

CHAPTER TWO

A Hunger to Know

The sun had gone down; Passover had arrived. The small narrow streets of Jerusalem were strangely deserted. Lambs had been butchered and roasted with special herbs and spices. The festive meal had been prepared. Families, dressed in their most elegant attire, gathered around tables adorned with fine linen and polished silver. Yowceph's aged father, Joakob ben Matthan, sat at the head of the table, proudly assuming his role as master of his family.

After leading the family in a prayer of thanksgiving, he turned his attention to the children. "On this special occasion, each of you is permitted to have a very small glass of wine. Then, as most of you know, one of these little ones may ask the very important question which is asked each year at this time. He then poured the wine, passing the glasses down to each member of the family. Each adult was served a goblet of wine and a well-rounded plate of food. Then Joakob, who was better known as "Granpapa", indicated to a young grandchild it was time for the question.

Passover evening was celebrated by feasting and storytelling. This was the children's favorite festival. Every father went to great lengths to impress upon his family the purpose for the celebration. The children heard the story every year. But they had forgotten many of the details and excitedly anticipated reliving the colorful descriptions used in relating the first Passover.

Then the moment arrived for the question, "Tell us, Granpapa, why we are here in Jerusalem. Why are we living in someone else's dwelling or staying in tents? Why have we all gathered together to celebrate this night by eating roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread? Will you tell us the wonderful story, Granpapa?"

The family listened attentively as the revered family patriarch began. "Yes, my children, I shall tell you a most fascinating, well-loved story. Today, at sundown, is the beginning of the fourteenth day of the first month of the New Year. This is Passover evening. Tomorrow will be Passover day; it will end at sundown, and after that the very next day will be Yahweh's High day, we observe every year on the fifteenth of the month. It is observed for seven days, known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is why we are here for eight days. Or these seven days we are careful to abide by the Almighty's instruction to cleanse our dwellings and not eat leavening for those days. On the last day of our celebration we will observe the seventhly as a holy Sabbath day.

The old matriarch paused, giving each one time to take in what he was saying. "Many, many years ago, our forefathers, with their families, found themselves in slavery to a cruel king who ruled the land of Egypt. Our peoples, the descendants of Jacob, later named Israel, were not permitted to worship their God. They were forbidden to learn about his ways. There was no place of worship for them. They were

oppressed, beaten, forced to hard labor every day of the week; they had no freedom. They were not only forbidden to keep the weekly Sabbath, as well as the yearly Sabbaths. They had to work as hard on the Sabbaths as any other day.

“They soon forgot which days Jehovah had instructed them to observe. Their families were often sad. Their wives and children wept often. There was no relief from their miseries. They were always tired; pain was a way of life for them. It was a terrible time for all twelve tribes of Israel. For many years they cried out to the God of their fathers, “We, your people, are in agony. Come to our rescue, Eternal God!” they cried. God saw their misery and heard their cries. He called forth a man from among our own people. God protected him from a watery grave by moving the princess of Egypt to adopt him while he was yet an infant. He was given the name of Mosheh and educated as an Egyptian. The Egyptian princess, not aware who his family was, was tricked by Mosheh’s sister into hiring his real mother as his nurse. It was Jehovah’s direction, for in time Mosheh’s Hebrew mother taught him his real heritage. And when the time was right Jehovah commanded the man, Mosheh, “Lead my people, Israel, out of the land of Egypt. They have been in bondage long enough.

“But when Mosheh went before the cruel Egyptian King, he stubbornly refused to let the people leave. ‘Why should I let my slaves go free? I don’t even know your miserable, invisible god! Do you actually think I am stupid enough to let free labor go just because you come to me, Mosheh, and tell me ‘your’ god says he wants them free?’ he shouted in outrage. ‘Go tell your god what I have decreed!’ he thundered at Mosheh. Well, the God of Israel could have struck Pharaoh dead right then and there, but he wanted to teach Israel just how important they were to him. He wanted to show other great nations of the future how much power he has. He wanted to show what he was willing to do to free and protect his chosen nation. He also wanted to show all nations that He was in control, and not even a powerful king like Pharaoh could stand in His way. Jehovah sent plague after plague upon the kingdom of Egypt, but each time Pharaoh broke his promise to let the people leave. Finally, Jehovah decided it was enough. ‘This is what I am going to do,’ he told Mosheh. ‘I will send the death angel to visit Pharaoh’s kingdom. Pharaoh’s first born son, along with every first born son in Egypt, shall be slain in the middle of the night. I will prove to both Israel and Egypt that I am Supreme Power.’

“Jehovah told Mosheh to instruct the people of Israel to take a young adult male lamb, without blemish, keep it penned for four days. Then, just before the evening of the fourteenth of the first month, butcher the lamb, putting some of its blood on the outside of their doors. Each family was to do this and be inside their dwellings by dark. The blood was a sign to the death angel not to slay anyone inside. Every family who refused to follow this instruction would surely be visited by the death angel in the middle of the night. Of course, only the Israelites knew what was going to happen, so you can be sure they were careful to do just as Mosheh said. That night in Goshen there was blood on every Israelite door. All the little children had been put to bed early; lights were turned low. Adults sat quietly, afraid to speak.

“Suddenly, out of the quiet of the midnight darkness a piercing scream was heard, then another, and another. The night became filled with moaning, screaming, and wailing. Mothers all over Egypt were discovering their young first-born sons dead in their beds. Some wives were finding their

husbands lying dead beside them. Others, who had no children, suffered the loss of a father, a brother, an uncle, or perhaps a cousin, that were firstborns. First-born male animals were lying dead in the fields and barns.

Pharaoh's wife was screaming, 'See what you have caused by not letting those miserable slaves go? You have brought death to every family. You killed your own son!' she moaned. 'You murderer...you killed our son!' Pharaoh ran to his son's bedroom.

Seeing his teenage son lying motionless, he stood speechless, his sullen face turning gray."

Granpapa Joakob held the attention of even the youngest child, their round eyes wide with fright. Jehoshua found himself completely absorbed in every detail described. His head grew heavy. He struggled to keep his painfully dry eyes open. A dark cloud enveloped his consciousness. When the darkness subsided, he found himself in another time. Gradually he begins reliving many descriptive details, many undisclosed occurrence that had never been told by the teachers or elders. There was no need for him to wonder about what had happened that night. He was startled to realize he had actually been there. Then came one shock after another. He had been the very one who had talked to Mosheh, who had sent the plagues. He had performed the miracles; He had used His power to lead the families of Israel out of Egypt.

Suddenly, a terrible fear struck him. His stomach churned and knotted, leaving him shaken and weak. An unspeakable horror and dread attacked him with such fierceness he feared he was losing consciousness. He quickly looked about at the faces above the long table surrounded by aunts, uncles, and cousins.

He was glad no one had noticed his flushed countenance. With great difficulty he regained his composure without attracting attention. For the first time in his life he felt utterly alone. He knew there was a very real reason he had experienced such overwhelming emotion. And for the first time in his life his human spirit felt the bitter bite of fear.

Long after the story had ended, the meal finished, the table cleared, the children put to bed, Jehoshua lay contemplating the evening experience. His young mind was still in a state of shock. He had been able to look back into the past and see himself, to feel the anger, the sadness, and the love as only a divine being could experience. The emotion had been so powerful he had almost lost control. "Why did I feel such crushing pain and fear when Granpapa described the butchering of the lamb.

What does that have to do with me?" he wondered. "I know in part about many things, but there is so much I do not yet understand.

I have read and studied the ancient writings; much of it speaks of me. But the many unexplained pieces have not fell into place yet. I am unable to see the whole picture. My teachers have told me all they know. The priests and scribes here at the Temple are much more educated in the ways of the ancient manuscripts. They devote their entire lives to instructing the people. I must make an appointment to speak with them in private". He prayed before retiring, asking the Father's guidance. He wanted desperately to understand the plan. Yet, he had a strong feeling that perhaps there was some

knowledge of future events he was not yet emotionally mature enough to handle. He had come to realize that he was not the son of Yowceph, but that his Father was the all-powerful Eternal Creator from the vastness of the heavens. He could feel a power growing in his spirit that no other humans were demonstrating.

The following day, the daylight part of the Passover, was the preparation period, preparing for the oncoming yearly High Day.

Joshuah understood that after the evening memorial, the preparation day followed, when all the animal sacrifices would be slaughtered, and at evening the first day of the Days of Unleavened Bread would start. He had observed this being done for several years of his young life. This observance required putting all leavened products out of their houses and off their premises, preparing for seven days, without leavening in their food. There was to be no labor done on the first and last days of these seven days. The first and last of these days, Jehoshua understood, had been set aside by Yahweh God as yearly Sabbaths and had commanded a holy convocation, a religious gathering, of all the people, especially the able bodied men.

Jehoshua was unusually excited about attending the convocations. Here the highly educated priests officiated over the services and discussed the laws and the ordinances, as well as added traditions.

The following five days, falling between the first High Day and the Last High Day, Jewish families spent visiting and renewing old acquaintances, feasting, sight-seeing, touring the beautiful buildings and the splendor of the Temple.

The scribes and priests offered scripture classes for those interested. Jehoshua attended every class. But he was extremely disappointed to learn the teachers dwelled almost entirely on the keeping of traditional laws, rituals, and physical ordinances, neglecting the very things he was interested in learning. The classes were packed with people each session, making it impossible for Jehoshua to get any personal questions answered. However, he managed to make arrangements to meet with the religious teachers privately at the end of the feast. They consented to meet with him the day after the last day of the Days of Unleavened Bread. The priests assured him they would be much too busy to give any personal time before then.

It was now after midnight. The last day had ended at sundown. The spring festival was over. Families had packed their animals, cleaned their temporary dwellings, and made preparations to leave for their respective homes early the following morning. Friends and relatives had said their last tearful good-byes. Children had been put to bed. Parents were hoping to get a good night's sleep before starting the tiring trip back home. Many would leave for home the following day, before the first glimmer of morning light.

Jehoshua had helped with all the evening preparations. He anxiously awaited the private session he had been promised.

During the hustle and bustle of activities, the family responsibilities, and confusion, he neglected to inform his parents he planned to stay behind. Knowing his parents had learned how self-sufficient and

reliable he had proved to be, he gave little thought to confiding in them about his plans. They had, long ago, acquired confidence in his ability to make responsible decisions. They had given him freedom to decide many things without consulting them. The thought uppermost in his mind was the driving hunger to find the answers to those disturbing, unanswered questions. He was aflame with a burning desire to get on with his education so he could begin to fulfill his role in the Elohim plan.

Morning pictured the end of what was called "the Passover season". The city of Jerusalem was teeming with people. Wagons, carts, and pack animals were loaded. Voices of excited women and children were ringing over loud noises of rumbling wheels and clattering hoof beats. Impatient men could be heard yelling at stubborn animals. Smaller children's voices mingled with the bleating and braying of domesticated animals.

Jewish families from far and near were on the move, returning to their home towns. After seeing his family packed and ready for the return trip, Jehoshua hurriedly found his way through the winding, narrow streets, leading to the Temple. He ascended the steep steps to the Temple and into a large entrance hall. He was greeted by one of the teachers, who led him into a musty, but impressive room. A huge, heavy, wood table stood in the middle of the room, littered with books, scrolls, and numerous writing materials. Bottles of ink and broken quills were pushed to one side. The room smelled of dust and stale incense. Here he would have access to the complete library of writings. He would be able to communicate with the most religiously educated minds in the world. Jehoshua sat in a huge carved oak chair. The heavy, pale-faced scribe gathered his long flowing robe about him and sat down beside Jehoshua.

"Now, what can I do for you, my lad?" he asked in a fatherly tone.

Jehoshua explained, "Sir, I am Jehoshua, the son of Yowceph, the carpenter. My mother is Maria. I live in Nazareth. I am a serious student of the law and the history of the house of Israel. I have exhausted the knowledge of my local school teachers. There is much I have learned, but I have a vast store of unanswered questions. Knowing, Sir, here in Jerusalem are many learned men who have studied extensively into these things about which I wish to understand, I have come to learn from these great educators."

The hours vanished as though they were but minutes. The sun had traveled high overhead and had begun its descent. The elderly scribe, who introduced himself as Gamaliel, invited Jehoshua to join him at a local eating place. They had delved deeply into many subjects regarding the law and the migration of the lost tribes of Israel. Gamaliel admitted some of the questions Jehoshua asked were difficult for him to answer. But, he agreed to continue studying with him until they found some answers. "Perhaps we can get some other scribes to join us tomorrow." he offered.

As dusk turned the bright spring sky to a dull grey, Gamaliel discovered Jehoshua had stayed behind with no overnight accommodations. He graciously invited Jehoshua to share his spacious home during his stay. Jehoshua accepted Gamaliel's invitation, expressing his appreciation for his hospitality.

The following day found Jehoshua deeply engrossed in study and conversation with several of the leading religious scribes, elders, and teachers of the law.

Yowceph and Maria were not overly concerned when they first discovered Jehoshua was not with their caravan. It was not unusual for him to steal away for several hours by himself. And, knowing many hospitable friends and relatives from their home town were traveling back to Nazareth, they reasoned, "Perhaps he has lingered behind to say some last 'good-byes' to some of his friends. It is possible he is traveling along with relatives in the back of the caravan." But, when night fall came, Maria became worried. Asking around, discovering no one had seen Jehoshua, she convinced Yowceph to return with her to look for him. Wanting to travel light and fast, they made arrangements for neighbors to care for their belongings, leaving their younger children in the care of trusted relatives. They gathered what supplies they might need, mounted their fastest mules and sped off toward Jerusalem. They stopped at intervals to inquire of stranger groups for any information that might be offered. After two days of traveling and searching Yowceph made camp for them to spend the night. Maria began to suffer bouts of grief. She feared that something dreadful had happened to her beloved son. "How far must we travel, Yowseph, it's been two days and no sign of him? If only we had turned back sooner, we have been traveling five days altogether. I know you are tired also. We must continue praying that Jehovah will protect our son wherever he is. My head is aching from the shedding of tears. My voice weak from prayers. But I trust that whatever happens will be the will of the Eternal. We must trust Him".

Yowceph held her in his comforting arms, "We will go as far as Jerusalem tomorrow, and if no news we will return, perhaps we have overlooked him in the crowds. We must not lose hope. Jehovah will guide us. He is ever mindful of us and hears our every prayer. It will be alright, I am sure."

Upon the following day they arrived in Jerusalem. As they enter the court of the Temple they called to a man in long flowing robes. Rushing up to him, breathing heavily, Maria clutched at his arm. "Sir, we are looking for our son. He is twelve years old, of medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, about one hundred pounds. He is a very strong looking lad, but he speaks with a soft voice, and is very well mannered. Have you any information that might help us find him?" she pleaded.

"Is your son's name 'Jehoshua', my daughter?" he asked.

Maria's heart quickened.

"Yes, Oh...Yes! Have you seen him, Sir?"

The aged priest smiled. "Indeed I have. I want to tell you, I am an old man, as you can plainly see. And, I must say...I have never in my whole life met a more remarkable young man than your Jehoshua. I am delighted to meet the parents of this fine young man of yours. I want to tell you, he has really had us going around in circles here. He has asked some very difficult questions concerning the law. He is unusually interested in the prophets, the system of worship, and the whereabouts of the whole house of Israel. Those are the kinds of things he is interested in. He asks so many questions. I am embarrassed to admit we are having problems answering them all. He explains new meaning to scriptures even we are ignorant of... This astonishing lad has amazed and surprised all of us." He stopped to get his breath, and then apologized. "I am terribly sorry. I can see you are almost sick with worry. And here I am, taking up your time, rambling on and on. Here...let me take you to him." He led the way to a large closed door. Maria's knees were still shaking. Weak with relief, she breathed a prayer of thanksgiving.

Jehoshua, surrounded by several important looking men in long ceremonial robes, sat engaging in intense conversation. Maria was weak with relief seeing her son safe from danger. But, at the same time she felt a stab of hurt that he had neglected to tell them he was staying behind. As Jehoshua glanced up at his parents, a look of surprise crossed his face. Maria could hold in her hurt no longer. "Jehoshua, my son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been sick with worry. We have been searching everywhere for you for these three days!" Tears of frustration spilled from her swollen eyes.

"I am surprised you searched for me, Mother. Didn't you know I would be in my father's house?" Seeing how upset his parents were, he rose from his chair, put his arms around Maria and said, "I truly am sorry, Mama, if I upset you. I did not intend to cause you pain. I thought you would know I would be about my father's business." He turned to Yowceph, "Sir, with your permission, may I have a few moments? I want to say 'good-bye' to these who have shown me much kindness. I shall join you soon."

As they proceeded back toward Nazareth, their son safely reclaimed, Maria had plenty of time to think over the things that had just taken place. Neither she nor Yowceph fully understood what Jesus had meant by his comment, "in my father's house, about my father's business". But she felt it was somehow connected with his unique birth and the unusual way he had been acting lately. "There has never been a boy as well behaved, respectful, sensibly, obedient, and as reliable as Jehoshua. He has never, in his whole life, attempted to go against our wishes at any time," she confided in Yowceph. "I fear there is much more to this than we are prepared to deal with. Still...what connection does he have with the scribes and teachers, at such young age?"

She glanced at her son, and thought, "One would never think this ordinary, homely young man is any different than any other twelve year old Jewish lad. But, no one knows better than I how different he really is."

Jehoshua's mind was racing too. "I read of being despised and rejected and acquainted with sorrows and grief. Even my birth resulted in agony and death to both little children and their parents. Again, it is written 'The spirit of the Eternal is upon me. He has anointed me to preach good news to the meek.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to release those who are bound in prison. I am sent to comfort all that mourn, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Eternal and the day of his vengeance'. I read about frightful things that are to happen to me and all the things that I am to accomplish. And...yet...I also read of being cut off from the land of the living, making my grave with the wicked. But no one can explain what it all means, not even the elders, or the greatest teachers of the law. Nor can Abba or Mama explain how it will all come about. Surely they must see why it is so very important that I seek out everything there if for me to learn."

Maria watched her son, wondering what mysterious thoughts he concealed. "This child, my son, is fast becoming his own man. I fear I am losing him to a higher power. Yes, I will soon lose him to his real father, the Eternal. Already, his thoughts and goals are far superior to ours. I am reminded of his

miraculous conception by the seed of the Ancient of Days, the Eternal Creator. And, though he is human, he is also of Emmanuel. His future is to someday become a great and powerful king, ruling the twelve tribes of Israel.

“It still seems but a faded dream, or perhaps a story that has been told over and over about someone else. But, when I jog my memory to dwell on the events, I have no doubts. I know it happened. Just the same, as time goes by, I find it more and more difficult to remember everything clearly,” she thought.

Traveling back toward their caravan she drifted into the past, allowing her thoughts to take her back to that momentous time, thirteen years ago.

Up to that time her life had been much the same as other young Jewish women’s. As a descendant of David, she had come from an honorable and respected family. As a young child she had felt loved and secure. If her family suffered from poverty, she never knew it. There was always plenty of food from the fertile gardens and lush orchards. Their home was warm and cheerful, with ample room for pets and family activities. Her family had, for as long as she could remember, been successful farmers, with cattle and sheep grazing their land. Those were the happy times.

Then slowly, things began to change. There was talk of heavy, unreasonable taxes, revolt in the government, unrest in the larger cities throughout Judea and neighboring countries. Many had joined forces with the Zealots, revolting against the ruthless oppression inflicted upon the Jewish population. Open rebellion had only increased the problems of the common people, bringing upon them severe hardships.

Their religious elders and teachers of the law were constantly warning the people to turn to Jehovah, to plead for his mercy. “All of the writings and the prophecies point to this very time when Jehovah will send Israel a deliverer. Pray for Messiah to come. He will rescue us from the tyranny of the Roman government,” they predicted. As Maria got closer to womanhood, it seemed that the whole world must be sad, for she seldom saw anyone smile or laugh, as they had in previous years. There was much talk about the all-powerful, wonderful, vengeful ruler, who would come. He would take over the governments of the world, establish his own government. Then he would proceed to rule the Gentile nations with a rod of iron. “He will show those dictators and Romans who is to rule Israel,” was the cry of angry men.

Conditions became so severely bad; people were willing to build hope on anything. Unlike the average citizen, Maria’s parents had been upright, strictly keeping the laws of Mosheh. They taught their children about a Jehovah, a God of tender mercies and love. Maria had enjoyed the closeness of her family and the scriptural assignments she and her sister were given to study each day. She and her sister had not had the opportunity to study at the schools where the boys attended. But, she remembered sitting for several hours every day, during the winter months, at their one little wooden desk. She had been the first to learn to read from the Torah, and could memorize verse after verse. She was very glad, and thankful to her parents, that they had insisted their little girls also become taught to read.

From childhood, she had prayed earnestly to the God of Jacob, reminding Him of the suffering of her people. She begged Him for protection and deliverance for His nation. She believed Jehovah.

She believed He heard their prayers. He would answer in His own time; He would come to their rescue.

In her studies, she had learned that when Messiah came, he would be born of the royal line of king David. This was of special interest to her, because her family were descendants of David. And of course, her distant cousin, Yowceph, whom she was espoused to marry, was also of the lineage of David.

Maria glanced at the man of her thoughts. He had been a good husband, a wonderfully kind and loving father for their children.

“Jehovah has abundantly blessed us in so many ways,” she thought.

“It seems only yesterday that we were just planning our marriage. And, what a wonderful engagement party it was, lasting for several days in spite of the hard times. Mama and Abba were so pleased to get such a good catch for their young daughter. Our parents outdid themselves with the party. ‘It is good, in these troublesome times to have something to rejoice about,’ Abba had said. Friends, relatives, and neighbors kept dropping by with huge baskets of goodies. I had never seen so much fresh baked honey cakes, fresh fruit, nuts, cheeses, and wine at one time.”

Maria allowed her thoughts to go back into time, the present faded and she was once more the innocent, young bride-to-be. She remembered when the engagement party had ended She had devoted her full attention to sewing the wedding gown, and the beautiful cloak for Yowceph’s wedding gift, and began preparing for their marriage. In spite of all the problems around her, her faith in God gave her peace of mind and contentment. Trusting Him for his goodness and mercy, and ask for His blessings and protection from the evil about her.

It had been a busy, hectic day. Maria had gone to her small bedroom, which she shared with her sister. It was early, but she felt a special need to communicate with God. She was so very thankful for the love she felt from him. Tears of gratitude flowed down her glowing cheeks as she recounted the many ways he had blessed her. “You have given me a kind and gentle man to be my husband, and to father our children. You have kept your promises from generation to generation. There is no God but you, O Living God. Look down upon your nation, Israel, Holy One, and see the misery, the cruelties, and the oppression of your people. We long for the Deliverer. We are a people with only one hope...waiting for Messiah. I rejoice in the hope of the Holy One of Israel. Your merciful kindness is great toward us and your truth endures forever.”

When she ended praying, she proceeded to retire to bed for the night. She enjoyed the rare moment of privacy of the tiny room. Her sister was absent, visiting a cousin. Whispering afterthoughts and praises to her God, she drifted off into a peaceful sleep.

Suddenly, she was awakened. Her heart was beating rapidly. A strange fear gripped her. She sat up quickly, clutching the covers about her, rubbing her sleep filled eyes. She strained to see into the darkness of the room. A strange light, ever so faint, appeared, then grew brighter. Out of the pulsating glow, the form of a man appeared. His deep, vibrant, voice was soft and gentle. He said,

“Congratulations, precious lady. You are most favored by the Most High God.” Frightened, Maria gasped for breath. She struggled to control her shaking. The masterful voice continued, “Please...Do not be frightened, Maria. God is going to bless you exceedingly. You will soon become pregnant with a boy child. You are to name him Jehoshua. Jehoshua will grow strong and healthy. He will become King over all Israel.

You will be the mother of the very son of the Eternal Creator God!”

Maria finally managed to focus her attention on this strange man whom she suspected was an angel, and a messenger from Jehovah.

Blinking her eyes, she cleared her throat. With a nervous gesture, she managed a small squeaky voice, “But, Sir...How can this be? I am still a virgin.”

The man smiled, “Yes, I know. But the Eternal God will impregnate you by the overshadowing of His holy spirit, and you shall bring forth his son.”

Stunned, Maria could hardly speak. “Whatever Jehovah wants of me, I am his servant. I am most humbly honored to be so chosen,” she said.

The angel watched her wonderment with amusement, and then continued, “Your aged cousin, Elizabeth, also is experiencing a miracle in her life, even now. Though she has never been able to conceive a child, now God has made it possible. She is no longer barren. She is already carrying a son in her sixth month. His name shall be called John, the son of Zachariah. He shall be born with the holy spirit dwelling in his mind. The holy spirit will enable him to perform the special mission of preparing the way for Messiah.”

Maria sat upright in her suddenly darkened bedroom; the angel had disappeared as mysteriously as he had appeared. She could hardly believe what she had just experienced. “Am I really awake, or am I having a strange dream?” she asked herself aloud. Long into the night, she lay sleepless. She tried to recall everything she had read from the ancient writings of the Prophets concerning the promise of Messiah. Gradually the words began to flow into her memory. “Hear O house of David, the Eternal himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, meaning God is with us. By the time he is old enough to eat curds and honey he will know how to choose right from wrong. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; the government of God will be upon his shoulder. His name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He shall rule upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” She said the passages over and over, trying to apply it to what was happening in her own life, at this moment.

Another passage came to her, “Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the Lord, and the poor among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless shall come to nought and the scoffer cease. And all

who watch to do evil shall be cut off. I shall tell of the decree of the Eternal: He said to me, "You are my son. Today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice."

Unable to sleep, thoughts kept thrashing through her dazed mind. Questions which only time could answer, aroused her most vivid imaginations, making her heart flutter with expectation. "Am I truly to be the mother of the actual son of God, the virgin to give birth? Will I be blessed beyond all women, to fondle, to suckle, and to nourish the child king, whose destiny is to establish the government of The Eternal? Will my body produce one so great, one who will rule forever, bringing peace and happiness to all mankind? Our people have long awaited and desired the coming of the Deliverer. Is it really true...God has chosen me as an instrument in bringing about this marvelous plan... How will I tell my family...Shall I tell them right away, or wait until I began to swell with child...What shall I tell Yowceph? Surely he will be overjoyed, sharing such a wonderful blessing with me. When will this marvelous conception take place...When will I know I carry God's son within my body...How thrilling to know I shall have a man child as my firstborn, a child of perfection, the very son of The Most High God! My soul cries out in praise and exaltation to a just and loving Being." Question after question ran through her excited thoughts until the wee hours of the morning. Finally, exhausted, she fell into a deep,

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