

PRODIGAL SONS

Part Nine

"Well don't look now, but we seem to have more visitors!" Michael pointed to a small group of men heading towards their camp.

"I recognize Simon and his friend," Telesphor seem to relax a bit.

"I think you are right," Eliud agreed, "but I don't recognize the other two."

"The old man can't be dangerous," Telesphor added. "Maybe the other is his son or a friend?"

"Our oasis in the middle of nowhere is getting crowded," Abe mentioned.

"There is always room for more friends," Eliud reminded.

"Shalom, Simon!" Eliud greeted his party and invited them around the campfire. "We would offer you something to eat but we ended our meal a while ago, and I am sure the women finished off any cooked food by now."

"No need," Simon spoke for their small group. "Our friends arrived at our camp early in the day and we have already eaten, but I wanted you to meet them."

"Anyone we know, Simon," Eliud asked.

"Yes and no," Simon teased with his cryptic answer. "This is Felix, a Roman friend of mine!"

"That is a surprise," Telesphor said with interest. "I thought you never had a love for Romans. But I am pleased that you introduced your friend, and as a Roman."

"There are bad ones," Simon admitted, "and then there is Felix who is a Christian."

"So, there are actually good Romans?" Eliud teased.

"This Roman knew my father," Simon simply said with emotion.

"Thank you for hinting that our friendship is in Christ," Felix added, "since it was Jesus who brought your father and I together."

"Yes, he loved to tell me the story many times," Simon mentioned, "and I never tired of listening to him repeating it."

"Before we get anymore crowded here in the oasis," Abe teased, "explain a little more this Jesus of Nazareth person."

"As we were talking about before in the book of Isaiah," Telesphor offered, "the servant in his book is the anointed one, the Christ."

"We believe that Jesus ben Joseph is this anointed one, the Messiah," Eliud added.

"I thought Isaiah was talking about Cyrus, King of Persia?" Abe asks.

Michael interrupts, "I am more interested in what Jesus ben Joseph, the Christ, has to do with your relationship," Michael interrupts looking at Simon and Felix, "especially you father, Simon?"

"Meet the Centurion, Felix," Simon simply said pointing at his friend, "who was at the foot of his cross."

Eliud and Telesphor were stunned!

"What brings you here..." Michael finally asked for the others, "...to this oasis?"

"In the middle of nowhere?" Abe added with interest.

"You never mentioned this to us," Eliud said, "after all these years."

"I was protecting myself and Felix," Simon admitted, "and our families."

"Can it be true?" Telesphor said to no one in particular but was now excited to hear more.

"I guess you could say, I am on the run from the authorities," Felix said.

"But the Lord will protect you," Simon said convincingly. "After all these years we have been on the run, and we have always managed to escape."

"But I am getting too old now, Simon," Felix sadly said. "I am tired of running."

"You can stay with us," Abe said unexpectedly.

Michael was surprised at his brother's suggestion. "I guess we are sort of on the run anyhow. But aiding and abetting a Roman deserter?"

"A centurion at that," added Telesphor.

"We are a respected caravan and well known," Eliud interjected, "and the Romans always check the caravans for just such persons on the run."

"Even though such travelers as Eliud and myself could probably get away with it," Telesphor said, "but they would extract a hefty bribe."

"Well, I guess that saves me the trouble of asking," Simon said. "That was the reason I brought my friend Felix to meet you. I guess one could say that Felix met my father at Golgotha."

"At our next meeting," interjected Felix, "after I came to believe who this Jesus of Nazareth truly was, Simon's father was there to receive me."

"To make a long story short," Felix said, "I wanted to give a gift to Simon's father for helping this Jesus carry his cross. I gave him the garment that Jesus wore."

"What garment?" Michael asked confused.

"The condemned are always stripped naked before being crucified as part of their shaming," Felix explained, "especially Jews."

"My father said that they rolled dice for it," Simon added.

"I won!" Felix said.

"It must have been expensive," Michael said.

"It was seamless," Simon said. "It was weaved by hand in one piece!"

"Only a mother would have made that," said Telesphor.

"Imagine, the garment Jesus wore before he was crucified," Michael said.