

Chapter 1: Tiglath-Pileser the Third ...

Chapter 1 opens with an introduction to Howard W. Campbell, Jr., a man caught in a web of contradictions, being an American by birth but tied to the Nazi regime by his actions during the Second World War. In 1961, Campbell finds himself imprisoned in a modern Jerusalem jail, where he writes to Mr. Tuvia Friedmann, the Director of the Haifa Institute for the Documentation of War Criminals. Friedmann, intrigued by Campbell's past as a suspected war criminal, has shown an unexpected kindness by offering him a typewriter, one bearing the S.S. symbol, a chilling reminder of the dark period in history that Campbell was once deeply involved in. As Campbell writes, he reflects on the irony of receiving such support in his current position, as a man now isolated from his former life and surrounded by the memories of atrocities he once played a part in.

As Campbell reflects on the weight of his surroundings, he becomes acutely aware of the ancient stones that make up his prison cell, some dating back to the time of King Solomon. These centuries-old stones serve as a silent reminder of how far removed he is from the world he once knew, highlighting the vast span of history that has passed since his actions during the war. His mind also dwells on the changing perspectives of the younger generations, particularly Arnold Marx, his young guard. Arnold, a mere eighteen years old, knows little of the horrors of the Second World War, as it ended long before his birth. For him, the war is merely a distant historical event, one he understands through textbooks and lectures rather than the lived experiences of those who survived it. Arnold's ambitions lie in more contemporary pursuits, like law and archaeology, with a special interest in excavating Hazor, an ancient site rich in historical importance. This generational divide between Arnold's youthful enthusiasm for the past and Campbell's heavy burden of guilt over his involvement in a catastrophic war creates a stark contrast between the two men.

The conversation between Arnold and Campbell serves to highlight the vast differences in their understanding of history. While Arnold's life is filled with the study of ancient civilizations, Campbell's existence is dominated by the moral weight of his wartime decisions and the aftermath of his actions. When Arnold mentions Hazor's destruction by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, Campbell is struck by the mention of violence that occurred long before his own time, yet still seems to reverberate in his own life. The name Tiglath-Pileser III is not something Campbell readily recalls, but it triggers within him a sense of historical continuity, connecting ancient violence to the atrocities of the 20th century, and, by extension, to his own actions. Arnold speaks casually about the historical events that have shaped the ancient world, but for Campbell, these events serve as painful reminders of the violence and destruction that have been a constant thread throughout human history. This exchange serves to deepen Campbell's internal conflict as he contemplates the cyclical nature of violence and how it has affected both the past and the present. As Arnold remains untouched by the emotional and moral ramifications of the past, Campbell is left to wrestle with the burden of his own role in history, questioning how much of the past can ever truly be erased and how much of it will always linger. The conversation between them also highlights how the passage of time can shape perspectives, leaving one generation to dwell in the shadows of the past while the next looks to the future with hope and curiosity.