

King Solomon and the Man Who Sued the Wind

by Ahimaaz, Court Historian



Translated and Annotated by
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Illustrated by Steve Solomon



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Professor Solomon is the author of *How to Find Lost Objects*, *Coney Island*, *Japan in a Nutshell*, etc. His books may be downloaded free at:

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THE LITIGANT WAS A THIN, RED-HAIRED MAN NAMED Isaac; and he had a curious complaint. “I wish to sue the Wind,” he said. “The Wind owes me a sack of flour.”

“Indeed?” said King Solomon. “Tell us about it.”

“Your Highness, I am a poor man,” said Isaac. “I live in a hut near the sea, and take whatever odd jobs come my way. When I scrape together enough cash, I go into town and buy a sack of flour. Along with vegetables from my garden, the flour provides me with sustenance.

“Several days ago I was returning home with a sack of flour, when I came upon a beggar. Seated by the roadside, he had not eaten in days. I looked at this poor soul and said to myself: ‘I have more than I require, and the Lord has commanded us to be charitable.’ So I gave him a portion of my flour.

“Continuing along the road, I met a fellow who was wandering in a daze. He had been beaten and robbed by thieves, and had not eaten in a long while. I said to myself: ‘I have more than I need, and the Lord bids us to be charitable.’ So I gave him, too, a portion of my flour and walked onward.

“As I approached my hut, the Wind suddenly arose. Struggling against violent gusts, I had nearly reached my door—when the Wind snatched the sack of flour and flew off with it! I watched with dismay as the sack disappeared over the sea.

“Was that not reprehensible, Sire? To leave me with not a whit of flour for myself—with less than the recipients of my charity? I was unjustly and gratuitously deprived of my flour. And I am suing the Wind to get it back!”

“Let’s hear what the Wind has to say,” said Solomon. “Hold onto your hats, folks.” And waving his ring in the

air, he summoned the four Winds.*

One by one they came gusting through the windows. Robes flapped—hair fluttered—papers flew into the air—as the Winds swirled about the hall.

With a stern look, Solomon addressed them.

“This man has brought an accusation against you. Several days ago, he says, the Wind took his sack of flour. Did any of you do such a thing?”

“Not I,” said the East Wind.

“Nor I,” said the West Wind.

“Nor I,” said the South Wind.

There was a pause. Then the North Wind spoke.

“All right, it was me,” said the North Wind. “I am guilty—with an explanation.”

“Let’s hear it.”

Swirling up to the throne and hovering there, the North Wind said: “On the day in question, *and in the course of my duties as a force of nature*, I caused a storm at sea. As I blustered about, I noticed that a ship, battered by the storm, had sprung a leak and was sinking. Now I had intended no such destruction—just a sudden gale and a bit of a scare. You know what I mean? Just some rough waters.

“So I determined to plug the leak if I could. Blowing into shore, I spotted a sack of flour—which *happened to be* on this gentleman’s back. It was the only suitable object in sight. So I grabbed it, rushed back, and plugged the leak with it—thus saving the ship. Along with the passengers and crew, I might add.”

“A conscientious and commendable act,” said Solomon. “Nonetheless, you deprived this man of his property.”

* In *Biblical Antiquities*, John Nevin describes the four winds of ancient Palestine: “The east wind was the most injurious. In the summer, as has been said, it was hot and dry; withering, as it passed along, the herbage of the field.... The west wind, coming from the sea, generally brought rain. That which came from the north, is described by Solomon as *driving away rain* (Prov. xxv, 23). And Job tells us that *cold and fair weather are from the north* (xxxvii, 9, 22), while the whirlwind more frequently rose from the south; and the winds from that quarter ordinarily brought heat; though sometimes the southern breezes appear to have been considered agreeable.”

“Well, excuse me!”

Just then three merchants entered the hall. One was carrying a bag marked “Gold.” They approached the throne and bowed.

“Pardon the interruption, Your Highness,” said the merchant with the bag. “But in fulfillment of a vow, we have come to make a donation to the Temple. During a recent storm, our ship sprang a leak and started to sink. The three of us fell to our knees and prayed. If the ship was saved, we vowed, we would make a sizable donation to the Temple. No sooner had that vow been uttered than *a sack shot out of the sky*—and stopped up the leak! Plugged up the hole in our ship! It was a miracle from GOD. Upon reaching shore, we came straight here with this bag of gold coins for the Temple.*

“Proceed to the Temple and render thanks unto the Lord,” said Solomon, “for His aid in your moment of need. As for the gold, you may leave it here.”

Depositing the bag on the dais, the merchants bowed and exited.

“What’s that refrain in the psalm?” said Solomon. “‘How perfect is Thy Providence!’” Then to Isaac he said: “The Wind owes you a sack of flour. Take this gold instead. Consider it a reward for those acts of charity.”

Isaac shook his head. “I performed those acts as *mitzvot*—as good deeds that were my duty to GOD. I expected no reward and shall take none. I just want my flour.”

“A worthy attitude. How about this then? In presenting your case today, you have acted as your own attorney. You are entitled, therefore, to an attorney’s fee. Would this bagful of gold cover your fee?”

Isaac opened the bag and peered in. “Not quite,” he said, “but call it a deal.”

And hoisting the bag onto his shoulder, he departed the

* An anachronism. The bag would have contained tokens—irregular pieces of gold—rather than minted coins. Regular coinage was not instituted in the Near East until five centuries later. Instead, gold and silver were measured by weight—the basic unit being the shekel. (A shekel equaled about four ounces.)

hall.*

* Several variants of this tale are to be found in Jewish folklore. In one of them, the inhabitant of the seaside hut is a widow, who weaves nets for fishermen. As she returns home one afternoon with a sack of flour, it is snatched away by the wind.

Meanwhile, a ship has sprung a leak and is sinking. Aboard are some non-Israelite merchants. In terror of drowning, they pray to every god they can think of—to no avail. Suddenly they recall the GOD of Israel and pray to Him, promising an offering of gold in return for their deliverance. No sooner have they made this vow than the sack of flour shoots out of the sky and plugs the leak.

The widow goes to King Solomon and lodges a complaint against the wind. As he is deliberating, the merchants arrive with their offering. Solomon wants to give the gold to the widow; but she declines it. It should go to GOD, she says, for whom it was intended and who will provide for her needs. Pleased by her words, Solomon hires the widow to weave curtains for the Temple—to be paid for by the gold.

The curtains that she weaves have a special lustre, on account of her piety.