

THE PRODIGAL SON

Part Five

"This is the first of several favorite oases on our journey," Eliud said. "And if we time it right, we will have the whole place to ourselves."

"That is amazing, Eliud," Abe said. "How can you ever know that out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"How can you ever find this place," Michael added, "out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"Because of a lifetime of traveling," answered Eliud, "and generations of traveling. I know the best spots and the timing."

"Amazing," was all Abe could say. "It is beautiful."

"Water in the middle of all this sand," Michael said in wonder.

After finishing their meal and settling in, the men continued their conversation until the stars made even their campfire seem small.

"I never realized how beautiful the sky was until I had this time to look up," Abe said.

"And that is why you need to travel more," Eliud agreed, "so that you are not always looking down at the ground!"

"It's like a splash of milk over the heavens," Michael offered. "And the Lord God made two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night; and he made the stars, and God set them in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was."

"Pouring out of his pitcher of milk the stars across the dome of the sky," Eliud added.

"What's wrong, Abe?" Michael said. "You look like you've seen a lion!"

Suddenly, the men found themselves surrounded by a small army of sword wielding warriors.

"I thought you said we would be the only ones here?" Michael asked terrified.

"We are," Eliud said, "except one must be prepared for any visitors and at any time! Welcome, Simon!"

"Welcome, friend," Simon returned the greeting. "We have to stop meeting like this!"

"Have your men eaten yet," Eliud asked.

"We have," Simon answered, "but we couldn't just pass by without saying hello. Who are your friends?"

"Not Romans," Eliud said.

"Good! I hate to redden this white sand with their blood," he said as he and a couple of his men joined the three around the fire.

"This is Michael and his brother, Abe, joining me for a journey to Egypt. You're welcome to join us," Eliud offered.

"We were hoping to accompany you part of the way. We are heading back to Cyrene," Simon said.

"Running from the Romans again?" Eliud inquired.

"Times have been tense lately since that Galilean has been preaching peace," Simon said ironically.

"I guess that is bad business for the sicari," Eliud also teased, but Simon didn't find it funny. "Who is this Galilean...Jesus ben Joseph?"

"The one and only, Jesus ben Miriam," Simon said mockingly. "Let me leave you gentle men in peace, while I still have some left to offer. We will be skirting the road, so take no offense if we don't ride with you."

"I understand, Simon," Eliud said. "We will appreciate your presence, and feel the safer. Go in peace."

"Shalom," Simon said in farewell.

"They scared the devil out of me," Abe said after they left. "Thank goodness you knew them. At least he said, Shalom!"

"You will meet all kind on the road," Eliud said, "sooner or later."

"So they are "the" sicari, the assassins?" Michael asked in distain.

"They are, but don't dwell on it," Eliud warned, "and forget you ever met them, since they are the bane of the Romans and any who sympathize with Rome. It seems they make Cyrene their hiding place."

"Cyrene?" Michael said in disbelief.

"Again, keep it to yourself," Eliud warned. "I'm only telling you this since we will probably meet them again. It is sometimes better to just accept people where they are at in order to survive on the road. You never know when you will need their protection. And they will protect us, and now you, in the future. So rest assured."

"Who is this Jesus ben Joseph?" Abe asked.