

The Song of Inheritance

*The Book of Meshullam, Chapter 2, verses 15 to 28.*

15. **And Meshullam had three and seventy sons in Jabesh. When Meshullam became an old man, he retired to the mountain to pray and he prayed thus: Lord, I have three and seventy sons, and one and sixty daughters, and my loins have been most fruitful. But now I am greatly troubled.**
16. **And the Lord pulled back the clouds which covered the mountain and He spake: Wherefore art thou troubled, Meshullam?**
17. **And Meshullam answered saying, Lord, I have three and seventy sons, but I know not which of them should inherit all my goods and all my lands and all my goats. For, having an great multitude of sons, it is not meet that I should break up my goods and my lands and my goats and divide them equally among them. I have but seven and forty goats and they are prime. And I know not how yet I should consider the claims of my one and sixty daughters.**
18. **And the Lord was greatly troubled by these words and answered, saying: Take thyself down the mountain and rub thyself with glowing embers and black ashes and wear sack-cloth for forty days and forty nights, for even thinking about thy daughters.**
19. **Meshullam did as he was commanded, and for forty days and forty nights did clothe himself in sack-cloth and did smear his forehead with ashes and did burn the soles of his feet with embers, and did go about mournfully. His many daughters hid from his gaze, for he was mightily wrath against them. After forty days and forty nights, he again ascended the mountain to pray and he prayed thus: Lord, I am in years old, to the number of three and eighty. I have three and seventy sons, neither more nor less, and am greatly troubled, for my days are numbered and I know not how I should share out my lands and my goods and my goats among my sons.**
20. **And the Lord drew back the clouds which covered the mountain and He said: It is written that a son must follow in the steps of his father. The son of a baker must become a baker. The son of a butcher must become a butcher. The son of a Judge must be a Judge. The son of a King must be a King. The son of a Greek must be a Greek. The son of an apothecary, yea, even a false one, must be a false apothecary.**
21. **And Meshullam listened to the words of the Lord and he heard these words and he understood them not. When the Lord fell silent, Meshullam also fell silent, and with his hand scratched privily upon the grey locks of his head.**
22. **At last he raised his voice and he spake again. Lord, what meanest thou by these wise words of judgement?**
23. **And behold the Lord spake saying: the son of a player of cards and a roller of dice must become a player of cards and a roller of dice. The son of a scribe must become a scribe. The son of a smiter of balls must become a smiter of balls. The son of a worshipper after Baal must become a worshipper after Baal. The son of a man born in illegitimacy must be illegitimate. The Lord has spoken. With these words, the Lord withdrew behind the clouds which came down as a curtain in the temple and concealed Him from the sight of Meshullam.**
24. **And Meshullam sat for seven days and seven nights upon the mountain. The youngest son of Meshullam, who was named Meraioth, came out of the house of Meshullam and travelled in search of his father. He found him upon the mountain and asked him, saying: what ails thee, aged father? Meshullam looked upon his favourite son and answered him, using the same and very words of the Lord concerning the sons of the fathers.**
25. **But Meraioth knew not what his father meant and sat down to bethink himself concerning the words of his father.**
26. **And each day for two and seventy days did another son of Meshullam ascend the mountain and did ask the same question before his father and did receive the same answer. After three and seventy days and three and seventy nights all the men of Meshullam's family sat upon the mountain, so many that the men of Jabesh did name the mountain, Hel'maboab, that is, the Mountain of Confusion.**
27. **And then did the wives and daughters of Meshullam ascend the mountain, although it was an holy mountain and the feet of the women did desecrate it vilely. Athaliah was the chief wife of Meshullam, the most beautiful of all his eleven wives. She spake loudly and mocked, saying: Behold the man and the sons of the man, who sit upon the rocks and**

**consider not the crying of their wives and sisters. For it is truly said that the son of a wise man must be a wise man, but the sons of a fool must surely be fools.**

**28. With these words did Athaliah smite the ears of Meshullam and his three and seventy sons. And straightway did they see the wisdom of the Lord and the foolishness of their ways. And it was as if they had perceived a great light. They raised a joyous noise and arose and greeted each other and descended the mountain and came once more into the house of Meshullam. And Meshullam did grow old to the number of five hundred and seventeen years, and two and seventy of his sons did perish before him, and thereafter did he praise the Lord each day for His wisdom.**