

Book One

THE KING HIDDEN

Chapter Eight

DESTRUCTION AND PEACE

Stephen H. Funck, August 21, 2015

MORNING COMES

Before the walk up call, Jason and the Cohort Commander gave the list to the orderly. The men were to dress prepared for battle and assemble in the Commanders quarters. There were four corporals with spear, sword and shield plus the deputy commander, two chief centurions and two centurions and a deputy centurion with sword and shield.¹ The orderly gave each food and drink to take along. No one said anything or asked any questions. All were silent on the outside and very unquiet on the inside. Something unpleasant was up. The deputy commander lead the group out. They left the Herodium as the soldiers for morning duty were sitting down to eat. Those talked among themselves, speculating on what was going on, glad they did not have part of it and glad those that did were going away from the Herodium. Better somewhere else than here.

The deputy commander told them they could eat as they marched. They did so in silence. They were headed on the road to Jerusalem. They would be getting there after the morning prayer was over and business was started. Who were they going to surprise? Why so many high officers and so few soldiers? Arrest some very important person? What had the king learned yesterday? Some had come from the Temple late the day before. No real combat was expected. A show of force would be enough. They turned off the road to Jerusalem and headed toward the village of Bethlehem. Now what was up?

THE ORDERS

The deputy ordered halt. They stood at attention. Jason spoke. He was one of the king's highest counselors. "As you know, we have orders from the king. We have a task to carry out. It must be done without any failure. The order is unusual and is unpleasant. You have been selected because of the high regard for your abilities in the past. We are going to enter the village. Two soldiers are to remain at the edge. If you see you are needed, come and help the rest to leave the village."

"The rest will go to the house of the priest. It is important that you do not have an evil or angry face. The priest will be told to gather all the children he has circumcised in the last two years. The king has a gift for them. I have a scroll to read and a purse in my hand. Two soldiers will stand at the entrance to the house and only allow inside the children and their mothers. No one else, the rest will have to wait outside."

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_auxiliaries

“There is another reason why you have been selected for this mission. Think what do you all have in common? You may answer?”

One answered, “We have been in battle”. Another said “I believe we have all actually killed in combat.”

Jason said, “There is one thing that is even more important. You are all fathers. What are you willing to do to protect the life of your own son? What you will do is not for the king. Some might rather die than obey. If you refuse, your sons will die.” He paused. “The order is to kill every male child under the age of two in the village!”

They remained standing at attention for a moment to comprehend what they had just been told.

“You are high ranking officers. You do not look like soldiers coming for combat, to kill and destroy. It is very important that you have on your faces a look that does not frighten. Look like we are coming to bring a high gift, an honor to this village. It is true, no other village in the country is being so honored. Most of the men have left for their work. There will not be many left. It will be done and over before people can react. It should not be too hard to leave.”

IN THE HOUSE OF THE PRIEST

Jason and the deputy commander went inside while the others stood at parade rest. The whole village was abuzz. Everyone was running to see. A whole group of high ranking officers had come to the village. They looked so grand in their uniforms. The two soldiers were overlooked, just escorts. Jason spoke to the priest. He was so excited, he could hardly talk. There had been nine boys circumcised including his own son. The word to gather all those circumcised in the last two years was said to those gathered around the door. It flew through the village and within a few minutes the boys and their mothers were in the courtyard of the house of the priest. The officers all came in, leaving the soldiers at the gate. Jason closely questioned the priest if this was indeed every child that had been circumcised in Bethlehem in the last two years. The priest showed him the roll. None had moved away. Two died after they were enrolled. He thought two boys died right after they were born. When he was satisfied, Jason stepped before them holding the purse in one hand and the scroll in the other. He paused to compose himself, put a smile on his face and looked over the women and infants gathered around. He began to read from the scroll. The scroll was about something else, Jason was making the words up as he went.

“By the command and royal powers of the great king, Herod², a proclamation for the village of Bethlehem and all Judea and all the lands of my domain.” As he was speaking the deputy caught the eyes of the officers and had them move so each one was behind a mother and child. He put his hand on his dagger. They understood. He was encouraged, they had guessed close to the right number. If there had been many more children than officers it would have been more difficult. The priest and his wife were especially excited, their other children were crowded in the doorways. “I have directed my servant Jason to present a special gift to all those circumcised in Bethlehem in the last two years. They are to be killed!”³

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great

³ Matthew 2: 16 esv

They needed the soldiers with spears to clear a way as they ran out of the village. Their helmets and shields took the blows from the stones. Jason ran in the midst and was shielded by those around him. The villagers didn't keep up the pursuit after they got away from the town. In the open they would not have withstood a charge by trained soldiers.

No one talked on the way back to the Herodium. They did not want to think or feel anything. They walked without order. There was no energy to march. When the palace came in sight the deputy commander asked Jason what he would report. Jason said the orders were carried out exactly as the king commanded. Every one was to be highly commended. One of the soldiers in back said to another, "Do you think we killed the Messiah?" The other replied he did not think the Lord God almighty would permit his anointed to be harmed. "So it was for nothing."

ON THE ROAD

Mary and Joseph had camped by the side of the road to Tekoa. The interrupted sleep left them tired. Mary had packed enough bread to go home to Nazareth. They ate, took care of the baby and headed south. Joseph said, "I wonder how long it will take to get to Egypt? Where to go in Egypt? I was looking forward to seeing my children. What will happen to them? How long will it be? They were expecting us. They will be hurt, worry. Why did the Lord command us to go to Egypt? The Lord woke the magi up in the middle of the night and ordered them to leave and not go to the king. We were leaving in the morning anyway. Why did He make us travel in the dark? I felt safer after we past Herodium. It seemed alright to stop when it got too dark to see the road."

Mary was quiet as he rambled. Finally she said, "I have been praying for your children. The Lord will take care of them. He will let no harm come to them because of this."

"Pray for your parents. Pray that He will direct us on the way."

"Always I pray. He will prevent us from going astray."

"Why would God send heathen magi to us? I do not expect them to tell anyone back in Babylon."

"Prophecy fulfilled?"

"The prophecy says there will be kings of Tarshish and camels of Midean. So we have Magi from the east with gold, frankincense and myrrh."

"Maybe they will tell kings of Tarshish and those in Midean."

"One of them said his family claimed to have been royalty."

"It is not only our own people who will be saved. Many times God says the Messiah is for all people. 'I will also give thee for a light of the nations, that My salvation may be unto the end of the earth.'⁴ "

"It could take some time to redeem Israel, longer to have the light of salvation go to the ends of the earth."

⁴ [Isaiah 2:6 jps](#)

“Beginnings are small and quiet.”

“I wonder what will come.”

“We do not know the mind of God.”

“He does new things. We do something new, go to Egypt. Many of our people are in Alexandria. We could go there. I don’t know. Mary, pray that God will lead us to where He would have us be.”

“I have been praying.”

“Open our minds to see His way, make our paths straight before us. You know the passage in Isaiah where He says God conceals the Messiah in His quiver? Do you think that is a prophecy of what the Lord has been doing?” Mary nodded. “Zachariah felt it was important to hide John from the Temple rulers. That they would take him away and raise him to serve their purposes. What would they do if they had the promised one? They would take Yeshua away from us.”

“That would break my heart.”

“Mine too. How are we supposed to raise up the promised one of God? Why would He pick us?”

“With much prayer.”

The following day they came to Hebron. As travelers do, they went to the market, some to buy provisions, some to learn the news.

News, surprise they hadn’t heard already. “We just came from Tekoa. What news?”

“Herod had all the baby boys killed in Bethlehem.” Mary gasped, fell into Joseph’s arms and sobbed. Joseph wept as well, the baby joined in with his cries. “Are you from Bethlehem?”

“We know many people there. We came from Tekoa. What happened?”

“They say a detachment of Herod’s men, high ranking officers came early in the morning. They ordered all the children circumcised in the last two years to be gathered. Herod had a gift for them. One man shook a heavy purse. They killed them all, even the priest’s son.” The report brought more sobs and tears, pain. Pain.

They didn’t have the energy to continue on. They rested until the next day. Joseph said, “So the Lord had to tell us to leave in the middle of the night. We would have been caught. They think they killed Yeshua.”

“Who would dare try to kill the Lord’s anointed?”

“We have to hide. The Lord has made Yeshua a polished arrow and hidden him in His quiver.⁵ It would not have been possible to hide camels and kings. I sat with the magi on the side away from the village. I don’t know if anyone realized they had come.”

“I did not let Amahl go to the well and be seen.”

“The priest refused to circumcise Yeshua. He was not enrolled on the list. Do you think someone will remember us and tell Herod we came from Nazareth?”

“I pray they do not. They will keep quiet and Herod will think his evil deed was done.”

“The murder of the children of Bethlehem may have saved the lives of others.”

⁵ [Isaiah 49 2 jps](#)

It was several weeks later that people in Bethlehem realized there had been another baby boy born, that had been turned away and not circumcised, but no one mentioned anything to anyone, not even each other.

THE ROAD TO LIFE IN EGYPT

As they were walking, Joseph asked Mary if she was a descendent of David. The prophecies said the Messiah was to be son of David. Mary said she was from the royal line all the way. Joseph said he was a descendant of David's but by Nathan. So those prophecies were fulfilled. Joseph asked Mary if she had heard that some said there were two Messiahs, one son of David and one son of Joseph⁶?

"Where does that come from?"

"I heard someone a few years ago saying that. He said the Messiah, son of Joseph would suffer. and be killed."

Later as they were walking Joseph asked Mary if she had any thoughts where they were to go. She had not. Joseph said, he had been thinking of going to Alexandria. There were many of their people there. But they might meet some who knew them and might report back to the Temple or Herod. Maybe a small town would be better. He was good with his hands. In Egypt, they did veneer and inlay work. He might learn that. He could have good skills when he got back to his children. He was always thinking about his children. All he could do was pray for them. Mary constantly prayed for them and for her parents as well.

At the markets Joseph kept looking for inlay work for sale. He kept asking where it was made. He was hoping to find a small place where he could learn the trade. Finally he was led to a man in a small town⁷ and asked if he could help him and learn the trade. At the closest synagog, Joseph asked the leader if he could arrange for a message and money to be sent to Nazareth in Galilee? Joseph wrote a note and sealed it. They had money from Zachariah and from the Magi. He kept some back to buy jewelry for Mary. He needed her to look respectable, married to a respectable husband. When his son James got the message and money, he showed them to Joachim. They understood it would be a long time before Joseph and Mary returned.

Joachim invited the children to live with him and Ann and found a tenant for their old house. The rental income was theirs. When the news came of the killing of the baby boys in Bethlehem, they understood Mary's baby had to be hidden. Joachim offered to support James to study under the scholars in Tzippori. He declined, he felt it was his duty to support his brothers and sisters. Joachim had gotten the message from Zachariah about Mary, the special child God had given her and the marriage to Joseph. He had shared all of it with Ann but only the marriage part with Joseph's children. They and the people of the village wondered. They knew it was forbidden for Joseph to marry a woman made with child by another man. The village people did not know why Joseph had gone to Egypt and abandoned his children. They knew it all seemed fine with Joachim.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah_ben_Joseph The Messiah Son of Joseph "Gabriel's Revelation" and the birth of a new messianic model. By Israel Knohl BAR 34:05, Sep/Oct 2008 <http://www.bib-arch.org/BAR/article.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=34&Issue=5&ArticleID=14>

⁷ There are many places in Egypt that claim the holy family. None are near Alexandria. I think when Egypt was mostly Christian, people all over connected their local church to the holy family. Even today Egypt is 10% Coptic Christian. You may be interested in <http://www.touregypt.net/holyfamily.htm> http://www.egyptvoyager.com/features_holyfamily.htm

Joseph, Mary and the child went to Synagog service, held in a grove of palm trees. Mary was the only woman there. She did not stay or return. Joseph attracted questions since he was from Judea. He said he was from Galilee. He acted as if he knew little and said less. It was a small group. Barely a minyan.⁸ They were wrong and confused about many things but he was there to worship and pray. He overlooked their faults. Nothing was entirely right back home. He was not either. God have mercy on us all.

Joseph and Mary lived quietly. He learned quickly the fine skills of inlay and veneer. The master was pleased he had more to sell. He even shared a little of his increase with Joseph. At home Joseph and Mary enjoyed their time with the baby. They wondered what will this special child be like? He seemed normal. He cried when he was wet, hungry, later at times when he was hurt falling, learning to walk. He was a good baby, but very curious and into everything. He was quiet during prayers and loved to hear his mother sing Psalms and soon was learning to sing along. Mary baked bread spread with dates in the shapes of letters⁹. He was an early talker and quick learner. He could repeat the Shema before he was three. Mary and Joseph taught him to memorize pieces of the scriptures. Joseph had done that with his sons in Nazareth. He was impressed how much quicker Yeshua was to learn and how accurate.

They prayed and talked and decided they would tell Yeshua nothing about the circumstances of his birth, nothing of the angels or magi. They did tell him about Joseph's children and their mother Sophia. He learned about all their family. They told him about Zachariah and Elizabeth's miracle child John. At that, Yeshua had a very serious expression. He asked them all kinds of questions, and for a child spent a lot of time in prayer. They told him there were things they did not know and he should pray to God for God to lead him. He played with the other little boys but avoided their childish squabbles. Life was very good. Joseph missed his children, worried about them. What would they be like when they returned? When they returned? If? He prayed. He was comforted that Mary kept them in her prayers as well. Yeshua started praying for them and Mary's parents.

News from Jerusalem was infrequent and thin. What was going on?. They learned of the palace intrigues, Herod ordering the executions of some of his own sons. He had executed his favorite wife earlier. Finally news that he had died but rebellion and more killing followed. Roman legions came from Syria, crucifying thousands.¹⁰ It even sounded like some had set themselves up to be the messiah.¹¹ Herod Archelaus was the new king and began by killing thousands.¹² Joseph wondered if it would ever be safe to return. Finally an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."¹³ Before they returned home, Joseph took them to see the great temples of On¹⁴

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minyan>

⁹ As far back as we know, even today, Hebrew children learn their letters this way. The sweetness is to teach them the word of the Lord is sweet on the tongue and pleasant to learn.

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publius_Quintilius_Varus

¹¹ http://www.livius.org/men-mh/messiah/messianic_claimants00.html

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_Archelaus

¹³ Matthew 2:20 esv

¹⁴ On is the Hebrew name. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heliopolis>

and the pyramids and temples near Memphis.¹⁵ He talked with Yeshua about the emptiness and hopelessness of false gods and the greatness and saving power of the real God. Yeshua was excited that this was where Moses had been and saved the children of Abraham. Mary and Joseph both said that was just the beginning. There would be a new Moses who would save all people from all evil. Yeshua looked very serious when he heard that.

THE RETURN

Joseph had been saving money for the day they could return, so they could buy a donkey and provisions. As they were on the way back, they talked of going up to Jerusalem and seeing Zachariah, Elizabeth and John. The reports of all the fighting and destruction discouraged that idea. They heard that the Romans had destroyed Emmaus¹⁶ and prayed that Joseph's brother and family had been able to escape. They were excited about returning home. Joseph kept praying that his children would be happy to see him. He was afraid they would be bitter. Mary also prayed, for the children but also for her parents. The constant reports of rebellion and bloodshed all around made them feel they were surrounded by danger. Joseph asked, "Mary, will we find anything left? I feel we should have stayed in Egypt."

Mary reminded him, "That was what Israelites said that caused them to wander in the desert for 40 years. Didn't God tell you it was safe to return?"

It did give them pause that Tzipori was destroyed.¹⁷ Fortunately they did not have to go through it to get to Nazareth. They could see Nazareth on top of the hill. As they climbed the hill from Nain, little Mary saw them. She wasn't so little any more. She recognized them, shouted to those around her and ran down the hill into her father's arms. Joy! Joy all around! Some ran to tell the others. Jude, Salome and Jose escorted them into the village. James was working in the fields and Simon was working for Mary's uncle in Cana. They were living in Mary's parents' home. Her mother, Ann, was waiting at the door.

"You were our miracle child, God's special gift, the answer of years of prayer. Praise God you have returned after years of prayer."

"The bitterest pain in my heart is knowing all the pain I have brought you. I so wanted to bring you happiness. Where is father?"

"God called him. He so longed to see your face again. Let me hold the child."

Yeshua was too big for an old lady to hold. Joseph picked him up so they could embrace. The villagers saw so much joy and praises to God that their suspicions and judgment were quieted for a time. So much news to catch up on. Judith had also gotten too old to take care of Ann. Salome, with Mary's help, was able to do all that was needed for the family.

Joseph gathered all his children later and asked about each one. He told them he was so proud to hear how well they had done and how richly God had blessed them. He said he knew how strange everything appeared with Mary and her son and himself. He asked them to trust God and charged them not to allow them to be judged by the village folk. This was God's doing. At the sabbath service, Ann came in escorted by Jude and

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

¹⁶ "Emmaus was also burnt by Varus's order, after its inhabitants had deserted it, that he might avenge those that had there been destroyed." Josephus Antiquities of the Jews Book 17, Ch. 10, section 9 <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-17.htm>

¹⁷ "took Sepphoris, and made its inhabitants slaves, and burnt the city." Josephus Antiquities of the Jews Book 17, Ch. 10, section 9 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzipori>

Jose as she usually did. Joseph came in carrying Yeshua. James and Simon escorted Mary, Salome and Mary. They were home! There was quite a murmuring by everyone there.

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

What were the political and religious conditions at he time?

How do professional soldiers kill all the small boys in a village?

Why was the killing of the children of Bethlehem not worth reporting?

Why did they have to leave in the middle of the night?

How does this story affect your understanding of Mary and Joseph?

What did it mean for them to be called by God to parent Jesus?

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.