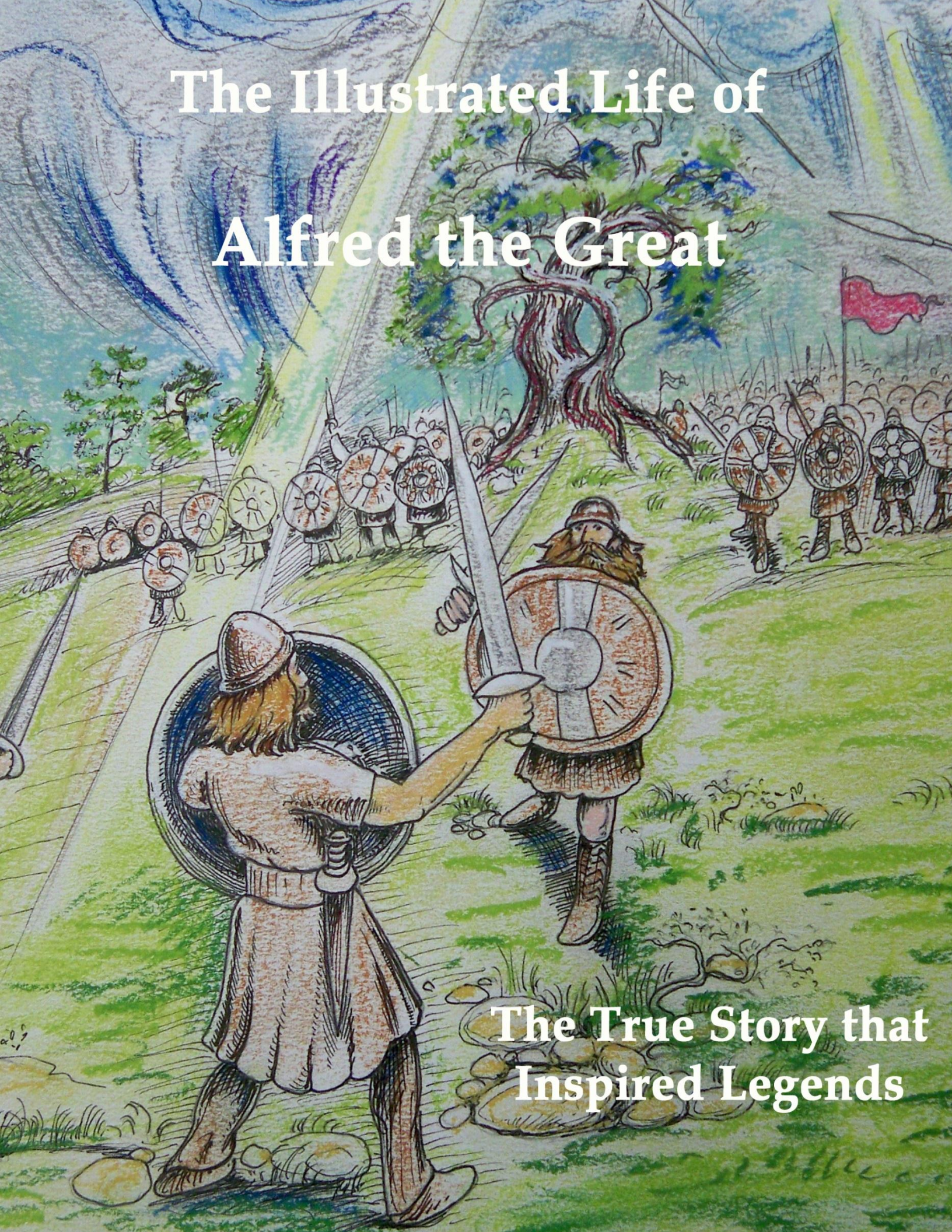


# The Illustrated Life of Alfred the Great



The True Story that  
Inspired Legends





*The Illustrated Life  
of  
Alfred the Great*



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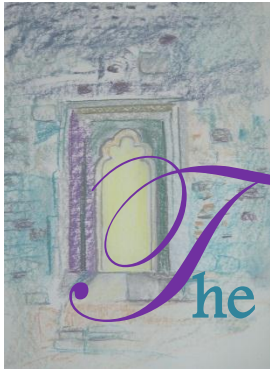
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\*Historians consider these stories folklore.



# Part I

## Introduction



## The Beauty of

## Holiness

The reds, yellows, greens, of the stained glass are fading as the light of the setting sun, now splended upon the hills and vales of England's fair land, makes its final entry into the quiet interior of the ancient Abbey. The now lit chandeliers illuminate with colorful brilliance yellow sandstone, faded red stone, ancient red paint, ornate walls, colored pillars, grey arches, dark brownish grey marble, white marble sculptures, yellow and white letters on the floor. The bright red of the light-stands for reading the prayer books and the colors of clothing contrast the many earth tones. The final light of day brightens the purple and blue glass of the ornately crafted windows.

I commence writing this book depicting the life of Alfred the Great while sitting before the tomb of Geoffrey Chaucer, beloved among the greats of English literature. The life of Alfred the Great has been a tremendous inspiration to me. His literacy program of 889 AD played a very pivotal role in the history of England and the English speaking world. Alfred derived his strength and wisdom from God and the Bible he loved. From these he found the happiness he desired for himself and the people of England. The purpose of this book includes presenting fun and exciting drawings depicting the life of Alfred, to be historically accurate and informative, and highlighting principles from Alfred's life which helped him to ascend to the pinnacle of human greatness.

Surrounded by stones of the past, the stones of Westminster Abbey, sitting in front of the tomb of Geoffrey Chaucer, I pause to reflect upon the beauty of Christianity. Westminster Abbey certainly is exemplary of the most beautiful of all buildings ever built. Ornateness and color and history and beautified space testifies to all generations the glory of God. Shortly prior to sitting down to pen these words, I saw the tomb of Edward the Confessor, this Abbey's founder, Alfred's descendant and recipient of Alfred's love for God and people and learning. Westminster Abbey is where influential monarchs are crowned. But these stones attest to a much greater King, the King who Alfred drew his strength and power from, the Lord of lords and the King of kings, Christ Jesus. The building attests to another time, a time more directly associated with the simpler and fundamental sources of strength, the stone and wood of the earth, and a king who drew his strength from God Almighty. Alfred saw himself as a direct spiritual heir of Moses, Christ, and the twelve disciples, a ruler who governed under the direct authority of God.

Alfred the Great was the king who led the English people to defeat the invading Vikings. After the Vikings had rampaged and murdered in England for decades, and after having killed his own brothers, Alfred gave the Vikings an opportunity to be forgiven. Alfred, having won a decisive victory over the Vikings, baptized the invading king, adopting him as his son. Alfred is considered the founder of England, the first king of all the English. He founded the English navy and is credited with beginning the juried legal system. He built defenses to protect England from invaders and established a military with three units to insure the constant defense of England's people. He wrote a law code for his people. He designed and implemented a mother tongue literacy program, his first purpose being "the happiness of the English people." One of Alfred's titles is *The Father of English Prose*. He himself translated *Psalms* 1-50 from Latin into English for the people to read. Alfred's educational program catapulted English to become the language learned by more people than any other in all history. He is a hero for all of mankind.

"The fool has said in his heart, 'there is no God.'" God has a very real and historic place in the history of mankind. Libraries of books have been written about servants of God who daily witnessed God's almighty presence in their lives. The history of the English language is very uniquely linked to God and the Bible. English received its alphabet when Christian missionaries wrote an English translation between the lines of their Latin Bibles. The first literature written in the English language was the Lord's Prayer and the Gospel of John, translated, as far as we know, by the Venerable Bede. Among the first great English poets in history was Caedmon, known for his Christian songs and poetry. King Alfred the Great's Bible based literacy program gave the people of England literacy in their mother tongue, propelling English to become an



international language of great importance. Without any doubt, Alfred's personal faith in Jesus Christ and his love for the Bible, affected everything he did. He was one of the most influential people of all of history.

I hope that this Illustrated Life of the great Christian king can once again give this man his rightful place in the history of civilization. A great deal of what we know about Alfred the Great comes to us from the biography written by one of Alfred's spiritual advisors, Asser, who came to Alfred from Winchester. This *Illustrated Life* is based upon Asser's *Life of Alfred*.

The Church in Wantage  
Stones resting in place for 700  
years whisper peacefully, inviting  
us all to eternal life in Christ Jesus.





# Chapter 1



## Alfred's Early Years

Alfred was born to King Aethelwulf and his wife Osburga in AD 849 at the royal residence in Wantage, Berkshire, their fifth and youngest son.

Today in the center of the Wantage town plaza stands a memorial to one of the greatest persons in all of history. Surrounded by the living is the memory of a life affecting now more people than all but a few others. A warrior, a man with vision, a man of simple and astounding beauty, a person whose greatest desire was the “happiness of the English people”, his gaze goes not only into the village, but reaches to the ends of the earth.

In Wantage there is also a church built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Walking around the building I was engulfed in the quietness of stones laid with precision and standing for seven hundred years without moving, whispering through time the permeating and pacifying Truth, which is the cornerstone, inviting all to enter the rest of eternal life. The church existed here before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, for it touched the life of Alfred born here in 849. How much do things change in 1164 years? If all the buildings we are looking are made of stone and wood and grass, I don't think it is necessary for things to be that different. The ancient saddlestones, rocks positioned to the correct height to aid mounting a horse, and road markers date back hundreds of years to show the way to Wantage and lead from here to Ashdown and greatness. Marking the turn at the church into the town plaza, the stones remain. Alfred walked here. Gray, an equal blend of all colors, the color of stones remaining, blending the past with the present, allowing us to remember with more than vagueness, delineating the path to ascend the height of service to a people destined for greatness, service of one submitted to authority. Alfred served under the kingship of his father and elder brothers before he became the first king of all

of England. He carried with him continually a handbook of psalms and prayers, a handbook of scripture, his entire life. The authority of scripture enabled him to attain to the pinnacle of human greatness. Standing below the memorial I wrote:



**Alfred the Great**

Snow rests upon his cape  
And dusts the ground around his feet  
His permeating stare  
Has peripheral vision  
Aware  
Of his kingdom  
As chill's in the air  
Alfred holds his ax  
Abundantly prepared to act  
To unite, to defend  
To educate  
To pray, to judge  
To translate  
To visit and then  
To burn the cakes  
Alfred stands in history a giant  
All mankind upon him reliant  
For bringing English to prominence  
A life devoted to Christ his king  
A blessing for all mankind did bring  
Education in the mother tongue  
Understanding for the young  
And one person can  
Change the world





The Birth of Alfred

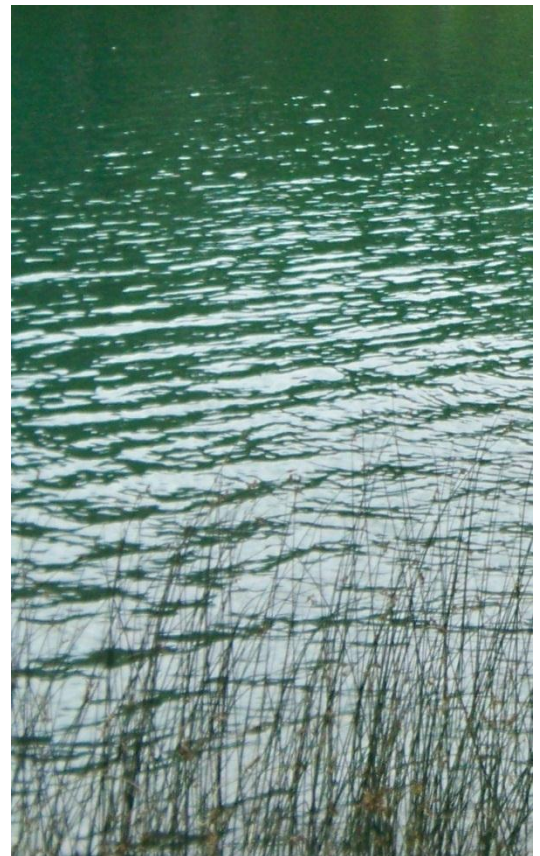






### Alfred's Well

Cool, clear, flowing waters bubble, eddy and swirl, washing over the pebbles and sand. When there is a cool stream to wade in, a soothing pool to swim in, I think these people are more content with life. Swimming in a refreshing stream or pool grants wonderful pleasure to life. Alfred's pool is the essence of this. Reflecting the green grass and flowers, the shady trees and grassy hills, the waters bring contentment and joy as they bubble, eddy and swirl. Living in a hot and dry climate one longs for this cool stream, possibly more than anything. For children to play in the refreshing water of a stream, a pool, a pond, river, or lake, I believe, grants them something for life's journey which isn't found any other way, from any other source. The green and blue reflected in the flowing liquid refreshment color the clear pleasure eddying and swirling into the lives of the children blessed as Alfred was to be refreshed by its blessing, refreshed to create the future, better than the past.













The stream near Alfred's well flows through time, clear and bubbling. Cool, clean, refreshing waters washing over the young Alfred, playing in the watchful care of his mother Osburga, refreshing the life of a child who would influence the world as few others, refreshing all of mankind. The artesian waters reflect shadows of the past, near where legend says nearly 1200 years ago the child played. The actual location is now very shallow, but immediately down from there the stream is possibly more like the well was many centuries ago. It would certainly be a pleasant day for a child to wade here in the cool moist quiet greenery of a summer day. There would be nothing better. So I think the legend could be true, for the cool waters here are most definitely fit for a king. And at this same time, along the coastal waters of England...

steady. There was no talking, only concentration, as this invincible armada fulfilled its highly trained and skilled purpose of bringing sudden destruction upon its unwary, hopeless, undefended human target.

When the ocean waves struck the planking, there was a clang of metal. The bearded man stared toward the stern, focusing only on the task of lifting, pushing, pulling the oar, propelled the ferocious Viking menace toward its goal of drunken rape and swarming destruction of the villages with no awareness of what was about to happen. The clang of metal again as the wave hit the planking. The metal of spears and axes and swords waiting their opportunity to split open the skulls of the children and unarmed Christians of



...the cold ocean water flowed rapidly alongside the planking, the white turbulence swirling into the blue green depth. The thirty oars lifted, water rolling off them, pushed and dropped and pulled, propelling the ship towards the hapless victims. Off the stern, off the bow, to the leeward, to the starboard, many more vessels were precisely duplicating the same arduous exertion. The vast armada was as terrible a force known. The side of the boat was protected with leather and metal shields. The sail was filled adding speed to the vessel of doom. The bow of the ship gracefully lifted toward the head of a beast staring forward toward the unknowing peace loving villagers. Inside there was the heavy breathing of sixty strong men exerting their all to advance to the plunder. The beat of the rhythm was constant and

fair England.

The quiet soothing ripples of the cool water flowing through the shaded green of Wessex are only interrupted by the pleasant voice of the toddler and his mother's comforting words. There could be nothing better on the afternoon in England's peaceful village.

Alfred was only a child of two years when a large armada of 350 Viking longboats arrived along the southeastern coast of England and entered the mouth of the Thames River. Would



this menacing enemy force overtake England? Unbeknownst to this formidable enemy, this little child of two years would be the one to turn them back from conquering the land. Great challenges have always seen great people rise to meet them. In Alfred's day there was not a greater challenge than the Viking menace. There was ample land where these invaders came from. It was not land they needed. Raiding and pillaging was their way of life. They were there to rob the people of their wealth and to conquer. The Viking menace was as dreadful an invading army as there ever was.

What problems do we face? What difficulties have arisen in our lives? Imagine your land surrounded by invaders who swarmed like hornets to pillage and steal and destroy with no force to stop them. The beautiful land of England with its cities, towns and villages, monasteries full of silver and gold, was easily captured and plundered. This terrible force of Viking invaders would eventually meet one who would defeat them, and change the course of history.

Leaves from near Alfred's Well







The Viking Menace







### Alfred's Reward

In AD 861, when Alfred was twelve, he received an award from his mother, Osburga, for learning to read. Alfred's joy was surely great as he thanked his mother for the book of Saxon poetry. This personal family story from Alfred's childhood forms a bookend to his lifelong love of learning. His desire for education went largely unsatisfied until later when he was able to gather around him scholars to aid his pursuit. The thirst for learning he experienced as a child motivated him to personally teach his own children and to provide an educational program for the children throughout his realm. Alfred found great joy in books, dedicating a great portion of his life to study and the production of libraries for the people of England. He dedicated the final ten years of his reign as king of England to his bilingual revival of

learning. Reading in Alfred's day was in some ways the same as reading today, but in other ways quite different. The English language was only being written down for about two hundred years. Books were only available to small numbers of people and were primarily written in Latin. Books represented enormous wealth as they required lifetimes of dedication to acquire the knowledge to produce them. Alfred's smile on his face as he received the gift of Saxon poems from his mother foreshadows the greatness which he was pursuing even at a young age. He not only valued highly books and learning, he had acquired a book of his own. The joy upon the face of the twelve year old child receiving the beautiful book of Saxon poems reaches smiling children today. The impact of Alfred's educational program continues till now to affect our world.





851 AD The Destruction of London

16







Alfred's Father and Brother Plan for Battle



Aethelwulf and Aethelbald defeat the Danes in the Battle of Aclea 851 AD



## Chapter 2

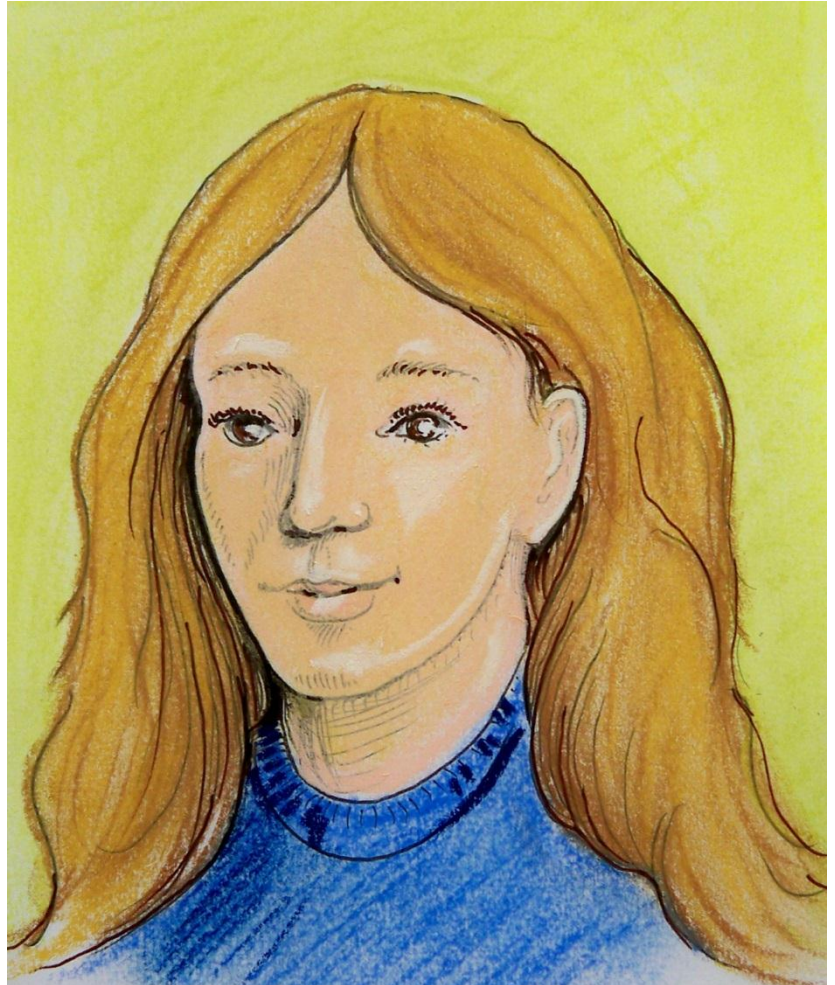


# Aelswitha

Just how does a nineteen year old young man seek and find a wife? Not just any young man, but the son of king Aethelwulf? I don't suppose anyone knows for certain what exactly this entailed 1143 years ago. All we know is that Alfred sought for and found a wife. Where did they first meet? Did Aethelwulf recommend someone from Mercia? Was it a royal function that took place in Wantage? Did Alfred hear about a young lady and venture on a royal outing for a visit? Alfred's sister Aethelswitha was married to the king of Mercia. Possibly she is the one to have found a bride for her younger brother. For sure, the son of a king would agree to marry someone he enjoyed the company of. The young man was even at this age very busy with the responsibility of leadership for in only two years he would lead the English army into battle. He would have also, we could imagine, found time to visit the girl he loved. Was this the romance that inspired sonnets and plays? Surely a young man in love found time to visit his choice for his wife. Did he set out alone over the hills and vales or did he arrange a royal entourage to visit the princess? Maybe he did both. Surely there were some official visits. Did Aelswitha visit the royal residence? Given the legends of Alfred venturing out on his own on reconnaissance and other missions later, it seems to me that there may have been several times he set out in private to see the girl. Did they have a secret way to communicate when the son of the king wanted to visit in order to whisper promises to the girl he loved? All of this is possible and much more because history only affords us that his quest was successful. He married Aelswitha. Soon they would have children who would someday be

mentored to be king not only of Wessex, but of all of England.

Maybe young Alfred sent a message with his most trusted helper to the young girl saying that on a certain evening he would attempt a quiet rendezvous. Did they speak to one another at a quiet window? A young man who in only two short years would lead the armies of England was capable of a successful plan to see his beloved. How long did it take to arrange a royal wedding? Was it at a church similar to the church which stands today in Wantage which dates from about





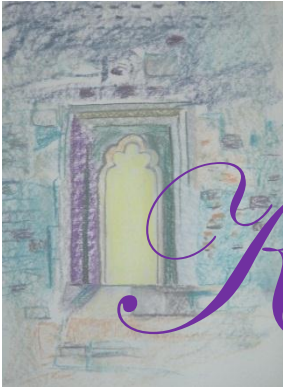
400 years after Alfred? Alfred and Aelswitha were married in Mercia in 868 AD. A day of joy and celebration, happiness for all to partake in, for the royal son had a wife.



Alfred and Aelswitha



## Chapter 3



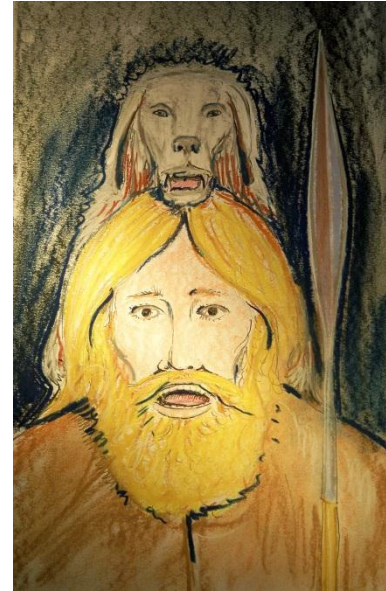
# King Edmund

## Of East Anglia

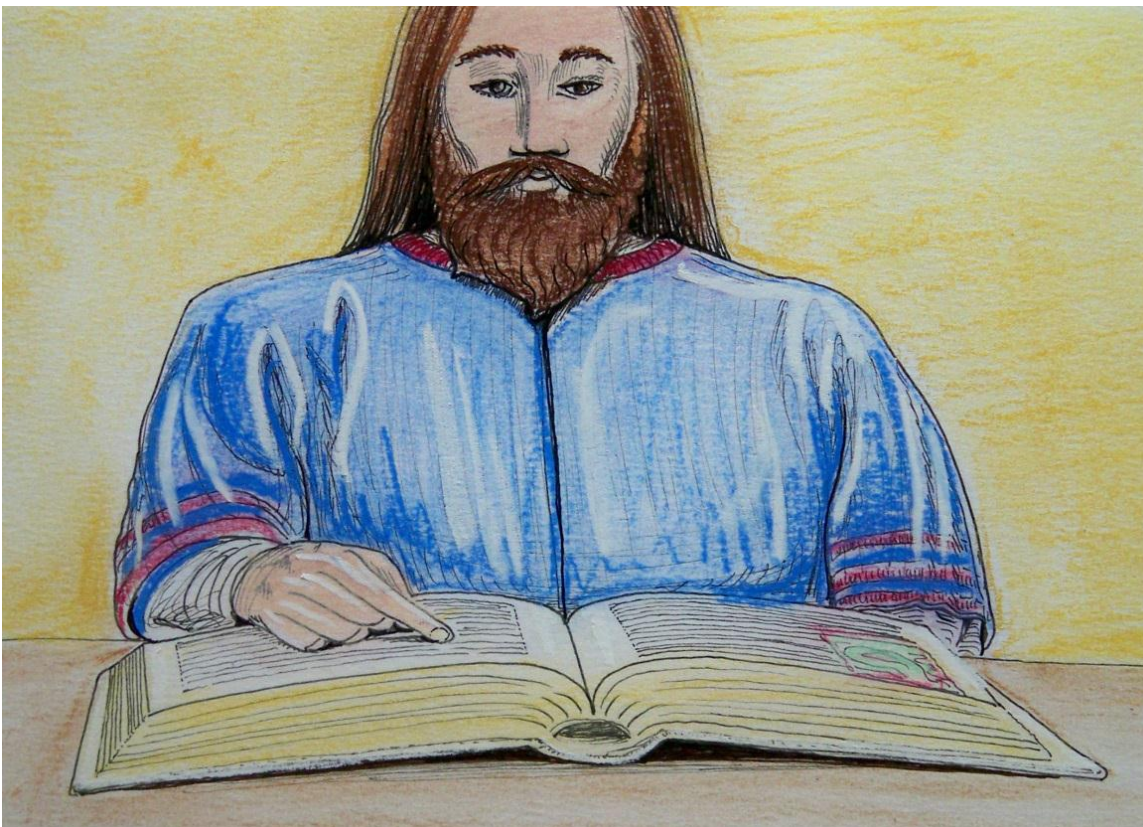
In AD 870 the king of East Anglia was Edmund, beloved of the people, known for his knowledge of the Bible. King Edmund retreated to a quiet tower for a year in order to memorize the entire book of Psalms. He is known for being able to quote this entire book of the Bible.

The Viking army was led by Ivan the Boneless, the Berserker. Berserkers were Viking warriors who were the first to rush upon hapless villages, catching the people by surprise, bringing

terror and destruction. They wore skins of wolves and were in an abnormal state as a result of drugs or alcohol or both. They killed everyone who got in their way so that even those of their own force had to stay clear of them.



But King Edmund was a godly man, a saint in the Catholic Church. Ivan the Berserker tied King Edmund to a tree and killed him with arrows. Darkness overcoming the light, the berserkers were the most dreaded, fearing no one, living only for drunkenness and destruction, they continued on undefeated.

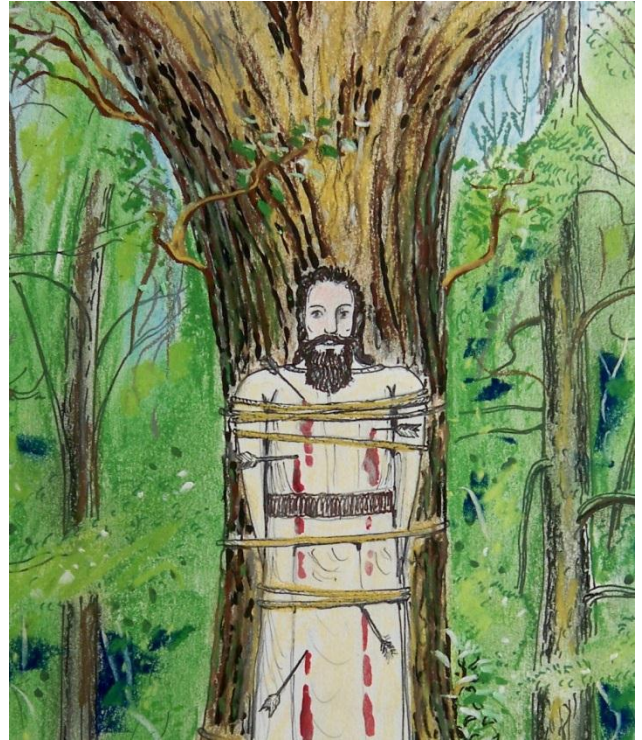








The differences between these two leaders represents a key moment in the history of civilization. Only about two hundred years prior to this there was not that great a difference between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings. But the Anglo-Saxons accepted the message of the Bible. They realized the joy of a life of thanksgiving to the Creator and left the violent drunkenness of their former pursuits. King Edmund's studying the Bible was a vastly different experience from the pagan past as well as from our modern day. The people of England embraced learning and its pleasures and joys. Turning the pages of the illuminated manuscripts, with gold and silver plating, brightly decorated pages which people spent their entire lives producing, reading the message from the Creator of the universe, set the people on a new course. The experience of knowing God and learning the Bible was for king Edmund and other leaders of this newly Christian people, a truly transforming experience.



We see the intricate artwork and beauty of the scriptures crafted in this day and realize they are some of the most beautiful objects ever made, but we can forget that they changed the course of human history, they transformed the world. The experience of reading these Bibles must have been wonderful for those who could own them. Emanating from these pages of unsurpassed beauty came the voice of the Almighty God, speaking about forgiveness, love, kindness, truth, patience, peace, and a Creator who loves mankind with an eternal love.

Most of the people of this day viewed these books from a distance. Illiteracy was normal and all but small portions of the Bible remained in Latin. The people would hear the message from those responsible in the Church.

The question of which people would be victorious in the end began to loom. Would the pagan armies led by the berserker king destroy the peace loving Christians? They tied Edmund to a tree and filled his body with arrows. He died a martyr, and the Viking menace continued onward.







### The Martyrdom of King Edmund

**King Edmund was a godly man. He had meomORIZED the entire book of Pslams. Ivan the Berserker, the invading king, tied him to a tree and killed him with arrows.**



## Chapter 4



# The Battle of Ashdown

In AD 871 the Vikings, referred to as the *Danes* in Asser's *Life of Alfred*, entered Wessex and took Reading, fortifying the town. Young Alfred was the commander of the English army under his elder brother Aethelred, the king. Aethelred and Alfred led the English army against the Vikings in Reading but failed to dislodge them. The English lost. Now the Danes were assembling to take more from Aethelred's realm. Prior to the Battle of Ashdown, Aethelred went to pray. When Aethelred tarried in prayer, the Viking army prepared for attack. Alfred understood that should the Viking army descend the hill the chance of victory diminished greatly. They had to attack immediately in order to engage the enemy at the top of the hill. Alfred signaled the attack and led the army, running up the hill "like a wild boar". The English were victorious. This victory gave Alfred respect in the eyes of all the English and later he would be the first king to unite all the Anglo-Saxons.

The role of courage in the life of a nation's leader is vital. Every nation has enemies and therefore every nation's leader must be courageous. In the history of every nation there are continually trying times and moments of crisis. These times are so numerous it almost seems that if they are not obvious then the danger is organizing itself secretly. Moments of peace are to be enjoyed as gifts from heaven above. The peace that I have enjoyed as an American was only possible as a result of the defeat of the worst tyranny the world has known in World War II. My father, Joseph F. Hauser Jr., fought under General Patton in WWII and played a role in the liberation of France and defeating Hitler in the Battle of the Bulge.

In Alfred's day the king and his younger brother led the army with sword and shield in hand, directly into mortal combat. The king and his brother led the troops out in front into the chaos of war. This was their duty. Alfred met this challenge. Looking into the face of a formidable foe, the worst menace the world had known, the violent surge of Viking berserkers, Alfred understood that there was only one way to emerge alive and that was to commit everything to fight for survival and the safety of family and the continuance of the kingdom. There was no other way to survive. And so, courage crystalized in his soul, as his elder brother the king tarried in prayer, the Vikings prepared to descend the hill, Alfred led the charge uphill to do battle with the undefeated foe, and the English army followed. Near the top of the hill the battle was engaged. They had to defeat these drunken berserkers or life as they knew it would be no more. The uphill struggle of the English pushed back the raging pagan throng. This was the beginning of the end of the Viking menace and the commencement of Alfred's great respect in the eyes of the English nation. The courage of young Alfred inspires us today to fight for truth and righteousness in our world.

### Alfred and His Sword

A man and his sword and shield engage in mortal combat, fighting for the survival of a Christian nation invaded by an undefeated army who knew only destroying, pillaging and drunkenness. It is difficult to fully grasp the responsibility of a ruler in Alfred's day when kings led their armies personally into battle. A man grasps his sword. His muscles and tendons clasp the heavy weapon and tightly grip the protecting shield, to stop the onslaught of evil against the homeland. It is as though with that grip he possessed the power of the entire nation united with him, for it was only his grasp which could stop the incoming tide of destruction. It was his arm which could swing the heavy sword against the flood. He and his fellows could hold back the raging darkness. His hand gripped and his arm lifted, and with his muscles, sinews and tendons, he saved humanity. In Alfred the human race fought for the victory of light over darkness, of good over evil, of right over wrong. And the right was victorious. Even as daily, every man, woman and child fight in a war for victory over wrong. Whatever struggle we may be in, in Alfred we can see the importance of one man, one woman, one child. The work we each do is important. We, like Alfred, can help fight for good over evil. We can



hold back the flood in the realm in which we are “king”. Whether we are grand or not, our work is vital, because in our struggle on the side of right is the struggle of all mankind. Our victory gives birth to the future world. It is our muscles and tendons and sinews which grasp and lift and swing with our weapon to hold back the flood of evil, for all humanity is depending upon our efforts.



Aethelred in Prayer





Alfred commands the Troops (↑ This was my first drawing I did producing this book.)



Like a Wild Boar





**The role of courage in the life of a nation's leader is vital. Every nation has enemies and therefore every nation's leader must be courageous.**





### AD 871

Alfred fought in six battles in the year 871. The Battle of Reading, the Battle of Ashdown, the Battle of Basing, the Battle of Martun, the Second Battle of Reading, and the Battle of Wilton. In the first Battle of Reading, the Danes invaded Wessex and captured and fortified the key town for their base of operations. From Reading they planned to capture all of Wessex. In the Battle of Ashdown,

Alfred demonstrated his leadership and the Saxons were victorious. The Danes were victorious in the Battles of Basing and Martun, after which Alfred's brother Aethelred died and Alfred became king. In the Second Battle of Reading and the Battle of Wilton, Alfred again was defeated.







## Chapter 5



### Alfred Becomes

### King

#### Alfred and Aethelred

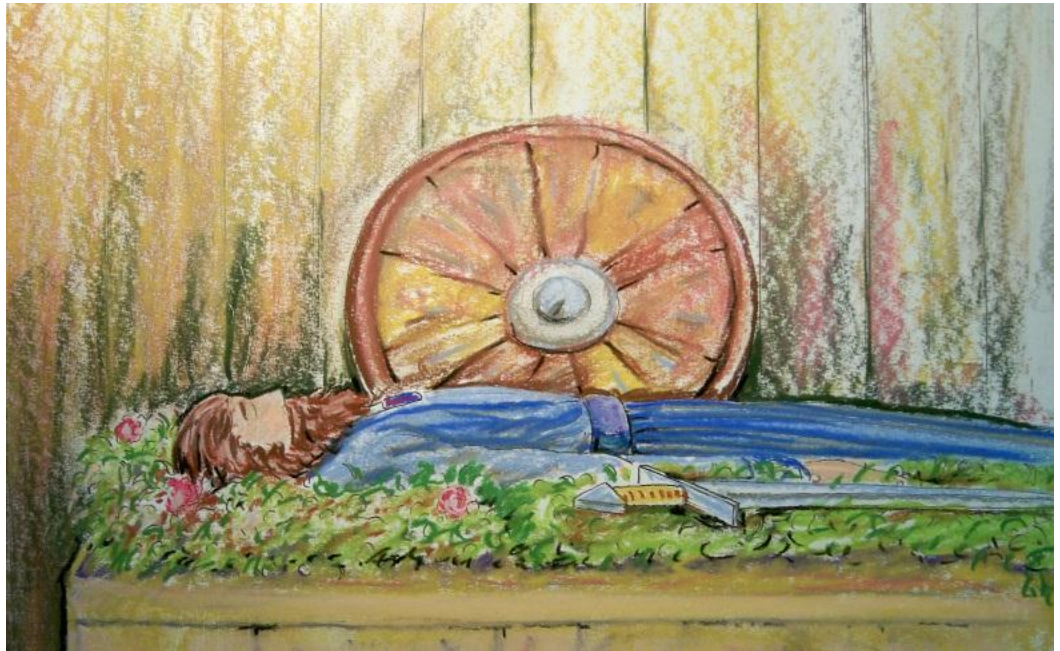
Alfred labored under the mentorship of his father and his elder brothers. For several years Alfred assisted his elder brother Aethelred the king. There is no doubt that the influence of Alfred's father upon the young boy was invaluable. Alfred's close working relationship with his nearest sibling in age who became king while Alfred was a teenager was especially meaningful as Alfred prepared to lead all of England from the age of twenty-two to the age of fifty. It was while leading the army under his brother Aethelred the king that Alfred was first victorious over the Vikings. Aethelred went to pray and during this time the enemy began maneuvering for attack, forcing Alfred to commence the fighting. Alfred surely saw the efficacy of the king remaining in prayer being himself a man of faith.

Alfred's eldest brother contested the kingship of their father and began to rule in his father's place. Alfred very clearly reveals his condemnation of this action. Alfred served in line, excelling in every aspect of his labors, knowing that as the youngest of five sons it was possible he would not rule. This made his understanding that he came to power in the will of Almighty God all the more clear. It was not by man's actions he became ruler of all of England, but by God's will.

Alfred's benevolent and tireless efforts on behalf of the people of England testify that his belief in prayer and the will of the benevolent Ruler of All was effectual.

#### Alfred Becomes King

What problems do we face? What challenges have loomed up in our path? Consider the invading army has not only conquered the kingdoms neighboring yours, but the invading army has killed your father the king, your elder brothers who ruled, your next eldest brother the king, and now it was your turn to reign, knowing that now you were the one person the enemy



#### The Death of Aethelred

wished to silence. Now we understand why Aethelwulf had five sons who reigned in succession. Alfred was mentored by his father and brothers and at twenty-two years of age becomes king of Wessex. He is now responsible for stopping the Viking menace. We can imagine Alfred looking adversity in the face and saying, "It's my turn. With God's help and strength, we shall defeat this army of drunken berserkers. We shall be victorious!" And the world exists as it does today because of Alfred response.





Alfred Becomes King



# Part II

## Chapter 6



### Surprise Attack at

### Chippenham

In AD 871 the royal Christmas celebration with the king himself was in Chippenham. There was a treaty in place with the Vikings in Reading and therefore peace allowed them to relax and celebrate the Savior's birth. God commands celebration. He delights when we have fun in His love for us. How old a strategy is it to commence an attack during a holiday celebration? Was it a common strategy among Viking warriors? Suddenly a messenger bursts in, "The Vikings have attacked!" The Christmas celebration ended and war had commenced. Perhaps it was while he was leaving he began designing plans for a military capable of rotating responsibility for guarding the nation. The Vikings had left Reading and invaded the king's position in Chippenham making significant progress during the holiday celebration. They had broken their treaty, catching the English off guard. The Viking advance was devastating. Alfred needed to gather his forces and call the nation quickly to war.

At Chippenham Alfred barely escaped with his life. Later, at Chippenham, Alfred defeated the Viking king Guthrum. Jesus said, "In weakness my strength is made perfect." Alfred's near death at Chippenham may have had influence upon his later achievements of designing a military which was constantly able to guard against attack and building the burghs so that every citizen was no more than twenty miles from a safe refuge. Chippenham would later become the place of Alfred's greatest victory. How often in our lives do

we find ourselves so weak and vulnerable that if we make it through it will be by "the skin of our teeth." That place of near death can be the place where victory is finally achieved, if we persevere. Perseverance will lead to success and often it is in the weakest moment where inspiration is found to achieve it. At Chippenham during Christmas celebration they were suddenly overwhelmed by the brutal force of the Viking onslaught. The people died defending their king. This sacrifice surely weighed heavily upon him and from this weight of responsibility, the cost of his life, came a plan to defend England with a rotating military constantly on guard. From Chippenham Alfred retreated deep into the one place he knew he would not be found, the watery wilderness of the swamp.



**The Vikings Break the Peace During Christmas Celebration**









Escape from Chippenham



## Chapter 7



# Burning the Cakes

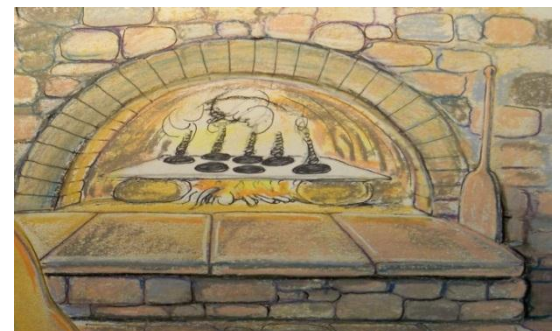
Alfred's small band of men who escaped with him at Chippenham were all sent on missions to call the nation to war. Alfred, alone, would inform one of his most important commanders. I can imagine the story unfolded like this: he was entering the village and suddenly realized that the village had fallen to the enemy. Knocking on the door of a home, a middle-aged "rounded" woman answered the door. Realizing the soldier needed cover she rushed him into the home and asks him to watch her cakes of bread in the oven while she finishes some other chores. Alfred agreed. Coming in from the cold, the warm oven and the aroma of baking bread surrounded the king with calm. He began considering the grave situation the nation was in. The enemy's advance was significant. How many villages had fallen? He may have already begun designing the new advancements in the military and defenses for the English people. After dark he would leave for the appointed rendezvous. The king's thoughts became occupied with the crisis of the nation.

"You mindless dumbo! That was my hard work for dinner tonight!" the housewife yelled. We can almost hear Alfred's words descending through time as he jumps up, "O, I'm sorry! Let me get them out of there quick. I ruined the bread," Alfred mumbles with remorse. One can imagine Alfred being so respectful that he fails to inform the woman she is scolding the king of England. Possibly later when the husband returned he questioned the guest, "And who do we have the pleasure of giving hospitality to this evening?" "Well, I was coming from the royal events in Chippenham and found out by surprise that the Viking army had taken your village. I am King Alfred and am thankful for your hospitality." The woman then pleads forgiveness for her harsh rebuke and Alfred forgives her. The humanness of

royalty, a story which endears Alfred to us as no other earthly king.

Consider what makes this story appealing: that royalty can knock on the door of a commoner, seeking refuge; that royalty is capable of speaking with a commoner without announcing his identity; that royalty can be scolded by a housewife for burning the bread and not immediately pronounce retribution, imprisonment or death. Alfred in this story is vulnerable and capable of mistakes like the rest of humanity. Yes, he is responsible for the safety of England, but he himself needs a place to hide. This story is an amazing anecdotal occurrence in the history of one of the most powerful nations when its continued existence was very much a matter of question. The Vikings were victorious. They were conquerors. And now they had advanced to where the king found himself caught by surprise and needed to find refuge. This tale unites the nation because the housewife's work of baking bread plays as important a role as the work of the king. The mundane chore of feeding the family takes center stage on the timeline of civilization. She was willing to allow the stranger to rest inside, provided he busy himself with important work, feeding the family. Yes, he would accommodate the demand, no problem. But in the time when concentrating on baking was paramount, the king's thoughts wondered to other things, how to save the nation. Is there anything more important than providing the family with daily bread? While many historians consider this story legend and not true history, I'm one to believe that a great deal of legend is rooted in historical fact. I want to choose to believe that this story actually happened.

Folklore is history passed down by the common folk. Writers of history would not be interested in this story even if it were actual fact. The source would not have been the king. The source would have been the woman baking the bread. Because it exists as folklore there is the possibility that it is true. It should remain as what it is.





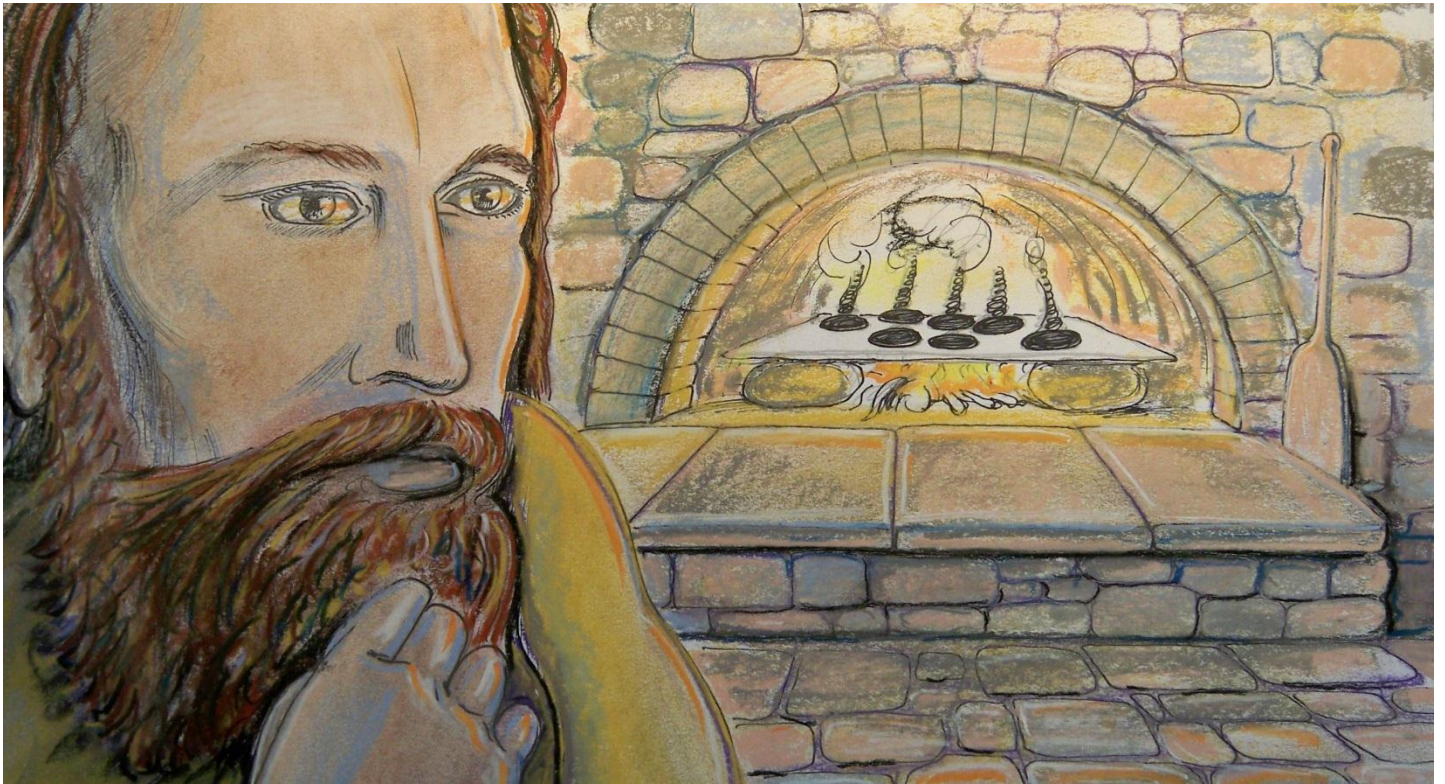


Alfred Seeks Shelter

“Watch the loaves”







Alfred Deep in Thought Burns the Cakes

Oh no! They're burnt to a crisp.





## Scolding the King



Making Amends





## Chapter 8



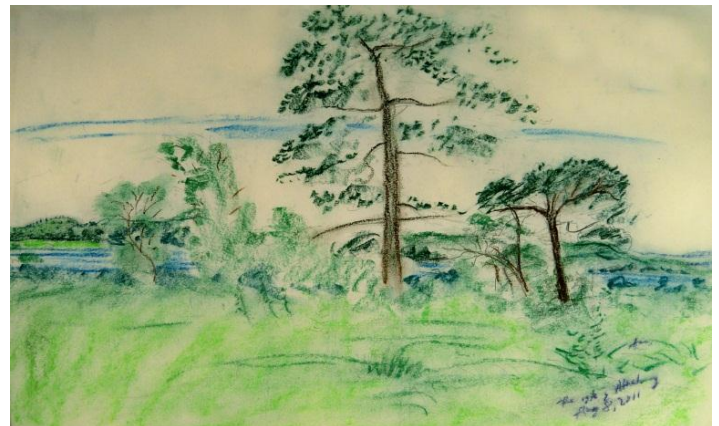
# Headquarters in a Swamp

King David of the Old Testament retreated to a cave. King David had been already anointed by the prophet to lead Israel. He already defeated Goliath with his sling and the name of the God of Israel. David had dined with the royal family and was best friend of the king's son Jonathan. And suddenly King David ran for his life and ended up in a remote cave far from the comforts of civilization. There in that cave he hid, while God united all Israel behind him. David's enemy was the king of his own nation, jealous of the praises sung to the future ruler of God's people.

Alfred retreated to a swamp. Deep into the uninhabited watery wasteland, where no one could follow, they retreated following their king. It was seemingly the last hope. Alfred was the only king left and now he was forced into hiding. Alfred's benevolence and skills in leading the army were placed below his ability to hide, to walk through the swamp and disappear. They had to regroup and unite, and this was only possible in secret. Like David before him and like many other leaders in the midst of life and death struggles, Alfred led his army into hiding in the one place he knew the enemy would never come, the place no one would ever go. It was the place only seen by wild animals before, and now it became the headquarters of the king. And from this place of disappearance, Alfred united behind him all of the tribes of the Anglo-Saxons. He had his trusted followers, just as David had his mighty men. These who followed him through the mud and into secret seclusion, these helped carry his message, we must unite. This is our only chance. We must unite to stop the onslaught. We must unite for our very survival. And from the watery encampment came what alone would save England. The English united behind Alfred's authority to defend against the conquering foe. Alfred would not give up. He

did not give up. He fought on from deep within the marshes. He fought for a better England, for a better world. He fought for the future where we are living today.

To exist  
To be stripped of all but our existence  
To become spiritual  
To draw strength from God alone  
To of necessity disappear from human knowledge  
To enter obscurity  
A king becomes obscure  
In order to save civilization  
Alfred's plan was to enjoy Christmas  
Instead, he entered the most remote region  
A place uninhabited  
A swamp  
To hide  
To disappear  
To stay alive  
Was there another option?  
For a moment did he consider surrender?



No, not for a moment  
He had to survive  
To rule England  
To save the people of England  
His fellow believers



## The Isle of Athelney

At the darkest hour  
To seek a place  
Of such remoteness  
There is nothing beyond  
The middle of a swamp  
An isle of safety stands  
So that one thing is surely found there  
Time  
To plan the final battle  
Upon which all depends  
When the only end is victory  
For otherwise all is lost  
From existing from where one is unknown  
to exist  
For the enemy would destroy  
As was Egypt for the Christ child  
And the wilderness for King David  
So was the Isle of Athelney for King Alfred  
In utter obscurity  
Alfred and his band of men  
Prayed, gathered facts, planned  
Called a nation to destiny  
And set out through the swamps  
To rise again

The most able of all uses his skills to hide.  
It is in hiding they find hope. From the watery  
seclusion there arises a plan, a plan for rebirth of a  
nation. From the quiet secluded watery darkness  
arises a misty renaissance. The small team of men  
emerge from the headquarters in the swamp to do  
reconnaissance and after planning they emerge  
once again, this time to call a nation to fight, to  
battle for survival. They emerge from the watery  
darkness and call everyone to gather, a gathering  
of a nation to see their king, to follow him from  
hiding to battle, to fight for their land and their  
freedom.

From hiding arises an army victorious.  
From the watery silence arises  
The roar of resurrection,  
The roar of a mighty army reborn,  
To defeat the enemy once and for all,  
To win freedom.

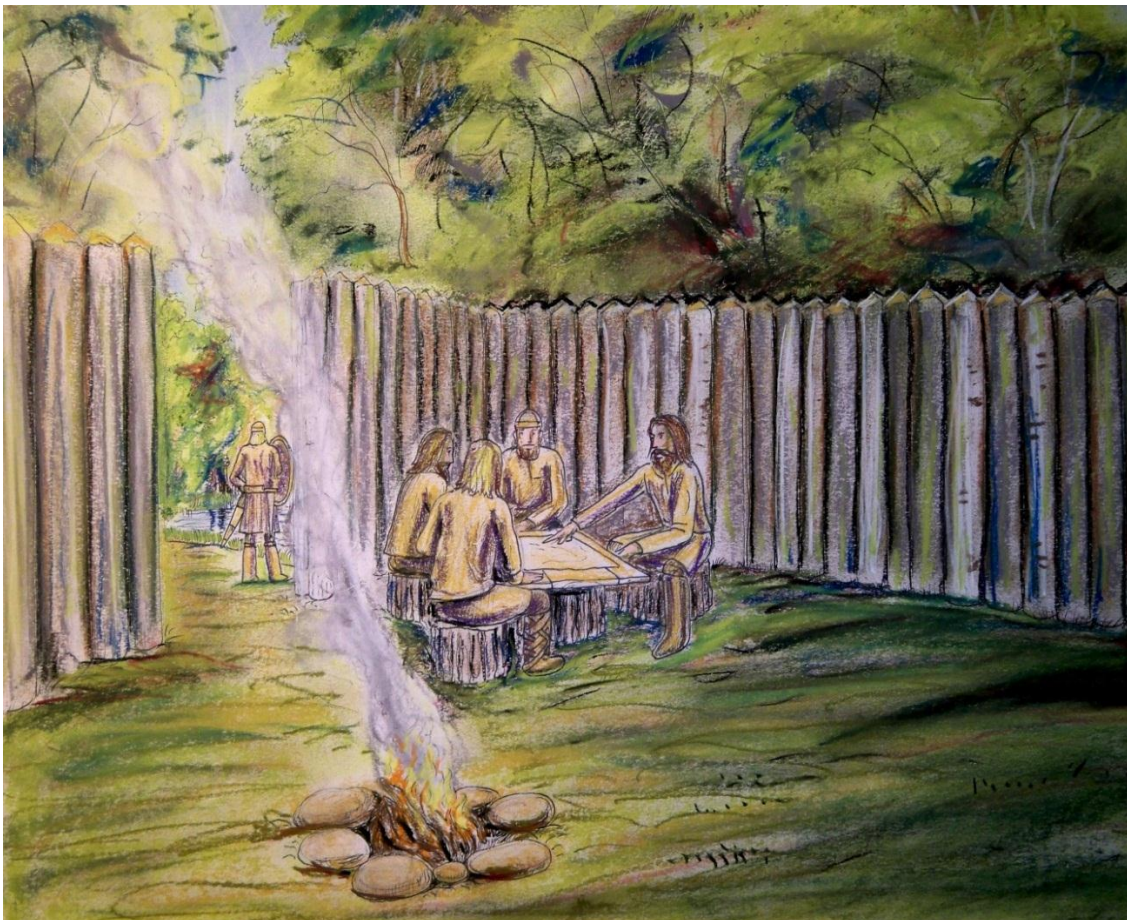




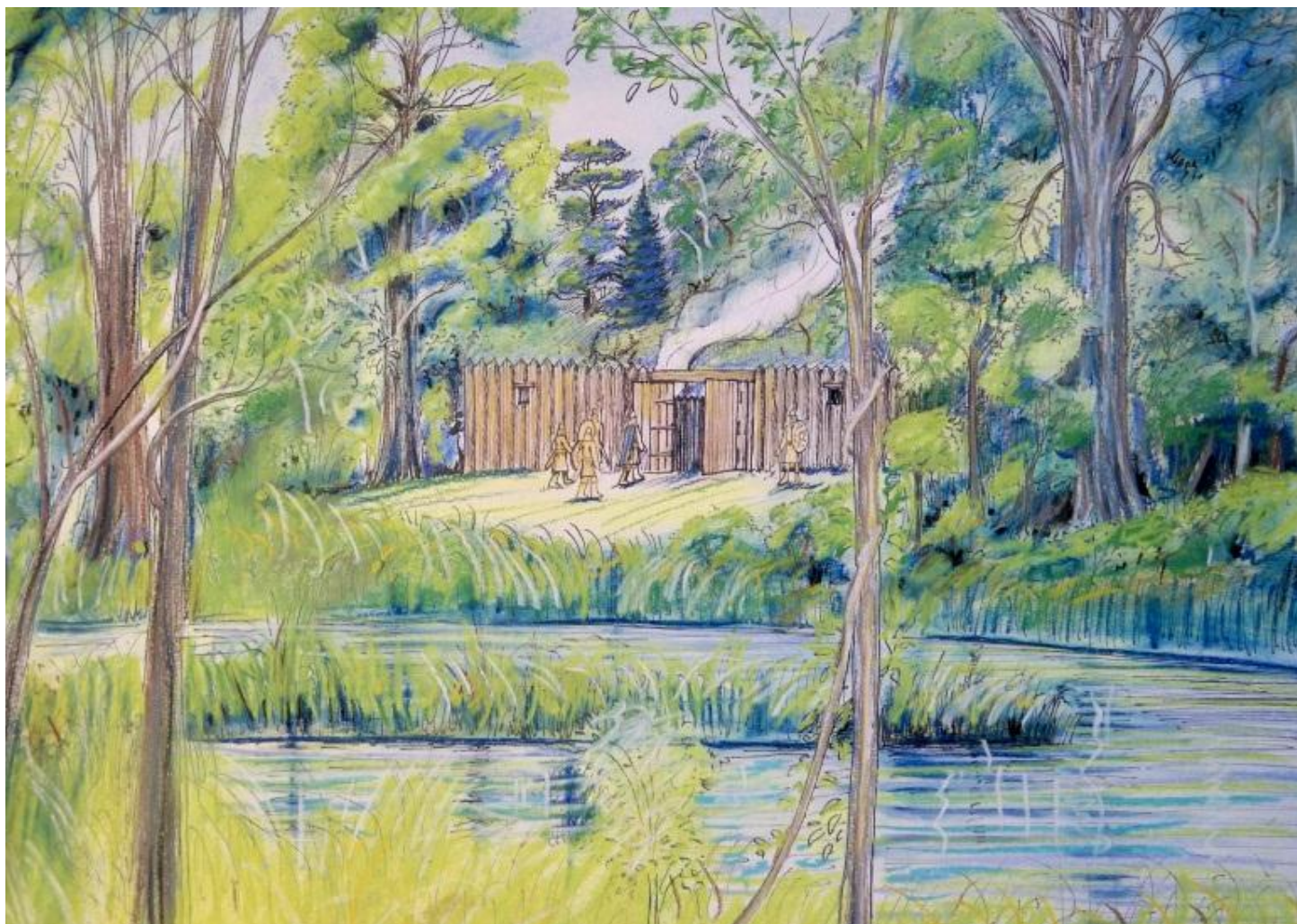


Reading the Bible with His Family

### Planning







Headquarters in a Swamp

**Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the  
shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me,  
from my deadly enemies who compass me about.**

**Psalm 17: 8,9**



## Chapter 9



### Alfred's Secret

## Mission

From deep inside the watery seclusion, Alfred sent his faithful men on missions to prepare the English for war. There was one mission which was so necessary, so dangerous, he would have to do it himself. This was the last effort, the final possibility before the nation ceased to exist. They needed vital information of the enemy's strength and strategy. There would be only one more possibility of victory. They needed to prepare for the battle which would end in victory or England would no longer exist, and their headquarters was deep within the watery marsh. This most important, most dangerous job, Alfred would take himself. He was the one responsible for England's survival.

When his commanders had left on their missions, Alfred left also, sloshing back through the swamp toward the enemy. He wore the clothes of a poet. He knew as many poems as anyone. He would enter the enemy's camp as a poet and entertainer and listen for the vital information needed. His talent was enough. He got in. He entertained and listened to every word. He was trained since a child to lead the military. No one was better able to understand the importance of all he heard. He stayed on as long as necessary, listening, making friends, hearing the plans. He was as harmless as a dove. Then he left. He took with him all the information and weighed everything. Thinking he was gone to another village, the enemy thought nothing of his departure. Alfred headed back through the swamp to plan the war. Now they had all they needed. They prepared to give everything for the future of the Christian nation.

Surely he reflected on how the Son of God left all to come to earth on His vital mission to save mankind by taking on human flesh to defeat the

enemy and death itself. Alfred returned to the hidden headquarters in the depth of the swamp and ruled England.

Although many historians discredit this legend as being folklore, the reason I want to believe that this story may be true is because it is so exactly like the Alfred of history. Because the story is found written later does not mean it is not true. Much true history exists in oral form for long periods. Alfred had accomplished so much worthy of writing down that some stories would not have been considered necessary to write. Very old written history can get lost. When England needed defended against the Viking army preparing attack, Alfred led the charge up the hill. In his day, the king was responsible personally to win the victory. The king and his men were pushed into complete seclusion and there remained only one more possibility for future existence. Alfred was the man and he was a poet, known for his personal knowledge of poetry. Alfred would have only informed a very small number of people of his plan to infiltrate the enemy and afterward, it would have only been known to a very small number, if any, besides the king himself. Immediately following this commenced the war to save England, so from the outset, this story would have been relegated to unwritten history, making its existence as folklore essential. For me personally, I enjoy hearing in this story a ring of truth.



**Alfred Instructs His Men**





Alfred the Poet





Alfred's Secret Mission





## Chapter 10



# The Meeting at Egbert's Stone

All the inhabitants of Somerset, Wiltshire and Hampshire counties gathered at the request of Alfred's men. The Danes had conquered nearly all of England and Alfred alone remained, but in hiding. The people didn't know for sure if he was still alive. They gathered at Egbert's Stone and the rumor spread that Alfred was alive, Alfred, their courageous and benevolent king who had defeated the Danes before. Was Christian England to be a thing of the past? Would paganism prevail? Would the Christians of England be a conquered people?

More and more were gathering as Alfred and his men rode nearer to the rendezvous. All were gathered, many hundreds of men, prepared for war. Alfred arose, revealing himself alive. A roar of joy sounded throughout. A shout of joy as though one had been risen from the dead. The king was alive! "Prepare for battle! We must fight for our land, for freedom, for our lives!" The plan was well thought out. The roar of victory sounded across the valleys, the roar of joy, the shout for freedom. The English had a trusted and beloved leader, someone to inspire and gather all for battle, to unite the people in the cause of liberty. The roar of joy demonstrated the confidence and love the people had for Alfred the benevolent ruler. After one night camping at Egbert's Stone, they set out to meet the enemy. Victory was essential.

Has there ever been such a roar of joy as this when freedom's light was so nearly put out by the dark wave of paganism? The roar sounded over the English countryside, through the forests and valleys, a roar of hope, echoing through time to our ears today. From seclusion and obscurity on a tiny island in a swamp, Alfred rose to lead his nation to victory, going on to establish England as a world power which would affect the history of

all mankind. If I strain my ears I can hear that roar today, a people wanting freedom, a people willing to fight, a people wanting a leader who is a godly man, a benevolent man, a wise man, who garners the confidence of the entire nation, a man who leads into battle to fight to the death for the sake of liberty and right.

### The Plan

Alfred and his small band of men found time to prepare for this last battle. They hid from the enemy in the most remote location they knew of. The hiding procured for Alfred the element of surprise, only if they carried out the plan immediately, for he had revealed himself. They had gathered all the facts, they knew the enemies strengths and weaknesses and locations and plans. Now was the time to use everything, with their faith in God, for the final conflict. They organized and attacked, to liberate England from the invading berserkers, from the bondage of drunken unbelief which had terrorized England for decades. They had won battles before and they had lost battles before. They made a plan that was sure to win and set out to engage the enemy at Ethandun.

What struggle are we in the midst of? How would several months in seclusion, gathering facts, praying, consulting advisors, planning, affect our situation? Are we to the point where there remains only one more battle and victory is a must? King Alfred accomplished this for the future of civilization. Must we do the same? Alfred emerged from the swamp with a well-researched plan of attack. The English people responded and commenced the war to liberate England from the pagan invaders.

God revealed himself in Jesus Christ with a plan, a plan to redeem mankind. One of the themes of scripture is the importance of courage. The courageous warrior is honored throughout the Bible. The most courageous of all was Jesus Christ who took captivity captive and defeated every enemy of man. The plan was to live a sinless life. This was possible because of his divine nature, conceived by the Holy Spirit, then to die for the sins of the world, to die in the place of every person. Just as the armies of Israel retreated from the gates of Ai, drawing the enemy out of the city to be ambushed by the enemy in hiding, Christ took captivity captive, by surrendering to death, the final enemy of man. A lesser warrior would have been defeated, but Christ had the plan of



God, prepared from his place of obscurity in eternity, the ultimate plan of victory, for death could not hold him. Christ surrendered to death in order to walk out of the tomb alive, conquering death for all of mankind.

What plan do we need to overcome in our personal battle right over wrong? Just as Alfred did, when we realize we are in preparation for the final battle, we would benefit from time spent in seclusion. We too should gather all the facts and get advice from our closest advisors, devise the plan for certain victory, that we may rise again.

### Character

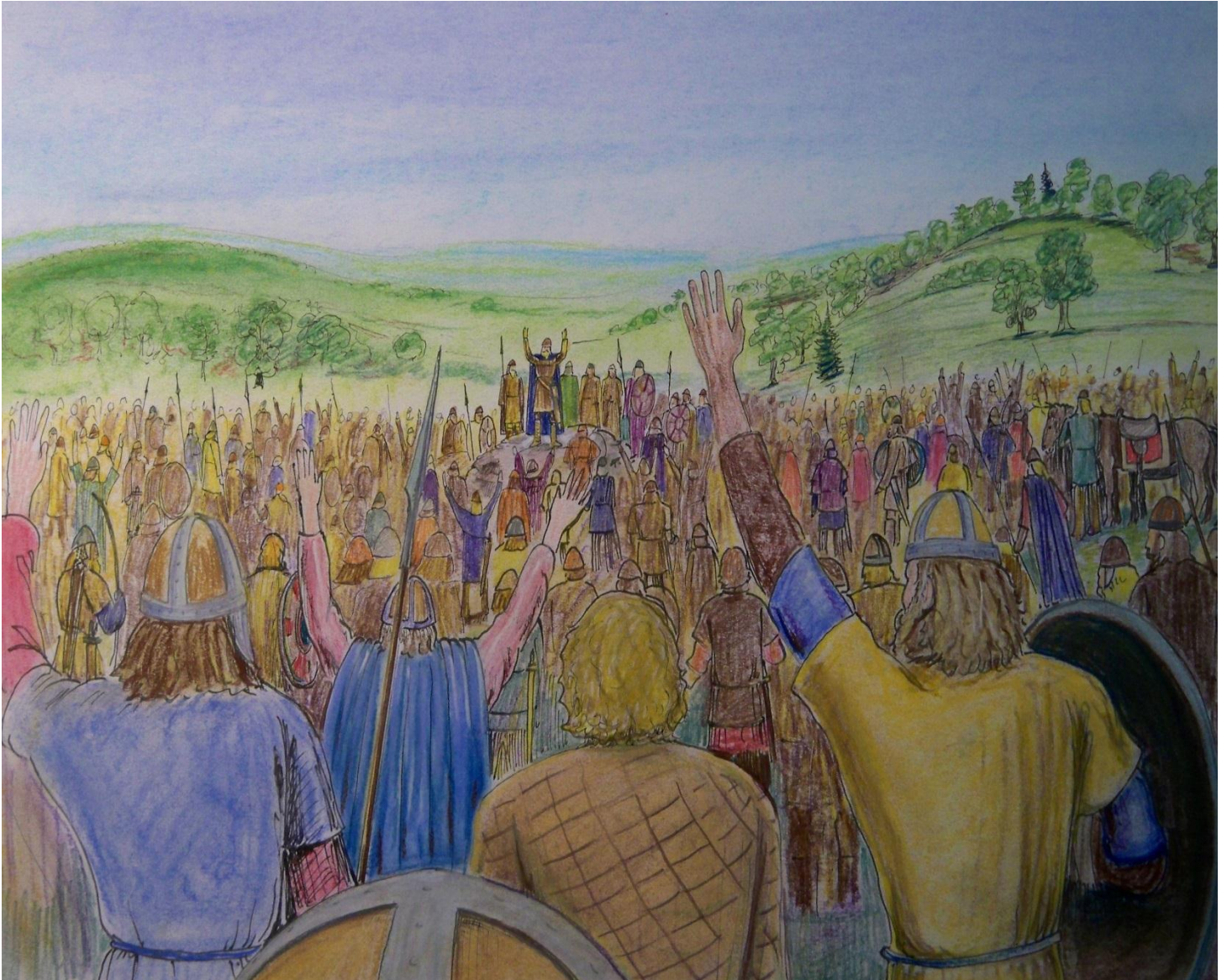
When Alfred revealed himself to the English he was unanimously accepted with rejoicing. The king was desperately needed and was able to lead because he possessed a character of the quality which all people received and honored. He was first of all courageous. He was morally upright beyond question. He was outstandingly benevolent. He willed to do right against tremendous opposition. Alfred possessed a belief that if a people lived worthily before God there was no enemy that could stand before them. Alfred had courage, godliness, moral integrity, conviction that God fought for the godly. As the people gathered and fought with Alfred, he became the first king of all of England. During his reign Alfred's benevolence was demonstrated more fully. He desired fairness and justice. He committed every resource for preserving a peaceful and just society so that everyone could profit from an education.

The people of England came and gathered to meet Alfred at Egbert's Stone because they had an enemy they all hated, the Viking menace. Because of Alfred's character and because he was the true king, the son of the king, and because of his faithful band who organized, the nation met to battle for freedom. Alfred's courage was not simple raw human courage. The courage Alfred possessed was founded upon trust in the living God. He possessed a certainty that if he and the people of England lived worthily before God, then no enemy could stand before them.

Alfred's moral integrity was more than his individual life's choices. Moral integrity in an individual is inseparable in most instances from the moral integrity of the society the individual lives in. England was a Christian land. Alfred believed that the invading armies into their

country were because of a decline in Christian education and morality in England, nevertheless, Christianity had already existed in Britain for about 800 years. Alfred was born into a Christian family and society. He was the son of godly parents. From an early age Alfred learned devotion to God. When Alfred became king he gathered around him learned men who were outstanding spiritual leaders. It was in this tightly woven fabric of Christian influence that Alfred's exceptional moral character was able to mature and become the influence to so many in his time and in ours as well. In the record of Alfred's life there is no hint whatsoever of any scandal but only the most sincere devotion to Christ. He invented a clock so he knew when to pray. He himself translated *Psalms* 1-50 into English for the people to read. He saw Christian education as the means for the English to find happiness, peace and safety. I've traveled to many different lands and cultures and there is no question that the English are among the most literate of all people and the happiest. Today, over one thousand one hundred and twenty-two years since Alfred began his mother tongue, Bible based literacy program, its influence is still very strong.





**A shout of joy as though one had been  
risen from the dead.**

*Asser's Life of Alfred*



## Chapter 11



# The Battle of Ethandun

After months of planning for the final battle, organized by Alfred's faithful band, the English engaged Guthrum and the Danes at Ethandun, in the battle to determine the future of England. The Saxons had no other king still undefeated. They had won before; they had lost. They had planned for certain victory. They had the element of surprise. Due to Alfred's months spent in secret seclusion, the English had been unaware of Alfred's fate. Now they were engaged in the battle to determine their future. They fought for their loved ones, for their lives, for their land and for freedom. They lined up their shield walls and secured them tight.

Every nation's history includes conflicts where the outcome has had great influence. The outcome of the battle of Ethandun affected the history of mankind. The English rallied and fought with their beloved leader, believing God was with them, knowing they could win. The shield walls



**King Guthrum**

were kept close, they strove long and hard and with God's help, Alfred and the English defeated the pagans. Guthrum and the Danes, badly wounded, retreated to Chippenham where the English laid siege.



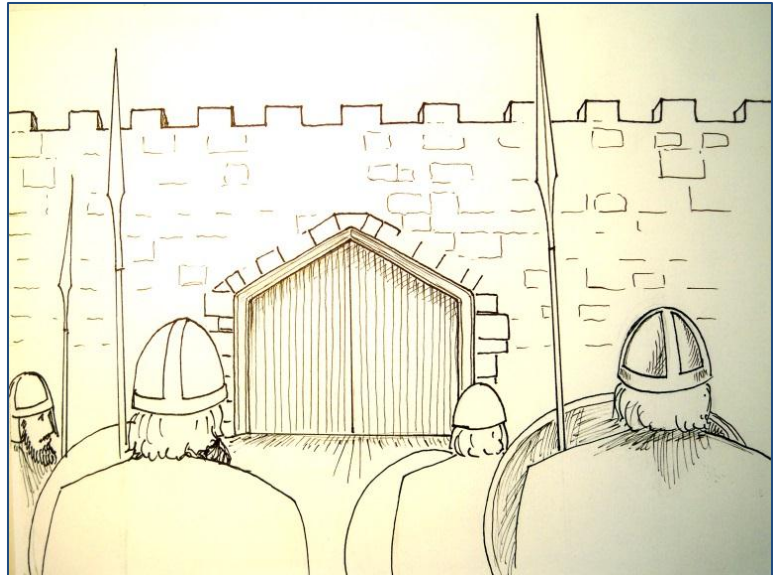


## Chapter 12



### Guthrum's Surrender

Alfred's benevolence is revealed as nowhere else upon Guthrum's defeat. The Vikings were enclosed in the walled city of Chippenham and were in great distress. The English victory was decisive. As Guthrum and the Vikings surrendered to the Christians, they were at the mercy of the English as never before. The Danes were to receive no provisions whatsoever in the final terms, until they forsook their pagan gods and adopted Christianity and were baptized. Upon their becoming Christian, Alfred allowed them to remain in England and gave them the eastern shore, a region known as the Danelaw. The boundary still exists to this day.



**The Siege of Chippenham**

**Guthrum is Defeated**







Guthrum Surrenders



## Chapter 13

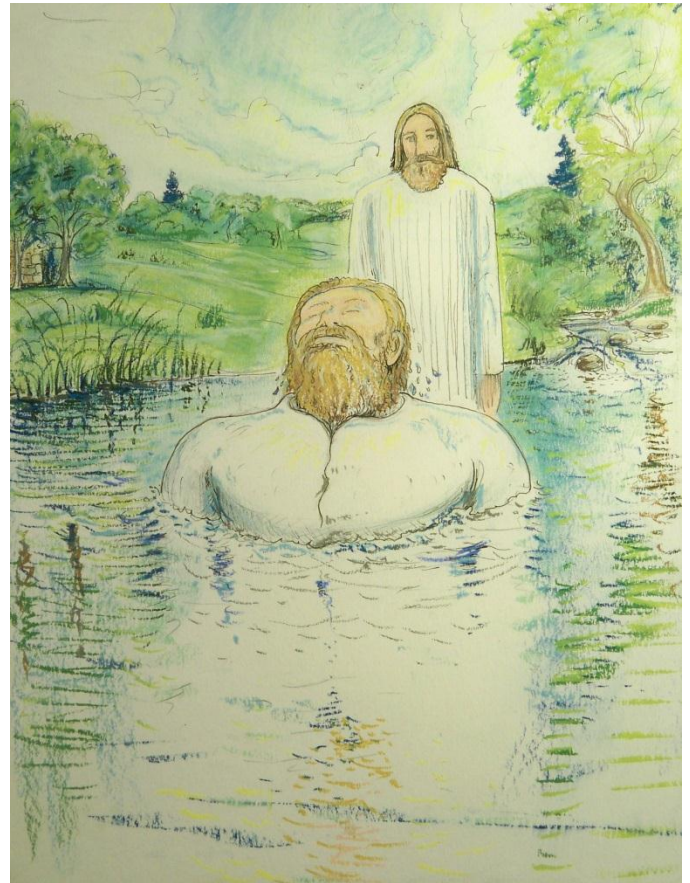


King Guthrum and thirty chosen men came to Alfred at Aller. King Alfred baptized Guthrum and adopted him as his son in the Christian faith. After being baptized they spent twelve nights at Wedmore and Alfred gave the new believers gifts of gold.

In the Old Covenant of the Bible, God's people were given land as an inheritance. They were commanded to conquer the land and, in order to keep their religious community pure, had to kill all the inhabitants. In the New Covenant of the Bible, God commands his people to disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching to do all that Christ commanded. In the Old Covenant, where God's people are commanded to destroy the inhabitants of the promised land as they inherit it, God's need for the cross in order to redeem mankind is clearly demonstrated. In the New Testament we see God's true desire is to redeem the people and not to annihilate them. Alfred understood the power of Christian baptism and, instead of killing the defeated Vikings, offered them forgiveness. Christian baptism is an act of obedience whereby the believer testifies that they have died with Christ and are now risen to new life. We all have sinned and, like Guthrum, are worthy of death. God offers us eternal life and a blessed life on earth if we accept his forgiveness and his love. God adopts us as his children. Baptism is a demonstration that we have accepted God's offer of eternal life. Alfred's sponsorship of Guthrum reveals that Alfred considered Guthrum had indeed accepted God's forgiveness. The message of baptism requires the sinner to repent, or to turn to God, and acknowledge that he has died with Christ on the cross. This is represented by the new believer submerging under water. As Christ rose from the dead and came out of the tomb, the new believer comes up out of the water and begins life anew, living for the glory of God. Alfred granted the Vikings a place to live in

England along the eastern shore known as the Danelaw. The peaceful cohabitation of the English and the Vikings eventually led to dramatic changes in the English language. Through the interaction of the two peoples, English has dropped the many conjugations which other languages of Europe use.

Scandinavian people today are the kindest and most soft spoken people I have ever met. How is it that these people used to be the fiercest, most dreaded of all peoples? This is a result of the power of the gospel. These people converted to Christianity and became peace loving. King Alfred the Great played a key role in this transformation.



**Guthrum Is Baptized by Alfred**

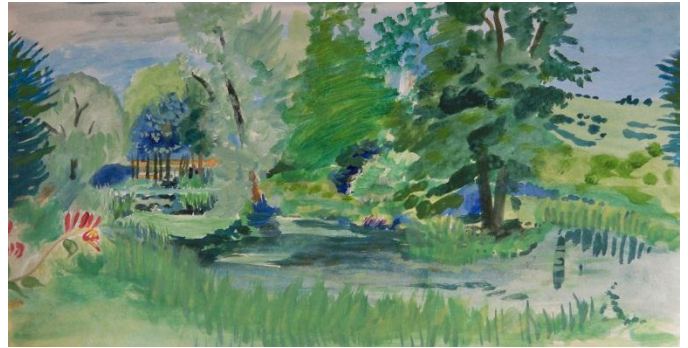


## Chapter 14

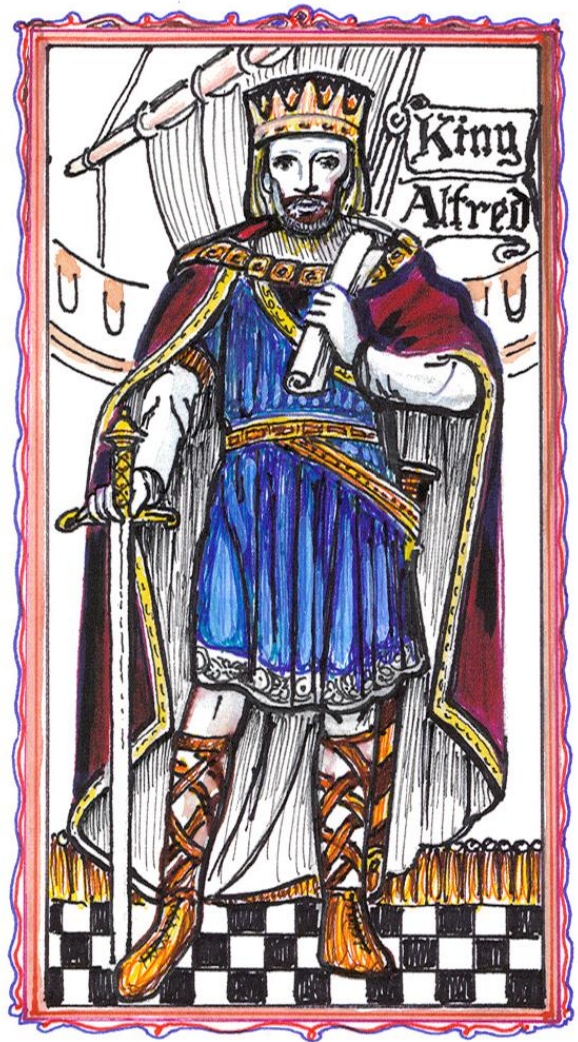


# The Treaty of Wedmore

Alfred and Guthrum spent twelve nights at Wedmore where they began their peaceful coexistence as believers in Christ. Guthrum the Viking king was now Athelstan, Alfred's adopted son. Alfred disciplined the king of the Viking nation in obedience to Christ's great commission. At Wedmore Alfred demonstrated his faith as never before. For a conquering king to slaughter the enemy that plagued them for decades is allowed in history. In the Bible this is part of the Old Covenant. Alfred had won a decisive victory. The enemy was utterly defeated. To offer the Viking army pardon upon the forsaking of their pagan gods and receiving Christ and Christian baptism truly reveals Alfred's heart. Alfred was a peace loving king who accepted the challenge of leading his countrymen to defend their land against invaders. Alfred believed he ruled under the authority of Almighty God and in this authority offered God's forgiveness. The power and influence of this act of forgiveness cannot be fully comprehended. The invading Viking menace, the worst terror the world has ever known, became peace loving Christians upon Alfred's royal pardon. All the Viking armies did not immediately convert to Christ. Alfred's act of mercy played a key part in a process that eventually would change the invaders dramatically. England went on to become one of the greatest influences in all of history. The pardon's impact reverberates to our world today, sending a clear message to all mankind of the benefit of the covenant relationship God desires with all of us. To redeem is better than to annihilate. Alfred's action demonstrates God's desire as revealed in the New Testament. The gospel message has a very real and important influence in our civilization and there are few greater examples than the Treaty of Wedmore.



Near Wedmore





# Part III

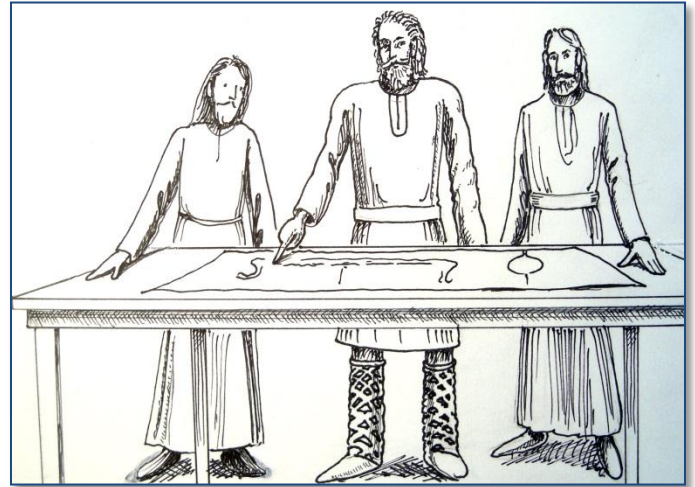
## Chapter 15



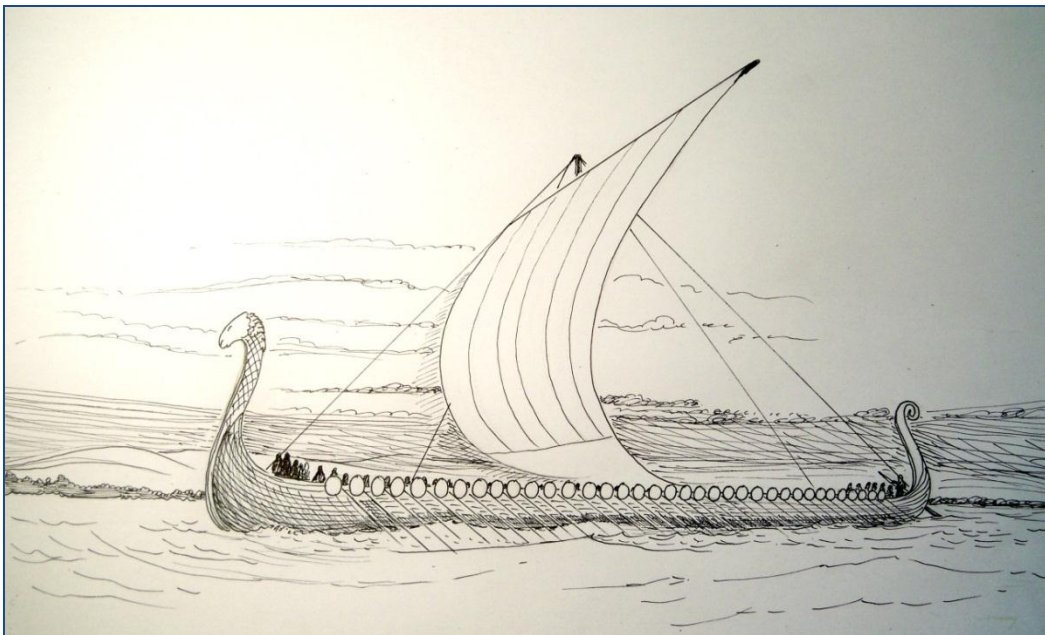
### Naval and Military Design

#### Alfred's Longships

The English nation was particularly vulnerable from the sea. The Viking armadas entered the rivers and sailed far inland with their destructive forces. Alfred countered the Viking armadas by building ships that were taller, longer and faster than the Viking long boats. Alfred personally was involved in the design of his long boats which were sixty oars long and sometimes longer. Where England was most vulnerable, through perseverance and determination, strategy and invention, they were able to overcome this vulnerability. The Royal Navy became key in England's future role.



#### Alfred Designs the Longships

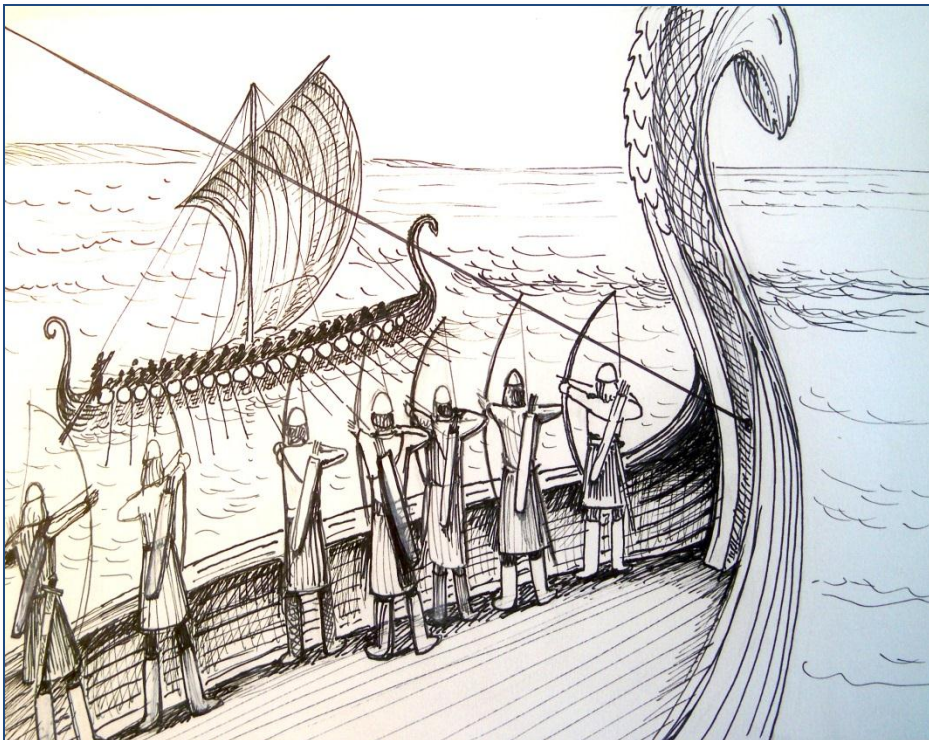




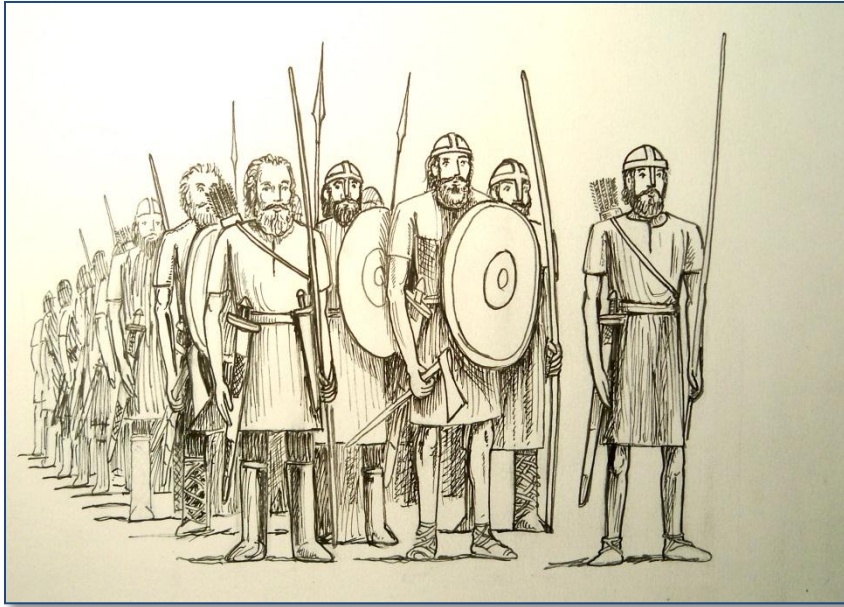


### Alfred's Superior Defenses

The English often defeated the invaders, successfully protecting England from attack.







**Alfred's Mighty Men**

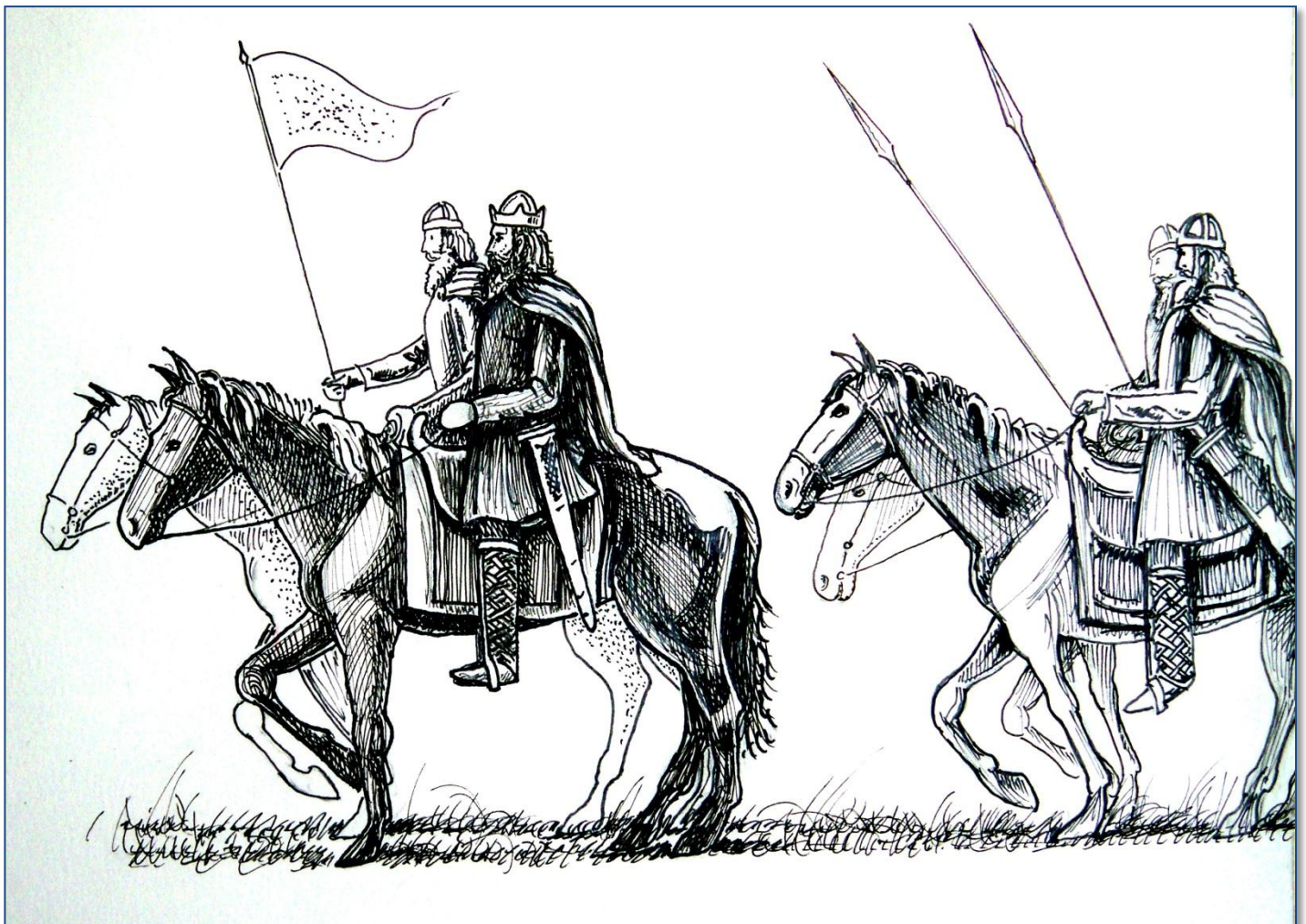
## The Burghs

Alfred designed a system of fortified towns called burghs. These were strategically located so that every English family was within one day's walk or twenty miles. The burghs were fortified with tall earthen walls which were constantly manned to defend against attack. They provided a safe haven for the English people. There was also an improved communication system to give adequate warning of an enemy attack. There were also defenses constructed over rivers to prevent the enemy from sailing upstream without being stopped.

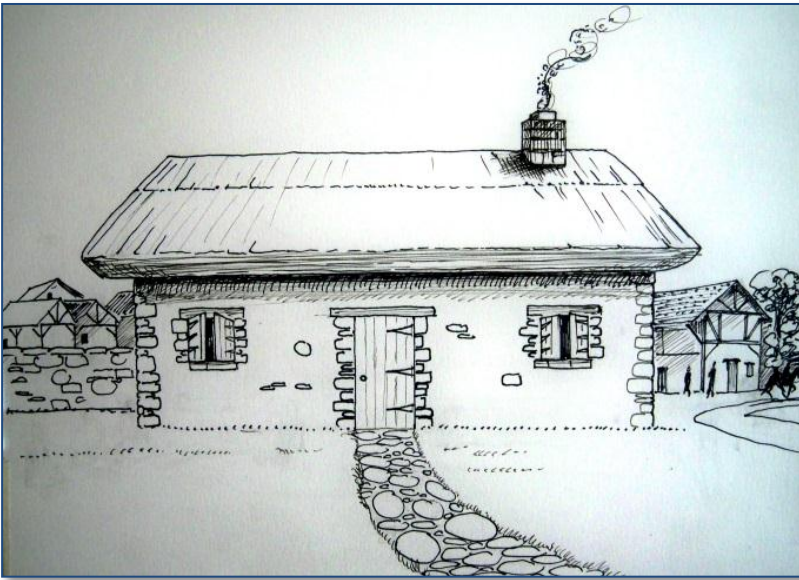
## The Military

Alfred designed a military with three rotating forces so that England could always be ready to thwart an invasion. One unit was on duty while two were off duty. There were also special forces which traveled with the king.

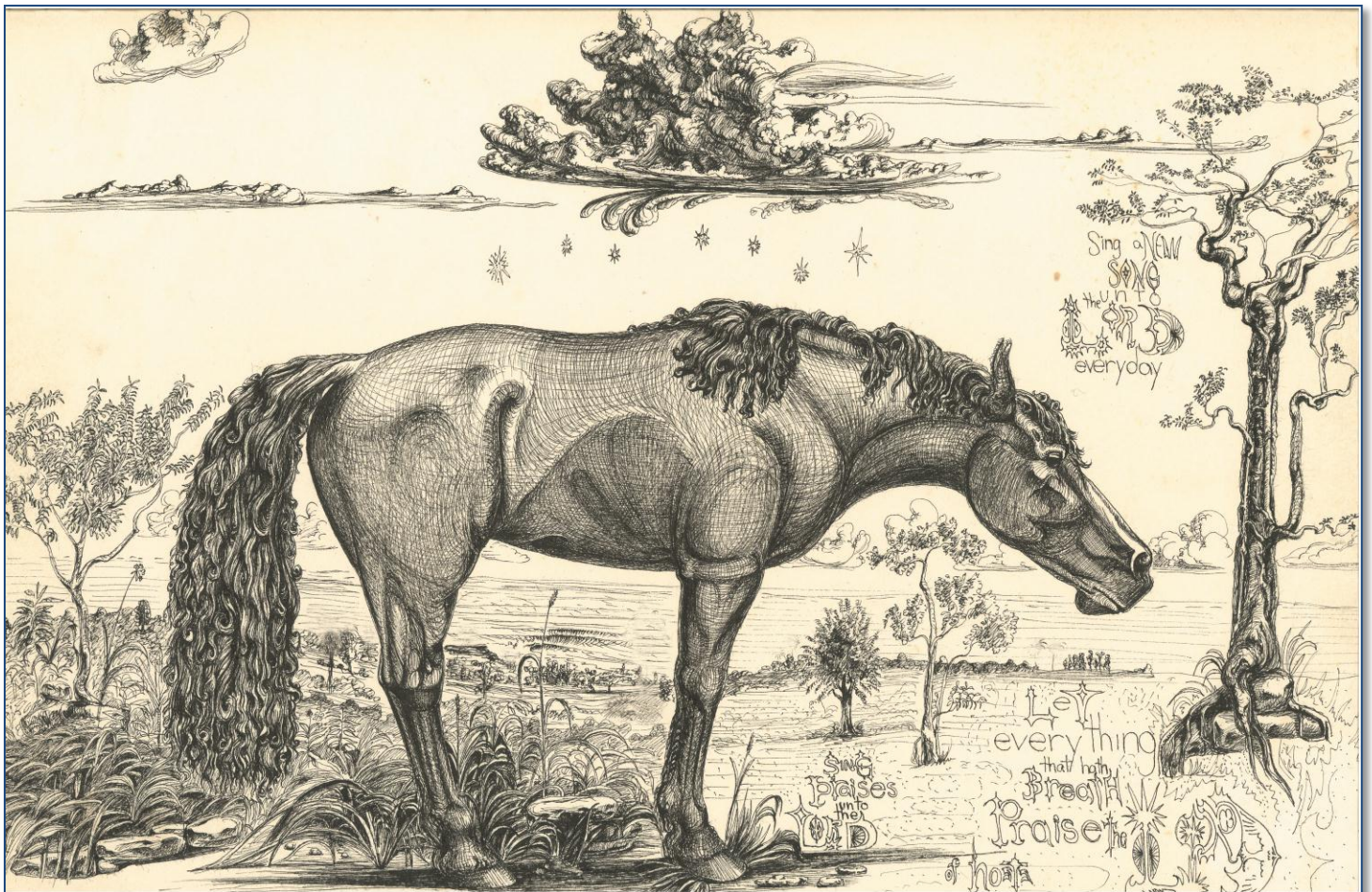
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886 Alfred Restores London



Domesticated horses have been present in Britain since 2000 BC and have played a key role in British culture and in warfare since very early times.



## Chapter 16



Asser was Bishop of Sherborn and came to Alfred upon his request to aid him in his pursuit of understanding. Asser represented the best the Church could offer. He came to Alfred to help quench his lifelong thirst for knowledge. He brought a wealth of learning, but he also brought the light of Christ.

### Alfred's Faith in Christ

Most English historians write about Alfred in terms of his military and political accomplishments. While every historian mentions that Alfred was a devout Christian king, this aspect of his life is often relegated to a mere mention. I believe that Alfred's personal faith in Christ influenced everything he did and deserves significantly more attention in a study of the king. Here I would like to focus on Alfred's faith and the evidence of its vital nature in his life, beginning with a look at Christianity during this period of history.

The church in England at the time of King Alfred was a merging of several streams of Christianity. The gospel came to England during the first century via Roman soldiers who brought with them scriptures. This is considered historical fact. There is also the legend of the church being begun in England by Joseph of Aramathea. This early church was begun among the Celtic people who inhabited Britain during this time. This first century church was surely very much like the church we read about in the Bible. The apostle Paul preached to Roman soldiers as we read in the book of Acts. The Roman army was in London since 70 BC. The church of this day was a rapidly spreading faith accompanied by miraculous signs and wonders. Later, the Anglo-Saxon tribes invaded England and pushed the Celtic people west and north. Later, during the fifth century, the Church of Ireland became established through the

work of Patrick and others. The Church of Ireland became a very significant influence for Christianity in the world, sending missionaries to England and throughout Europe. They produced some of the most beautiful manuscripts ever created. The Celtic Christian faith was characterized by it being begun in the first century, religious life revolved around making Bibles, and sending missionaries was of paramount importance.

In 597 AD, a group of 70 missionaries came to London from Rome led by a missionary named Augustine. The Saxon king gave his permission to Augustine and the team of 70 to convert the English people to Christianity. These missionaries gave English its alphabet when they wrote a translation of the Bible between the lines of Latin. In Alfred's time these two sources of Christianity had merged into one church. The Christian faith of England was firmly based upon the Bible. King Alfred had numerous scholars from the Celtic church assisting him with his studies as well as helping him design his bilingual revival of learning. In Asser's *Life of Alfred*, Asser expresses his joy when Alfred reveals his personal collection of favorite scriptures he carried with him his entire life. Asser's delight in the king's revealing his handbook shows the importance of scripture and personal faith in the church at this time as well as Alfred's delight in reading the Bible. While this occurrence receives little attention by historians, it is certainly significant that one of the greatest leaders in all of history personally communed daily with the God of the Bible. There are very few leaders in the history of the world who have had the impact upon civilization that Alfred has had. To have recorded this moment describing him revealing his personal collection of scripture is unquestionably a momentous occasion. One of the truly greatest people of all time found his strength and wisdom from the God of the Bible. As an evangelical Christian I find this truly inspiring as few other historical events.





## Chapter 17



### The True Believer

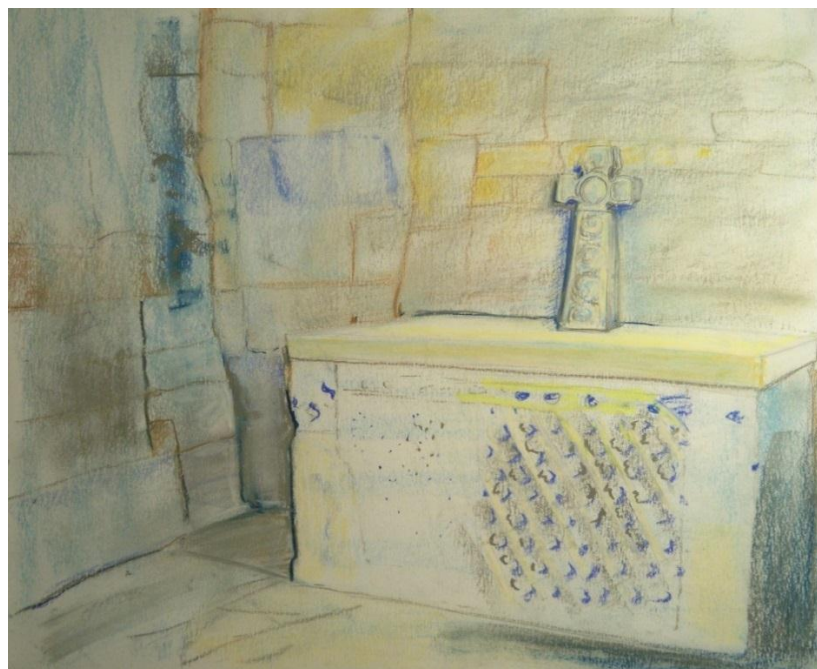
King Alfred's love for scripture and devotion to God, his work to translate the Bible into English and his many benevolent acts as king are demonstrations of his genuine faith. Alfred was responsible for the Church in England which was a merging of the Celtic Church begun in the first century and the Latin Church begun in England in the 600's. Alfred had Celtic advisors and was clearly influenced by this stream of Christianity. Alfred was also connected to the Church in Rome. One of the most beautiful churches ever built, Hyde Abbey, was constructed to house the remains of Alfred and his family.

As an Evangelical Bible believing Christian myself, it is important for me to point out that Alfred's personal faith in Christ, his daily reading of scripture and personal pursuit of its truth, his program of Bible translation and mother tongue Bible based education, is identical with the emphasis of the Protestant Reformation. He was not only connected to the original Church founded by Jesus Christ, but also a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation.

Alfred was a true believer beholden only to scripture and his Savior's love. Alfred was, first of all, part of the Church Universal, the Bride of Christ. His faith was bigger than any one form of Christianity. He communed with God Almighty. Alfred's genuine faith and Christian character expressed itself in a very broad scope of abilities: the first king of all of England, naval and military designer, translator of the Bible, lawgiver, judicial advocate for the rights of the poor, promoter of foreign diplomacy as well as foreign missions, educator, Father of English Prose, humanitarian. Without any question, Alfred is one of the greatest individuals in all of history.



**Alfred in Prayer**



**Alfred and His Handbook**

"As the busy bee travels far and wide, searching through the marshes, so without pause and unceasingly did he gather many little flowers of Holy Scripture of divers kinds, wherewith he filled full the cells of his mind." Asser's Life of Alfred, page 71.







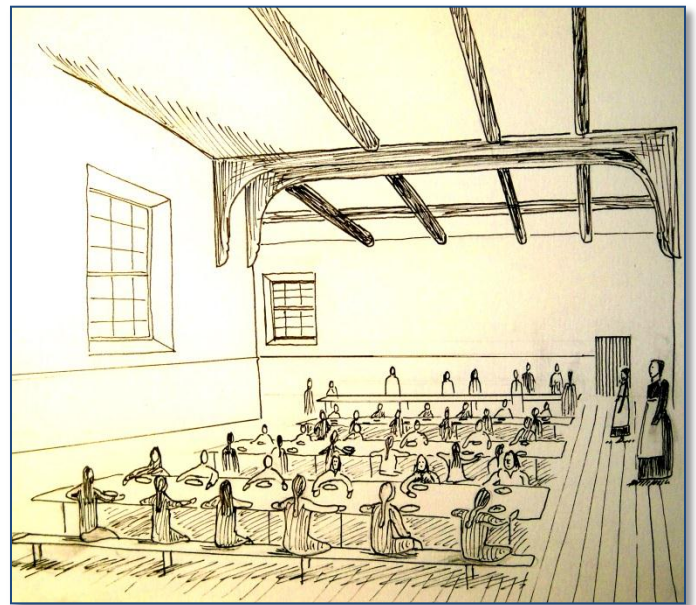
## Chapter 18



Alfred's

### Support of Monasteries

There are few joys in life, if any, greater than the joy of helping others. This was the work of women in monasteries and among them was Alfred's sister. With the king's commitment to giving half his time and resources to the work of God, Alfred's sister had his full support. God's concern for the poor and needy fills the pages of scripture and filled the hearts of this royal family. Prior to the discovery of modern medicines, the crippled and handicapped were more numerous and the needs were ever present. If love is mankind's greatest need and the role of the needy, poor and handicapped is to teach us to love, then these have the greatest purpose of anyone. Their influence is to produce in us what the world is in most need of. Those working in the monasteries, with the support of the king, were very busy in the joyful work of love. To lift a nation is not an easy task. When lifting a heavy object one lifts from the bottom. As Alfred's sister lifted the poor and the handicapped, she lifted all the nation of England. She was placing England on a path to becoming one of the greatest nations in the history of mankind.



**Orphanage in Bristol, England, 1850**

King Alfred's Bible-based educational program continues to influence the world. One thousand years after King Alfred, George Müller helped raise over 10,000 orphans in his Christian orphanage in Bristol, England. He helped provide a Christian education for over 120,000 children.





## Chapter 19



### Alfred's Clock



“The prayers of a righteous man avail much.”

A righteous man accomplishes a great deal through

prayer. Alfred devoted a great deal of time to the work of God and prayer. We know this because he invented a clock in order to devote half his day to the work of God and prayer. Alfred understood that the Bible taught that ten percent of our resources were to be given to God and in this way we would receive his blessing. Alfred reasoned that if he gave fifty percent of everything to God, then he would be more blessed. He reasoned that his vow would only be possible if he were to have an accurate way to tell time. He had his craftsmen produce candles which burned evenly, dividing the day into six candles which took four hours to burn. Wind caused the candles to burn faster so he had crafted a box to put the candles in made of wood and clear horn of oxen. This as much as anything reveals to us what a godly man Alfred truly was. Every historian makes a note that King Alfred was a devout Christian. What historians fails to note is that he is one of the greatest leaders in all the history of mankind and his greatness is inseparable from his love for Jesus Christ and the Bible. His faith and knowledge of scripture literally affected everything he did. In Alfred's beloved Psalms we read, “Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance.” Alfred not only worked and fought for the peace and blessing he desired for the English people, he prayed.





## Chapter 20



### Alfred's Bilingual

## Revival of Learning

**“My will was to live worthily as long as I lived, and after my life to leave to them that should come after, my memory in good works.” Alfred the Great**

**“Therefore he seems to me a very foolish man, and truly wretched, who will not increase his understanding while he is in the world, and ever wish and long to reach that endless life where all shall be made clear.” Alfred the Great**

All the Old English language in existence today is from King Alfred's revival of learning. He placed centers for learning throughout England. Prior to modern methods of producing literature, books were extremely valuable and for the most part remained in the libraries of monasteries and royalty. Alfred's centers for learning devoted libraries specifically for the education of the people. The first reason Alfred gave for his educational program was “the happiness of the English people.” Being discouraged by the lack of justice in the courts and the lack of education among workers in his realm, Alfred mandated all government workers to be literate. He also decreed that all children be taught to read. His command for all male freeborn children displays the king's understanding of the limit of his authority and does not, I believe, reflect his not wanting to provide education for all children. Alfred labored greatly to personally ensure the success of his literacy program through the making of translations, writing letters and the sending of gifts. Alfred wanted the English people to have the joy of learning which he had

experienced. He made his beloved Psalms available by personally translating them into English. This benevolent act is surely among the most significant of all of history. “Righteousness exalts a nation.”

Alfred's educational program eventually led to the flourishing of English literature. In a sense, all the English literature in our world today is a part of Alfred's ongoing literacy program. The fiat of a king to educate the people has very long reaching implications. That founding a literacy program with Bible-based literature is effective has been proven by England's long and influential history.



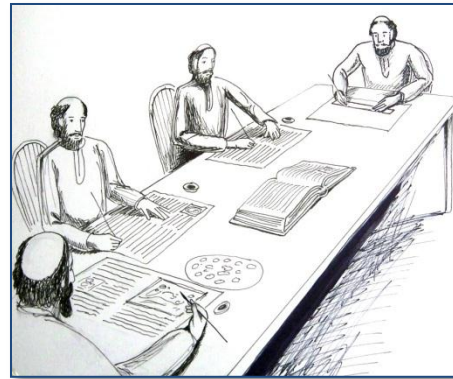
**The Father of English Prose**

Alfred's *Preface* to his translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care* is considered the beginning of English prose. In his *Preface* the king explains his reasoning and design for the educational program.



Bookmaking became a unique Christian art form. People spent entire lives producing beautiful books. Books became a primary vehicle of wealth. When the island of Lindesfarne was invaded by Vikings, they “swarmed like hornets” upon the hapless monastery. The most valuable material object to be rescued was the *Gospel*. It is considered one of the most beautiful books ever created and is beyond price. Four to five monks would work on each page of a book. One would draw the lines, another the text, another the intricate first letters, another the illustrations, etc. They used vellum or calves skin. King Alfred saw the production of libraries throughout England as paramount in his plan for the happiness of the English people. It is interesting that Asser’s biography of King Alfred ends abruptly about ten years prior to his death with no apparent explanation. There is very little in the biography

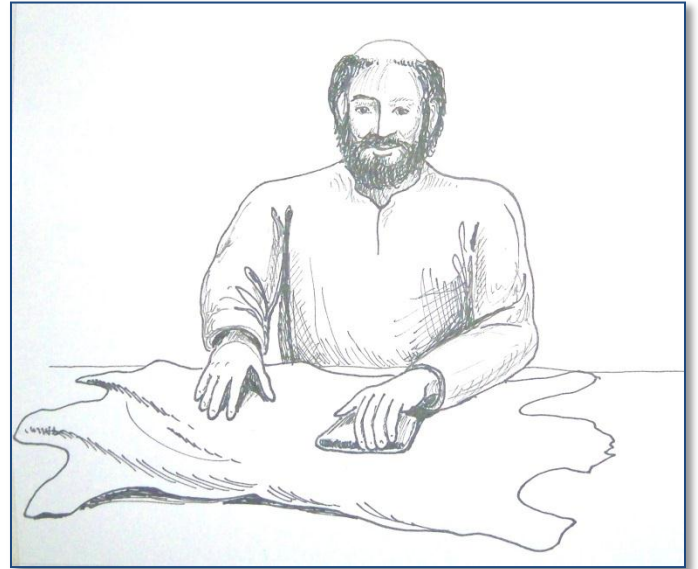
concerning the literacy program. The biography ends with Alfred’s realization of the need for education. My personal theory is that King Alfred saw his plan to educate England as being so important, he instructed Asser to stop working on the biography and they busied themselves with the task of producing an educational program. This was Alfred’s focus the last ten years of his life and is possibly his greatest contribution of all.



**Making  
Books**



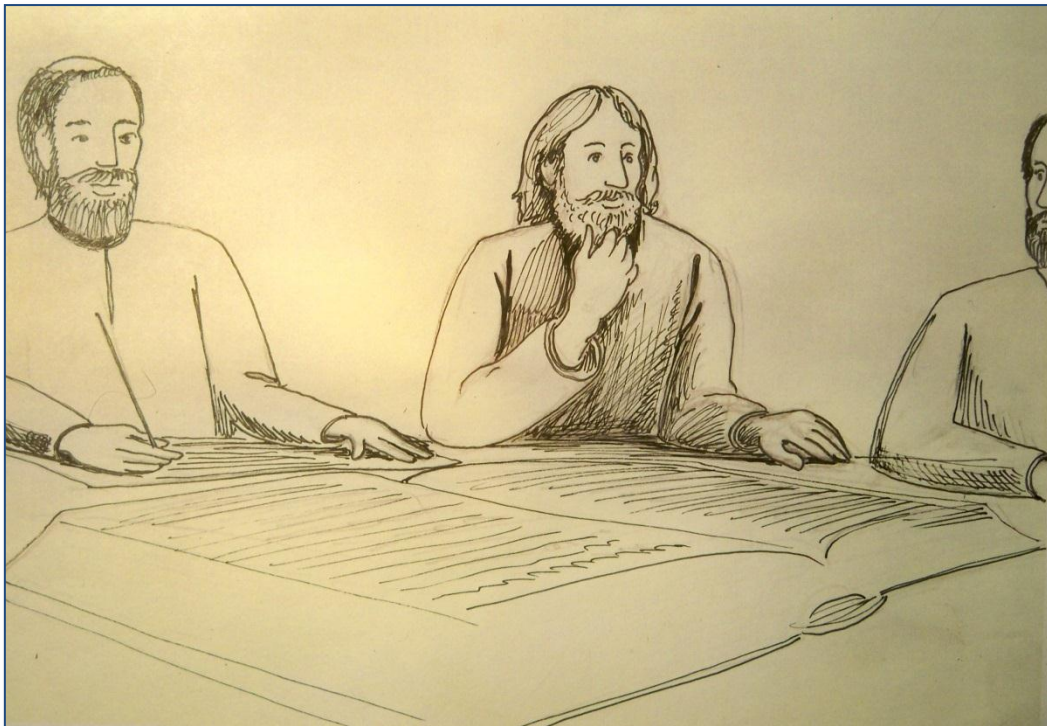




Preparing Leather

*“Thou O Lord, art a shield for me, my glory,  
and the lifter of my head.” Psalm 3:3*

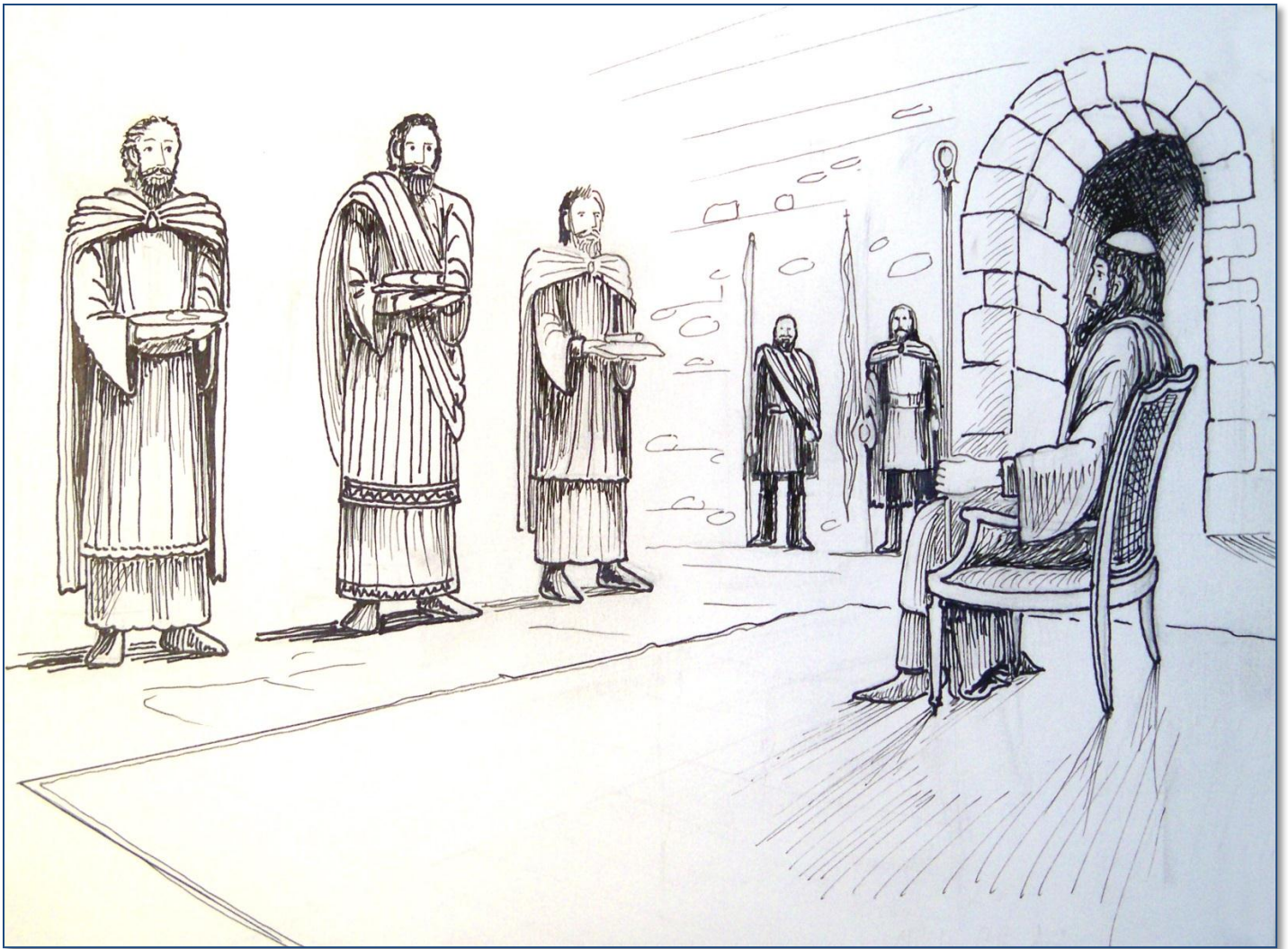
Translation Team Translating Literature from  
Latin to English











### Alfred's Gifts Arrive

To inspire a nation to read, Alfred gave gifts. He translated books. He wrote letters. He produced jeweled pointers to follow the line of text. He had these gifts brought to his bishops who were responsible for the learning centers. Alfred was not at all content with merely giving an order that the English people become literate. He inspired them to literacy by himself translating important literature into the spoken language. He wrote encouraging letters and gave valuable gifts made of gold to demonstrate how vital the vision of an educated population was to him. He considered it paramount. To this day England is very possibly the most literate society on earth. How powerful is a letter from the king and gifts of gold, a book translated by the king himself? These gifts have affected England to this very day and have influenced the entire world.

**These gifts have affected  
England to this very day  
and have influenced  
the entire world.**



## Chapter 21



# The Alfred

## Moment

The government of Alfred the Great was a moment in history when a good, wise, just, capable king ruled. King Alfred was the monarch over both secular areas of government and those of the church. Without any doubt, he was a just and caring ruler who labored tirelessly for the betterment of the realm. Alfred's expenditures of the kingdom's money was approximately as follows: 17% for military and government workers, 17% for civil engineering, research and development, 17% foreign aid, 12% for

the poor, 12% for monasteries (scholarly pursuit, bookmaking, aid to the poor) 12% church schools, 12% foreign missions. Alfred divided all the kingdom's income into two halves, one for secular needs and one for church needs. To have such a godly, benevolent, just, wise, capable, courageous king carefully administering the resources available for both the secular and religious needs of the nation provided a moment in history whereby a great nation was born and catapulted into expansive influence in the world. Alfred's descendants continued this careful benevolence. Such good leadership is not always in position. The Saxon line of kings was removed from power when the French speaking Normans conquered England in 1066. They also removed the leadership of the church, killing all but one of the bishops and placing their people in positions of authority.

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# Chapter 22



Alfred's

## Principles

### Alfred's Benevolence

Alfred's comprehensive planning for the wellbeing of the English people places him in history as one of the most benevolent rulers of all time. Examples of his benevolent reign are quite numerous. He designed a fair legal system requiring all those with responsibility to be educated. He supported monasteries which helped the neediest among the population including the poor and the handicapped. He designed a system of towns which were defended against Viking attack. These towns were strategically located so that every family was within one days walking distance, 20 miles, of safety. These were combined with a communications system and a rotating military. He desired for the English people to have Christian education and by so doing bring the blessing of God upon the nation.

King Alfred would review the legal proceedings of the courts and sometimes would even sit in on proceedings. He was at times discouraged by unfairness and the lack of education among those responsible. It was his desire for justice among the poor which led him to begin the educational program which eventually led to the flourishing of the English language. The educational program was Bible based. Alfred considered one of his most important responsibilities to be the writing of a legal code. His code was based upon Mosaic law and other laws of the Bible. He is attributed with beginning the trial by jury system. Moses, David and Solomon of the Bible are known for their concern for justice among the poor. The Law of Moses had many provisions for the poor. Among the more well-known was the provision for the poor to offer doves as sacrifices. The Law required the offering of lambs, bullocks and various animals for the sins of the people. Those who could not afford the giving of these animals were able to offer doves instead. God chose a dove as a symbol of his presence, showing

his special identity with the needy. The poor, the fatherless, the foreigner and the widow were people especially cared for in the providence of God as described in the Bible.

Alfred longed for education as a child and sought learning whenever possible. When his position enabled him, he gathered around him scholars. Alfred saw education as key for justice, happiness and also for God's protection. He commanded for all children to be literate, beginning with education in the mother tongue. Alfred's Bible based educational program was intended to help the people live better Christian lives and in so doing obtain God's favor upon the nation. Alfred's benevolence is probably most clearly seen in his response to the decisive victory over Guthrum at Chippenham. Adopting Guthrum as his son is an extraordinary demonstration of forgiveness and love.

Other important principles we see in the life of Alfred the Great which enabled him to ascend to the pinnacle of human greatness are:

- Respect for authority
- Alfred was mentored by his father and brothers.
- Unceasing hunger for learning. He understood education was key for the future of the nation
- Love for the Bible
- Devotion to Jesus Christ. Faithful in worship and prayer
- Extremely courageous
- Worked with team of advisors
- His greatest accomplishments were for the wellbeing of the English people. (Alfred was a servant/leader.)
- Alfred believed in Christian marriage and family values.
- He saw happiness, safety and blessing coming as a result of Bible based Christian education.
- Did not surrender to defeat in the face of enormous opposition
- Understood the importance of mother tongue education
- Commanded that all children be literate



## Psalm 2

Why do the heathen rage, and the people  
    imagine a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
    and the rulers take counsel together,  
        against the LORD,  
    and against his anointed, saying,  
    Let us break their bands asunder,  
    and cast away their cords from us.  
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:  
    the LORD shall have them in derision.  
Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath,  
    and vex them in his sore displeasure.  
Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.  
I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me,  
    Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.  
    Ask of me, and I shall give thee  
    the heathen for thine inheritance,  
    and the uttermost parts of the earth  
        for thy possession.  
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron;  
thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.  
Be wise now therefore, O ye kings:  
be instructed, ye judges of the earth.  
    Serve the LORD with fear,  
    and rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son, lest he be angry,  
    and ye perish from the way,  
when his wrath is kindled but a little.  
    Blessed are all they  
        that put their trust in him.



## **Alfred the Lawgiver**

Foundations are essential. The foundation of a building determines how high the building can be and how long the building will last. Once I was working on a crew pouring the foundation of a large building. The building was to have three floors of poured concrete. While we were pouring the large footings of the foundation the boss explained that this building required twice the normal size footings of a building this size. The reason was because a train ran immediately next to the building. The vibrations caused the building to require the extra foundation. Foundations are essential for something to continue. Without a foundation a building is vulnerable from destruction from every side. We live in a civilized world with foundations. The world we live in would not exist as we know it were it not for the foundations which have been laid. To remove a foundation is to destroy what exists. Alfred The Great understood that God gave to Moses the laws which governed mankind. He understood that the New Testament of the Bible gave us further instruction in how government was to serve. He saw himself as being appointed by Almighty God to lead a Christian nation and to bestow laws which were just and divinely ordained. Alfred The Great's foundation which he placed was grounded on the Bible. That Alfred's foundation was sound has been born out through time. England became not only a great nation, but an empire. Today there is nothing desired more throughout the world than to learn the English language, even in the remotest parts. This is a testimony to the strength of Alfred's foundation. Alfred saw the need for mother tongue, Bible based education. Alfred's writings were in the spoken language and the focus of his writings was Christ the Savior.



# Alfred in History









## King Alfred the Great's Educational Program and Its Influence upon the English Language

Alfred the Great, King of All the Anglo-Saxons (849-899) has unquestionably had a significant influence upon the English people and their language. King Alfred is rightfully known as the father of English prose (Greenfield & Calder, 1986, pg. 39) and as a great educator he used his abilities to give wisdom to the English people. The effectiveness of his educational program was tied to his success in other realms. He was a successful military leader, defeating the Vikings on land and on sea. This deserves mentioning prior to looking exclusively at his bilingual English/Latin revival of learning.

In King Alfred we find a unique combination of character qualities and abilities which contributed to the success of his educational program. He was a man who cared about the poor. He had a lifelong love and yearning for wisdom and learning. He pursued education to the point where he could translate from Latin into English and make his own contributions to English literature (Asser, 893, pp. 76,99). His ability to rule his kingdom caused the other rulers among the Anglo-Saxons to willingly submit to his authority (Asser, 893, p. 96). He worked closely with the Church in England to the point where he placed the responsibility for his educational program into the hands of the bishops. He held the need for wisdom and learning among the people a priority to the point he funded the program and demonstrated utmost commitment to its success.

His concern for the poor was tied to his love for God and the Bible which he had all his life (Asser, 893, p. 89). Asser tells us that after he learned to read he carried with him at all

times a collection of psalms and prayers and favorite quotations "for the sake of prayer" (Asser, 893, p. 99). This was his custom his entire life. Having learned the art of translation, he translated the *Psalms 1-50*, one of the greatest accomplishments of his life. A theme throughout Asser's *Life of King Alfred* is his love and yearning for education. He won a prize book from his mother for learning to recite poems. When in the position to acquire learning by his own means he gathers around him accomplished "luminaries", scholars of his day, to read to him and instruct him as often as possible (Asser, 893, pp. 92,93,96,97).

Alfred became an author of unique ability. His love of certain prose works highly esteemed in his day was surpassed by his ability to add to these works his own prose of high quality. Consider the greatness of Augustine of Hippo, one of the greatest Christian authors of all time. Alfred valued highly Augustine's work on the salvation of the human soul, the *Soliloquies*, and included it in his translation and education program. He also added his own work to this book.

He brought all of these qualities with him when he became king in 871. As a result of his love of fairness and the respect he gained as a victorious military leader, rulers of the Anglo-Saxons willingly submitted to his sovereignty (Asser, 893, p. 96). All of these unique aspects find their culmination in his translation and educational program. Asser concludes his biography of King Alfred when he had completed 40 of his 50 years, describing Alfred's dedication to bring learning to the people of England, noting that his commitment to educating the people revealed the king's true character (Asser, 893, p.110). The biography ends there, describing very little of the program itself. It is as though this great man came upon the greatest challenge of his life and they put down the biography and began the translations and the education of the English people.

King Alfred prioritized educating his own children and the children of his ealdormen and nobles to the point where he personally helped instruct them how to read (Asser, 893, pp. 90, 91). According to Asser, the king regularly judged matters concerning the rights of the poor, observed judicial hearings where others judged and looked into judicial matters throughout his kingdom which were passed in his absence. Through this he noted a lack of wisdom among those



responsible which lead him to the translation and educational program (Asser, 893, pp. 109, 110). The final chapters to Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and Alfred's *Preface* to St. Gregory's *Pastoral Care* describe the program.

Looking more closely at the program itself we note its inspiration and goals, the recipients, the content, and the king's commitment to its success. Firstly, its inspiration and goals. We already noted how Asser records the king's concern for justice and the rights of the poor. In Alfred's *Preface* he writes to the bishops describing his plan. It is remarkable how personable the king is in very clearly sharing the process of discovery he went through to begin the program. It was not merely a royal decree. The first goal he mentions in his *Preface* is "the happiness of the English people". He then reasons that the rulers must live in obedience to God, peace, morality, have authority in England, being prosperous in wisdom and in warfare. He is inspired by this having been the situation in England years before. He also states how the sacred orders were zealous about teaching, learning and all their services to God. Previously people had come to England in search of knowledge and instruction. He then refers to "punishments" which came upon the English people because "we loved only to be called Christians, and very few loved the virtues". Evidently he was referring to the Viking invasions. He not only is inspired by the learning which England possessed in the past, but he is inspired by how the scriptures had previously been translated into the languages of the people, from Hebrew into Greek and Latin.

Then I remembered how the law was first found in the Hebrew language, and afterwards, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it all into their own language, and all the other books as well. And afterwards in the same way the Romans, when they had learned them, they translated them all into their own language through learned interpreters. And all other Christian nations also translated some part of them into their own language. Therefore it seems better to me, if it seems so to you, that we also should translate certain books which are most necessary for all men to know, into the language that we can all understand, and also arrange it, as with God's help we very easily can if we have peace, so that all the youth of free men now among the English people, who have the means to be able to devote themselves to it

may be set to study for as long as they are of no other use, until the time they are able to read English writing well; afterwards one may teach further in the Latin language those whom one wishes to teach further and wishes to promote to holy orders (Alfred's *Preface* to St. Gregory's *Pastoral Care*).

Alfred realized the potential of youth, making them the recipients of his program. He longed for education as a child and wanted to grant his wish to the youth of England. He was consecrated when a young child by the Pope in Rome. His plan for wise rulers to bring happiness to the English people included educating the youth.

Asser records how the king required it of judges, ealdormen and reeves, all people holding office to be educated or lose their position (Asser, 893, pp. 109, 110). Since Asser mentions the education of office holders at the end of his biography and does not mention the requirement of all freeborn male children, it seems the program began with those holding office and progressed to include freeborn male children.

Alfred's reasoning for his translation and educational program is also found in his *Code of Law*. He began by translating the law of Moses from the *Old Testament*. "These are the laws that the Almighty God himself was declaring to Moses and commanded him to keep; and after the only begotten Son of the Lord our God, that is the Savior Christ, came to earth, he said that he did not come to break nor to forbid the law, but to increase it with all good things; and he taught mercy and humility" (Davis, 2000, p. 155). Alfred then goes on to translate the letter of the apostles to the church in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, which conveys their decision concerning the *Old Testament* law with regards the churches. From there he mentions the gatherings of many church leaders to formulate laws for Christian people in Europe and England, concluding with "Then I, King Alfred, gathered them together and ordered to be written many of those [laws] that our forefathers held, those that pleased me; and many of the ones that did not please me I rejected with the advice of my counselors, and commanded them held in a different way" (Davis, 2000, p. 156). Alfred thus places himself in a direct line between God and the English people as a "valid mediator" of the law (Davis, 2000, p. 156).

The following books are associated with Alfred and his educational program: Gregory's



*Pastoral Care*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Gregory's *Dialogues*, *Psalms 1-50*, Orosius's *History of the Pre-Christian World*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England* and the *Laws of King Alfred* (Booth, 1997, p. 50; Discenza, 2001, p. 434). Of these, five are to be considered authored or translated by Alfred himself: *The Laws of King Alfred*, *the Prose Psalms*, *Pastoral Care*, *Soliloquies*, and the *Consolation of Philosophy* (Booth, pg. 50). The *Psalms*, *Soliloquies* and the *Consolation of Philosophy* offer spiritual wisdom, the *Soliloquies* being concerned with the soul of man. The *Pastoral Care*, *Dialogues* and the *Laws* offer training for those in leadership.

Alfred made additions to the works in order for them to be better understood by the English people and to make them more overtly Christian. Probably the best known alteration made by Alfred was his changing Boethius's Lady Philosophy to Wisdom and the character of Boethius to Mind. Wisdom is a type of Christ in both the *Old* and the *New Testaments* of the *Bible*. "In Whom (Christ) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (*Collosians* 2:3) In the *Proverbs* of Solomon, Wisdom is described similarly to the Word, Christ, in the Gospel of John. *Proverbs* is one of the more Christo-centric references in the *Old Testament* and from very early in the history of the Church, Wisdom is considered a type of Christ. Abbot Aelfric, who lived the last half of the tenth century, considered "the greatest prose writer of the Anglo-Saxon period (Greenfield & Calder, 1986, p. 75), writes, "His (God's) Wisdom, with which He wrought all creatures, is His Son, who is ever of the Father and with the Father, God of God, as mighty as the Father" (Greenfield & Calder, 1986, p. 80). This exemplifies the strong Christian characteristics of the educational program and Alfred's source of happiness for the English people.

In 890 the Anglo-Saxon people were only a few hundred years beyond the very infancy of the Christian Church among them. The Anglo-Saxons were converted primarily by two streams of Christianity, one coming from Ireland and one coming from Rome. They were converted during the hundred years following the mission of Augustine in 597 (Latourette, 1938, Vol. II, p. 71). Prior to that the Anglo-Saxons were an invading people, plundering for wealth and reaping much sorrow and despair. Their pre-Christian poetry reveals a very deep need for true happiness. They were now being invaded by another pre-Christian illiterate people who were threatening their very

existence. Alfred's desire to bring the wealth of true wisdom to his people and to bring them the Christian law and happiness, it seems, was a very dramatic improvement for the people and an improvement which required the utmost urgency. From our perspective as English speaking people much further removed from our pre-Christian past, having had the benefits of Christian knowledge and law now for nearly 2000 years, we may not see as clearly the dramatic improvement that Alfred was endeavoring to make. His plan was of monumental scope. While implementing his plan he was also busy defending and building defenses against the Vikings. It is only natural that a program of such vision would not have been as fully realized in his own lifetime as he would have wished; the education of a nation is something requiring more than one lifetime. His prioritizing the education of his own children helped the plan go beyond the limited time he had.

Alfred concludes his *Preface* with a demonstration to the bishops of his utmost commitment to the success of the educational program. With the book he was including an "aestel", evidently a bookmark, made of gold, worth the equivalent in our day of many thousands of dollars (Discenza, 2001, p. 449).

From here I would like to address the following two questions: 1) To what extent was Alfred's plan realized and what was its effect upon English society? and 2) What was the effect, if any, upon the English language as a whole?

There is evidence of a large royal school in Winchester (Booth, 1997, p. 48) and of a literate nobility immediately following Alfred's life (Booth, 1997, pp.49, 50). As successful as Alfred was in his other endeavors and as committed as he was to the success of the program, it would seem that as the king said himself, "with God's help we very easily can (instruct all the male youth of free men now among the English people) if we have peace" (*Preface*). According to Griffiths, there was war with the Vikings from 893-896. If as it seems from Asser the program began in 889 (Meaney, pg.17) then three or four of the last ten years of Alfred's life were occupied by warfare, hindering the program. It would seem that there was opportunity for six to seven years of ideal success for the program. Meaney (1975) states that manuscript evidence shows there were at least five centers for initial distribution and from these more copies would have been made and distributed (p. 19). The number of bishops implementing the program is not for certain. Sisam states that there



would have been “up to ten (copies) for his bishops” (Sisam, 1994, p. 374). In 597, Augustine’s mission was authorized to consecrate twelve bishops under an archbishop in Canterbury. Later there was authorization to consecrate twelve more bishops under the authority of the Church in York. There is mention of bishops during this time in Canterbury, London, Rochester, Oxford and York (Latourette, 1938, pp. 68+). The Latin mission diminished in influence during the hundred years after Augustine arrived. In 667 there were only three bishops, partially a result of deaths from pestilence. Theodore of Tarsus arrived from Rome and consecrated new bishops, started schools and raised the level of education in Latin and Greek (Latourette, 1938, Vol. II, p. 75). Altogether I have found mention of church centers during Alfred’s time in the following locations: Canterbury, Rochester, Oxford, Worcester, Dorchester, Hereford, Winchester, Sherborn and York. There were also the two monasteries founded by Alfred in Athelney and Shaftesbury. This would make eleven possible locations for learning centers (Asser, 893, p. 103; Fuller, 1845, p. 316; Sisam, 1994, pp. 374,375). Of these church centers mentioned, Winchester is considered the likely “literary headquarters” (Sisam, 1994, p. 37). Alfred’s assistants mentioned by name are: Asser, bishop of Sherborn; Plegmund, bishop of Canterbury; Werferthe, bishop of Worcester; Swithulfe, bishop of Rochester; Aethelgifu, Alfred’s sister, abbess of Shaftesbury (Sisam, 1994, p. 374). Alfred also mentions in his *Preface* Grimbold and John. Asser mentions Werful and Aethelstan. Fuller mentions Ealheard, bishop of Dorchester (Fuller, 1845, p. 316). Further supposition as to the success of the program is unnecessary. There is no reason not to believe that a great deal was accomplished during the years dedicated to the program. Just as important is that the “educational revival begun by Alfred continued under his successors, his son Edward the Elder (899-924) and his grandson Aethelstan (924-939) (Greenfield & Calder, 1986, p. 25).

Having worked for the revival of learning and Christian virtue and having founded several monasteries, Alfred is considered the beginner of the Benedictine revival of the second half of the tenth century (Latourette, 1938, Vol.II, p. 125). “The Benedictine reform movement provided the impetus for the great burgeoning of English learning and literature in both Latin and the vernacular during the second half of the tenth century” (Greenfield & Calder, 1986, p. 26). Aelfric, abbot of Eynsham from 995-1012,

considered the greatest prose writer of the Anglo-Saxon period, “clearly followed the Alfredian precedent,” in using the vernacular as a medium for theology and the discussion of doctrine...” (Greenfield & Calder, 1986, p. 76). It is believed by some that Aelfric was inspired by King Alfred in his efforts to further learning. “Bernard Huppe’ has charted some parallels between Alfred’s *Preface to Pastoral Care* and Aelfric’s preface to his translation of Genesis. It is to Alfred’s example that Aelfric and his patron Aethelweard looked a century later. ‘What Alfred created, Aelfric completed’” (Booth, 1997, p. 66).

What was the resulting effect of Alfred’s translation and educational program upon the English language? Booth states, “The unique elements in the Alfredian reform were twofold: a forceful programme for the education of his laymen (the re-education of the aristocracy), and the elevation of vernacular prose from the diplomatic into areas of wisdom, theology and philosophy” (Booth, 1997, p. 41) “We might too in the end propose that King Alfred’s programme had one singularly great achievement. It was that a king of such historical importance dignified his own language with books of such universally high moral and intellectual tone” (Booth, 1997, p. 66). Davis goes a little further in describing the influence of Alfred’s writing and program using English. “Thus the *Preface*, as ‘a specimen of original English composition,’ has ironically overshadowed the translations it introduces, even though Alfred presents translation as fundamental to English Christian identity. *Pastoral Care* itself, Alfred’s translation of Pope Gregory’s powerful *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, is enormously important to English history, since it simultaneously expresses universal Church doctrine and associates the authority of that doctrine with a secular power that claims an identity with the English vernacular” (Davis, 2000, p. 149). “The emphasis of Alfred’s *Preface* as it works within this system (of translation), is on the potential of the vernacular to act as a medium for authority. Alfred’s verification of his own validity as a translator provides the necessary validation for the translations that he presents to English readers, who in turn become participants in the authoritative system of Christian wisdom” (Davis, 2000, p. 152). Thus Booth notes Alfred’s efforts lifted the English language to new heights and Davis shows that lifting the language with such spiritually rich texts lifts the people as well. Discenza notes three main effects of Alfred’s program: “First, the program established a continuity between Anglo-Saxon rulers and



Christian history by situating its roots in highly respected patristic works chosen for translation, thus justifying itself. Second, it provided for the perpetuation of the system so that Alfred's successors, both as king and in lesser offices, would think of education as their responsibility and would not let the program die. Third, it sought to establish the particular vision Alfred and his advisors had of a good government as a reality." Discenza goes on to say, "they (the Old English translations of Alfred's program) boldly re-imagined English society in a way never done before... It is the texts' vision of how society could work, and how knowledge and wisdom should take their rightful place beside earthly treasures, that calls for attention. The Alfredian texts still have much to say" (Discenza, pg.467). The Carolingian Renaissance of learning on the continent, helped by English scholars such as Alcuin and others, involved more books than Alfred's program, but it was mainly in Latin (Discenza, 2001, p. 451).

I would like to note that Alfred himself saw his work as nothing new, but rather as a continuation of many who went before. He was inspired by an historical principle of translation which was evident from the Hebrew scriptures until his time. He also reasoned concerning what might be called the *missionary principle*: that the wisdom contained in these texts was to be given to all peoples. Observing this, Alfred concluded it was his job to give the English people this wisdom by translating these texts. While the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek before the time of Christ, after Christ there began a proliferation of translation work in many languages: Syrian, Coptic, Armenian, Latin. From 860 to 869, Cyril and Methodius were translating the scriptures into the language of the Slavic people. A translation had been done in Gaellic. The Venerable Bede was evidently the first highly influential person to translate Christian literature into English, having translated the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed and the Gospel of John (Greenfield & Calder, 1986, p. 38; Latourette, 1938, Vol.II, p. 77). Alfred nowhere claims to be unique regarding his translating books into English. He does however, see himself among a very select and limited number of people in history; he placed himself in the line of kings and leaders from Moses, David and Solomon, to the Apostles and those understanding these principles and committing themselves to the task of giving wisdom to the people. In this sense, Alfred was given a responsibility few people ever have the possibility of doing and he did it to the best of his

ability. The question will always remain, would the English language have re-emerged from the successful invasions of two non-English peoples, the Vikings and the Normans, had not Alfred done his job as well as he did? To attempt to answer this in a scholarly way, to this author, seems futile. It seems the greatest honor we can give to Alfred is to believe his own words and the words so often repeated by his biographer, that all of their accomplishments were "by the grace of God." Alfred and his biographer continually attribute all of their successes in every realm to the God who gave the Wisdom. Alfred had found happiness in God. He had found true riches in the education he had pursued his entire life. His God had demonstrated His ability to bring victory and peace. Now his goal was to give this wealth to the people of England.

The principle of translation, that a text has an inherent meaning that can be understood and transferred into another language is an outgrowth of an even greater principle of Wisdom: incarnation. God can dwell in people. This principle was fully realized only in Wisdom Himself, Jesus Christ, living on earth and accomplishing His task for all people of the world. The *New Testament* says, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes" (*Romans* 10: 4 NIV). There is something beyond the mere written word. The written word exists for a purpose beyond itself: to reveal a Person. This lead Christians to translate the scriptures into various vernacular languages and this principle inspired Alfred to translate books into English for the English people.

A great deal of translation of languages has been done by and inspired by English speakers. English has a wonderful history of using education to inspire upward mobility and freedom. English has been on the cutting edge of the pursuit of learning and has become the language of technology and many areas of scientific endeavor. The English speaking church has been on the forefront of the missionary movement. William Carey, an Englishman, is known as the father of modern missions. The English speaking world has enjoyed a very high degree of literacy. While Alfred's educational program cannot be proven to be the sole reason for these historical aspects of the English language, it can be said that it is certain his program contributed a great deal. The principles of translation and the pursuit of learning was a heritage of the English language prior to and subsequent to Alfred's English/Latin bilingual revival of learning. Alfred and his program stand



as one of the highest peaks on the historical horizon, one of the largest waves of the rising tide of learning in the history of the English language.

In the Hebrew and the *New Testament* scriptures we find that Wisdom is a person. It is the power inherent in the texts themselves accomplishing the lifting of the English language and the English people. What we witness in Alfred's great accomplishments is in fact Wisdom Himself doing what He planned to do. These principles of translation and missions are Wisdom's principles empowering the king and directing history. Alfred knew it was by the grace of God that he understood his job and was guided in its accomplishment. When Alfred was twenty-three years old, King Edmund was killed defending East Anglia, causing the English to mourn as few times in their history. As Alfred's beloved *Psalms* declare:

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger, and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my king..." (*Psalms* 2: 1-6).

A year later, Alfred became King.

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## Writing This Book

I learned about King Alfred while studying for a Master's degree in linguistics. I had begun doing literacy work in 1990 and was aware of the great need for mother tongue or L1 literacy. There is no question that L1 literacy is the best approach to education. Many cultures do not promote L1 literacy for various reasons. Learning about King Alfred's L1 literacy program in 889 AD, I was immediately captivated by the story of his life and wanted more people to learn about this great man. I also believe that King Alfred inspired some of the ideas which Tolkien put into his mythology about good versus evil. Having written the paper on Alfred's literacy program, I researched his life and began writing this book while on my way to Africa to work on an L1 literacy program for refugees. I stopped in England and visited locations associated with Alfred's life: London, Wantage, Winchester, Chippenham, Wedmore and Athelney. This was a spiritual pilgrimage for me, drawing inspiration from this man who fought so valiantly against the non-Christian invaders. My goal is to produce a book worthy of the only English monarch given the title *The Great*, and to help restore him to his rightful place in history, inspiring others to the greatness we need today in the world in which we live. I cannot add to the Alfred of history. The goal of this book is to make the Alfred of history more well-known, for his life is truly inspiring.

In Asser's biography of the great king, Asser shares his joy upon seeing the king reveal his personal handbook of favorite scriptures he carried with him his entire life. Asser pauses and worships God because the first King of all of England communed daily with his Creator. This moment recorded by Asser also touched me profoundly. It is this moment in the life of Alfred which was the greatest inspiration to me. I felt that the story of this great king deserves a book highlighting the king's personal faith in God as it truly affected everything he did. I've included this section in the Appendix so that I can share some of the reflections I wrote while visiting historical places in the life of Alfred.

### Dec. 10, 2010      Wantage

In Wantage looking at the town square which hasn't changed much in 400 years. A glance at the church dating to the 1300's makes me feel I should somehow record the experience. The stone and brickwork all around has stood the test of time. Every building is unique and very well built.

The English people seem to be very happy, which was King Alfred's goal. There are those who have not embraced happiness as evidenced by last night's news, but everywhere I've been people are for the most part happy. English society is, I believe, the most literate society I've ever seen. I am an expert in studying literacy and although I have not done an actual survey, simple observation makes it very apparent that literacy here is extremely integral to life, even more so than in the US and Israel where I've done more research.

On my bus ride to Uphington and Farringdon, the oldest looking house I saw had stonework resembling the church in Wantage and a thatch roof. It had wooden lintels. I think this was the house where Alfred burned the cakes. (I'm joking, ha ha.)



**The House Where Alfred Burned the Cakes**

### Dec. 10, 2010      10:00 pm      Winchester The Tomb of Alfred The Great

I sit utterly awed by one of the greatest men to ever live. Alfred, Aelswitha and Edward the Elder were buried here in 1100, moved here from the Cathedral where they were placed around 900, 1110 years ago. I know the bones were lost over the centuries, but this is where his remains were placed. I was not sure whether I would find the tomb, but was out walking and came upon the historical plaque. Lo, here he was, I am awed. It was almost as though I was led here because I did not have a clue where the location was. Oh that we might live worthy of the faith of a man like this, worthy of the cause of living for God; that a king of such a great people could be so devoted to Christ, and to see the effect of that love throughout all the world. Luther was great, but it is not





Hyde Abbey Gate

The Tomb of Alfred



German people want. It's not any language but English, and all this because of Alfred and his desire to serve his God.



Here I am on August 3, 2011, in what is best thought to be the location of Alfred's Palace in Chippenham, where Alfred nearly lost to Guthrum. The following is what I penned.

August 3, 2011  
I'm sitting on the actual spot of Alfred's palace in Chippenham where he was nearly killed during the surprise attack during Christmas celebrations. The king was nearly defeated as the Vikings despised their treaty and surprised the men of God with violence & treachery. This marks the lowest point in the history of Alfred and England and also of the Christian world. Alfred and a small band of men survived. What do we do when we reach the low point of life? What is our reaction and our response? Alfred escaped and went into hiding. To exist was his response. He had to hide. He was the last king of England. And as he existed he planned. He gathered facts. He planned and gathered facts for what had to be a victory. There was no option for loss. He was the last king standing.

Sitting in the location of Alfred's palace where Guthrum retreated after the battle of Ethandun, I'm contemplating the power of forgiveness. For over three decades the Vikings pillaged the English, nearly conquering all of England, killing Alfred's father and brothers. Here in this spot Alfred offered Guthrum Christian baptism and adoption as his son in the faith. Forgiveness won. Because of Christ, civilization was born anew.

**August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011, St. Andrews Church, Chippenham**

I've just prayed in the very spot where Alfred's sister Aethelswitha was married to Burhred of Mercia 853 AD, and where Alfred prayed when he was in his royal palace here. I'm sitting in the location of the Saxon church which was here from 800-900 AD. 1133 years ago, the great king found strength and guidance here. It may have been here in this spot he prayed for wisdom after Guthrum and the Vikings were defeated. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Deliverance in prayer, deliverance from the tormenting enemy, deliverance from bitterness from enemies persisting, deliverance from suffering, we need these today as much as Alfred did 1133 years ago.

The greatest accomplishment of any human being is to surrender to God.





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**August 8, 2011**

**Athelney**

All civilization has been affected by the efforts of one man to hide here, to plan and embark from here to the final victory. Here at Athelney Alfred found time. He hid to stay alive from the marauding Vikings. Here he prayed to God to enable him to be victorious in the final battle. There was only one battle left. Alfred was the last king. Had Alfred lost, the English may have rallied, but maybe not. They had to be victorious. They needed information on the enemy's location and strength. They needed to rally all the English at precisely the correct time and place to march to victory. And with God's help the final battle would be theirs.

**August 8, 2011**

Today I visited Wells and the Isle of Athelney. What an inspirational and wonderful experience. The Cathedral of Wells is beyond words to describe; breathtaking, awesome, don't begin to describe the beauty. It is amazingly and intricately crafted in its immensity and accomplishes precisely what the crafters were trying to accomplish: awe in the hearts of all who see it. It was a great blessing to pray there and I had real faith that my prayer was heard, as the intertwined limestone ceiling floating distantly above me aided the ascent of my one request. The labor of devotion by these believers was not in vain as for so many hundreds of years worship has ascended here to God, who is worthy of such magnificence.

I left Wells and found my bus to Taunton, getting off in Borough Bridge at the King Alfred Inn. There was no room to be found, but Jim, the host at the bar asked around and found Peter who lives across the street who gave me a room to stay in for 30 pounds. It is a very comfortable place. I walked the 1 ¼ mile to Alfred's monument and had a very nice visit there, meditating and praying, reflecting on the two months Alfred stayed there preparing for the final battle. I walked the length of the Isle after reading *Psalms 42 and 43*. After doing a sketch of the view and getting some pictures I started to leave but turned back. I had to pray more. We need strength today to defeat unbelief just as Alfred did. I had a very wonderful time in prayer as I drew from the history of this great man, who, although he was forced into total seclusion with a small band of men, did not give up, but found from God the strength to rise again to victory.