

CHAPTER FIVE

Flight For Life

Maria's thoughts continued to move back through time as she recalled her son's unusual birth and the fearful times that had followed. Their lives had changed drastically the first months of his life. Word had spread near and far about their special child who had been born in Bethlehem. Visitors came from all over Judea to see the child who had aroused so much attention during the fall holy days. Often visitors were heard to say, "I am amazed at the excitement that has been stirred about this normal looking child. His features are as common as any other Jewish baby; his parents are no different than any other poor, newly married couple in Nazareth."

In time, memories of the miracle child subsided; as the months passed only his parents were consciously aware of his difference. Maria and Yowceph could not forget the visit of the angel, the words the aged prophet and prophetess had spoken over Yeshua. When the spring festival season arrived, Yowceph took his wife and small son back to Jerusalem to observe the festival. "Jerusalem will not only be crowded with worshippers at this time of the year, but it will also be full of roving gangs of restless, unpredictable rebels and ill-tempered Roman soldiers. I think it wise that we go back to Bethlehem and rent an upper apartment during our stay for the festivals," he had confided.

After settling into their rented apartment Yowceph and Maria, completely unaware of the huge entourage of people who would soon arrive at their temporary dwelling, were expecting no more than the usual hectic festival week of worship at the Temple. The happy couple were totally unprepared for the excitement, fears and dangers that would soon descend upon them. Journeying over mountains and desert wastes infested with cruel and desperately dangerous bandits, a huge caravan of wise men traveled for several weeks from the land of Babylon, over five hundred miles east of Jerusalem— from a land whose history went back to Abraham, Daniel, and the captivity of the House of Israel. Their mission was to visit the new Prince. This extraordinary, sophisticated group of astronomers, belonging to the highly educated class were accompanied by many like-minded companions. They were being led by a distinct phenomenon, a supernatural light, which by direct revelation of the great Eloah, went before them, guiding them into Jerusalem.

As the impressive group neared the city, news of their arrival spread. Their search for the child, whom many proclaimed to be born king of the Jews, reached the ears of the cunning and ruthless king Herod. Herod, part Jew, part Edomite had come into power under the Roman government. He had gotten control of Judea by crimes of unspeakable brutality, murdering any and all whom he suspected of undermining his power. He was more than a little concerned when he heard of the possibility of an imposter taking over his throne! Herod lost no time summoning the top Jewish religious leaders. His bloated body sat rigidly on the edge of his velvet covered chair; his heavy, bulging eyes bored intently down upon them. "You men are educated in the prophets' writings and understand the scriptures better than anyone else. So I have called you before me that I may receive enlightenment concerning a future

coming Savior who is to be king over us Jews. And, if you will be so kind, would you please, tell me where he is to be found when he appears?"

Quoting from the book of Micah, a nervous lawyer answered, "It is written by the prophet, 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel.'" Dismissing the long-robed lawyers, Herod hastily sent a messenger to the astronomers inviting them to be his guests. After serving his grateful, unsuspecting guests a lavish meal and his best wines, the deviously cunning king sanctimoniously pretended he, too, was interested in knowing the whereabouts of the prophesied king.

"I was informed this new king-child is to be born in the town of Bethlehem, just a few miles south of here. When you find him, please, be so kind as to bring word, that I, too, may go and worship him." Soon after leaving Herod's palace, the angel of light reappeared before the entourage, leading them to the rooms where Yowceph and Maria were staying. Yowceph and Maria had had many visitors since the news of Yeshua's birth had spread, but never such a large, wealthy, and distinguished group as this. They were greatly impressed at the distance these men had traveled. Yowceph welcomed them all, but reminded them there was room only for a limited amount of visitors inside the modest building. As small groups of elegant visitors entered the vestibule where Maria presented Yeshua, each in turn, fell face down in royal obeisance, worshipping the child. And, as was the custom when appearing before royalty, individual visitors paid homage before taking their leave by presenting extravagant gifts to the young Prince. Some gave gold, some gave frankincense, and some gave expensive perfumes. Throughout the Passover season, as word spread of the occurrence, they were host to many new groups of curious visitors each day.

At the close of the unusually hectic Passover festival the crowded cities began to empty as Jewish families loaded their belongings on pack animals and wooden carts, and began their long treks back to their respective homes. The honorable visitors, unaware of Herod's murderous intentions, would have gone to him before returning to their country, but was warned by Eloah in a dream not to go back into Jerusalem. They obediently chose a different route, avoiding Jerusalem and any who would inform Herod of Yeshua's whereabouts. Yowceph and Maria packed their possessions and retired, planning to leave for home early the following morning. During the night Yowceph was awakened by a familiar voice. "Yowceph...awake. Yowceph...listen very carefully. You must not return to Nazareth now. Herod is seeking the child to kill him. You have no time to loose. As soon as Herod discovers the astronomers have left without reporting back to him, he will determine to find the young child and have him killed. Take him and his mother and flee to Egypt until I appear to you again." Yowceph, startled, sprang to an upright position. The angel was gone. There was only the even breathing of his sleeping wife and child. He shook Maria gently. "Wake up, Maria," he whispered urgently. "I have just been visited by the angel again. This time he has brought words of warning...of danger. We must prepare to leave this place as soon as possible. If Herod finds us he will surely kill our child." Maria was up instantly, gathering personal articles. "Where shall we go, Yowceph?" she asked. "The angel said we must go to Egypt. Hurry, we must leave soon. I will go for the animals and cart. Herod is sure to send out spies, searching for us throughout Judea. Even now they may be searching nearby."

Herod had impatiently waited for the return of the wise men. Upon receiving news from his informers that the company had been sighted traveling many miles from Jerusalem, he realized he had been tricked. In violent, revengeful furor, he summoned his guards. "Those dogs think to rebel against my authority, do they?" he exploded. "I'll show them! I'll not be made a fool of by any newly acclaimed Savior, or of those insipid, traveling star-gazers, either. I, king Herod, make a new decree! Bring my scribes and seal. Be it known to every insubordinate who harbors such pugnacious ideas of a child-king—from this day forward—every detestable, sniveling, Jewish, male brat two years old and under shall be executed!" Herod's angry, perspiring, bloated, face turned a dark shade of purple. His black, beady eyes gleamed with satanic hatred as he feverishly provided his executioners with signed papers to carry out his fiendish, cold-blooded orders.

"A baby king, indeed—I have had enough of these rebellious Jews! They will find out what happens to anyone who dares to suggest an insurrection against me! Bring every treasonous blasphemer who holds to this absurd revolutionistdogma before me immediately!" he commanded.

"I demand to question them personally. All suspected heretics will be thrown into the dungeons. I will not tolerate any more of this ludicrous nonsense!" he screamed. Taking the main trade route out of Bethlehem toward Hebron, Yowceph gently urged his mules to their fastest pace, endeavoring to reach the safety of the river area before nightfall.

"We can expect to travel about thirty miles each day, if we have no unexpected problems. We will have to allow time to stop and refresh ourselves and the animals. We dare not stop in Hebron, though. Herod may have already sent out spies to the nearest towns. We will have to bypass the cities. We should be well pass Hebron by daybreak," he confided. "By noon we can rest by the water's edge, hidden by the trees and foliage. We can proceed on around Beersheba before dark. The river near Beersheba will provide a suitable place to camp for the night. Once we reach the main trade route I hope to be out of Herod's reach. Then we will be able to travel more slowly on into Egypt."

In the front of the jolting cart, Maria, nestled in a seat of straw, held Yeshua securely, tightly clutching a thin blanket about him, and shielding him from the damp night air. "The Eternal will protect us, I know," she breathed to the child before giving herself totally to prayer.

The deserted roads were quiet, except for an occasional traveler. But as gray skies turned light, they dodged bands of soldiers, traveling merchants and early caravans. The morning sun bathed the sky with an orange-red hue as its brilliant mass lifted above the distant horizon. In search of a resting place Yowceph pulled off onto a narrow road leading away from the view of fellow travelers. The road was bumpy and lined with jutting boulders and neglected fruit trees. Reaching a small clump of overhanging trees, Yowceph pulled the animals to a halt beside a hidden stream of gurgling water that seemed to appear from out of nowhere. After helping Maria out of the cart, Yowceph tended the animals. "It should be safe here. After I refresh the animals and we must freshen up and have some food."

Maria stretched her stiffened legs and arms, then sat the child on the crude, makeshift bed she had fashioned by spreading a heavy garment over heaped straw and leaves on a shaded, grass-covered area. She handed him his favorite toy. "You be a good little boy; stay there while Mama finds something in the cart to eat." She kept one eye on Yeshua, the other on her work. "I am amazed—even at this tender

age—Yeshua is such an unusually loving and obedient baby. Though he would love to crawl away and explore, I have no fear of his leaving the spot where I have put him. Already he is beginning to speak some words surprisingly well. His mental maturity is unbelievable. I am so blessed to have this wonderful child. Even now, he senses we are troubled, and is especially quiet,” she thought.

Hours later, the sun, high in the sky, grew unmercifully hot. The road was thick with dust; the green valleys had changed to a parched, sandy soil. As they neared a busy city, the road became congested with traveling traders, their horses and fancy coaches sending blinding clouds of red dust behind their trail. The discomfort from dust and heat brought painful cries from the tired child. He chafed beneath the protective cloth draped and tied securely over his torso.

Try as she might, Maria could not keep the choking dust from finding its way into their eyes and lungs. Maria breathed a sigh of relief when Yowceph pulled off onto a winding, bumpy, trenched road. “We are within a few miles of Beersheba; we must avoid getting too close. Farther down this road we will find a safer spot, out of sight, where we can rest,” he promised. By late afternoon, they had reached their destination for the night. Their sun-burned faces were streaked with perspiration and dirt. Tired and hungry, their bodies ached from the long day’s constant jolting of the cart as it bumped over rough, dirt roads. They pitched camp beside a stream, beneath a thick clump of fragrant foliage. Here the air was free from heat and dust. The trees gave cooling shade and the stream nearby supplied clear fresh water for cooking and bathing.

“We are only a few miles south of Gerar, but I think we are finally safe. We can relax now,” Yowceph comforted her. “Tomorrow we will be able to travel at our leisure. It will be wonderful just to be able to walk, for a change.” The following day they continued working their way deeper into the south until they finally reached Egypt. It had been a long, hard trip, filled with urgency and discomfort but they giving thanks to Yahweh for bringing them this far, confident they had finally reached safety.

Soon after arriving at their final destination in Egypt, they settled into a small village near On—a once great city that had fallen to ruins in times of war—located a few miles north of Memphis. There they found other Jewish families and made new friends. Some of the expensive gifts, given to Yeshua by the Eastern visitors, were sold; the money was used for getting settled into a rented house. Within a few weeks, Yowceph was able to find work in his trade as carpenter. Even though there were many Jewish communities, with synagogues and schools, living in Egypt was a new and interesting experience for them. They were delighted to discover they were unknown in this new location. For the first time since the birth of Yeshua, they were able to live and enjoy a private life, away from visiting curiosity-seekers.

Several months after settling in Egypt Maria discovered that their little family would increase; they would be blessed with a second child. Shyly, she informed her husband, “I have wonderful news for you this night, my dear husband. The Eternal has blessed us with another life. Perhaps it, too, will be a son. Yeshua be so excited when we tell him. You know how he loves little babies.” Instantly Yowceph reached for her, waving his long arms. “Not any more than this humble husband of yours. You have made me the proudest and happiest man on earth, my wonderful little Princess. God has surely blessed me beyond measure to have a wonderful young wife such as you.”

He held her at arm's length, a broad smile on his weathered face. "When can we expect this blessed event, my blessed fruitful one?"

Maria glowed in the warmth of his love. "Before the winter rains descend upon us. And this time I long for the comfort of my own home when our second blessing arrives. It will not be as eventful and perhaps not as exciting as when the Eternal gave us our firstborn, but I have had enough excitement these past months to last a life time. Though I fear it is not yet finished. I am so very happy...but at the same time...I am somewhat saddened that I cannot be among my own kin when I give our parents another grandchild."

Yowceph's beaming face turned somber. "It is true...I know how it must be with you. I, too, miss our families. You must not worry about these things now. just concentrate on our blessings. Soon, with two little ones to care for the time will go swiftly. The Eternal will not forsake us. He will not leave us here in Egypt. He will send His angel when the time is right...we will return to our home. Are we not, even now, being blessed beyond our expectations?"

The long, hot, dry summer gave way to cooler temperatures as the days grew shorter.

Maria gave birth to another son; they named him James.

A short, mild winter came and faded into another hot summer. Yeshua was

delighted at the prospect of having his very own little brother. He proudly boasted to

the neighborhood children,

"We have a little brother in our house. Mama says he will soon grow big like me...and then he will play games with me. But I am the first-born...I will have to take good care of him...I will teach him how to do things like I do. Sometimes, when he is awake, Mama lets me hold him." Yeshua's mentality seemed constantly to outgrow his little boy's body. He developed into a quiet but friendly, inquisitive child. Maria devoted many hours teaching, training, and struggling to find the answers to his never-ending, persistent flow of startling questions.

By end of the day Maria was relieved when Yowceph came home from work. "I am so glad to have you here to give me some much needed help with answering this child's questions. They get more difficult every day. I am constantly amazed at the things running through his mind," she confided to her husband. "Today it was: 'Where does the rain come from...where is the moon...why is the sun brighter than the moon...where is the sun at night...where does the darkness hide when the sun is bright... where do the birds sleep at night...where do clouds come from, and where are they going...how far is it to the nearest star...how old is the earth...how high is the sky...why can't we see the winds...?' He never runs out of questions. So far, most of his questions I can answer without difficulty, but lately he has startled me with questions like: 'How many people are living on the earth...how many nations live across the oceans...why are some people sad and in pain...why are we different colors and have different languages...?' These are not so easily explained. I never know what he will come up with next. You get the next question," she teased.

As the months passed Maria yearned to return home. She longed to see her parents, her friends, and the familiar homeland of Nazareth. She was resigned to accept God's will in any case. But every day she prayed fervently they would soon be able to return. "It seems such a long time since we have kept the holy days with our family. I wish we had more news of the happenings in Jerusalem. Surely by now it will be safe for us to return," Maria suggested wishfully.

Yowceph replied, "There is still fear. As you know, even the Jewish Diaspora in this area has not gone up to Jerusalem for many months for fear of Herod and the Romans. I know it has been difficult for you, my little Maria," he said gently, "not being able to communicate with your family all this time. But we dare not send word to our families; it would be too easy for the wrong people to get word to Herod. We cannot be sure Herod has forgotten his determination to destroy Yeshua. We must continue to pray for protection from Jehovah and wait patiently until He sends word it is safe to return."

Yeshua, at four years old, was no more a baby. His once simple questions became more complex and thought provoking. He often expressed an interest in the law, history, and many other adult subjects. "When will I be old enough to attend synagogue school, Mama?" he persisted.

"You are so eager, my son. You must not grow up too soon. There is much for your Mama and Abba to teach you yet. Then, my little man, there will be plenty of time for you to leave my arms to study with the teachers. I do so hope we will be back with our family before you are ready to attend synagogue." Several weeks later Yeshua awoke to sounds of cheerful singing coming from outside his little room. Peeking around the door, he was met with sounds of cheerful excitement. "Yeshua...come. Rejoice with me. Jehovah be praised...He has answered our prayers...He is so good and upright. Your mama has some wonderful news...I am so happy today. At last, we are going to go home," Maria informed him. "Last night the angel appeared to Abba. He said it was safe for us to return home. Isn't that wonderful? Now, my son, you shall be able to see your Grandmamas and Grandabbas. Abba says if we can dispose of our personal belongings in time, we may be able to attend the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. It is a beautiful city with exquisitely decorated buildings. But, the grandest of them all is the beautiful temple!" She scooped startled James up and swung him above her head, laughing gleefully. "Won't your aunts, uncles, and many cousins be surprised to see us, after so long time? Turning to Yeshua she added, "And you, my child...you have grown so big and strong. The last time they saw you, you were just a little, bitsy baby, just trying to walk. They will be so surprised when they see what a fine young lad you are. And won't they be surprised when they see little brother?"

Yeshua, catching his mother's excitement, began dancing around the room, clapping his sturdy, little hands. "How far will we travel? When will we get there? Can we take our puppy? Will we ever come back? Who will be there, in the temple...Will Abba...?" "Whoa...hold on my little fellow," she laughed. "It will take us several days to arrive there. But first, there are many things we must attend to. We will explain everything to you as we go along. How would you like to see the little town where you were born? If Jehovah wills, we may stay with relatives in Bethlehem, the place of your birth, for the festival season. So many grand people came to see you when we were last there."

Yeshua became quiet, "Tell me again, Mama, about the bad man and why we had to leave in haste, in the dark of night. Abba won't let the bad man hurt little brother, will he?"

The long awaited day arrived. Excess belongings had been disposed of; business matters were taken care of; traveling arrangements had been made. Yowceph, with his small family, were on their way back to Judea. "The trip going back will be much more enjoyable than when we traveled down here," Yowceph told Yeshua. "You were near a year old. You remember the story of the wise men, don't you?" he asked. Yeshua nodded, his little face becoming somber as Yowceph continued. "A lot of bad things were going on in our country, but your Mama and I traveled with our families and neighbors to observe the Passover in Jerusalem. You were just a little fellow, but we didn't want to leave you behind. We took you back to the little town where you were born. Each day we would go into Jerusalem to observe special services and be taught by the scribes and priests. Before the Days of Unleavened Bread had ended we were surprised with a visit by a very learned, elegant group of men who had traveled for many weeks just to see you. They proclaimed you the rightful King of Israel. And they came and bowed before you and left valuable gifts just as they would had they been in the presence of Herod himself. After they left many others came, out of curiosity, to see what all the commotion was, and to see the one who was given so much honor. When the Passover festival season ended we were preparing to return home in Nazareth, when in the night Gabriel, a special messenger sent from Yahweh, appeared to me during the night and warned me of danger. He told me to make hast...to take you and your Mama and flee to Egypt that very night. King Herod, the ruler of Judea, was a very evil man. He heard about the many people who had traveled so many miles to see a baby boy, whom the prophets said would grow up to be king over Israel. Fearing that this special child would someday be a threat to his power, he became distraught with jealousy. He determined to find the child and have him killed. That child, my son, was you. But that same angel has visited us again. He said Herod is dead. And we may return to our homeland."

They traveled the great southern caravan route, stopping along the way for food, refreshment and lodging. When they reached the prosperous, commercial city, Gala, an enclave within the Roman Province of Syria, they stopped for overnight accommodations. The inn-keeper, a thin, elderly man, welcomed them with a warm, broad smile. Unable to hide his obvious curiosity, he stated as a matter of fact, "You are Jewish", then asked, "Strangers around here, are you not?" "Yes, Sir," Yowceph answered. "We left our home in Nazareth and settled in Egypt near three years ago. We have traveled from Egypt, on our way back to Judea. We plan to visit family in Bethlehem, before continuing on to our home in Nazareth." The proprietor frowned. "You being a family man with a wife and small children along...I don't know if I would want to go that close to Jerusalem, if I were you, my friend." He patted Yeshua's tousled, dark head. "You have some fine looking lads there, Sir. What is your name, my small friend?" he asked Yeshua.

"I am Yeshua, Sir." he said, "We are going to see the place where I was born. Mama says we are going to see a wonderful, pretty city that has many big, big buildings. And then we will see my Grandmamas and Grandabbas. I have lots and lots of cousins, too," he added proudly.

Leading them to their sleeping quarters, the man climbed the stairs slowly, shaking his head. "It's a shame your little Yeshua will not find any little boy playmates or cousins of his own age when you reach your troubled country. Most will be either two years older, or two years younger than he. There has been much sorrow and pain among your countrymen since you left." Reaching their rented room,

Yowceph urged the man to linger. "I pray Sir...please; tell us what has been happening? We have not heard of these recent events."

Surprised, the man explained. "Have you not heard how the mothers of your land still weep, crying for their dead sons? Near the time when you left...I'd say, Israel's king Herod went on a wild rampage. He sent out orders to have all Jewish males two years old and under executed. He slaughtered babies from coast to coast. He not only killed baby boys, but many of their parents and relatives were injured and some were imprisoned. Some were even killed, trying to protect their children. Many are still in prison for resisting the executioners. You know...old Herod never did have any love for his pitiful, helpless subjects. In his thirty-four years on the throne, hardly a day passed without someone being sentenced to death; not even his own family escaped his jealous wrath. You, yourself, know how he had his sister Salome's first and second husbands murdered; he had his brother-in-law drowned in the Jordan River and he had his mother-in-law, Alexandria, put out of the way. Why...he even had his own wife, Mariamne, and his two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus executed. Just before he died, he had a couple of the Jew's most popular and beloved scholars burned alive, and whole noble families exterminated root and branch! He has killed off many of the Pharisees, and I heard that five days before his death he had another of his sons assassinated. But that hideous act against a whole country of innocent male babies shocked everyone. There's no wonder Jewish groups from all over the country were in constant revolt against his insane government..."

Yowceph and Maria were stunned. "Tell me, Sir, what is the condition of the country now? Who occupies the throne in Herod's place?" The older man pulled at his streaked beard.

"It's not a place I would want to visit. No indeed! From what I hear, Herod's son, Archelaus, has succeed him on the throne. On Herod's deathbed he made a will nominating his three remaining sons controlling power. Herod Antipas and Philip are tetrarchs of Galilee and Peraea, and the territory northeast of the Lake of Galilee. Archelaus has been accepted by the Herod family as king in his father's place. In spite of the acceptance of Herod's former enemies—Germany, Gaul, and Thracia—Archelaus is having a terrible time with his own countrymen. It's obvious the Jews have a burning hatred for the Herods. And when you add this to their loathing of the Romans, you have a nation on the brink of a violent uprising! Shortly after Herod's death, Jews from everywhere gathered in mobs, in and around Jerusalem, demanding atonement for the two scribes, Jehuda ben Sripa and Mattathias ben Margoloth, whom Herod had burned at the stake like human torches. Well...as you can imagine, Archelus had to make some quick decisions. He resorted to sending a garrison of troops into Jerusalem, hoping they would get things under control. But, before the day was over, three thousand corpses were strewn all over the courts of Herod's supposedly 'holy' temple. I tell you, friend... Archelaus has a mess on his hands up there. Providence and the gods must have been on your side for you to have missed out on all the turmoil that is boiling in your country...I wouldn't tempt the gods by taking a chance on landing in the middle of that stench. It got so bad, even our governor, Quintilius Varius, was pulled into their squabbles. "Just a few months ago, back in the spring, during one of their perpetual religious holy days, while the Herod's took documents to Rome to be approved by Emperor Augustus, all hell broke loose. Sabinus, a Roman agent of the Imperial Treasury, took upon himself to audit the taxes and tribute of Judea. Well...I guess this was the last straw for the Jews. Masses of people streaming into the city

began stoning the Roman legions—sent to Jerusalem as a security measure—and set fire to the arcades, pillaged the temple, taking all they could lay hands on. Sabinus had to barricade himself in the temple for his own safety. They had revolt spreading throughout Jerusalem like wild-fire!”

Yowceph sat close to Maria on the worn, wooden lounge. He could feel her warm body shiver with emotion. With one shaking arm she held little James close to her breast, the other arm grasping her firstborn protectively close, unaware of his trying to wiggle free. Her eyes were glued to the speaker.

The man continued. “Our Governor took troops from Rome, Beirut, and Arabia; finally they put down the revolt. The rebels were captured in droves. I heard that about two thousand men were crucified. No Sir...I sure would not want to take my family into that inferno, if I were you,” he warned.

After Yowceph and Maria settled in for the evening, they searched the scriptures, hoping to find an answer to their dilemma. “Is the prophet not speaking of our time of sorrow...’Thus says the Eternal: ‘A voice is heard in Rama, limitation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted for her children, because they are not.’ The mothers of our land are indeed weeping for their babies, for they have been torn from their arms and slain. And did not the prophet Hosea say, ‘Out of Egypt I will call my son’? I think we can be sure we are living this prophecy this very day!” Yowceph said soberly.

During the night Yowceph and Maria prayed earnestly for divine guidance and protection. Once again Gabriel appeared to Yowceph in a vision. “Yowceph...the Eternal has heard your prayers. Stay clear of Bethlehem and Jerusalem during this time of unrest. Return to your home. Take the young child and his mother to Nazareth.”

Traveling north by way of the coastal trade routes, Yowceph avoided the larger towns.

“My heart is torn with sorrow for the young Jewish parents we see in these towns. Their faces are gray with pain. They look longingly at Yeshua, and then their eyes darken with suspicion. I think they may be wondering how we happen to have these sons, when theirs have been slaughtered.” Maria’s eyes filled with tears. “I fear what sorrows we will find when we arrive home. How many of our family have suffered, are bereaved of their sons?”

Yeshua, listened quietly, taking in every word. Because he seldom spoke unless invited to do so, his parents were surprised to hear his mature words interrupting their conversation.

“Abba...Mama...are we not safe? Remember what you told me on the way? Doesn’t the Great Elohim want us to be happy because we are going to see our Grandabba and Grandmama and all our cousins? We can tell the sad people that the bad king no longer lives. Then they will not be so sad. Did you not tell me He will not leave the babies in their graves, but will awake them and bring them back to their Mamas and Abbas?”

Yowceph’s face brightened. “You are so right, my child. You have shown us wisdom is not limited to the aged alone. We must no longer dwell in the negative. Instead, we must begin to think of the glorious future of our nation. Soon the earth will rejoice as it bursts forth with gladness. The Eternal—the Almighty—sends his Savior to Israel to establish a new government—one of justice, love, and mercy.”

Nearing their home town of Nazareth, Maria bubbled with excitement. “Soon we will be there. I wonder if they have heard by now that we are on our way home. It would be fun to surprise everyone.”

They passed familiar groves of date palms, fig trees, and pomegranates encircling the hills in friendly green. The fields were rich with the yellow of wheat and barley. Vineyards hung heavy with fruit; the air was intoxicating with the fragrance of richly colored flowers growing wildly along the hard, dirt road.

Pointing to an ancient stone structure in the distance, Maria motioned to Yeshua. “Look... Yeshua. Up ahead... see... there is the well where our family draws water. See the women carrying pots on their heads? Wait until you taste the sweet water from the wells of home. Soon, we shall be at Grandmamas.”

As they came within sight of Maria’s parents’ home, Maria handed baby James to his Abba, grabbed Yeshua by the hand began running. With arms waving wildly, Maria’s younger sister, Solome, came rushing toward them, followed by her mother, Anna. The three women fell into each other’s arms.

“Oh, Maria...it is so wonderful to see you. We heard you were on your way. We have been watching for you all day,” Anna exclaimed. She wiped tears of happiness from her moist face. Reaching for the child she gushed. “Oh, Yeshua...what a big fellow you have become. I am your Grandmama...come, give us a big hug,” she invited. “Won’t your Grandfather be surprised to see how grown up you are?”

Yeshua shyly wrapped his sturdy, short arms around Anna’s neck, giving her a warm, moist kiss. Swinging Yeshua up into strong, young arms, the younger woman insisted, “Now it’s your aunt Solome’s turn.” Everyone stopped in stunned amazement as Yowceph appeared with a small child in arms. “And what do we have here? Do my eyes deceive me...is this another little one...are we blessed with two fine children?”

Anna could hardly restrain herself as Yowceph surrendered little James into her arms. Yowceph accepted affectionate hugs and pats from the excited women as his father-in-law, with arms extended in a warm welcome, emerged amid paternal clamor. The two men embraced. “Well...my son, you have brought my daughter home safe to us, along with two strong, healthy, young grandsons. For that I am most grateful! For a long while we feared for your safety. It’s so good to have you home again.” Handing the reins to Maria’s brother, Ben, Joakob said: “Ben and his friend here are good with animals. Let’s all go inside where you can relax with a cool, refreshing drink. You must be dry as a desert bone. I suppose you are as anxious as we are to get caught up on what’s been happening since you left.” He swept Yeshua up onto his thin, frail shoulders, laughing vigorously, while thumping Yowceph affectionately on the back. He led them into the dining area of the cool, stone house. Anna and Solome disappeared and returned with a stone jug of aged wine, and platters of cakes, cheeses, and fruit. Yeshua sat on his grandfather’s bouncing knee, struggling to keep his balance while listening to the grown-up chatter.

“Had Joah not heard on one of his business trips of a Jewish carpenter by the name of Yowceph—who worked in On—we would never have had hopes of seeing you again. We bless the Eternal for letting us know you were still alive. We had hardly left Jerusalem when the horrible news of Herod’s insane slaughter of innocent baby boys reached our shocked ears. It was a dreadful sight to behold. There was hardly a house free of mournful wails. Everyone was touched by the trauma of knowing someone who had lost a child to Herod’s executioners. Even now, the memories are still fresh. Many have suffered

injuries and imprisonment. We prayed every day that Herod would not find you. The Eternal heard our cries. Yet, we must still not be overconfident. Even though Herod is dead—Archelaus is his father's son; he is not to be trusted," he warned.

"Let us talk of something more cherry," Anna interrupted. "Maria, did you know your little sister, here, is betrothed to be married? She and cousin Zebedee have made wedding plans. Isn't it wonderful, Jehovah has brought you back safely, and just in time for your sister's wedding? Come; let us show you the beautiful things she is making." The women, engrossed in wedding plans, left the men alone.

Joakob turned his attention to his older grandson. "You and I, young fellow, are going to have to get acquainted. I can see right now, you are a quiet one. But I think I could get you interested in holding a fishing pole with your old Grandabba. What do you think about that?

There's a good fishing hole not far from here. And they tell me—it has lots of big fishes just waiting to be caught."

Yeshua, having received permission to talk, broke his silence. "Oh...thank you, Grandabba. I love to go fishing. Abba took me fishing where we used to live. He turned and put his short arms around Joakob's middle. "I love you, Grandabba. Will you also take me to see the many houses Abba has built...and the synagogue school I shall attend when I am older? Mama is teaching me to recite many verses from the sacred books. Will we go by the synagogue when we go fishing? Mama says little brother and I have many cousins. Will you take James and me to visit them, too?"

"Well, now!" Joakob spluttered, "You don't speak often, but when you do, you don't have any trouble saying your piece, do you?" Turning to Yowceph he asked: "Are you sure this grandson of mine is not an ancient wise man in disguise?"

Yowceph smiled. "You will find Yeshua to be an exceptionally intelligent child, eager to learn everything there is to know. He is unique in many ways, as you will discover in time. He not only speaks several languages, but as he mentioned, he can recite accurately many verses from the sacred books. He will amaze you with his unquenchable thirst for knowledge. This is only one of his most outstanding traits. Now that we are back home, we must be especially careful not to draw attention to his outstanding abilities."

Joakob nodded agreement. Yowceph continued. "We must be exceedingly discreet or we assuredly will bring danger upon ourselves and our whole family. So, you can see why we must caution the family not to spread the news of our return. We hope to fit in as inconspicuously as possible."

Giving Yeshua a big, crushing hug, Joakob said, "Your Abba is a very wise man. And I agree—there is trouble enough as it is. We will have to be very careful when we go for that walk...now won't we? I can see getting acquainted with you is going to be an interesting and enjoyable experience for your old Grandabba." Yowceph, eager to hear local news, asked, "I am most anxious to contact and visit my parents. Have you news of them?"

Joakob's face turned somber. He allowed Yeshua to slide off his lap. "I am afraid your mother is grieving herself down to the grave, my son. During the horrendous time of Herod's slaughter, your father and mother tried desperately to help hide your sister's child. They were unsuccessful—the child was slain,

and your father was beaten severely. I am saddened to be the one to tell you these painful things. Your father lived only months after that. Most of our relatives in the area of Jerusalem were unable to hide their babies from Herod's sword. Some have gone into hiding and we don't know if they still survive."

The women reentered the room. Catching part of the conversation, Maria's voice shook with fearful concern. "Oh, how dreadful! We must go to your mother at once." Suddenly she thought of her beloved cousin, Elizabeth, and her family. She glanced anxiously at the saddened faces. "Have you news of Elizabeth and little John?" "The last we heard, Zachariah fled to the wilderness with his family. We have not heard from them since. We pray daily for their safety."

Yowceph and Maria settled into their house and community without incident. Time and troubles had dulled Nazareth's memory of Yeshua's birth. Still, Yeshua was cautioned and trained to be careful not to draw attention to himself by openly displaying his obvious talents. By age six Yeshua had witnessed the death of his grandmother; he had met many aunts, uncles, and cousins; he had welcomed another new baby brother into his life, and began attending synagogue school. Remembering those early years in Nazareth brought both joy and sadness to Maria.

As the years sped by their family had increased; they were accepted into the community as an average hard-working, Jewish family. Yowceph had proved to be a good provider, in spite of the hardships of the time, and a devoted husband and father.

Maria's thoughts continued to wander. "By the time Yeshua was nine years old he was mature beyond his years. He was never like other boys, full of mischief and childish tricks, trying to get out of studies and chores. No...Just the opposite, he tackled his chores with enthusiastic energy, and devoured his study material with abnormal passion."

During one of their serious talks Yeshua had confided, "There is so much that I must learn, Mama, to prepare myself if I am to become a leader of our nation. You and Abba have stressed the importance of my preparing myself for the role. Yet, I have only your word that I have been born to fulfill this position. I talk each and every day to the Great One above, yet He does not reply. At times I become so very frustrated...I feel so powerless. You know how hard I have studied the history of our nation, the sacred writings of the prophets about the Great Eternal and the coming Messiah. I have read every scroll and sacred writings in synagogue school and their libraries. I have tried to see myself as the Messiah, to study his role as described in the writings. Daily I study the laws of Noe so that I may please Him in all that I think and do. The more I learn the more I hunger to know."

As his interests broadened, Maria spent many hours each day in serious study with her son, searching the scriptures for accurate answers to his many startling inquires. He was ever curious of the writings about the Deliver.

"I read of a "sign", a child born of a virgin, a child who would learn to choose right from wrong, who, it is said, will have the government upon his shoulders. He is to be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty Yahweh, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. I have grown up being taught that I am that child. And I must believe you and what you have told me about my birth. I read of delivering the people of Israel out of bondage and establishing them in a wonderful setting in their own land. I also read of being cut off from the land of the living, making my grave with the wicked. "I read of being despised and

rejected and acquainted with sorrows and grief. I can't help but remember how 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 release those who are bound in prison, to comfort all that mourn and proclaim the acceptable year of the Eternal and the day of His vengeance'. I read all about the things that are to happen to me and all the things that I am to accomplish and no one can explain what it all means. Nor can you and Abba, Mama, explain how it will all come about. Surely you must see why it is so very important that I seek out everything there if for me to learn."

Maria sighed. "Yes, my son, I wish there was more that we could tell you, but there is a limit to our understanding. Only the heavenly I Am can reveal to you the details you so crave to know. You must be patient. When the time is right He will reveal Himself to you." she assured him. As the children grew, Maria could not help but notice the difference between Yeshua and their other children. It had been difficult not to show partiality to Yeshua. From the time of his birth he had been without selfishness, rebellion, jealousy, or any of the many negative attitudes so prevalent in other children. Each reading of the prophetic writings made her aware of the awesome responsibility she and Yowceph bore as his guide and teachers. In the recesses of her mind was the constant realization that he was destined to greatness and they were miraculously privileged to be a small part of his life. Maria's thoughts went to her other children. "I love my children dearly, each in a different way," she thought. "James tries so hard to be like his older brother. But I can sense an attitude of jealousy growing in him toward Yeshua. Jose and the girls adore Yeshua almost as much as little Simon does. I must be especially careful to spend more time with them," she vowed. "Have I neglected the younger children in favor of Yeshua?" she wondered. "True, because of the nature of his birth, I have devoted much time to him. There are things we have shared that no other mother and son will ever experience. But now...I feel he is soon to enter into his own world, a world that will exclude me. Nearing Nazareth her thoughts were interrupted by familiar sounds and sights. She studied the face of her twelve year old son. "His countenance is serious and dark as though he contemplates a dreadful life. It would be most interesting to read his thoughts...but instinctively I fear to know." And she wondered what unexpected adventure the future held for them and this mysteriously unpredictable son, part child and part Elohim.

Edited 2013.end of chpt 5