

THE SCRIBE

By Lloyd D. Pickering

PRELUDE

The scribe slowly laid down his quill and gave some time to thought. Picking it up again, he added a few more words, blotted them and rolled the scroll tightly in his hand. He then took up the clay canister, placed the scroll inside and capped and sealed the jar.

The time had now come for his task to be completed. He walked down the canyon and arduously climbed the cliff to the cave that had been selected. In the back of the cave he added his manuscript to those already placed and then he meticulously sealed and hid the mouth of the cave. He alone would know where it was and he would never tell.

The scribe did not know that the last words he had written would take almost fifty years to be unrolled after the first manuscripts were found. The best scholars of his day and for six hundred years before had made secret preparations for what they thought would be the final and inevitable battle between light and darkness, good and evil. The impact of his words would change everything they had ever written.

CHAPTER ONE

It was the wee hours of the morning two thousand years later. The phone rang in Fullerton, California. “David,” Phillip’s voice was urgent. “How soon can you join a small group I’m taking to Jerusalem?”

“I guess in hours, if necessary,” I replied. My voice was still husky from sleep. “What’s up? Something new I gather, your voice sounds excited.”

“Well, yes,” Phillip said. He had been dedicating his life to the unraveling of the secrets of the Scrolls. “I think we’ve missed something somewhere. The most recent work we’ve done contains something, which I don’t really know how to talk about. I want to do some further thinking and research in the Holy City. Join me?”

“And who else?”

“Janet Smith has promised to go. She’s been such a great help to me. Ed Dorin would be a great candidate and I think he will. That will probably be it.”

“Count me in. I wouldn’t want to miss out on what you are planning. When can we get together?”

“Join me in a few days. You can get a flight on El Al within a few days. I’ll be staying at the YMCA on David Street. We’ll all try to get together within the week. Does that sound all right to you?”

“I’ll be there, Phil.” My whole life of retirement, which I’d been hating, began to take on meaning again. I went out into the kitchen and made myself a cup of coffee. I sat looking out at Gilman Park, which was just beyond my backyard. The tops of the eucalyptus trees were swaying in the wind and it was raining lightly. An open grill fence separated my yard from the park, so I could see the pathways from where I sat. My azaleas were blooming profusely. One had my favorite color, which was a purple-pink. The grass on my lawn was green. January in California did not include snow.

I had known Phil for a long time. He was the owner of the company that had helped me publish my books. I had written three of them. I taught a class in Comparative Religion at Fullerton College. It was a popular class and I always had plenty of students. I had very much enjoyed teaching until my wife, Patti, died a year ago. She had a sudden heart attack. For most of the year I had been living in regret. I was always thinking of the things we intended to do together when I retired. I thought of the many times I didn’t tell her I loved her, and didn’t appreciate enough the gentleness and kindness

she always displayed. Her blond hair had turned gray, but her blue eyes had stayed the same. I always thought she was beautiful. Our two children, Ken and Nancy, missed her as much as I did, but they had their lives and their own families. I finally lost interest so much in my teaching that I retired. With the income from my books, which were often used as textbooks, I didn't need to worry about money. I did, however, need to worry about what I was going to do with the rest of my life. It was really a mistake to retire and I realized that now in my loneliness. I was only fifty-eight years old and I was in excellent health.

Janet Smith was Phil's chief editor and I remembered her well. She was very good at her job and completely caught up in it. I guessed she was about twenty years younger than I and strikingly good-looking. Her hair was brunette, dark and almost black. It was wavy and soft. She most often wore a well-tailored business suit. It was her eyes that were seductive. I knew what people meant when they talked about stars in your eyes. They glittered as she talked to you. She was attractive, but I had several reasons why I could never get involved. First, she was too young. Secondly, I had been married. Thirdly, she was dedicated to her work. I wondered if I had those in the right order.

She really knew her job and had been such a help to me. Perhaps that had been the attraction. There had been a spark between us, but I associated that with the work we were doing together. I felt it would be nice to see her again.

I started packing the following Tuesday. I wasn't very worried about what to take. I just threw in some shirts, some pants, some underwear and my shaving stuff. What I didn't have I could buy. The airport limo came to pick me up about ten o'clock in the morning. I wanted to have plenty of time. Security at El Al wondered about my small bag. I had to be grilled up to the third person before they felt I wasn't harboring any secrets.

The flight was easy the first lap and we went from our plane directly to the plane for Israel, so there was no wait in New York. I stood in the aisle a long time talking to a young woman going over to visit some relatives in Haifa. When we landed at Ben Gurion Airport, everyone clapped. I thought it was because of the smooth landing, but I found out they do it all the time. It wasn't hard getting through customs because I had nothing to declare. The bus to Jerusalem was easy to find and I was soon on my way.

I noticed the relics of war alongside the highway on the way up to Jerusalem. As we approached the city, I saw some forests of trees that had been planted by volunteers. It became cloudy and misty as we approached

the city. It was raining when I got out of the bus at the station in Jerusalem. The weather was almost identical to southern California. The station was bustling with people as they hurried to reach their destination. I put up my umbrella and walked across the street to catch the number twenty-three bus. It was hard to see the street in the rain, but I knew that I had to get off just a few blocks after it turned right on David Street. People were standing in the aisle because the bus was full. We careened around the corner and started up a small hill. I got off in the rain and went up the walk to the patio and inside the door to the YMCA. The lobby had a marble floor and it was more spacious than I had anticipated. There was a Star of David in one of the windows and a small sitting area just to my left. I walked up to the counter and asked about my room. Phil had made arrangements for me. I found they had a room for me on the third floor.

I took my luggage up on the elevator and got myself situated. The room was rather sparse, just a bed and a small dresser with a chair to sit on. It had its own bathroom, so I considered it to be adequate. Looking out the window, I could see the King David Hotel across the street and the Old City just beyond. There was a tower in the wall that was just next to Jaffa Gate. I was hungry; so I went down to get something to eat. Phil had chosen the YMCA because he said it was inexpensive, yet comfortable.

A beautiful young woman that resembled Elizabeth Taylor when she was young showed me to my table. She had dark hair and eyes that were almost black. She was about twenty years old and her body was slender and lithe. She moved with such grace that my eyes kept following her as she moved from kitchen to tables delivering the food. The restaurant served meat pies of every description. I had a beef meat pie and finished with apple pie and ice cream. It was decidedly good. After dinner, I walked across the street to see the lobby of the King David Hotel. It was enormous and very beautifully decorated. There were six or seven sumptuous sofas and ten or more comfortable chairs to sit in. There was only one person in the room, so I sat down near him and engaged him in conversation. He told me he had recently moved to Israel and had a room in the Old City. He said it was cheap there, but he had to come over here to escape the noise and confusion. It was never quiet at night over there. I admitted it was very quiet here. Later, I retired to my room to sleep off the flight. The radiator was warm and the room was already comfortable. I pulled the drapes aside to look at the rain and wondered where Phil could be. He had left me a message to make myself comfortable and he would see me the next day. Sleep quickly took over.

“Bokar Tov” greeted me as I entered the breakfast restaurant. Translated, it meant “Good Morning.” I guess that I could never get used to tomatoes and cucumbers for breakfast, so I asked the amiable young waitress to leave them out and ordered eggs, a roll and coffee. Just then I saw Phil and waved to him. He saw me at the same time. He joined me and ordered breakfast as well. He included the tomatoes and cucumbers and asked for some pickled herring as well. We sat across the table from each other, chatting about my recent flight, but he still wasn’t ready to say anything about our reason for being there.

The sun was shining a little later as we walked down Emile Botta Street next to the King David Hotel. This was a short cut to Jaffa Gate. We could see a tower rising above the wall. “That’s David’s Citadel in front of you,” Phil said. “It’s the area known as Herod’s Tower. His palace was just to the right of the gate. They have opened an exhibit there that tells the story of Jerusalem with visual aids. You’ll love it and I want you to see it before you leave.”

A giant construction crane was moving material for new buildings just to our left as we crossed the street. On the way up the ramp to Jaffa Gate Phil said, “I have arranged for all of us to meet on Temple Mount. There are some thoughts I want to share with all of you when we get there.”

We were too busy with our own thoughts to say much as we made our way down David Street. The vendors in the stalls wanted us to buy something almost every step of the way as we proceeded downward. At the end of the street we merged with a throng of people using the market place. As we turned right, I commented, “The stones are new here, this must be the Jewish Quarter.” Square stone blocks had been carefully placed to form the street. They had small chiseled marks in them to make them look old.

The people thinned out to a few strollers. We walked beside a sunken area that had been the original street of the city two thousand years before. It was twenty feet below and there were large columns in the middle of the street.

“That street that you see is called the Cardo, which is an original street dating back to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. when it was destroyed by the Romans,” Phil said. “This part was completely destroyed and rebuilt after the 1973 war. The others will be meeting us near the entrance to the Burnt House,” he added.

Ed and Janet were waiting at a falafel stand. I had met Ed on one of my trips to Phil’s publishing house. He looked great for his seventy years. His life project had been a study of Jewish History. With his gray beard and

almost white hair he looked like a prophet. Janet looked just wonderful. Her dark eyes sparkled as she greeted me. She was wearing her usual business suit and it looked especially good on her. I gave her a hug when we walked up. Together, we walked down the steps leading almost fifty feet below ground to the area know as the Burnt House. Down below were the rooms that had been part of an original house. There were still one-foot high walls dissecting the rooms and many artifacts were displayed in the area. This was the original ground, which had been burned during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Some of the artifacts included a priest's token. An entire home was excavated and many pieces of history lay among the ruins. I knew that Phil had a purpose in taking us back in time before revealing the reason for our meeting.

After we returned to ground level, we turned left. "We'll be coming out at the steps above Dung Gate," Phil said. "I want to show you the models of the various temples in the Wohl Museum before we walk down the steps."

He led the way into rooms containing the models. There was a model of the tabernacle, which the Jews erected in the wilderness. Another was a model of the temple, which was constructed by King Solomon. The third was a model of the building known as Herod's Temple, showing the great marble walls. Then we came to a fourth model, which did not look like anything we had seen. It looked as though it would be very high.

"Will they ever build it?" Janet asked.

"Probably not very soon," Ed replied. "Though some would like to do it. They have the Menorah prepared and a model of the Ark of the Covenant, as well. There could be room beside the Dome of the Rock." We walked over to see the exhibit of all the animals together in peace when the sword is turned into a plowshare and there will be a world without war. I didn't say anything. I just looked at the model of the waterfall on Mt. Zion and the lion and the lamb lying together. In my day? I thought. We can't keep people from killing each other let alone having that kind of peace.

We went outside and looked at the gold-capped Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount. "Caliph Omar built that in 691 A.D.," Ed said. "It encloses the great rock Al Sakhra. I'll tell you more about it later."

We walked down the steps into the area to the right of the Wailing Wall. Men and women were lining up separately to stand in front of the wall. We could see that much digging was taking place just to the right. "Those are ancient arches," Ed was explaining as I caught up. "That one is Robinson's arch, named after the fellow who unearthed it. That's part of the original base way down there."

We made our way up the ramp to the green door and entered into the area of the Temple Mount. Israeli guards searched us and then watched nonchalantly as we made our way towards the Dome of the Rock.

“Mount Moriah is supposed to be under the Dome, a bare rock three to five feet high.” Ed explained. “It was here that the Canaanites offered their sacrifices five thousand years ago. The Jebusites called this peak Arnona and built no structures on it, using it as an altar for pagan sacrifice. It was no wonder that Abraham was led here to sacrifice Isaac. An angel stayed his hand. We feel that this story was intended to abolish the sacrifice of children. David bought this peak from the Jebusites after conquering Jerusalem and started preparations for the building of the Temple. Solomon altered the contours and built the Temple here about 950 B.C.E. We use those letters to depict the words Before the Common Age, so that no one is offended. Modern research says this is the site of the Holy of Holies. A Muslim tradition holds that from this rock Mohammed was transported to heaven, so this place is sacred to many, many people.”

“I thought that a place of worship was regarded as so sacred that no one would ever build on a place that another had sanctified. Why was it that the Dome was built on the Temple Mount?” Janet asked.

“While the land was held by others it was a matter of a power struggle,” Phil told us. “You would find more regard in this land today. That is why it will be so difficult to erect a new Temple on this land.”

“Some of these things I can never comprehend,” Janet exclaimed. “How could a mere piece of land be so significant?”

Ed led the way slightly to the left. “Right about here,” he said, slowly and thoughtfully. “Right about here the Ark of the Covenant sat in the Holy of Holies, God’s presence on earth. What do you think happened to it?”

“Well,” I said. “One theory is that King Solomon married the Queen of Sheba. They had a son who took the ark to Ethiopia for safekeeping and buried it there.”

“Or,” Ed went on. “It was buried right here and will some day be unearthed.”

“Or,” from Janet. “That the Romans took it and buried it underneath the Vatican.”

“All theory, of course,” Phil interjected. “Remember that the tribe of Judah and Benjamin were conquered and went to Babylon around 587 B.C.E. Solomon’s Temple was destroyed and the ark could be in Iraq or Iran right now. Let’s move over here among the olive trees. That sun is bright for a winter day.”

We moved over to sit under the trees. It was very comfortable for a day in January. A light breeze was blowing and the air was pure and clean. I was enjoying the moment.

“What are all those graves on the hill over there?” Janet asked. The hillside just across from us was very steep and it was, indeed, completely covered with small tomb structures.

“Those are Israelites waiting to be the first to be resurrected when the Messiah enters through the Eastern Gate,” Ed said. “You’ll notice that the gate has been sealed. Before any of you start making up any smart remarks, I want to explain that nothing derogatory is permitted in our conversation, even in jest. Personally, I have deep respect for anyone’s religion. If you tell me that the rock in front of you is holy to you, I’ll polish it and plant a flower in front of it for you, just because you believe it is holy. That is respect. We should demand that from each and every person in the world.”

“I’m sure you’ll get it from us,” I replied. “There’s never any reason to make fun of any one else’s religion. It’s the best way that I know to get into deep trouble.”

“Well, that’s what is bothering me the most,” Phil put in. “What if? I just don’t want to carry the subject any farther right now until I can be more sure of some things.”

“To change the subject,” Janet added, trying to put some lightness into the conversation, “Isn’t that the Mount of Olives just beyond all those graves?”

“Yes,” Ed was quick to reply, “and the steep road that you see is the one that Jesus was supposed to have ridden on when he rode the donkey into Jerusalem just before his death. On Palm Sunday they reenact the scene.”

“And,” I added. “At the moment when He looked out over Jerusalem, Jesus wept. Those two words convey His sadness at being rejected. Thank you, Ed, for putting in those thoughts. I know, as a Jew, you believe that Jesus was a prophet, but not the Son of God.”

“We were just talking about respect, David. I think our friendship transcends any negative feelings and our mutual respect prevents any derision,” Ed responded.

“There’s my religion, too,” Janet added. “I don’t claim to be any of what you are talking about. I just believe in a supreme being who works within each one of us. I believe God works in us individually and not collectively. I don’t believe anyone was selected for special favors. That’s what seems to brew up all of the trouble.”

“Strange thing is, Janet,” I replied. “Everyone of us could agree with you on the basics, but it’s our customs that seem to stand in the way.”

“All right,” Phil said in a serious tone. “Perhaps there are some things that I know that would throw a different light on the subject. Or it could get a lot of people so riled up that they’ll set out to kill each other. The problem is, I don’t know exactly what will happen.”

“What do you mean, Phil,” from Ed. “What could happen that would cause such an amount of consternation?”

“Well, suppose there was something written that might cast a doubt on every one of the religions around us. How do you think that might be accepted by the religious world?”

“Not very well,” I said. “Except by the Oriental religions that would not be affected. The religious people might end up at each other’s throats.”

“Then it shouldn’t be published,” he said. “At least, I don’t think it should be. Yet hasn’t the world a right to know everything that was written instead of selected portions? Don’t the people of this planet have the education and capacity to judge for themselves?”

Janet could not help responding to his statement. “Maybe not as far as we think,” she said. “There is so much possessiveness and so much greed and so much selfish preservation of creed. There is so much of a feeling that we are right and everyone else is wrong. I see that disappearing to some extent, but it is still there. If you say anything that might endanger any group of believers, you could be in big trouble. People will kill for what they believe. They have, many times in history.”

“Exactly so. It’s better left unsaid,” Phil spoke hastily. “I’m almost afraid of what some words could do. We’ll end our discussion there.”

“Wait,” I hurried to say, “we all know that the early church was strongly divided. There was a group of believers who thought that God worked within the spirit of the individual rather than the group as a whole. We often refer to them as Gnostics. The early church fathers called them heretics and fought them in their writings. The organized religion prevailed, as we well know. It was not until several years ago, when the Nag Hammadi Scrolls were found, that we knew anything about these people. They were swallowed up by time. They were not evil people, they just disagreed.”

“And the early church as we know it formulated the Bible and probably took out anything that did not agree with what they wanted to have taught,” Janet went on for me. “That is why those scrolls were so secretly hidden, so that they would not be destroyed. Yet they contain some great thoughts for the world today. How many others were there that were never brought to light?”

“We’ll leave it at that, then,” Phil said. “Let’s bury the matter again and leave it for some other person to bring up when the world is ready.”

“The world will never be ready,” I said. And we dropped the matter there.

“Let’s go over to the Burnt House and have a falafel,” Ed suggested.

Back at my room, the heat came on and the radiator started warming up. It was starting to get chilly in the evening hour and it felt very good. I called the others and we decided to have a light meal in the coffee shop. The falafel had been very filling. I needed the exercise, so I decided to walk down the three flights of stairs. On the way down, I looked out over the soccer field in the rear, probably one of the most expensive pieces of real estate in the world.

While waiting for our meal at the restaurant we talked with two people from the United Nations about their activities in the area. We had a salad with a side of pita bread and humus. A very zealous young woman tried to convince us that the end of time was near. She believed the earth was only six thousand years old and was attempting to convert people to her religion. We did not believe in what she was doing, but we listened respectfully without giving her any encouragement.

Ed decided he had some important business the next day, but the three of us decided to make our way down to the Dead Sea to visit the Cave of the Scrolls and see the place where those people called the Essenes lived.

The next morning we got into our rental car in the small parking lot behind the YMCA and tried to find our way out of Jerusalem. We went north on David Street, but we ended up at Mount Scopus and the University. We turned around and decided on a better way, finally reaching an intersection that pointed the way to Jericho. Out past the Inn of the Good Samaritan, we stopped at a little shop that was made of hides and talked with the shopkeeper as we looked over what he was selling. The sun was very warm and the shop smelled like the hides, so we climbed back into our air-conditioned car and started the steep descent eastward. The road was wide and very modern. On the way we noticed the remains of a burned out bus, tell tale signs of the constant conflict going on here.

In the distance, the mountains and cliffs of the country of Jordan became visible on the far side of the Dead Sea. They are a pink and blue color, pale and very beautiful. We passed the junction of the road north to Jericho and turned south. Within a few minutes we were at the entrance to Qumram. Turning right, we drove up the small road and soon found ourselves on a hilltop where a small tower could provide a good view of an oncoming enemy. We looked at a series of rooms with low stonewalls still surrounding

them. Words came to my mind, “Ekosana,” I said. “Take me back to the time of these people. Let me know their feelings.”

“The people living here were known as the Essenes,” Phil said. “That large hole that you see in the cliff over there is where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Perhaps the area was as barren then as it is now, but we think there may have been more abundance of water. You see here a water channel for drinking water and a place over here for the ritual baptizing in running water for spiritual cleansing. Over here is a large meeting and dining hall with a pottery storage house.”

We paced off the main dining area and estimated that it was about sixteen by one hundred feet, long and narrow. “This would have been the room used for group meetings,” Phil said. “Probably it was also the room that was used for the desks used by the scribes in writing. They did an immense amount of writing. A scroll fragment pertaining to the Qumram community came to light at Masada, which is far to the south. It appears that the members of this community joined hands with the Zealots in their desperate struggle against the Romans. The discovery of the scroll at Masada provides definite proof that the Dead Sea Scrolls predate the destruction of the second temple.”

“The scroll cave is high on a hill overlooking such a deep canyon,” Janet noted. “This would have made it very difficult to reach and the Romans never found it.”

“That’s right,” Phil replied. “These people deliberately set themselves apart from all of the regular activities of society including the religious observances, which they believed were either unnecessary or sacrilegious. Some people think that John the Baptist may have been one of them. At any rate they lived a full communal life. The main principle of their faith appeared to be a strict adherence to the Mosaic Law and the belief in predestination, according to which all creatures were divided into the sons of light and the sons of darkness, destined to struggle at the end of days, in heaven and on earth, until the sons of light prevail.”

“What finally happened to them?” I asked.

“The defenders of Qumram and Masada found a common end,” Phil answered, “The Romans obliterated them.”

“How does what happened here affect us in our thinking?” Janet wondered. “They practiced ritual immersion in running water. Was that an early form of Christian baptism?”

“Well, “ Phil continued. “I wish that Ed were here to answer that question, but I will try until we can talk to him later. People have tried to read a lot of things into the scroll writings. We do know that the temple

priesthood was rejected and that these people had presbyters or elders instead. That may have been the start of the congregational thinking that influenced the early church.”

As we were walking through the area, Janet’s hand briefly touched mine. I felt a tingle. I had repressed so many feelings since my wife, Patti, died. I knew Janet had given her life to her career. Yet, I felt the touch had been very intentional. She went on with her thoughts. “I’m really bothered by the idea of predestination,” she said. “I believe that God created the world as an extension of Himself, so that He could experience Himself through His creation. If we are mere puppets and He controls the future, then there can be no experience. It’s all cut and dried. I just don’t believe it’s that way.”

“I don’t believe that, either,” I added. “That is a way of controlling the people. If that were true, we wouldn’t need to think for ourselves because we couldn’t decide what we were to become. I believe strongly in freewill. We have the ability to choose our own destiny.”

“Yet, you have to admit,” Phil joined in, “There are many factors that influence our lives that we cannot control. It might be a storm that takes away our home, a chance meeting that changes our life career, or a virus that causes us to become ill. Over of these we have little choice.”

“Well,” I said, “You have to ask how much God decides to control. How much of what happens is just natural law? If what happens is under His control, then He is responsible for the bad as well as the good. When I watch a science fiction movie, I wonder what it would be like to live without the normal restrictions of science where anything can happen and you never know what it will be. Still, I can’t discount what I would regard as interventions, when a small miracle occurs that changes your very destiny.”

“Have you ever experienced one of those?” Janet asked.

“Oh, yes,” I put in. “I remember the evening that I almost pulled onto the freeway with my car lights off. I distinctly heard a voice saying, ‘Tell him to turn on those lights.’ The car windows were rolled up. I looked around to see where the voice came from, expecting to see a police helicopter overhead, but there was nothing. I would guess the voice came from my own subconscious, but it was very real. I actually heard it.”

“Actually your spirit consciousness was guiding your subconscious,” Janet said. “There was not enough time for action, so the subconscious let the voice go directly to your conscious mind. That doesn’t happen very often because our conscious mind is not open, but in your case it may have saved your life.”

“Careful now,” Phil cautioned. “There has to be some degree of caution taken here because there are so many people who take liberties with the truth and those who actually believe things that never occurred.”

“I know,” I said. “This has to be a very personal matter with each one of us. There certainly should be no attempt to try to convince other people. It isn’t necessary.”

Janet thought it was time to change the subject. “We brought our suits. Why don’t we all go down to Ein Gedi and go swim in the Dead Sea,” she said.

It was not far to Ein Gedi and the road was smooth. We decided to see the Youth Hostel first. We were very impressed with its location. A large central patio area enabled us to sit and look out over the shimmering sea. We enjoyed the afternoon sunshine. At this elevation below sea level, the sun is not harmful to the skin because there is so much atmosphere to soak up the harmful rays. The soft, pastel colors of the desert were soothing. Everything seemed to be made of coral pink and light blue as we looked towards the distant shoreline. We sat there and let the light breeze blow in our faces.

Phil suggested lunch, so we checked with the kitchen and they told us we could join the communal meal. It was salad and vegetables, but they were well prepared and we enjoyed both the food and the company around the table. The young people suggested that we walk up to the waterfall in the nature reserve. We found the trail to be only moderately difficult, with steps carved into the hill in some areas. The nature reserve has an abundance of wildlife here in the midst of the desert. Several Ibex came loping by and the Hyrax, a small furry animal, could be seen feeding and scurrying about. We passed through two growths of bamboo and, following the creek, finally managed to reach the falls. A lot of water was pouring down from the rock right there in the dry desert. A sign pointed to a further and more difficult trail. Phil said, “That leads up to the spring and the cave where David hid from the wrath of Saul.”

We decided not to proceed any farther. A sign warning of the threat from leopards in the area helped to make the decision. As we walked back, some sound, which we did not even hear, scared the Ibex. They thundered up into the cliffs, showing their surefooted ability to scale the steep and rugged area. “Awesome,” we said in unison.

“O.K. Its time for that swim,” I said.

We went back to the Hostel so we could change into our swimming suits and drove the short distance to the sea. The shoreline was rocky and hard to stand on. When we entered the water, we noticed an oily feeling to the

water. It was so salty we were able to easily float on the surface, but we did not stay very long because the salt soon encrusted our skin. When we went back to the Hostel, we asked to use the showers and spent a lot of time getting ourselves cleansed from the oiliness and the salt.

As we gathered on the patio again, I made a suggestion. “Masada is only a short distance to the south, “ I said, “but time today is running short, so why don’t we save that for later and make a stop in Jericho on our way back?”

As we headed north again, we noticed some small villages down towards the dried up area that had been the Dead Sea in ages gone by. When we reached the Jericho junction, we turned to the right. The signs advertised “The Oldest City in the World.” We had to stop at an Israeli checkpoint before we could proceed into the city. They advised that we use caution. There were not many visitors and, at this moment, there was relative peace in Israel. Nevertheless, the soldiers warned us, we could run into trouble at any time, so we were advised to be very watchful.

High above us loomed steep cliffs. Phil pointed one out, “That is where the temptation of Jesus is supposed to have occurred. For generations there have been people who kept track of certain events. Most of the history goes back to the third century.”

We proceeded through the small city, where most of the shops were closed, and went on to the excavation of the old ruins. What we saw was quite disappointing. There was only a huge gash in the side of a hill. No evidence of fallen stones existed or even of any ancient wall.

“I remember an article written quite a few years ago,” I said. “This man said he found many stones that indicated a fallen wall, so I am disappointed.”

“When it comes to stories about the Holy Land, there have been many people who have tried to capitalize on the religious interest that people have,” Phil said. “Don’t believe everything you read.”

“Well,” Janet said, “perhaps we could drive over to the Allenby Bridge and take a look at the Jordan River.”

We started to do that and drove several kilometers in that direction. It was a desert area, with stunted smoke trees here and there, but little other vegetation. These trees grow in most desert locations. They have a smoky, light green color to the leaves, which is how they got their name. We were enjoying ourselves, but then we realized what we were doing and decided it would be too dangerous to be so far from the checkpoint and headed back.

It took only a half hour to get back up to Jerusalem. “Wouldn’t the Old Timers have been surprised?” Phil asked. “It took them a day or so to walk where we drove in such a short time.”

“You do lose some of the perspective,” Janet replied. “Perhaps we should do some walking.”

“You can forget about that,” I answered. “It would take me ten years to walk up that road we just traveled.”

We decided to stop for dinner at the Sheraton, not far from the YMCA. It was located near a park not far from the main shopping area.

“What a beautiful place,” Janet exclaimed as we entered the main lobby. “This looks like it could be in America.” It looked just like a fancy hotel in the U.S.A. and we felt right at home. The restaurant was marvelous. We had seafood all sauced and fancy. It was quite a bit higher priced than I was used to, but I wasn’t worried about money. There were two shekels for every dollar, so that made it seem a lot higher. Afterwards we went walking on Ben Yehuda Street. It is a walking street lined with shops and restaurants. It is paved with the same flat stones we saw in the Jewish section of the Old City. We had called Ed and he met us there. We saw him waiting not far from where we entered the street. He saw us first and waved. First, we had to tell him about our day’s activities, especially the little escapade in Jericho.

“Be careful,” was his best advice. He knew of a tiny restaurant on the street that had a custard cake. He said it was the best desert he ever tasted and he sure was right.

It is almost customary when you are in Jerusalem that you discuss religion and history. Your surroundings demand it unless you live there. For those who have never visited Israel, the Bible history seems mystic, but when you walk the very streets and visit the places the Bible talks about, it becomes very real.

“I just want to see this whole country,” Janet said. “From Galilee to the southern desert.”

“So do I,” I answered. “I taught so much about this land that I feel I know it by heart and yet I have never seen it.”

“So that’s what we’ll help you to do,” Phil said.

CHAPTER TWO

We decided to go down to Beersheva because that was where Abraham dug a well and started living in this ancient land. We could take a short cut past Bethlehem and Hebron, but that was in the West Bank and could be dangerous, so we decided to take a longer way and go through the valley where David is said to have encountered the giant, Goliath. We made our way through the one-way streets of the city and passed the bus station on our way to Tel Aviv. We turned off on Rt. 38 on the road to Bet Shemesh. Just north of Bet Shemesh the hills are rocky limestone, but the area is forested with trees. About eight kilometers south of Bet Shemesh the road enters a valley known in Biblical times as the Valley of Elah. Just before Rt. 35 strikes out east towards Jerusalem, a small bridge crosses the brook Kidron. "This is very likely the brook from which David selected the stones for his sling," Ed said. I got out of the car and tossed a small stone at my imaginary giant on the other side of the creek. It was just an ordinary place and an ordinary bridge, but the history was immense. We were all captured by our thoughts. It started to mist again as we made our way past Bet Gubrin and turned south on the main road from Tel Aviv to Beersheva. The road was a main highway, so the going was easy. The countryside was very green because of the rain. It was a good thing that Ed knew the way and could read the markers that there were, because there was little else to indicate where we were going. The main highway continues on to Arad, so we turned right and entered the rather large city of Beersheva. It is thoroughly modern, with many new buildings in the new part of the city. We continued on to the old city, where the streets were narrow, and got out of the car and walked around a while.

Phil said, "Old town Beersheva was occupied by the Turks and many of these old stone buildings still stand here on the south side of town. It was here that Lawrence of Arabia, disguised as a Bedouin, was imprisoned by the Turks in World War I and disappeared. He was never heard from again."

We walked over to Abraham's well. The place is a small teashop and the well is a section fenced off on the north side. I walked out behind the building, where a river was running, to get a better feel for the area. I felt the tingle of a finger running down my back. I turned to see Janet looking at me with those sparkling eyes, "I know you have been having some problems about losing Patti," she said. "I'd just like to help without being overbearing." I turned to her and hugged her to me. "I have known you for

so long,” I said, “You could never be a problem to me. I feel so very close to you now and I have been so lonely.” She put her face up and I bent down and put my lips to hers. She moved her mouth in response and I felt a wonderful peace come over me.

We did not want the moment to pass, but felt we had to go back in and share some tea with Ed and Phil. Phil had made reservations at the Desert Inn, on the south side of the city. We drove out there and walked into the lobby. In the center of the lobby a large oil heater was pumping heat into the air. We backed up to the heater and stood there a while as we allowed the heat to dry out our damp garments and warm us down to the skin. We decided to go upstairs to the dining room to take care of our hunger pangs. The meal was different, a medley of sausages and small pieces of meat flavored in the eastern style. We enjoyed it. While we were eating, we had a conversation with a man who was there to sell machinery. “So, in the desert, who needs machinery?” Phil asked. “Oh, they grow potatoes just south of here and I am selling them a packing unit for them,” he replied.

We went, then, to the main counter and got the keys for our rooms. Suddenly, a feeling came over me that I didn’t want to go alone to my room and I took Janet’s hand in mine. She understood right away and just gave my hand a squeeze and I knew I wouldn’t be alone for very long. The rain came pouring down and I thought about poor Abraham in his tent so many years ago. No TV and no radio, except he could get tuned in to Channel JHVH. Today the Bedouins have life just a little easier because they have tin roofs and I saw a tractor in front of one of the small shanties. I was lost in my thoughts when there was a little rap on the door. Janet was standing there, with some clothes on her arm, like she wasn’t going to plan to leave right away. She gave me a hug as she entered and we sat and talked a little while. We changed into our nightclothes separately in the bathroom, because we still felt very modest. When she came out of the bathroom I was already in bed. It was getting cold in the room, so she joined me quickly. I put my arms around her and held her for a while. I could feel her body close to mine, but we both knew that this was just a night for togetherness. It was all she needed and it was all that I could give at the moment. I woke several times during the night when the rain came down especially hard, but I slept better than I had in many months. I was sure that Janet would have slept better had she been alone, but she was doing this for me.

The next morning Janet went to her room to get herself freshened up and do her make up. We didn’t want to let Ed and Phil know we had spent the

night together. Not that we felt there was anything wrong with what we did, we just wanted to keep it to ourselves.

I went to knock on the door of Janet's room so we could go down to breakfast together, and she was just coming out the door. We had to go down some stairs and back through the lobby to the breakfast area, which was in the back of the hotel. It was a massive room, evidently made to accommodate large groups during the high tourist season. Right now it was virtually empty. As Janet and I started to fill our plates, we were astounded by the variety of food that we found on the tables. There were three or four different fruit yogurts, prunes, the usual herring, eggs, bread, and cheeses as well as orange juice, which was required for every hotel free breakfast. Ed and Phil were already putting away a fair quantity of food when we joined them.

"Good morning, did you sleep well?" Ed asked. We started to get embarrassed and then checked ourselves. "Yes, considering the amount of rain we got last night and the wind blowing," I replied. We dug into our food with hungry relish.

"By the way," Ed said, "I thought I might expound a little on the history of this part of the country and then, David, you might be willing to go into a bit of the background history of the land from which Abraham made his journey."

"Suits me," I said. "After I finish devouring this great breakfast we can go for a bit of a stroll in the desert. It has stopped raining outside."

As we went out the front door Ed began to explain, "In prehistoric times there was a marine reptile in this area, somewhat of a cross between an alligator and a dinosaur. The people who lived here during the time of Abraham's entry were known as Amorites and evidently emanated from areas near the Black Sea. There is evidence that there was a good water supply and the population was, for that time, prolific. The area now is known as the Negev, the desert. It is filled with rocky areas of complete nothing and little wadis of greenery where the plants grow and Ibex and Quail can thrive. Small flowers can be found in the summer. Out back of the hotel there is a small wadi where a small grove of trees has developed. That's what we're headed out to see."

"Then Abraham wasn't alone when he came to this land," I said. "There were a lot of other people around."

"Yes," Phil added. "There was a lot of trade going through from Egypt to the northern areas. You have heard of the hidden city in Jordan called Petra.

It was carved out of the rock and it was the center for traders to pass through.”

Ed continued his story; “Here Abraham planted a Tamarisk tree and dug a well, making peace with his neighbors. He called it ‘Beersheva,’ the well of the oath. Here Isaac and Jacob grew up. Joseph wore his coat of many colors and was sold into slavery. The tribes did not have it easy most of the time. They lived, as they had for many years, with the heat, the cold, and the sun.”

The rain had all soaked in except for a few puddles here and there. Sure enough, there was a small grove of trees in the wadi.

Phil said, “Kadesh Barnea, where the Israelites failed to enter the country, is just over the border to the south in Egypt. There isn’t much reason to go out there, because there is nothing there except the desert.”

Ed added, “There is a joke in Israel that God told Moses to turn right and he made a mistake and turned left. There would have been lots of oil that way, and Israel has found no resources underground, as yet anyway.”

We wandered near the wadi, but not in it, because we didn’t want to get mud all over our feet. In the low areas it was still very wet. It didn’t seem much like a desert. As we walked up the other side of the wadi, we came upon a new housing development. When a man came walking our way Janet asked, “Do you speak English?” “Nyet,” he replied. He was from Russia.

We went back to the hotel and decided that we would leave soon. Phil said, “I would like to go down to Mt. Sinai, in Egypt, so keep your passports handy. We’ll need them to get our special visa pass to spend a couple of days in the area now reoccupied by Egypt.”

We drove out south of town of Rte. 40, past the bus station and the Bedouin market. Phil said, “The story is told of the man who came to the market to buy a wife and bought a camel instead.”

“What’s the point?” I asked.

“Just that women are so cheaply viewed in some places,” he answered.

We stopped in the small town of Mitzpe Ramon to have some lunch. The restaurant was just beside the main road and was a bus station besides. It was the most wonderful chicken soup I’d ever had. Just past Mitzpe Ramon the road started downward and we went down for about one thousand feet into a huge crater and traveled for about five miles. I was astounded by such a huge geological enormity right in the middle of the desert. We joined Rt. 90 and turned south. The desert scenery was marked by small hills as we approached Eilat. We decided to pass by the city this time and went right to the border on the way to Nuweiba. It took some time going across the

border, because we had to get all of the papers in order. However, the road continued to be smoothly paved and we made good time.

“It looks to me like the Children of Israel would have had a hard time of it coming this way,” Janet announced. “The road runs so close to the sea that they would have had to wade in the water.”

“Actually,” Ed went on. “They probably didn’t come this way at all. We have no idea where they went in the Sinai and there are simply no records of either their journey here or their life in Egypt. What is interesting about this place right now is the fact that it was occupied by Israel for many years and has just recently been turned back to Egypt. You will see a lot of evidence of the farming and building that was done here during the occupation.”

At Nuweiba the El Sayadin Village offered the best place to stay. They had small houses, each a complete room and bath. We chose to have separate rooms, since they were not overly expensive. Dinner in Egypt was at 8:00 P.M. so we were really starving by the time the doors opened and we proceeded down the line of the cafeteria. It was pretty fancy dining, even if it was self-service, so we enjoyed our meal. The waiters brought the dessert when we were ready for it, along with some very good coffee. We had to buy bottles of water to drink.

It was very quiet and peaceful as each of us made our way to our rooms, ready for a good night of rest. I did not try to make any further overtures; I felt that Janet would enjoy the night best by herself. I did put my arm around her as she and I were walking towards our rooms. She acknowledged that by patting my hand. “I like that,” was all she said.

The car trip the next day, after a late breakfast, was a steady climb upwards. We had to go up to about seven thousand feet. The scenery was different. Here and there were seams of black rock and in one place a rock was spectacularly balanced on a pillar. I wondered how long it had sat that way.

When we arrived in the small St. Catherine’s Village, we stopped at a small restaurant near the bus station. It was warm enough for us to sit at one of the outside tables and we ordered the soup. It was a broth, with some kind of vegetable in it, and there were floating pieces of some toasted pita bread. We downed it with relish.

The road turned sharply to the right here and we journeyed on to the St. Catherine’s Village Hotel, which was just across and west of Mt. Sinai and the famous monastery. We had made reservations and Phil brought some traveler’s checks with him because they did not take credit cards. The proprietor called for a couple of men to show us to our rooms, which were

actually small stone houses. They were very nicely built and the inside floors were tiled. The houses had two bedrooms each, so Janet and I shared one. The house had a very large living room with bedrooms on each side. The living room looked out on the very beautiful sight of St. Catherine's Monastery in the afternoon sunlight. We sat on the couch for an hour, not saying much and just drinking in the view. As the afternoon wore on, we could begin to feel the chill in the air and turned on the electric heater.

"David, I think I have to explain how I feel," Janet said. "I have liked you for many years, but there was no reason for me to want to love you. What you don't know is that I was married one time to a fine, young man. We had a little girl. When she was about five years old, we found that she had leukemia and was going to die. We lived with that about two years and adored her as much as we could. When the end came we were both devastated. We just couldn't stay together and Tom went his way. He died in his early forties, only a few years ago. We did not have much communication during those years, but I heard that he married again. I never did. I made my career my life. I wonder how I could change that again if I ever dared to love, especially to love someone I might lose again. You are a bit older than me, you know!"

"Oh, Janet, I am so sorry," I said. "I never knew your background, and never really had any reason to inquire. It makes me feel so sad for you and adds to my own sadness in losing Patti not so very long ago. Like you, I wonder if I can ever get over losing her. That rainy night at the Desert Inn was like a bit of heaven to me, but it was also very problematic. That may not even be a good word, but it certainly explains my mixed up feeling. I want to love you, to touch you, and yet I want to keep my distance."

We sat there, holding each other, because each other is all we had. It came to both of us, then, that there was a great comfort in the fact that we had known each other for a long time and that we felt good together.

We had been told that dinner would be early here, about six o'clock, because of the chill and the darkness, so we went out and walked up the stone path to a huge building that was solely the kitchen and dining area. There were just a few people inside and we were taken to a table not far from the doorway. Shortly, Ed and Phil came in and sat with us. Dinner was not from a menu; it was the meal of the day. It was lamb, prepared in a special sauce. For dessert there was a tart plum cake drizzled with sweet syrup. As usual, the coffee was delicious.

"So, David," Phil was asking, "When do you think you would like to fill us in on the link between the Essenes and the religion of ancient Sumaria?"

“Whoa! That’s a tall order right after dinner,” I commented. “I would likely need my notes to go into any detail. Let me just say that the book of Genesis says that the children of Shem went to live in the lands to the east and that the grandson of Noah’s son, Ham, was Nimrod, who was a mighty one. He erected five cities, Babel, Erech, and some others in a land called Shinar. We call the area Sumar, but it should have been called Shumar, correctly, and Shinar and Shumar is the same region in what is now called Iraq and perhaps Saudi Arabia. It is the cities of Iraq, which had the treasures. We have thousands and thousands of clay tablets from the period two to three thousand years before the birth of Christ. They had schools, developed a system of writing, and had literature, farming, agriculture, and intricate irrigation systems. Their ziggurats or step pyramids were their places of worship. They knew the number of the planets, the roundness of the earth and our whole system of astrology. They made wonderful garments as attested by the fact that one of the residents of Jericho risked his very life to save a Sumarian made coat. Their tablets show wheels and carts and a very progressed life style. The strange part is that they accomplished that much growth in a very short period of a few thousand years. To really understand the culture and its refinement, you should visit the back part of the second floor in the British Museum in London. You can see there the wheel scroll of Hammurabi’s law. This stated, in effect, that it was taken from laws that had already been in existence for a long time, even though it was written about a hundred years before Abraham came to Canaan. Whew! That’s enough!”

“Indeed,” Phil said. “Enough to blow my mind. Do you think that this had some significance to the Bible we know today?”

“ Well,” I said. “The Essenes had to get their knowledge from someplace. We thought a lot of what was written was oral knowledge, but when we start digging, literally digging, into the ancient areas, we can find some of the same ideas that you find in the Old Testament, which is what the Essenes copied.”

“Now that’s my forte,” Ed entered in. “We can believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, that God literally sat on their shoulder and guided their hand. Some people do. Or we can believe the thoughts themselves were inspired. Or we can also believe that these thoughts are ones that were already in existence and that they were used in the narrative. The fact that we have so much from Sumaria that is pre-existent to the Torah leads me to believe the latter. Now, David, I want you to expound on the God’s of Sumaria.”

“The Great Father of the Gods was Anu.” I said. “He reigned in the vast expanse of the heavens and his symbol was a star. In Sumerian tradition rulership came down from Anu, and his emblems were the crown and the scepter, just as we have in kings today. Then there was Enlil, who claimed the power as Anu’s eldest son, born at his father’s heavenly abode. At some early point in time he arrived on Earth even before it became civilized, yet he was human in form.”

“Was he alone or were there others?” Janet asked.

“Enlil had a brother, Enki, who was a major benefactor of mankind. Enki claimed that it was he who instituted plowing and opened the furrows. He claimed that he was actually the elder brother and the first-born and was entitled to the powers that Enlil possessed. There was a great deal of enmity and jealousy between the two brothers. There were other gods and goddesses, but the number was always kept at twelve. The old records influenced the Greek concept in mythology and the Roman as well, both of whom had the number twelve.”

“It is interesting to note that the same problem existed in the Hebrew record,” Ed added. “Ishmael was actually the firstborn of Abraham. When Isaac was born to Sarah, he was displaced. Look at all the problems that has caused in the world today. The Islamic people still claim that they are of the firstborn of Abraham. Esau was the first born of Isaac, but he was conned into trading his right by Jacob, who received the honor of having the birthright.”

“I see that the waiter is giving us a signal and I have already paid the check, so I guess that means we’ll have to cut it for tonight,” Phil broke in. “Have a good sleep everyone, tomorrow we’ll meet here for breakfast and then go over to the monastery.”

Janet and I walked back to the house, making small talk about the cold air and the area, but not touching on anything serious. When we entered the living room, we embraced for a while and I touched my lips to hers, but we were both so tired that we went to our rooms and quickly got ready for bed. It was a bit cool in the room, so I left the heater on. About midnight I woke to the realization that the heater had stopped. When I tried to turn on the light, I found that the generator had been turned off. Fortunately, I had a flashlight if I needed it, because everything was in total darkness. I went back to bed. I hadn’t even gone back to sleep when I heard a soft patter and Janet threw an extra blanket across me and climbed in to put her back to mine. We kept nice and cozy all night long.

We were on an eastern facing slope so the sunrise warmed us up very early in the morning. We had breakfast, and we were ready to get in the car and go by nine o'clock. We drove down the hill and then up the other side to get to the monastery. The road on the other side was not as well maintained. As we left the parking lot to walk to the monastery, we noted large bins of collected bones.

"What in the world are these?" Janet asked.

Ed gave a chuckle as he replied, "The brothers in the monastery knew that they could not bury everyone in this rocky area over thousands of years, so they devised a system. They buried the body long enough for the bones to leach out and dry and then they collected the body, sorted the bones into their category and placed them in these bins. You will notice shin bones in one, skulls in another and so forth."

"Ugh," was Janet's response.

"Well, you see they did not venerate the body, only the soul," Ed replied.

We went through a wooden door into the monastery. It was warm inside. We turned to the right to a hallway. Just inside the door was a letter, written in 1859, requesting that the famous Sinaiticus manuscript of the New Testament be allowed to be taken from the monastery to be copied.

"It was never returned," I said. "You can see it now in the British Library in London. This manuscript dates to 300 A.D. When I visited the library I also saw three small fragments of parchment, one from the Gospel of John, one from the Gospel of Peter, and a third from an unknown gospel. These dated back to the first century and were presumed to be the oldest known pieces ever found. The Gospel of Peter is from the Nag Hammadi Scrolls."

At the other end of the hall we perused some other old manuscripts that had some interest for us. Mostly, we were interested in the Chapel. It was filled with exquisite old paintings of gold on wood from over a thousand years ago. The value of the silver chandeliers hanging from the ceiling probably surpassed these great treasures.

"It's awesome," Janet gasped. We all agreed.

We wandered over the grounds and noticed a bush all fenced off with a sign before it proclaiming that it was "The Burning Bush."

"That reminds me of a poem written by Browning," Phil said. "Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; But only he who sees takes off his shoes, The rest sit and pick blackberries."

"That fits in with my ideas," Janet answered. "There is divinity all around us if we will but seek it out. The soul's discovery of God! It makes life a magnificent adventure."

We decided to stop at the little restaurant on the corner on our way back to Israel via Nuweiba. We thought we might have some more of the good soup we'd had on the way up. The weather had turned beautiful and warm, but I was ready to leave the high altitude and get back to the coast.

At Nuweiba we stopped to see the small village and noted all of the abandoned buildings that had been left there when the Israelis left after the peace process forced them to return the Sinai to Egypt. There was no problem crossing the border back into Israel. We just had to have our passports stamped and pay a small fee.

We decided to visit the Underwater Observatory on the way into Eilat. We walked down a stairway down under the ocean and strolled around in glass tubes. We could see all of the beautiful coral and the amazing sea life before our eyes. It was an enjoyable side trip.

We chose the Caesar's Hotel for our stay. The amount of traveling we had been doing and the change in altitude had worn all of us out, except for Janet, who seemed to have a lot of amazing energy. She went to her room to start processing the notes she was taking and I went to my room for a nap. I didn't pay much attention to whatever Ed and Phil were doing. For our evening meal we had some wonderful seafood at a restaurant just north of the hotel. It was next to the channel that divides that area.

"I want to add to our conversation of last evening," Ed started his dialogue. "A small bit of history from Abraham intrigues me. These three men appeared to him, and he recognized immediately that they were divine beings. We are not told just how he recognized them; perhaps it was some sort of headdress or a halo or aura that surrounded them. He called one of them 'adonai,' which was translated Lord. It did not refer to the God of the heavens, known as 'Jahweh' and translated Jehovah. The term was sometimes used in recognition of a supreme person. The Jewish people believe that there were divine men who could roam the country and do great things. Two of these men later went to visit Lot in Sodom and struck the men of the city blind when they tried to invade Lot's house."

"This whole idea ties in with the Sumarian belief that Enlil and Enki could roam the world of their time doing good things," I added. "While we are on the subject, the idea ties itself in with the fact that God talks in the plural, as though there are others present. In the beginning He says, 'Let us make man in our own image.' Later, just before the flood, He decides to destroy man completely. He is upset with man because he is flesh. There is no explanation of why this is so bad, but it is preceded by the fact that the divine beings began to have sexual relations with the daughters of men and produced

children called the ‘nephelim.’ They became mighty men of renown, which is what that word seems to mean here, but every thought of their heart was always evil. The decision is made to also destroy all of the animals of creation. Then God changes his mind and decides to save Noah and the clean animals. The explanation is that He found out that Noah was of pure lineage, but He knew that before. Why the change of mind?”

“Well,” Janet asked. “Do you have some kind of an answer?”

“I think I can help out with that,” Phil entered in. “Back in my room I have a very short document called the ‘Epic of Gilgamesh’ from about three thousand B.C.E. This is probably the oldest known book. It was written on clay tablets and its significance is only recently coming into being because it was found to contain a history of the flood. Now I admit,” he added. “I have this available because I have been leading you into this and I knew we would like to see this small document.”

We all went back to Phil’s room and let him lead us on a little further. He started by saying, “The narrator is a man named Utnapishtim, but just forget that and think of him as Noah.” Then he began by paraphrasing: “In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied so the gods decided to exterminate mankind. Enlil did this, but Ea, speaking to the reeds, warned the man. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat. These are the measurements by which you shall build her, let the beam equal her length. Let her deck be roofed; then take up into the boat the seed of all living creatures. The man told the people of the city that Enlil was angry with him and, if he left, they would be made to prosper. Hearing this, they helped him accomplish the building of the boat in seven days. Everyone helped and they used pitch and asphalt and oil to seal the boat all around. They had a feast to celebrate the accomplishment of the task and he served a lot of food and wine. Then he loaded in all of his family, the wild and tame beasts and all the craftsmen. When it started to rain he said, ‘I looked out at the weather and it was terrible, so I too boarded the boat and battened her down.’ His description of the storm is poetic, ‘With the first light of dawn a black cloud came from the horizon; It thundered within where Adad, lord of the storm was riding. Then the gods of the abyss rose up; Nergal pulled out the dams of the nether waters, Ninurta the war-lord threw down the dykes.’ He went on, ‘One whole day the tempest raged, gathering fury as it went, it poured over the people as the tides of battle.’ A tidal wave had obliterated the landscape and he notes that even the gods were terrified. This was a calamity that was greater than they had anticipated. The wind blew for six days and six nights and tempest and floods raged over all the lands. ‘When the seventh

day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled.’ The man looked out and all he could see was the water all around. He sat down and wept. Then the boat grounded itself on a mountain and after a few days he sent out a dove, which returned and a sparrow, which returned. Then he sent out a raven and she cawed and flew around, but did not return. He then put out meat on grills as they came out of the boat and the gods ‘gathered like flies over the sacrifice.’ Ishtar then came and promised to remember these days. Enlil came and said angrily, ‘has any of these mortals escaped? Not one was to have survived the destruction.’ Ea made the excuse that the man was very wise and learned about everything in a dream. Enlil took the man and his family and had them live at the mouth of the rivers. Now, tell me, is there enough similarity for you to think that the Biblical writers drew on this tale?”

“Well, I can see that they juiced it up a bit,” Janet said. “They lengthened the time period to an impossible length for all of the animals to be in a boat, and they made the flood and the gathering of the animals universal.”

“That was probably meant to make it more heroic,” Phil said.

Janet said, “I like the story because it does not make the gods responsible for the flood itself. It was something that they could foresee, but not something that they could prevent when the huge tidal wave swept in from the Indian Ocean. Also, they couldn’t have saved everyone.”

“It was likely that this was towards the end of the ice age,” Phil said. “There had been a long time of drought and hardship prior to this time. Then perhaps an asteroid came close enough to earth to disturb the ice near the South Pole and a great chunk slipped into the ocean causing a huge tidal wave. The wise gods would have seen this coming, but could not stop it.”

“It did change the world after that,” Ed added. “Genesis, though, makes God omnipotent and totally responsible. We hesitate to do that when catastrophic events happen in the world today.”

“I think the Genesis story ends a lot nicer when God promises never to destroy the earth again, and places a rainbow in the sky as a token of the covenant,” Janet said.

Glancing over his notes, Phil added, “I have noted here that there was an apocryphal version of Genesis written by a very talented novelist in Aramaic. This was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Added to the Genesis account is a story, with Lamech, Noah’s father, speaking in the first person. Because Noah is such a beautiful baby he is acknowledging his fears that ‘the conception had been from the holy ones or the fallen angels. And my heart was changed because of this child.’ His wife, Bat-Enosh, assures him, ‘Thine

is the seed and from thee is the conception. And it is no strangers, nor is it of any of the Watchers or the Sons of Heaven.’ This is an affirmation of Noah’s purity in lineage. It also lends more credence to the biblical statement concerning the divine beings and their siring children from earthly women.”

“I have never read much about that,” I said. “Why haven’t people questioned it more?”

“Because the word is translated ‘giants’ and no further thought went into the matter,” Phil replied. “The word ‘nephelim’ is used two more times in the Bible. One time it refers to the stature of the occupants of Palestine in the eyes of the spies Moses sent over, and the other time with reference to Goliath. Both times it might have referred to the might of the individual rather than to the size. Perhaps, when we don’t have any answers, then we don’t have any questions either.”

“A small, but important, fragment of The Epic of Gilgamesh was found at Megiddo,” Ed put in, changing the subject. “So we know that there was a Palestinian version of the story.” He continued, “We know that the Essene copies contained the entire Bible as we have it, with the exception of the book of Esther. In fact, later versions so exactly match these early copies that we know great pains were taken to keep an exact perfection in making every copy. Esther was not left out by accident. Therefore, I draw the conclusion that the first compilation occurred before the captivity. I say this because Esther was a story of the captivity. I place the exile to Babylon at about 579 B.C.E. Now we have God speaking to Jeremiah before the exile, say about thirty years earlier, and saying, ‘Write all these things that I have told you in a book because I am going to bring the people back from captivity.’ This is about the time that I feel the original documents of the Torah were compiled, and for that very reason. It would be essential to have some story to unite the people after they had been subjected to the influence of another nation. After seventy years they might have forgotten the retelling of the events. Now, whether they were written on clay tablets or some type of animal skin as these later copies, we do not know.”

“We’ll call that a wrap for tonight,” Phil concluded. “You have more than enough to think about. I’ll be happy to hear more about your thoughts tomorrow as we go to Arad. If you are up to it we will enter Masada the back way, by climbing the long flights of stairs.”

It had been a long day again and we turned in readily. Janet and I went to our separate rooms again. We were both very tired, and we really did not know what to make of our feelings for each other. We both felt reluctant to pursue our affection any further.

CHAPTER THREE

The driving was easy as we headed north again on Rte. 90, a well-paved road. We stopped at the Hai Bar Nature Reserve, which is dedicated to preserving rare species of animals mentioned in the Bible. “Some of these animals had to be imported from neighboring countries,” Ed explained. “A rare species of donkey was flown out from Iran just before the revolutionaries closed the airport.” We drove through the reserve, but did not see many of the animals, since they are wild and were probably off in other parts.

We came to land so rugged that we had never seen anything quite like it. A jumbled array of small hills pressed one after another. We passed the south end of the Dead Sea and noted all of the machinery for refining the minerals from the water. Shortly, we turned left on Rte. 31 to go up the steep hill to Arad. There were two turnouts along the way that afforded us some spectacular views back towards the Dead Sea.

Arad has a central square in the middle of the small town. There were several small stands here that sliced lamb from a huge shank spinning upright on a spit. We ordered, and some slices were taken off for each of us and placed in pita bread. It was delicious. We sat and enjoyed our meal as the south wind tousled our hair and we basked in the beautiful sunshine. Afterwards, we went over to the ice cream parlor and bought a huge cone. It was five shekels, but they put on it everything the cone would hold. We would have liked a nap, but we got some water bottles and set out to see Masada. It was only a short drive to get there. Just a few cars were in the parking area and the steps looked formidable. We paid for our entry ticket and Ed encouraged us, “Don’t worry, there are several platforms where we can stop. We have a lot of time.” The massive flat top loomed far above us.

Janet observed, “Those Romans must have had a hard time erecting the ramp leading up there. What in the world is all this machinery lying around? Is that from Roman times?”

“No,” Phil replied, “Those are the left over remnants of the movie that was filmed here.”

We did stop many times on the way up. When we got up there, however, the view itself was worth the effort. The Dead Sea sprawled into the distance. The hills of Jordan were beyond, still in all of their blue glory.

Ed went on to explain the history, “Masada fell in 73 A.D., three years after the fall of Jerusalem. They had an elaborate watering system and they

could grow plants on the top of this mesa. However, the Romans erected a ramp and finally arrived at the top, only to find that the brave Zealots had taken their own lives as a final sacrifice.”

Janet was passionate as she said, “There is no glory in sacrifice. The glory was with the sane man who might have taken his wife and walked down the secret path in the dark of the night and went to live at peace with the people in the community. These Zealots were just crazy idiots who believed they could die for the Cause they represented. The Children of Light against the forces of darkness. So it went through the Crusades, the Holy Wars of the Ages, and the crazy suicide bombers of today, all believing they have a Cause that is worth dying for. A Cause is worth living for!”

“I can tell that you feel very strongly about that,” Phil replied. “I have never known you to be quite so vehement.”

“I am reminded of the story of the famous Josephus Flavius,” Ed entered in. “He was sent to a city near Acre to defend it. When the city was about to fall, about forty people went to hide in a cave. They also made a pact to die rather than to be captured. Joseph and another man were the last to stand alive. At that moment Joseph changed his mind and persuaded his companion that perhaps the pact was not such a great idea after all. They surrendered to the Romans, who spared their lives. Joseph became a favorite of General Vespasian, who would later become Emperor. He changed his name to Josephus Flavius and accompanied the Roman campaign. His historical writings are extremely valuable, though there is some controversy about his method of staying alive.”

Ed continued, “Just north of here lived Bar Kochba, a Jewish leader who successfully revolted against the Romans sixty two years after they destroyed Jerusalem. For the next three years, the Jews again enjoyed independence in their land and Jerusalem was their Capital. Then Hadrian sent in the powerful Roman Legions and they proceeded to crush the resistance outposts one by one. Bar Kochba and his followers found refuge in some caves between here and Qumram. A clear, glass plate was found there that could have been made in England in the 1800’s. They had a legal system that was profound and a woman lawyer named Babata took her legal papers with her into the caves so we have copies of leases, lawsuits, mortgages, and title deeds. They had a very advanced life style.”

“And gained absolutely nothing by their revolt,” Janet added. “Like the Zealots of all time, including those of today, who believe that God is with them in their passionate, murderous conflicts. David, I’ll bet even in your Sumerian documents you had wars and conflicts.”

“I have to admit there were always wars between the cities,” I said.

Phil made a suggestion, “Let’s do some more looking around up here at the fortress that King Herod built. This is an awe-inspiring place. By the way, two old manuscripts were found up here. One was the Book of Jubilees. The other was a complete manuscript that contained The Wisdom of Ben Sira. They were both written about 200 B.C.E. and neither was included in the Jewish Bible, but they make interesting reading.”

We continued to make a tour of the area and enjoyed the remainder of the afternoon without any further controversy. I rather enjoyed Janet’s sudden outburst because she had been quiet most of the time. Now, I wanted to hear more of her thoughts. We returned to Arad and ate at the Galit Restaurant on the southwest corner of the square. We had marinated meat that was very good and a cake covered with liqueur to complete the meal. We spent the night at the Margoa Hotel.

After a refreshing sleep and a filling breakfast, we started on the road again. About eight miles west we turned off a dirt road to the right to visit Tel Arad. “This is an old Canaanite city dating back to about 3,000 B.C.E. The king of Arad barred Moses and the Children of Israel from passing through on their march north from the Negev,” Ed related. “Later on Joshua conquered the monarch in battle. This later Israelite city was established about 1200 B.C.E. and sat on this high hill overlooking all of the surrounding area. An old synagogue is set here in the corner of the ruins. It was complete with an altar and a Holy of Holies. The altar itself we will see in the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem. It was this type of regional temple that aroused the wrath of the Old Testament prophets, since it took the place of the central authority in Jerusalem. There is some question here as to human sacrifice, which, according to the story of Jephthah’s foolish vow, should not be ruled out. He vowed to sacrifice to God the first thing that appeared in his doorway on his return home. His daughters came rushing out to meet him. We have no idea what his eventual solution was because there is no clear resolution of his dilemma.” Since it was cloudy and a strong wind was blowing, we did not spend any longer at the Tel.

We got into the car and drove down the driveway. Then we turned to the right, and started west on Rt. 31 towards Tel Aviv, driving past many Bedouin villages. “This area has produced many university graduates and one member of the Knesset,” Ed commented.

We cut back to Rt. 35 and soon found ourselves in the beach town of Askelon. We drove west towards the beach down Ben Gurion Boulevard, and then turned left to the National Park area. “I would come here just for

these lovely beaches,” Janet said. “I haven’t seen any that were more inviting.”

“While Askelon is known for its beaches,” Ed replied, “It also has a rich and fascinating past. There are no signs, however, of the Philistines, who ruled here during Biblical times. Neither are there any scallions or shallots to be seen, though the Crusaders ran a flourishing onion trade here. Their name is derived from the city.”

Janet and I walked through the park and climbed a hill on the edge of the beach. The sun was shining again and, as we looked out over the blue Mediterranean shimmering in the sunshine, I commented, “Those Philistines really knew how to choose their location. Have you ever seen any place with more beauty?”

“I’d just like us to build a house here and stay forever,” Janet said.

“Would you really like to stay with me somewhere forever?” I asked, as I put my arm around her waist.

“I’m thinking about it,” Janet replied. She turned and gave me a kiss.

We returned to Ed and Phil, who were examining the statues from the Roman period. There were many of them all set in a row.

As we joined them Phil said, “I find this marble statue of Isis with the child, Horus, in her arms very interesting. It looks like an exact replica of the Madonna and child. Isis supposedly mated with Osiris, even though his sex organs had been lost, and Horus was the result. This is from Egyptian mythology.”

“This ramp that you see,” Ed commented, “is the remains of a thirty-five hundred year old Hyksos city-wall and the upper parts are Crusader fortifications from the twelfth century.”

We sat around in the sunshine for a while, and then decided that we would continue on to Jaffa, just south of Tel Aviv.

Israel is, after all, a very small country and it is easy to get around. The one thing we hadn’t counted on was the lack of directional signs. On the way to Tel Aviv, we came to a place in the road where we had to go to the right or to the left, with no indication which way to turn. We turned to the left, which was correct. We found out later the other way went to the airport.

We were quite lost when we got into Jaffa, just south of Tel Aviv. There were many one-way streets, and we weren’t quite sure where to go. We knew we had to find Immanuel House, in the old section, but we didn’t know the street address. I felt that we were very near, and it turned out I was right, because it was one block south of Eilat Street and two blocks east of Jerusalem Street, where we were at that moment.

“What an interesting place,” Janet commented as we entered the garden that served as a parking lot.”

We were cordially greeted by the staff and shown to our rooms on the second floor. Each room had a balcony to look out over the old section of town. This was the part of Tel Aviv that had been built before Israel became an independent country in 1948. There was a flavor here that could not be found in any of the modern hotels. The rooms were large and each one had a private closet and bathroom.

“This was a very famous hotel in years gone by,” Phil said. “Kaiser Wilhelm stayed here when he visited Turkey prior to World War I. The city was still in Turkish hands at that time. The whole area, as you can see, has fallen into a bit of ruin, but it was fantastic in its day.”

“Well, I don’t know about the rest of you, but I saw a restaurant on the corner as we turned in and I’m ready to eat,” I said.

Everyone agreed and we walked the short block up to the restaurant. We had shish kebobs. They were not quite like anything we’d had before, because they were ground lamb with peppers in between. They had a Mid-East flavor and they were good.

Janet’s room was next to mine and Ed and Phil were on the other side of the hallway. They went right to bed, and Janet came with me to my room so we could sit on the balcony and talk. We were looking out at one very old building that was in need of some care and a coat of paint.

“It’s pleasant just being with you, Janet,” I said. “Even if we never have anything more than this, I treasure the time we spend together alone.”

“Give me some time,” she replied. “I feel more comfortable around you all the time. I just can’t be rushed into such deep feelings. I know we can experience a whole lot together. It’s there, but it can’t be forced. That would be like pulling open a flower about to blossom. We would lose all the beauty of it.”

We talked some more about the day and the events that had transpired. Because we were both very tired, we turned in.

Breakfast the next day was in the dining area in the middle of the downstairs. The staff cooked in an English fashion, so we had Wheatabix, the cereal that seems to keep on growing as you add milk. Tea and biscuits accompanied the cereal.

After breakfast Ed said, “Well, if you are game for it, we can walk right over to Old Jaffo, as it is called, and save finding a parking spot for the car.”

We walked down to the old clock tower, inspecting the shops as we went. There were shoes, clothing, and jewelry; anything you wanted, including

many antique items. “Those may look old, but they were made only the day before yesterday,” Ed said. “They will give you quite a story about finding that item in some old cave and then you walk up the street and find the same thing sitting in the window of another store.”

We walked up the hill to what is known as Old Jaffa, and came upon a restored area in the center of which was a large excavated plot. Here we could see a twenty-foot thick wall built by the Egyptians. There was also part of a city gate bearing the name of Ramses II.

“Jaffa claims to be the oldest port in the world,” Ed filled us in. “Japheth, the son of Noah, is supposed to have been the founder. Oh, yes, Egyptian records show that Thutmose III conquered it in 1468 B.C.E. He was heading north to put down a revolt of his subjects in the Jezre’el Valley. You’ll see that the remains also include a Canaanite city, a Jewish city built at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, a statue of Aphrodite, and traces of the Roman occupation.”

“I thought the Israelites had conquered the area about 1400 B.C.E.,” Janet said. “If the Egyptians were still here why aren’t they mentioned in the Bible?”

“It’s a good question,” I answered. “Probably the best explanation is that the Egyptians didn’t give the Israelites any problems. They could have just existed rather peacefully.”

We took our time looking around. A Roman Catholic Church and Monastery of St. Peter dominated the area. We could see the sea sparkling beyond the harbor. It was all so thoroughly enjoyable that we just walked slowly around the excavation, reading the signs.

“From the Egyptians this area passed into the hands of the Philistines,” Ed went on. “Later, David conquered the city and used it as a port to bring the cedar trees from Lebanon to build the temple. This was about 950 B.C.E. It was from Jaffa that Jonah set sail, before his fateful encounter with the whale.”

I said, “Yes, and it was here that Peter brought Tabitha back to life. While residing in the house of Simon the Tanner, he also had a vision to preach to the Gentiles. There’s a lot of history in this place.”

We strolled down the hill towards the harbor and passed the ancient mosque with an ornate fountain alongside it. Though not particularly interested in buying any art, we strolled through countless shops, just browsing.

About this time we ended up at the harbor, and Phil suggested that we might like to visit the fish restaurant here. We decided that we were hungry

enough by now and it was nearing noon, so we went in and sat down. It was buffet style and the fish was as fresh as you could ever want. There were all kinds of dishes to accompany the fish, so we were well filled by the time we left and it had been very inexpensive.

“Perhaps it would be good to go back and rest and relax this afternoon,” Ed suggested. “I would like for us to attend the Inbal Dance Theatre tonight. It is within walking distance of our hotel. They perform the unique dances of the Yemenite Jewish community.”

As it began to grow dark, we started out for the theatre. We felt perfectly safe. Ed told us this was known as the Neve Tzdek quarter. “It is an area that actually predates Tel Aviv,” he said. “It is filled with small homes and the places of famous people.”

We were pleasantly surprised by the size of the auditorium, and the dance was lively and very well performed. A large audience was present, even on a weeknight. They also did several dramatic dances that were quite different from anything we had seen before. We especially enjoyed the comical dance in which the poor fellow loses his violin and traipses all over trying to find it. We found it hard to believe that a theatre like this could be found in what seemed such a ragtag community. As we mingled after the performance, we could understand the quality of the theatre, because the guests were well dressed and very polite. They obviously came from the social community of Tel Aviv.

The night was warm because we were near the sea, so we walked with leisure back towards our hotel. Our noon meal needed some reinforcement, so we stopped at a small storefront restaurant and had some light refreshments and some tea.

I went to my room, but soon there was a knock on the door. It was Janet. “I just had to tell you what a wonderful day we had,” she said. “Oh, David, it is so great to have you with me.”

My arms opened up and she ran into them with a heavy sigh. “It has been such a long time since I’ve allowed myself the comfort anyone else could bring,” she breathed.

“I love you, Janet,” I said. “I have always loved you in a way, but now I can allow myself to love you more. I will love you always, and I promise that I will never leave you.”

She drew me down on the bed and said, “Yes, you will. Some day you will die and then I’ll be alone again.”

“That will happen to all of us one day,” I replied. “But if we don’t learn to enjoy what we have now, then what is even the use of living? Love is forever.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The next day we decided that we would go up to Haifa. It was not hard to find our way to the road leading north out of Tel Aviv. We passed many fine hotels on the seashore. They looked like great places to stay if you wanted to do the touristy things.

We drove down the main street of Natanya and turned around at the end and drove back to the main road. The shops were interesting, especially the ones dealing in diamonds, but we were not out for that sort of thing.

The old Roman city of Caesarea allured us however, and we detoured the short distance to the amphitheatre, which looks right out over the ocean. Phil checked out his fine tenor voice and the acoustics were superb. Another party entered and Phil decided that they might think him weird, so he stopped singing. A line of plaques looked interesting so we went over to look at them. One of them read "Tiberium" and another "...tius Pilate."

"That is the sole record of Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea at the time of Jesus," Phil said.

I said, "This is the place where Peter converted Cornelius and baptized the first Gentiles. Also, during his two-year imprisonment here, Paul defended himself before the Roman governor, Festus, and also presented his case to Agrippa II. We had to memorize those words, 'I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before you concerning all the things whereof I am being accused.' This is from the Book of Acts."

We checked out the hotels, but decided that it would be best to go on the short distance to Haifa. When we arrived, we drove up the steep hill to the Dan Panorama Hotel. The lobby was large and impressive, and we could see as we entered that there were many shops on a floor below. Janet and I asked for rooms on the fourth floor, even though the rooms on the upper floors were larger. We just didn't like to think of the long rides on the elevator. Since we were high on the hill, even the lower floors had wonderful views.

We had dinner at a restaurant next to the hotel and then retired to Ed and Phil's room, which was on the eleventh floor and larger than ours. Below us was the Bahai Temple, with its wonderful gardens. In the distance was the harbor, and ships unloading at the docks. We sat for a while and looked out at the view. "In Haifa everyone works," Ed commented.

Phil contemplated a further talking session, “David, take your notes and tell us more about the people who wrote the Nag Hammadi scrolls,” he requested.

I looked over my notes and decided where to begin. “The people known as the Gnostics believed in separation from the world and the sharing of community property,” I said. “They believed that they were being like the early Christians. One of the most prominent beliefs was that baptism was more than a ritual. They believed that it was the death of the old self, a burial of what a person had been, and a resurrection to live a new life,” I continued. “In fact, their message was so misunderstood that Paul, in writing to Timothy, cited Hymenaeus and Philetus, saying ‘They have shot wide of the truth in saying that our resurrection has already taken place, and are upsetting people’s faith.’ Writing to the Romans, Paul had already said. ‘Don’t you know that when we were baptized into Jesus Christ we were baptized into his death? Thus, we are buried with Him by baptism into death; and, just as Christ was risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in the newness of life.’ The Gnostics also pointed out that Jesus did not baptize any of the disciples because baptism was not appropriate until after His death, burial, and resurrection.”

“Wait, what about John’s baptism?” Janet asked.

“Well, you remember when Paul came to Corinth, they had not received the Holy Spirit,” I said. “When he asked what baptism they had, they answered that it was John’s baptism. Paul answered to tell them that John baptized unto repentance. Paul then baptized them again in the name of Christ, and they received the Holy Spirit, which must have been some special attribute.”

“So perhaps the Gnostics were not so far off,” Janet put in. “What they were saying is that baptism is more than a ritual, and they opposed the teaching that it was for entrance into the saving institution of the church.”

“Of course, the bishops won the day, because baptism was changed to sprinkling at the Council of Ravenna and extended to babies, who could not possibly fathom its meaning,” I concluded.

“Then they were actually in opposition to the established church?” Janet asked.

“By all means,” I said. “The Gnostics said that people who name themselves bishops are dry canals. However, the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity resulted in the ultimate eradication of Gnosticism, except for occasional underground movements.”

“Did they have other ideas that differed from the established church?” Phil asked.

“Several very interesting theories,” I went on. “The scrolls themselves are difficult to read because they differ so much from our way of thinking. However, I have made a note of several passages that would be of interest for their different views. The early church tried to make Mary Magdalene a prostitute, evidently because they wanted to demean her image. The scrolls make Mary the companion of Jesus. In the gospel of Philip, ‘As the companion of Mary Magdalene, He loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her lips.’ Again in the same Gospel, ‘There were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary, his mother, and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary.’ In the Gospel of Mary, Peter says, ‘We know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women’ and asks her to tell what she knew. She proceeds to do so, and then Peter becomes irate and indicates some doubt as to whether Jesus would tell her these things without telling the rest of the disciples. Levi comes to her defense saying, ‘Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Surely, the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us.’ A conclusion that we could reach is that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus, a fact that would have been totally rejected by the established church.

“Wow,” Janet said. “This must have blown the minds of those bishops in the second century.”

“ I think that the Gnostics were trying to antagonize them.” I said. “Most of the early writings that we have are refutations of Gnosticism. The movement threatened the creation of the church into an organized religious movement, with power and money. Some of the Gnostic writers went even further in their apostasy, saying in The Testimony of Truth, after telling the story of the eating of the fruit in the Garden of Eden, ‘But what sort is this God? First he maliciously refused Adam from eating the tree of knowledge. And, secondly, he said, ‘Adam where are you?’ God does not have foreknowledge; otherwise would He not know from the beginning? And afterwards He said, ‘Let us cast him out of this place, lest he eat of the tree and live forever. Surely he has shown himself to be a malicious grudger. And what kind of God is this?’ Worse than that, in the Gospel of Philip the writer declares that Cain was a child of the serpent and that is why he murdered his brother. In other words, when the serpent gave Eve to eat of the fruit it indicated that he had intercourse with her. Since the fruit was the knowledge of copulation, it does make some sense, but, again, this would

have been a source of wrathful ire in the church. Now, notice, I am only telling you what is there. I am not saying it was right or wrong.”

“Yes, the Book of Genesis definitely indicates that Cain is the son of Adam and Eve,” Ed put in. “I think their idea is a bit far-fetched. However, if they were trying to get attention, they must certainly have done that with these sayings.”

“There are some interesting aspects to the mystery of Eden,” Janet said. “The emphasis has always been placed on the result being a sin. Actually, the sin was the disobedience of Adam. The result was two fold, the knowledge of reproduction and not being able to live forever. I have a couple of major questions. Why did God not want the couple to know about reproduction? Why did knowing about reproduction keep them from living forever? Did God just want two people to tend His garden and never have any more children?”

“Janet, you have touched on an aspect that has caused inquiries throughout the ages,” I said. “The Apostle Paul argued that it was all part of a great plan. A portion of the letter to the Romans reads, ‘Through one man sin entered into the world and through the sin death and the same to all men passed through because all have sinned.’ He goes on to say that this is fair because what was lost in Adam is given in Christ through the promise of eternal life. Thus, it was always God’s plan to take away in Adam and give back in Christ. Without the former plan, there could not have been a latter plan.”

“What this means, then, is that we all became mortal beings in Adam,” Janet said. “But, then, why was there such an emphasis on sex being the sin? It was still a sin of disobedience, not of sex?”

Phil said, “I have always asked myself, if God felt it was such a sin, why did He make it so pleasurable? Nature, of course, argues it was necessarily so for the continuation of our race.”

“From the beginning,” I said. “The Origin of the World, says, ‘When they became sober, they saw that they were naked and became enamored of one another.’ Doesn’t that sound like a couple of teen-agers?”

“What about the Sumerians?” Ed asked. “Where did they stand in all of this?”

“The Sumerians had no Eden,” I replied. “So far as sex is concerned, it was downright prevalent among their gods, and so probably among the Sumerians as well. Certainly, it was not considered a sin. However, the big question here is, why do we have to die? Biblically, this was a problem, because the perfect God created the perfect man. In early Sumeria, the

God's, themselves, were imperfect, but they were immortal. So, the question was still asked, why do we have to die? There are two myths that deal with that question. The first is of a man, Adapa, who cursed the south wind. For that crime, he must appear before Anu. Enki tells him beforehand that he should not eat or drink anything set before him. Anu commands that the food of life be brought before him, but Adapa declines to eat. Since Adapa declined Anu's offer, he is sent back to earth and eventually has to die. In the second story, Gilgamesh is told that there is a thorny plant that grows deep under the water. If he eats it, he will become young again. Gilgamesh ties stones to his feet and retrieves the plant, but does not eat of it immediately. He goes to bathe in a well of water, and a serpent comes up from the well, snatches the plant, and eats it. Thus, Gilgamesh is deprived of eternal life, and he dies."

Janet said, "So, all of these stories simply say that we are mortal and we have to die."

"Well, of course they have to end up that way," I said. "After all, we all do die, so how could it have been otherwise?"

"With that, let's consider it a night," Ed concluded. "Sometimes in our discussions, we find more questions than we do answers. I'll try to figure out where in the world we can start tomorrow, but first we are going to go out and visit the cave of Elijah."

"Ed, I'd like not to have to leave on such a somber note," I said. "When my wife died, I set my heart on finding an answer to life after death. You know, when it happens close to you, it sets you to wondering. Well, I went down to Costa Rica and happened to stay at the El Cafetal Inn near Atenas. When the owner, Lee, found out what I was seeking, she placed the Tibetan Book of Death and Dying in my hands. The Tibetans believed that each one of us has a purpose in life. We are happiest when we find out what that purpose is, and work to achieve it. Death is the wonderful moment when we can again enter the spiritual body from which we came."

"It's like that lovely poem, 'The Rose That Grows Beyond the Wall,' which tells the story of another existence," Janet said.

"With that good thought, we will conclude," Ed said. And we did.

Janet had asked to room with me, and I had no objections. We went to our room and turned the sofa to face the window so that we could look out at the lights down below and then, finally, decided to turn in, sleeping in our separate beds, but feeling more and more like partners in life.

Our car needed some work done on it, so we took it over to Eldan Car Rental just next door to the hotel, and took bus Number 23 down to the main

bus station. From there we could walk over to Bat Gallim. The cable car runs from there up to the top of Mount Carmel. On the way up Phil said, "Well, Elijah may have ascended in a chariot up to heaven, but we have to be content with the thrill of being carried in a little plastic ball fifteen hundred feet up the side of the mountain."

"And almost too much of a thrill," Janet added.

The Carmelite Church, Stella Maris, Star of the Sea, is supposedly built over the cave in which Elijah hid from King Ahab. It has many beautiful paintings and statues inside. We were up high enough to see the glorious beauty of the Mediterranean spread out on the horizon before our eyes.

"You can almost see Elijah's servant going out from here to look towards the sea for the rain clouds," I said. "Seven times he saw nothing, but then he reported a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. The rain came swiftly, and Elijah wrapped his rags around his hips, and ran before the rain to the entrance to Jezreel. It feels like it is going to rain very hard later on tonight, even though the sun is shining now."

"So what do you think of the story of Elijah?" Janet asked.

"He was not the only one to be taken up without dying," Ed said. "Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him."

"We find many places in the Sumerian legends where they were taken up to be with the Gods," I added. "Do you suppose that there was a space ship, which appeared from time to time to transport certain mortals?"

"Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," Phil said. "From that, I would conclude that Elijah was changed as he was taken up."

"Well, it is interesting that the Sumerians could go up to the Gods and then come back again," I said. "Their Gods were anthropomorphic; that is, they were human in form. Now, I repeat again that these writings were from about twenty-five hundred B.C.E. They are very, very old. Actually, from the first beginnings of writing, and they were on clay tablets."

"When did men first begin to talk?" Janet asked. "Isn't it surmised that cave-men were not able to converse?"

"Let's go back to the hotel," I said. "I will get my notes and tell you some of the interesting, scientific facts that can be gleaned from that period of time."

After a good lunch, I began again, "Stephen Gould, in his book, *Wonderful Life*, makes a strong case that contingencies shaped life much more than evolution. He used the Burgess Shale as an example, because he found that a cataclysmic event wiped out most of the one-celled creatures in

the beginning of time. The dinosaurs are another example. They should have lasted forever by the theory of the survival of the fittest, but something wiped them out completely, paving the way for man to enter the world. Now, I am pointing this out because it is apparent that some great intervention shaped the life of Homo Erectus about 35,000 years ago. Appearing as if from nowhere, Homo Sapiens swept Neanderthal man from the face of the earth. In a period of millions of years, man had been able to create only stone tools, yet suddenly he began to develop weapons of wood and bones, and to use skins for clothing. Then, mankind began to develop the cereal grains, and to keep seeds and replant the grains. Orchards were developed, and fruits, like the apricot and the cherry, came from this region. In answer to your question, Janet, I think about this time, men began to converse with one another.”

“So, what do you think was the cause of all of this?” Phil asked.

“We really do not know,” I said. “There has been some conjecture that something from outer space entered into earth’s atmosphere about this time, perhaps even a planet, and the inhabitants of this planet transferred this immense knowledge to earth’s people.”

“Do any of the early records indicate this?” Janet asked.

“Yes,” I said. “The Sumerian’s Gods lived up above, and they were able to transport back and forth at will. The sign of the winged eagle is prevalent among their early pictures. The evidence grows when you realize that, by 4000 B.C.E., they had cities, built immense towers, had an elaborate system of writing, schools to go with it, and a system of laws together with sympathy for the poor and downtrodden. It was an immense leap forward. Then, too, there are pictures of carts with wheels, farmers with plows, and elaborate clothing. We know about their homes and cities, because we have unearthed those places. There are so many thousands of written tablets that it will be years before we can decipher all of them.”

“Well, it is certain that you cannot argue with the archeological evidence,” Ed agreed. “What is amazing is not just what we have found, but what we will probably find in the future.”

“Tell you what,” Phil chimed in. “Tomorrow we will go out to see Elijah’s statue, and then we will go on into the Galilee. There, we will enter a new period of history. That will be challenging, indeed.”

The next day we picked up our refurbished rental car and headed east. The road led us past the high rise of the university, and then along the spine of Mt. Carmel to the Druze village of Daliyat el Carmel. We noticed several of the older men wearing their characteristic walrus mustaches. Ed explained

that this was an Arabic speaking people with a secret religion, the result of a break with Islam one thousand years ago.

Just beyond the small town, we took a road branching off to the left. About three kilometers down the small dirt road, we took a right turn. The sign said it was private property.

“Don’t worry,” Ed explained. “This is a Carmelite Monastery open to the public.”

We saw the statue of a very fierce Elijah. “He looks ready to confront the priests of Baal right now,” Janet said.

“This is supposed to be the place where he confronted them,” Ed went on. “The priests of Baal took all day trying to get Baal to burn their sacrifice. Then, Elijah poured water over the sacrifice and God licked up sacrifice, water, stones and all, and won the day.”

After looking around the area, we went up on the roof to gaze down at the valley below us. We could see far across the hills of Galilee. Everything was green, because we had been getting plenty of rain.

Janet and I went on to Tiberious and spent our night there. This time there was no holding back. We loved each other and we knew it. The next day we sought the minister of the small Anglican church and we were wed. We decided it was time to go home and let the mysteries here solve themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE

We went back to the highway and turned left. This was the way to Nazareth. The city has no history, which is odd and indicates that it is not as old as people have thought. In the center of the city is the Basilica of Mary. On the second floor are pictures of Mary sent from many countries of the world. We spent a lot of time looking at those elegant pictures.