

The BREACH of UZZAH

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CAST: ABIATHAR: High Priest, consummate politician, age 50-70
 all men: ZADOK: assistant High Priest, scholarly, age 50 - 70
 NATHAN: prophet, age 40 - 60
 JEHOIADA: chief of Aaronites, age 55 - 65
 BENIAH: son of Jehoiada, army captain, age 25 - 30
 NACON: country farmer, age 30 - 65

SET: Israel, 5 miles west of Jerusalem: 1000 BCE
 Nacon's one room cabin, a window preferably in the back wall,
 an earthen oven in a corner. A rough cut wood table center stage,
 3 chairs surrounding it, a stool in a corner, at least one bed
 (preferably two) to one side

[Enter NACON followed by ABIATHAR & ZADOK. (shoes should be removed.)]

[ZADOK is carrying a box about the size of a small bread box.]

NACON

My house is your house, your holy high priestness.
 Please excuse the mess. I had no idea a man of your great
 stature would deign to grace the threshold of my humble

ABIATHAR

Thank you, Nacon. You're very kind.

NACON

This is a day, this is! All Israel comes parading right in
 front of my house. Was that King David I saw? [goes to window]

ABIATHAR

Yes. May we have a bit of privacy?

NACON

King David, himself. And that there on the ox cart.
 Is that the holy of holies box?

ABIATHAR

The ark of the covenant. The king is bringing it to
 Jerusalem. Now if you'll excuse us?

NACON

Certainly, your worship. Here's a skin full of red if you're thirsty. Bit of barley cake and cheese in the cupboard. Just cut the green off.

ABIATHAR

We're fine.

NACON

Such a day I never seen! The very ark of the Most High rolls past my door, and now the High Priest, and... uhh...

ZADOK

Zadok, assistant High Priest.

[Enter NATHAN.]

NATHAN

What's the meaning of this, Abiathar?

NACON

Nathan, the prophet! *God's feathers!* I'm dumb struck, I am!

ZADOK

That would be nice.

ABIATHAR

We'll autograph your doorpost.

[ZADOK puts the box on the table, and sits in the chair opposite the entry.]
[ABIATHAR hands Nacon some coins.]

For your trouble.

NACON

No trouble at all, I assure you most heartily.

ABIATHAR

Then for your silence. Now if you please.

[Exit NACON.]

ABIATHAR

Did you see what happened?

NATHAN

No, I was up front with king David, but I heard the crowd gasp like they saw a ghost, and then the music stopped. Who is this "Uzzah" on everyone's lips?

ABIATHAR

One of the oxen stumbled, and the wagon tipped backward. The ark started to slide off.

NATHAN

God!

ABIATHAR

Fortunately Uzzah caught it in time.

NATHAN

Ahh! Praise the Lord!

[ABIATHAR sits in the center chair.]

ABIATHAR

Amen brother, but there is an issue before us. Uzzah is not an Aaronite.

NATHAN

[sits in the remaining chair.]

So?

ZADOK

So he has to die.

NATHAN

What!?

ZADOK

According to the law, no one but an Aaronite is allowed to touch the ark of the covenant.

ABIATHAR

Or any of the other holy things.

NATHAN

Surely we can make an exception.

ZADOK

It's not up to us. It isn't just Moses' law; it's God's law.

NATHAN

Well what was he supposed to do? - let it fall?

ABIATHAR

That's not the issue.

NATHAN

Well what is?

ABIATHAR

The issue is what we're supposed to do.

NATHAN

I say give him a medal.

ABIATHAR

So would many, but there are others...

ZADOK

I was behind him when it happened. When the ark started to slide, we all gasped in horror. When Uzzah caught it, there were two distinct reactions. Half of the people, mostly women and children, gave a sigh of relief. The other half, mostly men, froze in even greater fear, expecting a lightning bolt to strike us all, or at least Uzzah. Some of the soldiers' hands went to their swords. The elders looked straight at my face. If I'd so much as given a nod, they would have struck him down. But I hesitated, and the moment passed.

ABIATHAR

Those same people are now looking to us for an official response.

ZADOK

What do we say?

NATHAN

Hmm... I see your problem.

ABIATHAR

Apparently you do not yet see *our* problem, prophet of God. We're coming to you, asking you what the Lord would have us do.

ZADOK

Shall we give him a medal?

NATHAN

[pause] Shit!

ABIATHAR

Exactly.

NATHAN

Who was in charge of this operation?

ABIATHAR

The chief of the Aaronites.

NATHAN

Jehoiada? I think we should talk to him first.

ZADOK

We already sent for him. He should be here shortly.

[Offstage JEHOIADA & BENIAH sing Hava Negiah.]

On cue.

[Enter JEHOIADA & BENIAH still singing and slightly drunk.]

JEHOIADA

Hey guys! What's up?

ABIATHAR

Were you not instructed to come alone?

JEHOIADA

This is my son, Beniah, captain of the mercenaries.
 Abiathar, High Kahunah, Zadok, runner up.
 Woah! Nathan! How's God doing?

ABIATHAR

A bit of decorum, Jehoiada, if you please.

JEHOIADA

Hey. The king is outside dancing his ass off.
 You telling me about decorum? It's party time.

ZADOK

Are you totally unaware of what just happened out there?

JEHOIADA

Close call. Very close. We should have had it tied down
 better. I admit it. But we're on top of it.
 My men are fixing it right now.

ZADOK

Aaronites?

JEHOIADA

Of course, Aaronites! Hey, it was a near disaster.
 But it won't happen again.

ABIATHAR

Do you happen to know what tribe Uzzah is from?

JEHOIADA

Uhh...

BENIAH

Benjamite?

JEHOIADA

No. Son of Abinadab. Where's Abinadab from?

BENIAH

I thought he was Benjamite.

ABIATHAR

The point is, he's not Aaronite.
He had no business being that close to the ark.

JEHOIADA

Well as it turns out, I'm damn glad he was.

NATHAN

Pardon me. This is a rather sensitive meeting.
With all due respect to the captain of the mercenaries,
I would request that he leave with our apologies.

ABIATHAR

I agree, this is an affair of state.

ZADOK

Wait. An Aaronite in the military may be of use.

JEHOIADA

Of use to whom for what?

ABIATHAR

But can we trust him?

JEHOIADA

Can *he* trust *you*? What's this about?

ABIATHAR

[ABIATHAR stands.]

Jehoiada, if your son is to remain here,
we will require an oath of secrecy from him.

JEHOIADA

Beniah, leave.

ABIATHAR

{ABIATHAR turns, starts to sit.}

Again I'll have to agree. This is for adults only.

BENIAH

I can keep a secret.

ABIATHAR

[ABIATHAR turns back.]

Do you swear it?

JEHOIADA

Hey! How come nobody's asking *me* for an oath?

ZADOK

It won't be necessary.

ABIATHAR

Beniah ben Jehoiada, do you swear, by the head of your father, to tell no one what transpired in this meeting?

JEHOIADA

No!

BENIAH

Yes.

ABIATHAR

Have a seat.

[ABIATHAR sits in the same chair.]

[JEHOIADA finds the stool, places it between ABIATHAR & NATHAN, sits.]

[BENIAH looks for something to sit on, settles for a bed.]

NATHAN

Are there any Levites in Uzzah's family?

[ZADOK begins taking a scroll out of the box he carried in.]

ZADOK

It doesn't matter.

He has to be a full Levite to handle holy things.

JEHOIADA

Well he wasn't exactly handling it.

ABIATHAR

His hand touched the ark.

JEHOIADA

But surely the law must take one's intentions into account.

ZADOK

[ZADOK reads.]

"And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward"

NATHAN

Hey, wait a minute. We're out in the middle of the country. Where'd you get sacred scrolls?

ZADOK

They were in the ark. A priest put them in there two hundred years ago. I was carrying them so they wouldn't get knocked around by Moses' tablets or the blooming rod of Aaron. Do you mind?

NATHAN

Sorry.

ZADOK

"And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die."

BENIAH

Kohath!? I thought it was supposed to be sons of Levi.

ZADOK

Moses and Aaron were sons of Amram, son of Kohath, son of Levi.

ABIATHAR

[to Jehoiada] Don't you teach your kids anything?

BENIAH

Okay, well if the sons of Kohath are Levites, what's the big deal?

ZADOK

The point is, if even Levites are to be executed if they touch holy things at the wrong time, how much more so for non-Levites.

JEHOIADA

I don't see what that has to do with this situation.

ZADOK

You're not a priest.

NATHAN

Wait. The text doesn't say they were to be executed. It just says they would die.

[ABIATHAR & ZADOK stare motionless at Nathan for a beat.]

ZADOK

Duuh!

NATHAN

Well maybe it means God would strike them down - personally - without any human intervention.

[ABIATHAR & ZADOK raise their eyebrows and stare at Nathan.]

Like when Korah rebelled against Moses, and an earthquake happened and swallowed them up.

[ABIATHAR & ZADOK remain motionless in the same stare.]

JEHOIADA

Or when Nadab and Abihu brought some strange offering before the Lord, and a fire came out and burned them up.

[ABIATHAR & ZADOK turn in unison directing the stare at Jehoiada.]

NATHAN

Surely you don't think...

ABIATHAR

Of course, that may be exactly what happened, but we can't be sure, can we?

NATHAN

The question is, what's the right thing to do.

ZADOK

The question is, what's the *safe* thing to do.

JEHOIADA

Behold, the difference between a priest and a prophet.

ABIATHAR

Actually no difference at all. The safe thing is the right thing. The right thing is the safe thing.

ZADOK

Agreed.

NATHAN

So you think the safe thing to do is to kill Uzzah?

ZADOK

Absolutely. Simple arithmetic. Uzzah is one man. Israel is many. If we don't strike Uzzah, God will strike us.

NATHAN

I thought I was the prophet here.

ZADOK

Right after Joshua took Jericho, he sent a detachment to take a small city to the west. Should have been no problem. They got thrashed.

ABIATHAR

Joshua asks God, "How come this happened?" God says, "One of your people didn't follow the rules." So they found out who it was...

ZADOK

They stoned him. Then they went back and took the city, no problem.

ABIATHAR

The scrolls are full of stuff like this.
One man screws up; all Israel pays for it.

ZADOK

Unless they nip it in the bud.

BENIAH

I don't believe this! I can't believe I'm hearing this!
You're talking about killing Uzzah for keeping the ark from
falling on the ground! What kind of a god would want us to
do that? Huh? What kind of god are you people serving?

JEHOIADA

Benny.

[ABIATHAR & ZADOK stare at Beniah.]

[NATHAN & JEHOIADA look down.]

ABIATHAR

That's really not the question.

BENIAH

Well it's *my* question!

JEHOIADA

Benny, take it easy.

ABIATHAR

It's not our place to ask what kind of god our god is.
It's our place to ask what he would have us do.

JEHOIADA

Excuse me, gents, if I may. The ark has been sitting around
at Abinadab's house for the last twenty years. Uzzah and his
brothers grew up with it. None of 'em are Levites. If this
is such an issue, why didn't somebody say something twenty
years ago?

ABIATHAR

I wasn't High Priest then.

JEHOIADA

Who was?

ZADOK

Nobody was. There wasn't even a king.

JEHOIADA

Who was in charge?

ZADOK

Nobody.

NATHAN

Well, there was Samuel.

ABIATHAR

Not exactly in charge; just a popular leader.

ZADOK

And not much of a scholar.

NATHAN

Yeah, just a prophet; what did he know?

BENIAH

What was the ark doing at Abinadab's house in the first place?

ABIATHAR

It's not a history lesson. Read the book.

ZADOK

Okay, here it is, folks, listen to this. This is God talking to Aaron. "Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep thy priest's office for everything of the altar and within the veil - yada yada, and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." End of discussion.

NATHAN

"Altar and the veil". Isn't that inside the tabernacle?

ZADOK

Right, and the ark was behind the veil.

NATHAN

What about when the ark is not inside the tabernacle?

ZADOK

Oh come on!

NATHAN

Well, this is important.

ZADOK

Damn right it's important!
Too important to be playing games with it.

ABIATHAR

Gentlemen.

NATHAN

I'm not playing games. I'm just examining all the angles.

ZADOK

Looking for loopholes.

ABIATHAR

Gentlemen.

NATHAN

We're talking about a man's life.

ZADOK

We're talking about God's law.

ABIATHAR

Gentlemen!

ZADOK

I'm getting just a bit tired of this supposed man of God

NATHAN

Supposed! You wanna compare track records?

ZADOK

All I'm saying is, I would think that a man of God would have a bit more respect for God's word.

NATHAN

I have total respect for it, whenever it comes to me.

[ABIATHAR lays his head down on the table.]

[JEHOIADA watches it like a ping pong match.]

ZADOK

So the books of Moses are not God's word?

NATHAN

God's word to Moses, yes.

ZADOK

But not to you.

NATHAN

When God has a word for me, He'll tell me.

ZADOK

Just like He told Moses?

NATHAN

Yes.

[BENIAH is nauseous. He covers his mouth, runs to the window, leans his head out, and pukes.]

ZADOK

Well then pay attention to what He told Moses.

NATHAN

I'll pay as much attention as He tells me to.

ZADOK

Do the ten commandments apply to you?

NATHAN

Yes.

ZADOK

How do you know that?

NATHAN

God tells me.

ZADOK

You know it because they're written down, right?

NATHAN

No; I know it because God tells me.

[BENIAH pukes.]

Just because something's written doesn't mean it's God's word.

ZADOK

And just because something pops into your mind doesn't mean it's God's word.

NATHAN

But *I* know the difference. That's why I'm a prophet.

ZADOK

But *I* don't know you're a prophet unless you say stuff that matches up to God's word.

[BENIAH thinks he's okay. He walks cautiously back toward his chair.]

NATHAN

How could it not?

ZADOK

I mean scripture.
A true man of God will do what scripture says.

NATHAN

A true man of God will bend scripture around to make it say what it has to.

ABIATHAR

[ABIATHAR raises up, places a hand on each of their shoulders.]
 And a great man of God will do both.
 Gentlemen, we are in agreement.

[BENIAH runs back to the window and pukes again.]

ZADOK

I don' t agree.

NATHAN

Me neither.
 He' s saying scripture is true because it' s written.

ZADOK

No, I' m saying it' s written because it' s true.

NATHAN

That' s what I' m saying.

ZADOK

Then why don' t you agree with me?

NATHAN

Because you' re not saying that.

[BENIAH pukes.]

ABIATHAR

Gentlemen, you are both saying the same thing. If you' d shut up and listen to yourselves, you' d see that.

NATHAN & ZADOK

No we' re not!

NATHAN

The only reason it' s written is because it' s true.

ZADOK

The only way to know what' s true is if it' s written.

ABIATHAR

You're right! Okay? *You - are - right.* You're not saying the same thing. You're saying different things. But it doesn't matter. You know why? Because it's irrelevant. You know what's true? I'll tell you what's true. It doesn't matter what's true; all that matters is what's written.

[BENIAH pukes.]

NATHAN

I'll second that.

ABIATHAR

You sure?

NATHAN

Yeah! It's disgusting.

ABIATHAR

Watch this. Hey captain! Who killed Goliath?

NATHAN

He's a kid. Leave him alone.

ABIATHAR

No, I want to show you something.

[ABIATHAR walks to Beniah, jostles him.]

Hey, who killed Goliath?

BENIAH

Huh?

ABIATHAR

[ABIATHAR pulls Beniah up by the collar and faces him forward.]
Tell 'em who killed Goliath.

BENIAH

David.

ABIATHAR

[ABIATHAR restores Beniah to his original position and walks back to his seat.]
See there? David killed Goliath. Nobody remembers Elhanan any more. Who's he? David killed Goliath because it is written. I oughta know. I wrote it.

NATHAN

You just proved my point.

ABIATHAR

I just proved there is no point.

NATHAN

Well then shut up and quit trying to make one.

ABIATHAR

I will if you will.

[NATHAN & ZADOK think, gradually acquiesce, lean back.]

[JEHOIADA gets up, walks to the window, pushes Beniah aside, and pukes.]

ZADOK

[reads] "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit."

[NATHAN & ABIATHAR stare at Zadok.]

Nothing. I just always liked that one.

ABIATHAR

Bottom line. I'm about to say it. You both ready for this?

[NATHAN & ZADOK give assent.]

[JEHOIADA & BENIAH turn to hear.]

ABIATHAR

You're the prophet. You talk to God all the time, or so everyone thinks. If you recommend dropping the issue, I'll go along with it - reluctantly. Long as everyone knows that big Nathan said it was the word of the Lord. If you don't make a clear statement, we have to recommend execution. That's our job. But all Israel is gonna know that we came to you, and you had no answer. What's it gonna be?

NATHAN

[NATHAN sighs and rubs his head with both hands.]
I'll pray about it.

ABIATHAR

Yeah, well pray fast. The people aren't gonna wait long.

NATHAN

First thing I'm gonna do is see what the king thinks about all this.

ZADOK

Why bother? David'll just throw it back on us.
Theological issue.

NATHAN

[NATHAN rises]
All the same, I still want to get his take on it.

ZADOK

Fine.

ABIATHAR

Say, Nathan. If you don't come to a firm decision, you might ask the king if he has any advice for us, huh?

NATHAN

If you wish.

ABIATHAR

And you'll return with that advice post haste?

NATHAN

I shall return.

[NATHAN exits]

ZADOK

So, the prophet seeks advice from the king.

ABIATHAR

Good move. There's going to be a lot of heat over this. The more it's spread it around, the better.

[JEHOIADA walks to Nathan's seat & sits.]

[BENIAH walks back to his previous seat.]

JEHOIADA

What if Uzzah brings a sacrifice.

ABIATHAR

What?

JEHOIADA

A sin offering.

If you're calling it a sin, let him bring a sin offering.

ZADOK

This is not the kind of sin you can do that for.

BENIAH

What if all Israel brings sacrifices, and we all pray. Dust and ashes and all that.

ZADOK

Very hard sell.

ABIATHAR

And even if they did, how's it gonna look? I'm standing at the altar with an unauthorized sacrifice before the whole congregation. "Lord do you really mean what you say, or can we make it up as we go along?"

BENIAH

It can't hurt to ask.

ZADOK

With all due respect, captain. How about if we leave the fighting to you, and you leave the priest business to us.

JEHOIADA

Hey, that's an Aaronite you're talking to. He could be wearing your robes some day.

ZADOK

Oh, excuse me; I didn't know he had those ambitions.

ABIATHAR

Why do you think he stayed?

ZADOK

Okay, religion 1-A. [second thought] Are you done vomiting?

[BENIAH nods affirmatively.]

Sure?

BENIAH

Yeah.

ZADOK

Okay, here it is. Our god is all we have to keep us together. If we even begin to forget that, any one of a dozen neighbors will conquer us, and make us serve their god, and their king, and their farmers, and their cattle, and their wives. No fun. That's why we need men like you. Now a soldier has to fear his god more than he fears the enemy, right? ... Come on, am I right?

BENIAH

I'd say respect more than fear.

ABIATHAR

Ahh, sweet youth.

ZADOK

Fine, respect. People don't respect a god who changes his mind. If you want to change the rules, you have to bring in a whole new god.

ABIATHAR

Actually a new slant on an old god works better.

ZADOK

Well... Okay, right. What you have to do is convince people that they don't understand their own god, and you do.

ABIATHAR

To do that, you need a popular cause.

ZADOK

Smoldering resentment.

ABIATHAR

Not easy, but it can be done. That's how Abraham pulled it off. People didn't like sacrificing firstborn sons. So why not an animal? Caught on, so here we are.

ZADOK

But that's not likely to happen again. Especially now; we have God down on parchment. Prophets can't just blurt out anything they like any more. That's why Nathan's running scared.

ABIATHAR

And frankly, I don't think you'll get enough righteous indignation over this Uzzah thing to pull off a theological coup. We'd just have to stone the both of you.

ZADOK

Speaking of stoning... [ZADOK begins packing up the scrolls.]

ABIATHAR

Ah yes. The problem at hand. If we grab him and stone him, they're likely to stone us. That leaves due process.

ZADOK

If we indict him for impiety, there' ll be riots.

ABIATHAR

What we really need is a Phineas.

BENIAH

What' s a Phineas.

ZADOK

A grandson of Aaron.

ABIATHAR

Back when Israel was wandering around in the wilderness, some of the men took foreign wives.

ZADOK

Strictly forbidden.

ABIATHAR

This one fellow named Zimri

ZADOK

A Simeonite.

ABIATHAR

...brought a foreign woman into his tent.

ZADOK

A Midianite.

ABIATHAR

...and had relations with her.

[BENIAH looks at Zadok expecting another clarification.]

[ZADOK shrugs.]

ABIATHAR

Well, rather than wait for the formalities of the law to bring the man up on charges, this noble youth named Phineas took a spear and pinned them both to the floor of the tent.

ZADOK

Killed `em.

ABIATHAR

Totally on his own, without orders from Moses or anyone else.

BENIAH

And that was noble?

ABIATHAR

Yes, very much so. Phineas was zealous for God's law.

ZADOK

And God approved of it.

ABIATHAR

God was about to smite Israel with a plague.
But just because of Phineas' action, God didn't do it.

BENIAH

How do you know?

ABIATHAR

Because it never happened.

BENIAH

Oh.

ABIATHAR

And Phineas became one of the most honored men in all Israel.

JEHOIADA

Yeah, well be that as it may, there's a big difference between humping a Midianite, and being in the wrong tribe to keep God from falling off a cart. I think we've heard about enough. Let's go, Benny.

ABIATHAR

That could be a mistake.

JEHOIADA

Hey, I admit my share of the blame. But me and my son are not gonna be a part of any vigilante operation.

ABIATHAR

Your share of the blame could add up to more than you think.

JEHOIADA

Hey, your priests were standing right there watching us from the start. If they didn't like the way I was doing it, why didn't they say so?

ABIATHAR

I have no idea. I'll have to ask them. Like, why would they allow the ark of the covenant to be transported on a cart?

ZADOK

You should have known that the ark is to be carried by hand.

JEHOIADA

Are you kidding? It's way too heavy!

ZADOK

Not at all. Book of the Exodus. You're supposed to put poles thru the rings and carry it by the poles.

JEHOIADA

Well why didn't your priests say that?

ABIATHAR

I'm surprised they didn't. I told them to.

JEHOIADA

Who? Who did you tell? What's his name?

ABIATHAR

I don't recall.

JEHOIADA

Hah! I'll bet you don't!

ABIATHAR

As I remember, I said it to a group.
[to Zadok] Who was in that group?

ZADOK

Uhh... I don't recall either, but I remember you said it.

ABIATHAR

[to Jehoiada] If they didn't tell you, they're in big trouble.

ZADOK

[to Abiathar] And you definitely told them that no one but Aaronites were to be involved in the transport.

ABIATHAR

[to Jehoiada] But then *you* should have known that without being told. Now how about if you just sit back down, and we'll all try to work this thing out together, like the good friends we are.

[Pause. JEHOIADA sits.]

[BENIAH follows suit.]

ZADOK

Options: grab and stone, due process, or something unpleasant.

JEHOIADA

What happens if you don't do anything?

ABIATHAR

Okay, let's examine that.

JEHOIADA

You'll get some grumbling from the right.
Maybe somebody'll even kill him for you.

ABIATHAR

Ah, but what will *God* do? That's the question. Next battle with the Philistines, if we win, God was pleased. Why? Obviously because good King David brought the ark back. If we lose, God was displeased. Why was God displeased, Jehoiada? Any ideas? [pause]

ABIATHAR

Of course they' ll stone Uzzah, but then they' ll ask,
 "Why wasn' t Uzzah stoned long ago?" Obviously somebody
 in government didn' t do their job.

JEHOIADA

You' re ignoring one of the possibilities. What if you stone
 Uzzah, and Israel still loses the battle?
 God was displeased. Why?

ABIATHAR

Beats me.

JEHOIADA

Well don' t you see? It cuts both ways.

ABIATHAR

No it doesn' t. Because we can prove that we did everything
 in our power to obey God. Our butts are covered.

JEHOIADA

With what?

ZADOK

With these scrolls.

ABIATHAR

So the big question is, (assuming there' s no plague or famine)
 can we keep winning battles until this blows over? What do
 you think?

[pause. Enter NATHAN]

[JEHOIADA & BENIAH rise.]

NATHAN

The king and I are in complete agreement.

ABIATHAR

And?

NATHAN

If the Lord wants Uzzah dead, the Lord will kill him.

ABIATHAR

So, what then? Are we to do nothing?

NATHAN

I didn't say that.

ABIATHAR

Well did the *king* say that?

NATHAN

No. [crosses to the wineskin] Is this yours?

ABIATHAR

It belongs to the owner. What are we supposed to do?

NATHAN

Do you think he'd mind?

[ABIATHAR rises. ZADOK follows suit.]

ABIATHAR

He offered it. What are we supposed to do?

NATHAN

[NATHAN pours a cup of wine.]

The right thing. Or was it the safe thing? I forget.

[hands the cup to Abiathar.]

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a parade to attend.

[walks toward exit]

If God is going to kill Uzzah, God will kill him quickly. The longer he lives, the more it appears that God approves of his action.

[starts to exit. Turns.]

One thing I'm sure of, if there is any mark of a weapon on the body, the king will be highly displeased.

[NATHAN exits.]

[a moment of frozen silence]

[ABIATHAR hands the cup to Jehoiada.]

[ABIATHAR exits. ZADOK picks up his box and exits.]

[another moment of frozen silence]

[JEHOIADA sits in Abiathar's chair.]

JEHOIADA

Join me in a cup of wine, son.

BENIAH

Thank you, father, I've about had my limit.

JEHOIADA

I said... have a cup of wine.

Fade out