

PRODIGAL SONS

Part Eight

"Yes," Abe recalls, "I remember the passage, 'Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased,' but how does the passage relate to this Jesus ben Joseph?"

"By itself," Eliud begins to explain, "it can relate to any good Jew, but when you read the passage beginning with chapter 52, verse 13, it begins to make clear who fits the description in the person of Jesus, the Nazarene. *'...See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him...'*

Abe continues the passage, *'...so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals- so shall he startle many nations, because kings shall stand speechless; for those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it.'* I have pondered myself on who this person would be."

"I am convinced that it is Jesus of Nazareth," Eliud said excitedly now, "and whose parents we were privileged to get to know on our trip to Egypt."

"But are you so sure," Abe challenged his brother's friend, "that he is the one, the Messiah, who is to free Israel?"

"Depends on what you mean by 'freeing'," Eliud counters. "Throughout our history we had leaders that only got us into bondage through their own fight to be king of the nation and even hopes as king of the world."

"And look where that got us," Telesphor added. "We seem to only exchange new kings with new enemies and repeat our mistakes."

"Will there ever be lasting peace," Michael asked no one in particular. "The Romans are here to stay."

"But that is what we thought of the Assyrians, and they were overthrown," Abe pointed out. "And then the Babylonians, and Persians, Greeks..."

"We have been on this topic before," Michael said.

"But my friend, Eliud," Telesphor ventured to ask, "you have never really settled in Israel, always on the move."

"That has always been our life," Eliud said, "and our belief since the time of our Father Abraham, to be faithful to the covenant and his lifestyle of never settling down, since that would bring on all the problems that the people of Israel still encounter today, Land."

"It surely fits in with the life of this Jesus of Nazareth," Telesphor said. "He had no place to call his own but rested his head at homes of his friends who followed him and took care of him."

"Where exactly did this Jesus come from," Michael asked.

"They say originally from Nazareth, but he was born in Bethlehem," Telesphor said.

"The Romans had their census that required everyone to register in their place of birth," Eliud said. "Mary was pregnant at the time and was fortunate to give birth to their son while in the village of her husband's birthplace."

"This is getting confusing," Abe complained. "He is known as Jesus of Nazareth, but was born in Bethlehem, but moved to Egypt for several years, and then back to Nazareth..."

"...with most of his ministry in Galilee," Michael added. "As I understand it."

"Correct," Eliud said.

"Why the trip to Egypt," Abe asked Eliud. "Did they join your father in his caravan business?"

"Not exactly," Eliud tried to clarify. "There is a legend that wise men from Babylon came to seek this Jesus through their divinization of the heavens to determine the place of his birth. King Herod was visited by them and was very interested. Unfortunately, the legend mentioned that this star would point out a future king. He eventually had all children in Bethlehem under the age of two killed just to make sure they would not inherit his throne."

"That sounds completely insane," Michael said angrily.

"Herod *is* insane," Eliud admitted. "Ask any member of his family, those that are alive."

"Ah," Abe gave a sigh of recognition, "Book of Numbers, chapter 24, verse 17, 'A star shall advance from Jacob, and a staff shall rise from Israel.'"

"What does this have to do with Jesus?" Michael asked.

"Remember, they were in Bethlehem for the census and Mary gave birth to her son, Jesus," Eliud said.

"How did they ever escape?" Michael was excited now, getting caught up in the story.

"Joseph, father of Jesus, had a dream," Eliud simply mentioned.

"Just like that," Abe asked doubtful.

"We all have dreams," Eliud reminded him, "and the Scriptures are full of the dreams of our ancestors."

"Ok, that is for sure," Abe admitted, softening up a bit.

"It was a wonderful journey, unlike any we experienced before," Eliud said kind of dreamily, "never an incident the whole way."

"Maybe this will be a repeat," Michael offered, "for Abe's sake."

"One thing about the caravan," Eliud said, "you take one day at a time."

"With a few oases sprinkled along the way," Telesphor added.

"And in the company of good friends," Michael pointed out.

"Looking behind to make sure," Abe said glancing around, "we are also covered by good friends."