

Book One

THE KING HIDDEN

Chapter Five

THE PRESENTATIONS

Stephen H. Funck, December 22, 2015

TO THE TEMPLE

The Torah commanded that on the fortieth day, a woman who had a male child was to bring an offering for her purification, a lamb or two doves or pigeons. Joseph, Mary and the baby went to the Temple to do what was commanded.¹ For most of the way they retraced the steps they took the day before when they went to see Zachariah, Elizabeth and baby John. Elizabeth had given Mary new swaddling cloths for the baby and dresses with fancy work. She did think she and the baby ought to look their best when they came into the House of the Lord. Mary was feeling stronger every day. She knew she would have no problems on the long walk back to Nazareth.

The road took them around the west side of the city past the great palace fortress Herod had built.² The only portion that was the least bit vulnerable to attack was the north end. There he had built three of the largest, strongest and most beautiful towers. Joseph had been talking to Mary along the way. She liked that. Men usually did not bother talking to their women. The women followed so far behind it was not easy to carry on a conversation. Joseph always encouraged her to walk close by. He liked to talk.

“Mary, one of the first places I worked was over there. It was a quarry then.”

“Yes.”

“The stone wasn’t the best. It looks like they gave up. Someone brought in soil and planted trees.”

“It looks nice.”

“I expect it was Herod. He likes to sit up on the tower and look around. I would see him up there. Those old quarry walls would make a good place for tombs. Good place just outside the gate.”

They went by two men in strange dress, talking in a strange tongue to a boy with camels and a donkey. It sounded like they said king. They appeared to be travel worn visitors. One was tall, very dark and thin, the other short and plump.

FOREIGN VISITORS PRESENTED TO THE KING

1 Redemption of the first born son http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pidyon_HaBen http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presentation_of_Jesus_at_the_Temple

2 Herod’s Palace in Jerusalem [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod%27s_Palace_\(Jerusalem\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod%27s_Palace_(Jerusalem)) There are no remains of the palace and walls. The area today is the Armenian Cemetery and has never been excavated. To me, the most reasonable explanation is that the Romans used the buildings as a quarry when they rebuilt the city and walls. Armies usually destroy fortresses they leave behind in foreign lands. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aelia_Capitolina The remains of the palace was the camp for the Tenth Legion.

They were arguing as usual. This time it was about the boy and the camels. They left them outside the gate. It could have been expected that they would talk about the Palace Fortress. They had never seen anything so grand. As they went through the city gate, they started talking about how to find whom they were looking for.

“You think we can just walk up to the palace gate and ask to see the newborn king? They will throw us out.”

“No, we tell them we were sent from Babylon with a royal gift.”

They tried to ask some people where the newborn king was. They tried in Babylonian and fair Greek. Some pieced together that they were looking for a newborn king of the Jews because they had seen his star in the east. They wanted to worship one that was so great that the stars proclaimed his birth. That excited a small crowd and they spread the news. They were led to the bridge over the dry moat in front of the palace gate. It was a huge gate. The center was high and wide for wagons. On each side were narrow gates for foot traffic.

The soldiers at the gate saw the crowd and asked who they were? What reason they had for approaching?

The tall one spoke in Greek. “We learned there was a new born king. We were sent from Babylon with a royal gift.”

The soldiers looked at each other. They knew Greek well enough to get the meaning. The two just didn’t look much like officials. The soldiers asked again in poor Greek, why they had come?

The tall one added they had seen in the stars that there was a great new king of the Jews and came to worship him.

The soldiers were shocked. “There is not. Be gone.” People in the crowd were shouting to the soldiers, trying to help them get inside. A man coming to the palace behind them, saw the crowd and overheard the conversation.

“Hail, Bagoas.” The soldiers saluted him with their best form. “May your day be crowned with success.”

“Hail. What do these strangers want?”

“They claim there is a newborn king. We are sending them away.”

“That might not be wise. It will come back to the king that you turned them away. He would be suspicious.”

The soldiers blanched and looked at each other with fear. “Thank you, Lord Bagoas.³”

Bagoas was fluent in Babylonian and asked the two why they were there. He made very clear that King Herod was not to be fooled with. He learned this was a private mission, not an official delegation from Shah Phraates IV of Parthia and asked about the details of what they had seen that brought them to Jerusalem.

He led them through the great central plaza to the Northern Palace. All along the way the men constantly exclaimed how great, glorious, ornate everything was. Bagoas was unimpressed by their undignified manner. It was clear they had not been in the presence of the powerful. He had learned enough to know that King Herod would be concerned about their information. With Bagoas in front they were admitted to the morning basilica. Herod used the matching basilica of the Southern Palace in the afternoon. Along the way Bagoas sternly instructed them how to conduct themselves, to be silent unless asked a question and to answer with a clear voice. They stood in the back of the hall and waited silently while the king was conducting business.

3 Bagoas is the name of royal eunuchs for Alexander the Great, Herod the Great and others. It may be a title as much as a name. He is mentioned in Josephus “Antiquities of the Jews” 17:2.4 <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-17.htm> . Shortly before this some Pharisees claimed God had revealed to them Herod would be overthrown and a messiah would heal Bagoas so he would be able to have children. That Bagoas was executed with others. I invented a successor with the same name, title.

The throne and wall of the apse behind were covered with gold. The throne room was glorious, paneled with beautiful marble. Every column was a different marble with a soldier at attention by each one. More soldiers flanked the apse. Near the apse were tables for the treasurer and clerks with bags of gold. They were collecting revenue at one and distributing payments from the other. There were courtiers with men around them conducting business in the side aisles. Each one called forward prostrated before the king. After each one had presented his petition to the king, he either departed the hall or went back to the end of the line. Finally after a long wait Bagoas was next.

“Arise Bagoas.”

“Great King, merciful and gracious to all, thank you for noticing your humble servant. I encountered two Magi from Babylon. They have news you may be interested in hearing for yourself.”

“Continue.”

“Some of this you already know. They report a new detail that may be a concern. Last year, some who wanted to make themselves great, claimed a new king would appear and even heal my predecessor. One of the items those rebels claimed proved their claim were the conjunctions in the stars with Jupiter, Saturn and most recently including Mars.⁴ These men have seen something more.”

“Bring them forward.”

Bagoas motioned to the two to come and pointed to the floor. They were to remain prostrate until told to rise. The king called for his own translator to come forward. The king told him to ask the two what they had seen in Babylon that had not been seen in Jerusalem about the conjunctions.

When he heard this, the tall one said to the other, “They saw the conjunctions here too.” When the translator reported this to the king, the king was visibly angry.

“Fools,” he exploded. The two dropped to the floor terrified and the fat one whimpered that they had seen more. They were told to rise and the tall one went on to explain. He had been on the roof watching the final conjunction when Mars joined Saturn and Jupiter when a flash of light joined all three together.

He ended saying, “Nothing like this has ever happened before. We came because we know this is of cosmic significance.”

This had not been seen in Jerusalem. Everyone in the throne room was stunned and deeply disturbed. They wondered how many would be killed because of this and hoped it would not include themselves. The king was deeply troubled. He was beyond anger. “Bagoas, you are dismissed while I consider what to do about this report. Take the two with you and return with them, late afternoon to my quarters.” Bagoas prostrated himself, motioned to the two to do as well and departed. The king was especially dangerous when he was cold and quiet. Bagoas knew he had saved his own life. As they were leaving, the king called the representative of the High Priest forward.

PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

Joseph, Mary and the baby went through the outer courts to the place where animals and birds were sold for sacrifices. You could bring your own or buy one from the vendors outside the Temple. If you did, the priests would very carefully inspect it to make sure it was perfect. What was offered for sale inside was pre-inspected so there never was a problem, except they were more expensive. Joseph did not want any problems so they bought the two birds inside. The baby watched the birds with delight in his eyes.

4 The Star of Bethlehem An Astronomical Perspective <http://www.astronomynotes.com/history/bethlehem-star.html> Author of original content: Nick Strobel .

Joseph and Mary had only been to the Temple on High Holy Days when it was filled to overflowing, except for just before Yeshua was born. This time they were both more relaxed and comfortable. It was as if they were seeing it with fresh eyes. Joseph was thinking about his conversation with Zachariah the day before about the changes from what it had been. The high walls and gates around the Inner Courts were finished. It was a powerful fortress. It was more fortress than earthly dwelling place for the God of peace and righteousness.

The walls around the Women's Court were over 20 cubits, 30 feet high, the inner court walls were higher. Oxen were not permitted in the inner parts so men had to bring the great stones inside. Cranes and scaffolding were everywhere. Shouting was minimized by the use of hand signs to guide the workers as they moved the stones.

They entered the Women's Court, here and there mashed inside and out were the temporary work spaces for the priests and levites. It was a jumble and mass of men busy at work in every direction. In addition to working on the central parts, they were finishing the fill on the northern courts and extending the western wall. More than ten thousand construction workers and even more worshippers and priests made the way difficult. On the High Holy Day the construction stopped as it did for the daily services. Then the hundreds of thousands of worshippers crowded the inner courts and overflowed the outer courts. Those worshippers ignored the construction, cranes, temporary shelters and lost themselves in worship. Hundreds of singers and musicians, hundreds of thousands of worshippers made a great noise, a great shout, a mighty sound glorifying the Lord God Almighty, King of Heaven, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Amen!

Joseph and Mary saw through the Nicanor Gate, the Temple and Altar covered with gold. They were the only parts totally finished. The Great Temple was 100 cubits, 180 feet high. The altar was in front on the left, more than 30 cubits square. Priests tending the sacrifices, were walking on the ledge around it, high over their heads. Around the great doorway of the Temple, 60 cubits high, was the Golden Vine of Israel. The wealthy had their names inscribed on a gold leaf or grape attached to the vine.⁵

Joseph, Mary and the baby went to the next waiting priest. He told them to go outside and come in the court of the priests through the women's gate.⁶ He met them again there. He was very kind, gracious, asked the baby's name. "Yeshua, God saves, that is a good name. We all are looking for the coming Messiah to be the savior of us all." He asked their names. "Mary and Joseph, good. Yeshua son of Joseph." Yeshua, Mary and Joseph were some of the most common names in Israel. He brought Mary to the place of slaughter, the shambles, where he twisted the birds heads off and cleaned them.⁷ Then he walked to the ramp at the far left side. He

5 Temple http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple Altar [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altar_\(Bible\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altar_(Bible)) The following gives an in depth view of the Temple services and actions. However it is based on words written long after the Temple had been destroyed and may incorporate much pious fiction. I expect the reality was somewhat different and less involved. http://www.templeinstitute.org/day_in_life/altar.htm

6 Women's Gate http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem_temple Women in the Court of the Priests <http://www.ou.org/torah/tt/5764/vayeitzei64/mikdash.htm> There was no separate court for women in the earlier temple constructions. The giver had to lay hands of the gift at the place of slaughter.

7 The Presentation of Jesus and Purification of Mary http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Presentation_of_the_Lord <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12984-sacrifice> <http://www.jewfaq.org/qorbanot.htm> For the different regulations for a son and for a daughter see <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/0312.htm>

climbed high over their heads to the ledge, put the blood on a horn of the altar and placed a bird on the fire, the other was kept for the priests to eat.⁸

THEY ARE RECOGNIZED

As they were leaving the women's court, they met two women with a baby. The older one was married the younger one with the baby was not. They both looked upset, frightened. Mary stopped and put her hand on the younger one. "Sister, be at peace. The Father of us all loves your child as His own. Always remember, God loves you deeply. He knows and is merciful to all who come to Him."

They saw compassion in Joseph's eyes. The older one was flustered and did not know what to say. "You're from Galilee?" She heard the accent in Mary's voice. "We're from Magdala."

Mary smiled and asked the baby's name. "Her name is Mary."⁹

Mary responded "That is my name too. We're from Nazareth. I will always pray for you all. Never forget your Father loves you and is full of compassion forever."

An old man had been watching them and after the group separated, came up to Mary and Joseph. "Peace be upon you. I have been looking for you. I am Simeon. The Lord is gracious to you and by you He has been gracious to me."¹⁰

"Peace be upon you, Simeon. The Lord of mercy has looked upon us all with favor." Joseph replied puzzled by the greeting. .

"I have so waited and prayed for this day to see God's consolation for His people Israel. You carry in your arms the promised messiah and I have been privileged to see him with my own eyes."

Joseph asked, "Kind sir, how did you come to seek us out?"

"I pray I have not frightened you. The Lord of all Mercy revealed to me that the promised one would be here this day. When I saw you talking with those women, I knew. Am I not right?"

"The Lord Almighty does marvelous things and all He does is good. I am Joseph and this is Mary and her son, Yeshua of God."

Mary added, "He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed God. "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." He said to Mary, "Behold,

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin_offering

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Magdalene She is not known by her father's or husband's name. She could have been illegitimate or orphaned. Without family she would have been marriageable only to the poorest or become a concubine, servant girl. Concubines were usually discarded when their owners married.

¹⁰ Simeon [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simeon_\(Gospel_of_Luke\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simeon_(Gospel_of_Luke))

this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (a sword will pierce through your own soul also) so thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”¹¹

Mary responded, “So be it according to the will of the Almighty.”

Joseph added, “He has called us to be His servants and entrusted us with the one He promised to send.”

“Let me hold him again and feast my eyes on the Lord’s anointed. My heart is bursting with joy.” They embraced and parted ways.

Joseph leaned his head over to Mary and said, “Sent from God, like the angel. We are walking according to His will.”

“I pray He will always direct us so that we do not stray from His paths.”

They started for the gate out of the Temple platform when an old woman approached them. She was shouting, “Praise the Lord God Almighty. Blessed be His name. Hallelujah.” She spoke to Mary, “He has kept His promises to His people. I knew when God gave his holy child to Elizabeth that He would soon be sending you.”¹²

“Mary said, “You are Anna. Elizabeth spoke to me about you yesterday. Truly God is good to His servants.”

“Oh, you saw her. How is she and the baby?”

“They are both doing very well. We put John and Yeshua next to each other and watched them.”

“Wonderful. That would have been so good to see. They recognized each other?”

“Yes. She said you worship here day and night, praying for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

“From now on I will be praising Him for accomplishing that and I have seen it with my own eyes.” She cried out to all around the good news. “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord God Almighty. Blessed be His name.”

Joseph took Mary and led her away through the temporary structures away from the crowd. He did not want anyone to find out who they were. He saw some of the Temple guards coming to see what the commotion was about. Zachariah had warned him the day before. The authorities, both the Temple and the King, had their own interests.

As they walked back to Bethlehem, Joseph was happily talking about seeing his children soon. He was wondering what, if anything, he could tell them, hoping they would understand. Maybe if he talked a lot about Elizabeth, Zachariah and John, they might accept that Yeshua was also part of God’s actions. Anyway he was glad to leave Bethlehem, Herod’s tomb and Judea behind. Even the Temple did not carry the delight it used to have. He teased Mary about being quiet, but noted she talked to the baby. She smiled but she had a lot to think about. She did tell him what Elizabeth told her about Anna.

Along the way he kept looking at the donkeys for sale. He wanted to buy one to carry their belongings back home. His hammer and chisels were heavy, Mary had been given outfits for herself and the baby from

¹¹ Nunc Dimittis http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nunc_Dimittis see also Mary, Simeon, Anna Biblical Archaeology Review <http://www.bib-arch.org/e-features/mary-simeon-anna.asp> The general opinion of the scholars is that Mary, Zachariah and Simeon did not compose the songs credited to them. I do not think Luke would have written them, placing them at the beginning of the Gospel and Acts, and not composed other songs later. I can not image who else would have composed them in the short time span of the early church. It seems simpler to image a scenario in which Mary, Zachariah and Simeon had sufficient musical, liturgical background and skill to compose the songs. I have known some, well steeped in liturgical language who could *extempore* speak in that style. We are no longer skilled listeners. Mary and Joseph could have heard and remembered Simeon’s song accurately.

¹² Anna <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/anna-in-the-bible> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_\(Bible\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_(Bible))

Elizabeth. With the money Zachariah had given them they were going home with more than they had when they left. Most precious of all they were going back with baby Yeshua, God's gift, God's son. They were filled with wonder and praise. The message they were married would be there before them. It would be good to see Mary's parents and Joseph's children. Blessings upon blessings, surrounded with shalom.

TOURISTS IN JERUSALEM

Bagoas knew he had to keep the two in sight in order to make sure they would return to the King in time. He was not happy about wasting his day with them. He decided he would give them a tour of the city.¹³ He began with the palace they were passing through. Twin palaces and basilicas named Caesar and Agrippa were north and south of the central court with groves of trees and splashing fountains, gardens and porticoes. They had never seen anything so grand. Bagoas knew the walls in Babylon were brick. He showed them one of the wall stones and asked them how they would move it. That caught their attention. They walked beside it and measured that it was 20 cubits, 30 ft. long, by 5 cubits, 7 ½ ft. high. He told them they were 10 cubits deep and asked them how they would move something that size? The wall was 6 stones high, 45 ft. They started counting them. The walls enclosed an area over 600 cubits, 900 ft., by 120 cubits, 180 ft., broad. The more they looked and counted the more they were impressed. Bagoas told them there were no larger wall stones anywhere.

Outside the gate the two told him what they really wanted. They had been on the road for a month. Bagoas thought bath. They corrected him. They knew there would be better women in the city than at the inns. There should be near the palace, some places that catered to the officials and courtiers. He thought they ought to bathe there first. Bagoas took them to the finest place nearby. They grumbled about the high price but considered it a treat to themselves.

Bagoas met with some other courtiers relaxing there. They were talking about the western extension of the Temple wall. As the wall was being extended south, it would soon cut across the drain at the bottom of the valley. The cardo, shopping street, going in next to it, would make a major increase in the width of the cut needed. Another issue was the height of the wall. It would be difficult to find a way for people to climb to the top of the Temple Platform. While they talked, they were graciously served by some girls and boys in training, in various stages of undress. Some of the staff were practicing music and dancing for tomorrow's performances at the Herodium. The house was well furnished and delectable tidbits were offered with good wine. Bagoas was a eunuch. That did not prevent him from finding much to enjoy.

When the owner bought virgins to prostitute, he would start them by having them work as servants. They would learn how to please the clientele and were acclimated to the life they were to lead. They learned to play musical instruments, dance and sing, sensual with great style, beautifully dressed or scandalously undressed. They learned to prepare fancy foods. They did cleaning, spinning, weaving, normal work they would have done anywhere. The premier venue was the Herodium, the theater, the center island of the great pool or floating on decorated boats. Things could be done out there that were not acceptable in the holy city. The high and mighty coveted invitations as special mark of royal favor. The prostitutes experienced the upper class life. Those who were uncooperative were sold to lower class places, inns and barracks.

Bagoas was not pleased when the two came back, he could have stayed longer. The pair availed themselves of all the delights available, especially the bath and message offered by lovely attendants. Bagoas led them south to the Hinnom valley. The chief priests were having glorious tombs constructed on the hillside looking directly over to the Temple. As they went down the valley the city wall rose up on the left higher and higher above them, an impressive sight. The wall became a dam with a great pool Siloam on the other side, out

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem_during_the_Second_Temple_Period

of view. Then the wall continued around the end of the Ophel Hill. Bagoas said the tombs of the first kings, David, Solomon and Rehoboam were at the end of the hill.¹⁴ He said "They were almost forgotten even though King David and his son were regarded as the ideal golden age for the nation. Many now thought David was buried someplace on the western hill behind them. The records even say they were here. As the Romans would say, 'sic transit gloria'."

The pair asked what that meant. Bagoas explained it was Roman, something like the glorious are soon forgotten. One replied, "well no one will ever remember us."

They re-entered the city through the "Dung Gate" next to the dam and the pool. Before them the road climbed the central valley between the Western Hill and Ophel. Bagoas told of the early history of the nation and King David who had captured the city on Ophel and made it the capitol. The city was a maze of construction everywhere. Bagoas said they needed a wide plaza for the crowds that entered through the southern gates. They needed more space up in the Temple Courts so he expected an extension on the south side so all the fine homes and buildings for a long way would be demolished. They were still discussing how far south and how the gates would be redone. There was talk of putting a huge basilica on top with passages underneath to the gates. The southwest corner could end up 100 cubits high (150 ft.).

They climbed up along the southern Temple wall. The powerful were moving up on the western hill, tearing down the homes there to build grander homes. Many of those displaced on the western hill were being forced to move outside the western and northern city walls. New city walls would have to be built someday. The deep valleys to the south and east of the city prevent expansion in those directions. They walked through the narrow passage between high walls from the last extension to the steps to the Hulda gate.¹⁵

INSIDE THE TEMPLE

Inside the two wanted to get close to the Temple and see inside of the Courts. Bagoas stopped them. They were shocked when he said it was death for a non Jew to go beyond the low wall in front of them. He pointed out the warning signs and told them as a eunuch, he was not permitted either. They had wanted to see the image inside and see what the god looked like. Bagoas told them there was no image, God had no visible form. That did not make any sense to them. They asked what the god's name was. Bagoas told them, it was never said. It was forbidden to address God by name. Instead they would say things like, God almighty, God of Abraham, Lord of the Angel host, Father of all. He told them the story of Moses when God appeared to him in the burning

¹⁴ Nehemiah 3:16 Tombs of the Kings. This site is rejected by nearly all scholars. It is so degraded by quarrying that nothing can be proven. The scriptures repeatedly state the kings were buried inside the city. No other burial was permitted inside the walls. The alternative site for the kings burials would be under or by the palace. That was at the northern end of Ophel by the Temple platform. It is now under the first extension of the platform, inaccessible for the foreseeable future. A hundred years ago, Raymond Weill excavated this site and believed it was the kings' tombs. <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/king-davids-tomb-a-closer-look/> <http://members.bib-arch.org/publication.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=21&Issue=1&ArticleID=18>

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hulda_Gates

bush at Sinai and God told Moses, His name was "I am".¹⁶ The two shook their heads, a god with no image and no name. There was nothing like that. Bagoas said that this was the only real God. All the others were made up. They said this one sounded made up too. Bagoas thought and said, "There was another difference. All the other gods he had ever heard of were flawed like men. They did evil. This was the only God who was totally perfect, holy, righteous. The only god who wanted people to be perfect too." They laughed out loud and covered their mouths. That was too much.

They asked why all the construction? The temple area was far larger than any other they had seen. Bagoas told them the Lord, the God of Abraham, their Redeemer, had commanded His people to come before Him three times a year. The first, Passover, was for the remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt. The second, Shavuot, was for the giving of the covenant between Him and the children of Israel at Mt Sinai. The third, Sukkot, was to remember the 40 years wondering in the desert¹⁷. There was no longer enough room when they all came. The vast courtyards could only hold a hundred and fifty thousand. The additions should add space for a hundred thousand more. Even then everyone would not be able to get in at the same time. In addition to the hundreds of thousands from all over the nation, there were vast numbers from everywhere the people had gone.

The pair knew that large delegations came every year from Babylon and Parthia. It was more than a month each way. Bagoas told them there were hundreds of thousands there that looked to this Temple. The biggest delegation came from Alexandria, one fourth of the whole city, a quarter million claimed this as home. They came from all over the world.

The fat one asked why would a god want them all to come three times a year? Bagoas said he did not know. At the beginning, they were twelve tribes taking over the land of Canaan. The Lord had given it to their Father Abraham. Long before they sent 400 years as slaves in Egypt. There had been twelve sons who became twelve tribes, 600,000 in Egypt. Enough to take over the land. God commanded them to come together before Him when He saved them from Egypt and gave them this land.

The tall one stroked his beard and thought. "You said they were twelve tribes? Did they fight each other?"

"I would think so. It seems to be normal for tribes to fight."

"Perhaps it was a way to keep them together."

"It did work that way. We know our tribe but we see ourselves as one people. For a long time our fathers gathered at a mountain north of here to worship. King David captured Jerusalem made it the capital and brought the Ark of the Covenant here. His son Solomon built the first Temple and most of this great platform. The great walls on the east and west are from him."

The tall one said he could see that thinking their god defeated the Egyptian army would be a great event to remember, but what was the covenant and what was the wandering in a desert? Bagoas explained, God called Moses to deliver them from slavery.

"The fat one said, "One man against the whole nation of Egypt?"

"God instructed Moses to have all the nation put the blood of a lamb on the door posts. Then God sent the angel of death through the land. He passed over all the marked houses and killed the firstborn of Egypt in all the

¹⁶ In Hebrew the infinitive of the verb to be, "being", sounds to the ear nearly identical with the first person "I am". It could be valid to say God's name is "Being" or "Existence". The Hindu concept of the divine essence being, the all, would be somewhat like it, except for the Hindu the god essence has no personality, no individuality, no intentionality and no character. The God the Bible has definite personality, character, intentionality. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahweh>

¹⁷ The Three Pilgrimage Festivals http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_holiday Three Pilgrimage Festivals refers to Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot.

rest. Pharaoh told Moses the people could leave. Today the nation comes to remember by eating the passover lamb and bread. Then God had Moses bring the people to Mt. Sinai where God made a covenant with them. He pledged to be their God and they promised to be His people, to serve and obey Him alone. He gave Moses His commandments for the people."

"What kind of rules would a god give?"

"Just 10 words. They can even be shorted into two. Bagoas recited "And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the LORD thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down unto them, nor serve them; for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the LORD thy God, in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."¹⁸

"Well that is a lot more than 10 words. I wonder what it would be like as just two words?"

"That is just the beginning."

"It is nothing like anything I have ever heard. Is that why Jews in Babylon do not worship our gods?"

"It is forbidden. They come here when they can and even when they cannot they send their offerings."

"Don't they have a Temple in Babylon? How can they worship your god there?"

"God commanded His Temple be constructed here, but He doesn't live here. The earth is His footstool."

"You said there was no image inside."

"This is the center of His worship, the remembrance of His Name."

"Your god is different."

"He is the only God. He reigns to the furthest ends of the earth. He has no temple anywhere else. In other places they gather to hear His words, pray and sing His praise."

"I thought they had little temples in Babylon," fat one said. "There is one where I live. I see men going in all the time,. Mostly on Friday evening."

"They are not temples. They are places to read God's word and pray, synagogues."

"I don't see what difference it makes. You said your god doesn't live here either."

"God commands us to worship Him here."

"Your god insists on His own way."

"In Nebuchadnezzar's day, the leaders and people here were not obeying God. God gave us over to Babylon and sent us into exile there. Seventy years later, God gave Babylon to Cyrus who had the exiles sent back home."

"You think your god controls what goes on in Babylon?"

"He rules the whole world."

"Gods have their own territory. Just like kings do."

"When Messiah comes the whole world will come here for worship."

¹⁸ Exodus 20:1-11

"Is that whose star we saw?"

"I don't know. I'm not even sure you really saw anything."

"I know what I saw!"

"You said no one else in Babylon saw anything. What astrologers say, never happens the way they say it will." Bagoas asked them to guess how tall the Temple was in front of them? The more they looked and thought, the more impressed they were. It can't be. It was 100 cubits. Bagoas was proud to say it was built in 18 months. It would be covered inside and out with pure gold. Nothing was like it in the world. They were showing the world just how great their God was and how great they were as His people!

The two asked about the Messiah that was expected? None of the other gods had anything like that. Bagoas told them about the first great savior Moses. God sent him to save the nation from slavery in Egypt and gave the covenant at Mt. Sinai. There was a promise there would be a second greater Moses, and a greater son of King David. The prophecies said He would make the children of Abraham the greatest nation in the world. They would be greater, richer, more powerful than Rome. All peoples, from every nation would come here to worship the only real God. They were building the most glorious temple in the world as a fitting place for Him to come and reign. He would be greater than Caesar. When they asked when that would be, Bagoas said nobody knew. There were many people with many ideas, thinking they had figured it out, that it would be soon. None of them agreed when, how or what it would be like. That was why the signs they had seen in the sky were so important. The triple conjunction was a powerful omen. The flash of light joining them all together was a very serious matter. The king's advisors were considering it now.

They asked about all the animals in pens? Bagoas told them to look through the gate at the altar. They could look through the gate, but did not recognize an altar. He told them to see the priests walking up high on the ledge. They were tending the sacrifices on the altar. They had never seen anything so huge. Bagoas said more than twelve bulls could be offered there at the same time. Unbelievable, they said. They were beyond laughing any more. People give gods sacrifices to gain their favor, a gift here, a chicken there. Why so much? They were astounded when Bagoas said God also demanded the tithe, 10%. Who did this god think he was? Bagoas said He is the real God. The judge of all, the creator of all. They did not think they wanted to get too close to a god like that.

"Well I know what I saw but I do not think I will like it if your ideas come true. I do not want your god to have power over me. Our kings are bad enough."

"Maybe I have given you the wrong impression. The Messiah is to bring peace, righteousness. He will make everything, everyone perfect, blessed forever. There will be no more suffering or evil."

"Well I don't know how any god can be powerful enough to make that happen," the fat one said.

Bagoas continued, "We come and pray for God to forgive us for all our sins. All we have done wrong, to protect us from the evil others do to us. We pray for healing. We come to praise Him for the great salvation He has given us in the past. We remember and look forward in hope."

"Sin, iniquity! You said, your god is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me. How can you say he is not evil? He will not allow you to come to His temple."

"He says He will open the eyes of the blind, make the lame walk, so He will heal me in the age to come.¹⁹"

"So you will have children in the land of the dead? You claim your god wants you to be righteous. What we see looks like his people can do any evil they want."

The sacrifices are payment for sins. We sin, we offer sacrifices, we pray, God forgives.

¹⁹ Isaiah 42:7

As they walked they passed group after group of men. Usually one man was talking and the rest listening, sometimes they were loudly arguing. Some groups were small just a few and some very large, hundreds. Bagoas explained they were scholars learning, studying the teachings, the Holy words God had given them. "You think your god writes his own messages to you? Never have heard anything like that." Bagoas explained they believed God guided the Priests and Prophets to write what He wanted. There were differences of opinion as to just what He had given and how to understand His meaning. The great scholars would attract large number of disciples who would carry on his teachings. Some who were just beginning or were saying strange things would have few followers. Bagoas repeated an old saying. "Two Jews, three opinions." There were many groups, some were filled with hatred for everything here. They think the priests have no right to be priests. They hate everything about this Temple. They won't even come here. They think they are the only pure ones. Most live out in the desert.²⁰

BACK TO THE PALACE

On the north side of the Temple they went by where the last of the fill was being emplaced for the Northern extension. Bagoas said just beyond was a great pool that would catch some of the winter runoff. Most of the water they needed for a year was underneath the plazas in great cisterns. They went down to the new latrine in the western fill before they left the Temple Mount. On the way back to the palace, they stopped in the market for something to eat and drink. This time they went into the king's private quarters. They were even more glorious than the basilica. There were just a few courtiers present with some lovely servants. They looked worried, ill at ease. The king had heard of the commotion the Magi had caused when they were at the gate asking about a newborn king. He had asked the representative of the high priest to be there. His own astrologers were present to talk about the conjunctions. He had always been deeply concerned about signs and omens. He asked the Magi to tell exactly what they saw and when. Who else had seen this in Babylon? They told him exactly what, when and that only the two of them had seen the flash that joined the stars together. None of the other astrologers, and they asked them all, had seen it. The king told them there was an old prophecy about a nearby village, Bethlehem. They were to go there and look for the child. When they found the child, they were to report back so the king could come and worship him also.

They were dismissed. Bagoas and the other courtiers talked with the king. They all agreed that the report had to be taken seriously. There were questions, did they have the right interpretation and were those two to be believed? Bagoas told them the pair seemed like fools, without understanding. There had been other reports that had led to tragedies. They did not need to remind the king that had cost the lives of his favorite wife and sons, the life of the previous Bagoas also. Caution was to be the word. Act if needed, but not overdone. Too many had been killed in the past. There was the affair at the Herodium tomorrow to prepare for. The courtiers hoped it would distract Herod and cool his temper.

Unfortunately, one of the courtiers, Jason stirred everything back up. He mentioned six months ago the old wife of a priest had a son. Everyone considered him a miracle child. Adding the nine months she was carrying the child brought it to about the time of the first conjunction. The representative of the High Priest said that child was not anything like this, might be a prophet. At any rate it would be many years, long after they were gone that they would be old enough for anything to come of it, if anything does. Herod said, "If the people think there is a newborn king, that is a threat today! Any such child had to be eliminated." Bagoas suggested they might wait a day or so until the pair came back from Bethlehem. He added, everyone is sure the Messiah

²⁰ There were many factions. Two of the most radical we know something about are described here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essenes> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zealotry>

would come when the Temple is completed, thirty maybe fifty years from now. Herod laughed, "I'll be long gone by then." They all laughed saying they would be gone by then too. They were not sure they wanted to be around when the Messiah would appear.

The pair hardly took a breath on the way out. It was getting toward the end of the day. Neither spoke a word until they were well outside the palace gate. "I hope I never go in there again."

"I never felt in the presence of such evil."

"I want to get away from here. Find the boy and get going."

"It's nearly dark. We can't see where we are going."

"I don't care. We'll find it somehow."

Questions. These are questions that were in my mind that I attempted to answer as I was writing.

How did it happen that what happened between the Magi and Herod was known, so the Bible could record it?

How could the visit of Joseph, Mary and Yeshua to the Temple, meeting Simeon and Anna, have been overlooked in an age filled with Messianic expectation?

How, who and when were the Nunc Dimittis, Benedictus and Magnificat composed?

What did the Magi do and see in Jerusalem?

What might the Magi have seen in the east that caused them to go to Jerusalem.

The Gospels record the events of Jesus life. They do not include the background information everyone knew at the time they were written. The following includes that background faithful to what is known about the history and culture. I hope this provokes-in a good way-the reader to think deeply about the Scriptural account. Go to my web site for more. <http://thesignofconcord.com> . They are in the section titled "King of Kings". There is also a section titled "King of Kings Supplements" with additional information.

If you do not think this reflects the culture and historic situation, how would you tell the story?

Many thanks to my patient wife Lynne for repeatedly proofreading.

Scriptures are from Jewish Publication Society of America 1917 Version. The New Testament quotes are ESV.