffering, and the profound mystery of God's ways with His people. At first glance, it is a retelling of the biblical story of King David, King Saul, and David's rebellious son, Absalom. However, to call it merely a retelling would be to miss its depth. **The Tale Of Three Kings** is a study in brokenness, a meditation on how God shapes a leader, and a startlingly counter-cultural examination of how we respond to injustice, betrayal, and the abuse of authority.

Written in a unique, almost poetic prose style, the book does not read like a typical theological treatise or a self-help guide. It reads more like a fable, a parable that seeps into the soul and challenges the reader's deepest assumptions about power, patience, and the path to spiritual maturity. For anyone who has ever been wounded by a leader, struggled with a difficult authority figure, or wondered why God allows His faithful servants to suffer at the hands of the unworthy, **The Tale Of Three Kings** offers a perspective that is both challenging and liberating.

Who Was Gene Edwards? The Author Behind the Classic

To understand the weight of **The Tale Of Three Kings** , it helps to know a little about its author. Gene Edwards (1932–2020) was a pastor, author, and church planter who was deeply influenced by the so-called "Lord's Recovery" movement and the writings of Witness Lee and Watchman Nee. However, Edwards was not a mere imitator. He had a profound, mystical streak in his spirituality and a direct, often confrontational writing style.

Edwards spent much of his ministry advocating for a simpler, more organic form of church life, free from the trappings of institutional Christianity. He had a deep love for the stories of the Old Testament, which he saw not as dry history but as living, breathing allegories of the inner life of the believer. **The Tale Of Three Kings** is arguably his magnum opus, the book that brought him the widest recognition and has continued to speak to new generations of Christians seeking to understand the crucible of leadership.

Unpacking the Narrative: The Three Kings Explained

The book is structured around three distinct figures from the Old Testament, each representing a different type of leader and a different response to the pressures of power and destiny. These are not just historical characters; they are archetypes of the human soul.

King Saul: The Rejected and the Patron of Injustice

King Saul is presented as the "type" of the natural man, the leader who operates in the energy of the flesh rather than the Spirit of God. In the biblical narrative, Saul was chosen by the people because he was tall,

handsome, and looked like a king. But his heart was not right with God. He was disobedient, jealous, and ultimately, consumed by a murderous rage against David.

In **The Tale Of Three Kings** , Saul is not merely a tragic figure; he is the embodiment of illegitimate authority that refuses to let go. He represents every leader, whether in a church, a family, or an organization, who rules by manipulation, fear, and raw human power. Saul's story is a warning about what happens when leadership becomes self-centered and disconnected from the divine will. He hurls spears at David, not once but many times, symbolizing the constant attacks that those anointed for a future purpose must often endure from those who currently hold power.

King David: The Anointed Suffering Servant

David is the central figure of the book, the man after God's own heart. But Edwards presents a David that is far from the triumphant giant-slayer of Sunday school lessons. Instead, we see a David who is broken, hunted, and utterly powerless. He has been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel, yet he spends years fleeing through the wilderness, hiding in caves, and living as a fugitive from a mad king.

The crucial lesson of **The Tale Of Three Kings** regarding David is his refusal to touch the Lord's anointed. On two separate occasions, David has the opportunity to kill Saul and end his suffering. His men urge him to do so, seeing it as God's providential deliverance. But David refuses. He understands a profound spiritual principle that is almost incomprehensible to the natural mind: God, and God alone, has the right to remove a leader He has placed in authority.

This is the core of brokenness in the book. David does not defend himself. He does not raise a hand against his persecutor. He does not even speak evil of Saul. Instead, he takes the position of a dead dog, a flea, a nobody. He trusts that if God has truly anointed him to be king, then God will have to fulfill that promise without David's help. This passive, trusting, non-retaliatory posture is what Edwards calls "brokenness." It is the state of being completely empty of self-will, self-defense, and self-vindication.

The book poignantly describes David's time in the cave of Adullam, where he gathers around him a ragtag army of the distressed, the indebted, and the discontented. These are not the elite; they are the broken. And it is here, in the fellowship of the broken, that David learns to lead. Edwards argues that you cannot lead the people of God until you have been broken yourself, and until you have learned to love those who are broken.

Absalom: The Rebel Son and the Usurper

The third king is Absalom, David's handsome and charismatic son. If Saul represents external persecution, Absalom represents internal betrayal and the chaos that comes from within. Absalom was a gifted leader, a man who could win the hearts of the people. But he was impatient and ambitious. Instead of waiting for God's timing, he decided to steal the kingdom for himself.

Absalom's rebellion is a profound tragedy. He was the son of a broken king, but he had never learned the lessons of brokenness himself. He had grown up in the palace, surrounded by privilege, and he believed he could take the kingdom by force. His story is a stark reminder that anointing cannot be inherited. It can only be forged in the crucible of suffering. Absalom's end is violent and inglorious, a warning to all who seek to build a kingdom on human charisma and political maneuvering rather than on the quiet, patient work of God.

Core Theological and Practical Themes

The Tale Of Three Kings is deceptively simple, but it is packed with profound truths. Let us explore some of the most significant themes.

The Mystery of God's Sovereignty and Human Suffering

One of the most difficult questions the book addresses is why God allows His anointed servants to suffer for so long under unjust authority. Why did David have to spend over a decade in the wilderness? Why didn't God simply remove Saul and put David on the throne immediately?

The answer, according to Edwards, lies in the nature of God's work in a man's soul. God is not just interested in getting a task done; He is interested in *who the man becomes*. David had to be broken. He had to learn that he could not trust in his own strength, his own cunning, or his own right to vindicate himself. He had to learn to trust God alone. The wilderness was not a punishment; it was a training ground. It was the school of the soul. As the book implies, the throne is not for the talented; it is for the broken.

The Sin of Touching God's Anointed

This is perhaps the most controversial and misunderstood theme in the book. Critics sometimes accuse Edwards of promoting blind submission to abusive leaders. However, a careful reading shows that he is not saying you should submit to evil. He is saying you should not *retaliate* against evil. He is saying you should leave the judgment to God.

The "saw" that the men of God used to cut up their master's kingdom was the "saw" of human reasoning, political maneuvering, and self-vindication. David refused to use that saw. He refused to take the kingdom by force. He waited. This is not passivity in the face of injustice; it is active trust in the justice of God. It is a refusal to let the evil of another dictate your own behavior. It is the hardest thing a person can do: to be wronged, to have the power to fight back, and yet to refrain, out of reverence for God's mysterious ways.

The Difference Between the Throne and the Cross

Edwards draws a sharp distinction between the way of the world and the way of the kingdom. The world seeks the throne—power, position, and influence. The kingdom seeks the cross—humility, service, and suffering. David's path to the throne led directly through the cross. He had to be stripped of everything before he could receive everything.

This theme is radical for modern readers, especially those in leadership positions. We are often taught that a leader must be strong, decisive, and assertive. **The Tale Of Three Kings** suggests that the greatest leader is the one who has learned to be weak, to wait, and to trust. It is a complete inversion of worldly values. The one who has died to his own reputation, his own rights, and his own ambition is the only one who is safe to hold power.

Lessons for Modern Leadership and Personal Growth

While the book is set in ancient Israel, its lessons are profoundly relevant for today.

- For Those Under Difficult Authority: The book offers a lifeline. It tells you that your suffering is not meaningless. God is using it to shape you. Do not fight back. Do not gossip. Do not scheme. Instead, pour out your heart to God and wait. Your vindication will come, but it must come from God, not from your own efforts.
- For Those in Authority: The book is a mirror. Are you a Saul, holding onto power by manipulation and fear? Are you an Absalom, trying to build a kingdom on charisma and rebellion? Or are you a David, a broken leader who trusts God to vindicate you and who leads through humility and service?
- For Anyone Suffering Injustice: The book provides a framework for understanding pain. It suggests that the greatest honor is not to be sheltered from suffering but to be counted worthy to suffer for the sake of God's training. The cave of Adullam is not a place of shame; it is the birthplace of true leadership.

Why This Book Remains a Classic

The Tale Of Three Kings has endured for over four decades because it speaks to a universal human experience: the experience of being wronged, the temptation to take revenge, and the deep, aching need for

vindication. It does not offer easy answers or a three-step plan for success. Instead, it offers a story, a parable that can haunt you and heal you at the same time.

It is a book that is best read slowly, perhaps even on one's knees. It is a book that reveals more with each reading, as the reader's own life experiences provide new keys to understanding the text. For the pastor who has been betrayed by his congregation, for the employee who has been overlooked by a petty boss, for the husband or wife who is suffering in a difficult marriage, **The Tale Of Three Kings** offers a whisper of hope: God sees. God knows. God will act in His time.

The ultimate message of the book is that the deepest work of God in a human life is the work of brokenness. It is not a pleasant work, but it is a necessary one. It is the only path that leads to the throne. For it is only the broken man or woman who can truly reign with Christ.

In a world that screams for us to defend our rights, assert our opinions, and seize our destiny, Gene Edwards quietly invites us to do the opposite: to lay down our rights, to be silent

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