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Norman - G AIT

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SON

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In those days, I was the one who came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the River Jordan. And Mark, in writing his gospel, said that when I was immersed by the Baptist, so did the heavens open and I saw "a spirit like a dove descending, and there came a voice from Heaven saying, 'Thou art My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'"

Upon which, Mark also said: "And immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness, and He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him."

While not untrue, that is as an acorn of the truth when set beside its oak. I would not say that Mark brought false message, no more than I would speak ill of an acorn. Nor

would I deride those who wrote later such as Matthew, or Luke and John. Still did they leave errors in recounting my days and many were the sayings, most pious, that they gave to me even if never said, and sometimes they describe me as gentle when I was wroth. They could only relate what old men told them were my sayings; such gospel is to be leaned upon no more than a bush that is separated from its roots and blows across a field. Being the Son of Man, I can speak for myself.

So I will give my gospel. If there are some who would ask how the words I speak were written, I would answer: Look upon all that is here as no more than a small miracle, since my gospel, like all others, is an account of miracles. Thereby need my words give no pause. They are related with regard for what has already been told, yet will I explain more concerning my journeys than others have been able to reveal. Mark, Matthew, Luke, John and all writers of gospel were laboring to build the spirit of their churches, and some spoke to those Jews who believed in me after my death, and some spoke to Gentiles who hated Jews yet believed in me, and each, seeking to give strength to his own community, lost

ability to sift true from false. Yet, no matter how many
discoursed on me, soon was it being said that as there were
no more than four pillars to support the sky, so were there
but four gospels, no more.

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In my early years was I an apprentice to Joseph the carpenter, and I can say that the work would be heaviest when splitting a log. We would use the head of an axe to strike upon a wedge until the wedge would divide the trunk along its length, whereupon we split it again, and so continued until many rough planks were hewn. And it took a master carpenter to guide the placement of the wedge.

Once our boards were shaped by dint of much trimming with an ax, then could we obtain a communion with the wood. For never did I forget that the first tree in the Garden grew apples with knowledge of good and evil; often it seemed to me that much good and evil was still in the temper of the wood. One had to respect the will therein. A fine piece labored upon for days could betray the tool at the smallest mistake, and sometimes, one's piece might split in treachery for no mistake at all, but rather out of knowledge of good and evil (and much desire to do the latter). But then an evil man

could not pass by a fine tree without saddening its leaves.

Yet so can I also say that some wood was near to a friend and would serve my wishes and guide my chisel. There was wisdom to be found in proper treatment of wood and I used to feel at peace doing such work, and did it for many years. The scent of a good chest properly shaped offered concupiscence of spirit between the wood and one's hand. I know not how else to say it, but then my family were Essenes and did not speak often on such matters. Of all Jews were we the strictest in observance and did not believe in gods of various description as did the Romans; therefore was it not meet to speak of the spirit in the wood.

Besides I was taught to be as devout as my father on earth, Joseph the carpenter, who wore white robes when not at labor, and washed such robes frequently, often with travail when our wells became low, but then the aim of each Essene was to live in much cleanliness. Therefore would an Essene would seldom marry, or, if with wife, would lie with her only when God said to make a child. It was often said of us that we were a sect who had to make converts or we must soon die out, and for certain, if the Lord did not speak, children

were not forthcoming among Essenes.

I, being so raised, was instructed to believe that women were not to be approached without heed; God did not wish us to spend hours on such pursuit. We were warriors for the Lord, or so we were told from childhood, and a warrior was not to know a woman (since such knowledge would weaken him,) and on this one could rely even if at war for thirty years.

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Now in the time of which I write, so was I still a carpenter at the age of thirty and had passed through my apprenticeship under Joseph for twice seven years and was now a master, but if it be asked whether in my youth, other apprentices had jealousy of me because they looked upon Joseph as my father, I would answer that he served God best by treating all of his workers with as much respect as those woods he fashioned for cabinets. Never was I his favorite in these years, but on certain days, when I would be most scrupulous in my work among the young men of our shop, Joseph would nod and say, "Thou wouldst make a good carpenter if that had been intended." And who could say why he spoke in such odd manner? His head was turned to the side, as though to press his lips upon a secret that turned like a wild creature in his bosom even if it were not wholly a secret. I had been told the true story of my birth from the time I was twelve, in which year it was Joseph who had imparted it to me

on our return from a visit to the Great Temple in Jerusalem. But now he was old and his memory had grown weak, and he could not recall that he had related it to me.

Nor had I been able to ponder for long upon what I was told when twelve. Soon after that trip I came down with a great fever and all that Joseph had told me became curious like a dream one does not remember but knows, yet does not know. Only when I was thirty and mourning Joseph's death did I recall all of his words. And indeed did I then find the need to visit John the Baptist, of which visit there is more to say but only in its place.

Speaking of those years from the age of twelve until I was thirty, mayhap it was not the fever that made me forget what Joseph had said so much as that I had little desire to remember. For such knowledge was without purpose in my life. Yet Joseph had told me all I needed to know even if I had not known what to do, and all of it was imparted to me on our return to Nazareth from the Great Temple. In those years, it was the custom of my family to journey to Jerusalem in the week before Passover, and this we would do in company with a host of other Essenes from Nazareth, rich and poor together,

all wearing our white garb to show dedication to our observances of the law. And given the size of our numbers, we did not fear brigands on the road; we were many. It was a journey of three days on foot from dawn to dark traversing the hills and valleys between Nazareth in Galilee and Jerusalem in Judea; my parents went to this Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem every year until I was twelve, and then they went no more.

For, on that last year, when they turned to go back to Nazareth from Jerusalem, I was not with them. Nor can I explain, but still did I stay behind in the Great Temple. Since the other children from Nazareth were in a group and walking together, my parents did not notice. Nor did my mother take knowledge of my absence until half a day was lost on the road back.

When they searched for me among kinfolk and neighbors, then were Joseph and Mary full of disturbance and on the road back to Jerusalem still did they not find me until coming upon my presence in the Temple. There I was sitting in the midst of priests and doctors, Pharisees and scribes, and was asking of them many questions (which was, perhaps, permitted

by my garb as an Essene). And to the astonishment of my parents, so was I behaving as if much learned.

There was long discussion in such days whether the Word had been with God from the commencement. Indeed, all can remember how in the gospel of John it is said with his first sentence: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But in that year when I was twelve, there was dispute among the priests of the Temple: Was the Word present in the beginning?

For as they would discuss the matter: Had it been the Word of God which created our flesh or was our flesh made by God with no Word even as He had created the flesh of animals? I listened to noted doctors in the Temple that day and they spoke of how in the beginning the Word must have been uttered to form our flesh; otherwise, we should be no better than the animals. But if such were so, then could there be any reason not to raise slaves like tame beasts in a flock and then consume such slaves as meat? How act otherwise, unless the Word made our flesh? So said the priests.

It was then I began to speak. According to Joseph and Mary, who had entered the chamber by then, such sayings as

were made by me, and coming from the mouth of a twelve-year-old, were as a miracle. Since I am without recollection of what I said, the Lord must have been speaking through me. And for the first time!

Indeed, in later years, after I had begun to minister to others, my mother would claim that my words were so holy then she could not give shape to such pronouncements with her own voice no more than she could pronounce aloud the name of the Lord. But as it was told to me by Joseph, I did say to the assembled priests and doctors that even before the Word was flesh, so did it live in water. For as all know, on the coldest day of winter, or on arising in the dawn, the breath of a man is like unto a cloud, and in a cloud is moisture as we know when a cloud touches us upon a hill.

So is our breath cousin to a small sea, and it is upon this sea that the vessel of the Word can be borne. Therefore is the Word one with God inasmuch as all the waters are His. Even as all the rivers go down to the great sea.

And when I was older, and no longer a carpenter and had left Nazareth to preach the gospel, so did I also know by then that the Word was indeed flesh. For if I had never

obtained knowledge of a woman, still had I heard that to whisper "I love you" into the ear of another was to awaken desire for the creation of another who is also flesh.

Of course, I did not enter discussion of such when I was twelve, but still did I tell the august elders that the Word was in the mist that came from our mouths, and that was enough wisdom to astonish them. My mother would always say that the faces of these priests, Pharisees, and scribes, were engraved forever upon her heart. And in response to such happiness and wonder did Joseph decide at this juncture on our lonely return to Nazareth, (and all three of us in fear of brigands), that to gird our safe passage, he must tell me the true story of my birth, or at least such was appropriate now that I had started to act like the Son of God.

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Yet for me to understand what he imparted was not simple. nor could it have been easy for Joseph to relate the true story of my conception and my birth. Yet, did he, and his words came back to me in all their clarity eighteen years later after he died and I was praying beside his body. Clear as each word had been when I was young, so did I lose it to my fever and thereby was it not until I was thirty that I remembered it all and knew again but as for the first time whose son was I, and knew this to a certainty.

Joseph, in the year before I was born, had been already espoused to my mother, Mary. Yet in that time had the angel Gabriel come down to Galilee and entered the bedchamber of Mary who was then a virgin and Gabriel said to her, and these words are as Mary told them to Joseph and he said them later to me: "Hail, thou that art highly favored; the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." Yet my mother was not only a virgin, but in such virginity much fortified by her

mother, also an Essene. Here, notwithstanding, was the angel Gabriel, dressed in white, present before her and as handsome as his own radiance. The white of his garments was like the light of the moon; she could see clearly how Gabriel was an angel. Still, did she wonder what manner of salutation was this.

And felt weak before Gabriel as if her virtue were already in flux; all her walls of determination were crumbling like sand. It was then that this angel, so near in her small room, where no strange man had ever entered before, said, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Those are the words that are told in the gospel of Luke who believed they had been uttered from the mouth of the angel Gabriel. Indeed they must be of the general truth, although, according to my mother, the angel said less and she

knew more.

Yet, in all her weakness, did she still say to Gabriel, "Shall this come to be, seeing as I know naught of man nor of such desires?" And the angel said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall be with thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore that holy thing born of thee shall be called the Son of God, for with Him, nothing is impossible."

My mother knew then a fear that she would fall away before him, but she only replied, "Be it according to thy word." And in such an instant, even as the angel arose and departed, so did my mother know that much had happened and she had conceived and was with child. For she breathed of an air sweeter than any garden, and it was not like other breath she had taken.

On the consequence, came the passages of a woman who is pregnant, and unruliness visited her in the next weeks, and small illness followed upon small illness; it was forty days from the time she had been visited by the angel that she told Joseph of how she was pregnant.

Now, Joseph may have been a narrow man, but he had much

belief in the virtue of my mother; thereby was he ready not to have neighbors pointing at her. So he made plans to hide her away with his relatives of another town. Yet as it transpired, no such need was found. In a dream came an angel of the Lord to Joseph, and he said: "Joseph, thou son of David, take Mary as your wife. For she has conceived by no man but was visited by the Holy Ghost and so will bring forth a son who will save our people from their sins."

And Joseph awoke from his sleep with the conviction that they must be wed forthwith and he took Mary as his wife and was scrupulous: He knew her not, nor did he desire to know her until she brought forth her firstborn who is myself. And they called me Jesus, which in Nazareth, by our rough dialect, is Yeshua, and as Yeshua was I called until the age of thirty when I went to visit John the Baptist and was blessed by him and would spend forty days on a mountain in the wilderness, at the end of which was one day of discourse with the Devil; then did I come down from such a mountain to go forth among others with my gospel. But of all that is there much to come.

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If Joseph could say that he was the son of David so could he have said that he was the son of Abraham. For, witness: Abraham was the father of Isaac, whose son was Jacob, who begat Judas, and from Judas came Pha-res, who was the son of Esrom, and from the loins of Esrom came Aram who begat Aminadab who begat Naason who was father to Salmon who brought forth Bo-oz whose son was Obed and his son was Jesse who begat David the king from whom, after a score of generations and more, would come Joseph my father on earth.

And there were many generations: King David was father to King Solomon who begat Roboam who begat Abia who begat Asa. And so did the ancestry of Joseph come down from Asa to Josaphat to Joram to Ozias to Joatham to Achaz to Ezekias who in his turn begat Manasses who begat Amon and from Amon came Josias father of Jechonias in that time when the Jews lost a great war and were carried away in captivity to Babylon. Yet did Joseph's ancestry continue from Jechonias to Salathiel to

Zorobabel to Abiud to Eliakim to Azor and from Azor to Sadoc to Achim to Eliud who begat Eleazar who begat Matthan who begat Joseph the husband of Mary and my father on earth, and he was of the last generations who had come back to Israel from Babylon, and, indeed, so could Joseph have been able to show that Abraham, his oldest ancestor, came from Adam, but of that is no need; Joseph was of great pride, and it was more than sufficient that he was a descendant of the house of David.

Thereby did he wish that I be born in Bethlehem for that is the city of King David. And so proud was Mary of this ancestry of Joseph that she was ready to travel with me heavy in her womb all three days south from Nazareth in Galilee down to Bethlehem in order that her first child be born where Joseph had been born, as had been David. And this is the truth of why we travelled, and not as is explained in Luke who said that all Jews were to be taxed by edict of Caesar Augustus in the city of their birth. That would have caused much disruption every year, and the Romans had no liking for such in the territories of Samaria and Galilee and Judea. So was Luke in error.

Yet it is true that I was born in Bethlehem and delivered by the light of a candle, and wrapped in swaddling clothes. So was it also true that my mother gave birth in a manger because, as all know by now (even should they know naught else) there was no room at the inn.

I cannot say if that is why the smell of hay and gentle animals brings me peace, but love rises into my hand from the hide of such beasts, and I offer what is warm in me for return. Later when I obtained the power to bless, I often put such gifts of the spirit upon barns and mangers. But then, who has more need for favors from the Lord than the husbandman as he labors to provide food to his family and village?

That would be the story of my birth and not the plenitude of tales told by my disciples who brought forth a host of angels to surround the hour. Yet no more is true than that a few shepherds were keeping guard over their flocks that night in the fields surrounding the manger and they did wander in upon my mother and father and my own presence soon after I was born. My mother would assert in much certainty that the moonlight on that eve had more

radiance by far than other nights; in later years, she would speak of an angel who had come into the fields to tell the shepherds: "I bring you tidings of great joy for unto you this day is born Christ the Messiah of the Lord." So was Luke with his gospel bound to have the angel saying more, but then Luke was allied with Paul in founding many churches to worship my name throughout the world, and all this done long after I was gone; so did Luke add much language to simple matters, and thereby did he declare: "With the angel was a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will toward men.'" And Luke even would have had it that the shepherds made my birth known throughout the world, but with this must I seek difference. My years were quiet when I was a boy.

It may be that the shepherds hearkened to the radiance of the moon outside the manger and did speak much of it in all the places near to Jerusalem. For so it is true that Joseph learned in a dream on the night I was born that Herod, King of Israel, spoke to his chief priests and to his scribes of how word of a new and most holy birth was everywhere and

descending upon his court from many places. Indeed, did King Herod not only hear of my birth in Bethlehem but of children delivered in many manglers girding the hills of Jerusalem and much did this vex Herod and put him at great determination to discover the whereabouts of this babe who might be a future king. Herod even made study of the scrolls and saw that the prophets had spoken of such matters taking place in the land of Judah: "For out of thee, Bethlehem, shall come a governor that shall rule my people, Israel."

And my uncle prove his

equal at hunting or sports. Yet, the Hebrews loved him not. For he was also an Idumean from south of Jordan and thereby a Jew in name but pagan by heart, and Caesar had made him emperor of all Jews in a declaration from Rome. For this reason, was Herod hated by many including all most devout among us, and he put graven images of the Roman eagle on the gates of our Great Temple in Jerusalem even if such is forbidden by the Commandments.

Moreover, did Herod have a life full of unkindness and foul spirit. Few were the Jews who did not know of the array of his deeds. And none was more evil than the execution of his beloved wife, Mariamne, his most beloved. Yet was Herod

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In that year of my birth Herod was already an old king. When young, he had been mighty in reknown, and handsome, and was more brave than others; all agreed he was the greatest warrior in Israel, and he had a multiplicity of lusts: He took to himself ten wives. Nor could any noble prove his equal at hunting or sport.

Yet, the Hebrews loved him not. For he was also an Idumean from south of Judea and thereby a Jew in name but pagan by heart, and Caesar had made him emperor of all Jews in a declaration from Rome. For this reason, was Herod hated by many including all most devout among us, and he put graven images of the Roman eagle on the gates of our Great Temple in Jerusalem even if such is forbidden by the Commandments. Moreover, did Herod have a life full of uncleanness and foul spirit. Few were the Jews who did not know of the array of his deeds. And none was more ugly than the execution of his beloved wife, Mariamne, his most beloved. Yet was Herod

afflicted with suspicion and could not trust her fidelity; so did he become convinced that she would destroy him by treachery. Whereupon, he had this beloved Mariamne struck down. Afterwards, he mourned her and by so much, that he gave large favors to the two sons he had with her, and each of these two sons now sought to murder their father even as he had slain their mother. They plotted, were discovered, and were beheaded. Whereupon was it said by the Emperor Augustus in Rome: "Better to be Herod's swine than his son." And that was much repeated among us.

Also did I learn from Joseph that as Herod grew older, so did he lose more of his reason until the greatest of his fears was that this babe, born in a manger, would replace him. Thereby, even as he was sick and close to dying, so did he call wise men into council and inquire of them on which night these shepherds had seen the moon become so bright, and Herod sent three of his wise men to Bethlehem, and told them, or at least so it is said in Matthew: "Go and search diligently for the young child and when you have found him, bring me word that I may come and worship him as well." On which word the wise men left from the Great Temple for their

short journey. And on the first night they saw a star in the east which passed above them and it moved to the south and they with the star until in a few hours these wise men came to a manger near Bethlehem and fell down before Mary and Joseph and worshipped me. So it is told. And they opened chests with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh--which is not true, and all should know, for if there had been many presents, Joseph and Mary would have spoken of such in the years that followed. But indeed they presented a gift of greater value inasmuch as these wise men gave warning to Joseph that he should not go back to any land governed by Herod. Indeed, these wise men did not return either, but departed to far-off countries in the hour after recognizing my birth.

Nor did Joseph wait until morning but took Mary and myself away in stealth from Bethlehem and traveled all the way into Egypt and lived there until the death of Herod, and that ensued before another year was spent.

Yet did Herod exact vengeance on many others in that excess of madness peculiar to old men who are in terror of their evil acts and so seek to bury them with more vile

deeds, and Herod sent forth soldiers to Bethlehem with orders to slay all children born in the days of my own birth. And the words of the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled:

"Lamentation and weeping and mourning, and Rachel was weeping for her children and would not be comforted because they were not."

So it was only after Herod had expired that an angel of the Lord came again to Joseph and said to him in a dream: "Arise, and take this young child and his mother and go back into the land of Israel, for the king who sought this child's life is now dead." And so Joseph could now go back to that village in the hills which is Nazareth.

And when I was told this story on our return from Jerusalem, so must I have been much aware of the deaths of the children of Bethlehem and all lamentations and mourning that followed, for in the year that Joseph died as I mourned by his side and remembered all that he had told me when I was young, I could wonder at the powers I had demonstrated before the priests of the Great Temple in my twelfth year, and I wondered if that much had come to me from the spirits of these many children who had died in my place. And I knew

that they had left me with a debt for I must now be faithful to the great gifts they had given back to the Lord by such early death.

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Now must I speak a little of my life from the time I was born unto the time I was twelve. For in Nazareth we had a life like others and Joseph who, in all ways but one, was my father, had become such a devout man that he spent much time in our small synagogue and often studied from the few scrolls to be found in such a modest place, and he would read in the language of the ancient Israelites which is more elevated than our own simple speech. So was I also sent to school in the house of prayer, and by the age of four, I knew many of the laws come down to us from Moses inasmuch as each commandments had given birth to another ten and these hundred gave issue over a thousand years to another ten hundred, until the law of the Jews by the year of my birth was a compendium most immense of many laws concerning prayer and diet and sacrifice on the altar, and we knew the five books of the Pentateuch which are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and the book of Deuteronomy.

So did I also study the prophecies of Elijah, and Elisha and Ezekiel and Isaiah and much of what had not been written in our scrolls was remembered by those who passed on the word from great-grandfather to great-grandchild. Thereby had I not been wholly unprepared to talk to the priests of the Great Temple in Jerusalem, being full of the spirit of the miracles wrought by Elijah and Elisha and could explain to Joseph on our trip back to Nazareth, when he consulted me on my opinion, that the Lord could not be pleased with the people of Israel since He had granted of late no miracles fitting to our needs. Joseph had replied: "Now is the time of the Romans. So must live under their yoke, and repay the Lord for our sins."

"But when the Messiah comes," I said to Joseph, "he will bring miracles to drive off all Romans."

"When comes the Messiah?" he asked of me.

If Joseph still treated me as a child, nonetheless did he treat me as worthy of respect through the circumstances of my birth, but until the day that I spoke aloud in the Temple, he had not seen me as more than ordinary by any other measure. Yet now as he recalled how the High Priest had even come to listen before I was done, Joseph's spirit was full of

joy on our return and this despite all danger each night of encountering brigands. So he said to me with a light in his eye, "You who know more than any, tell of when we will see the Messiah."

"That can only be," I said, "when God believes that a year has arrived in which to change the hearts of men."

"But are not all powers possible for the Almighty?" asked Joseph.

To which I replied: "All but a power to change the hearts of men."

"So do you speak," he said, "but you do not know." And by his tone did he tell me that I must now be silent for fear of giving large displeasure to the Lord.

But to myself I said, "I will try to change the hearts of men." A great peace full of sweetness came upon me then as if an angel had heard what I did not say aloud and had brought benefices from that Father who was other than Joseph.

When we were back to Nazareth, I had dreams where I spoke to God and He returned to me in His words, but in truth, I knew not what to believe, and could not see myself as His son. In my heart I could understand no reason why the

Lord would choose a woman from a simple family when it was Joseph, not Mary, who could speak of so many ancestors back to David the King. Yet from scrolls I had read and with much discussion of text in our school, so did I also know that the Lord looked upon rich women and their jewels as next to harlots, even as did those of us who were Essenes. Still I was not at ease with the Lord, even if He had decided to choose a common person like myself, no, not by any way was I at ease, being not only in awe of His majesty but in fear of His wrath.

Such wrath was vast. I thought of the days of the flood, as recounted in the scrolls, when "God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth and the Lord even repented that He had made man . . . and the Lord even said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast and the creeping things.'"

And then I also thought of the great cry that arose out of every house in Egypt on the night when the Lord slew all the firstborn, from the firstborn of Pharoah even to the firstborn of the poorest Egyptian. There was not an Egyptian house where there was not one dead. And I repeated His

words: "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me," and I knew the Lord even thought of wreaking such destruction upon His own people. And I remembered how the Lord had said to Moses, "Behold, these people will rise up and go a-whoring after the Gods of strangers, and will forsake Me and break My covenant and then shall My anger be kindled against them." So did He also speak of the limitless fire that would be kindled from His anger until it "shall burn unto the lowest hell and shall consume the earth with her increase and shall set afire the foundations of the mountains. They shall be burnt with hunger and devoured with burning heat and with bitter destruction. I shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also and the man with gray hair. Indeed would I scatter them into all corners were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy."

And that occasioned great confusion in me. I wondered how large could such an enemy be, yet was I no longer knowing in my confusion, thinking of all He had said in the scrolls of how he was a Lord immense beyond measure. Yet did He also

see Himself in contest among other Gods?

I do not know if I felt His wrath at having such thoughts in my dream but that was when the great fever came upon me and I was ill near unto death in my twelfth year and on into my thirteenth year was I weak, and all this after our journey home from Jerusalem. So it was that I forgot almost all which Joseph had imparted to me concerning my conception and my birth.

And when I recovered from fever, so was I again like other children although now a young man for I was a day more than thirteen. I began work as an apprentice in the shop where Joseph was master carpenter and learned much from him and spent seven years as a simple apprentice and then seven again as a full apprentice until I could say that I was a young master of carpentry.

And the first seven years were spent acquiring the wisdom of how to make mud-bricks and build framing for roofs and doors and windows. Also did I learn to build beds and tables, stools and cabinets, boxes of all size, and plows and yokes for oxen. By my second apprenticeship of another seven years did I work in Sepphoris which was the capital of

Galilee and an hour's walk from Nazareth, and there did I finish my education as a young master by learning to work upon fine houses with walls of stone and furniture to be fashioned of the finest kind, and Joseph taught me much for he knew many arts.

Here, too, lived Herod Antipas, the son of Herod, and Herod Antipas was now king. When I would see him pass in procession, hardly did I know why my heart raced like a steed who gallops away from an evil spirit on his path. Yet so did my heart race whenever I passed by the palace of Herod Antipas on my way to work. Nor did Joseph ever speak of this son of Herod; rather did Joseph keep his eyes on his labor, and observe the Sabbath, and the laws of diet and of daily ablution. And much did my family meditate on that purity to which Essenes must always give welcome. For by our cleanliness did we also war against the evil spirit of Satan who would rend the heart of Israel and scatter our people among his demons.

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Joseph used to say: "Where wood is joined to wood by a carpenter who loves the subtlety of the joint, so will one board of wood cleave to another, as in a marriage that is blessed. But planks joined by nails look to fall apart even as a nail rusts or a marriage is corroded by adultery."

Thereby was I never given tools that were made of iron until after I had served my first apprenticeship of seven years with tools of bronze. Joseph spoke to me always of these trials in their labor known to carpenters in other lands and ancient times: he would tell of how Egyptians would fashion small chests of great loveliness, even if in their earliest days they had no better choice for wood than acacia and sycamore, or fig and tamarisk, all too fibrous and knotty, and were obliged thereby to finish all surfaces with plaster, or paint and gold leaf. It was only later, after trade with Lebanon had commenced for cedar, cypress, juniper, pine and yew as well as ebony from Punt, that these Egyptians

could make their finest chests, but by then they knew to use ivory for fine inlay and could excise all knots in inferior wood, and cover such defects with veneer using many small chips for a marquetry. So the deeds of Egyptians in carpentry, even when limited to bronze tools, were more beautiful than our own despite the softness of their chisels and adzes. Even to make a round hole in wood required much care then, nor were their bow drills the equal of the brace drill Joseph would employ which was made of iron. Still, the Egyptians had been masters of in the art of joints and knew shoulder mitres and dovetail mitres, and the use of hard wood for dowels.

Now, in our work, we had iron and it took much apprenticeship to work with such metal for we all began with great fear. Essenes knew of the fourth beast in the visions of Daniel and how his teeth were of iron and terrible in their strength.

Nonetheless did we learn to work with tools of such metal and indeed the use of lead to work the iron into steel was known to us. In Sepphoris we would see swords that came from smelters so far away as Damascus where men knew how to

shape and sharpen steel into cutlery and fine weapons, but then, steel was more costly than gold.

In Sepphoris, we had many woods with which to work: maple, beech, oak, yew, fir, lime, and cedar, and I recall how I learned to look upon oak, whose wood was hard, as framing for a door, and upon maple which was supple for beds, and cedar that was sweet-smelling for chests. Sycamore, holly, lime and boxwood did I also use for turning legs of chairs; and for tool handles did we look to the wood of wild olive, excellent in its hardness, as was elm or ash. And citron wood was equal to steel, in being more expensive than gold, and was used only for the fine veneers of chests, as were also employed terebinth and palm, the alder root and the wood from a holly tree.

I had friends in other shops in Sepphoris who were learning to plate fine objects in gold and silver or to use horn and ivory for inlay, and some of us even spoke of travelling to Rome so that we might apprentice our skills to great masters. But such were only the dreams of apprentices.

Indeed I received much mockery from others. Like Joseph, I observed numerous practices of purity, (even to

abstention from the use of iron tools when building an altar). Whereas, Rome was licentious. It was said that the Emperor and Empress indulged in practices about which none of us could speak else vile sores visit our tongues. And of this did I know whereof I spoke. For I suffered from onslaughts of lust. Never by deed, yet had I suffered the secret adultery of the heart (even while allowed no practise for my loins.)

Yet in most hours was my trade was enough, and I did all that was best to keep it so, and could endure much by pride in my tools. For indeed was I proud of all that was within my box, a rasp, a plane, a hammer, an auger, a gimlet, an adze, a cubit rule, a saw, and chisels for paring, as well as a gouge; all such were mine. And I knew how to set the teeth of my saw so that the dust flew out from the cut with each pull and again on each push. Then was I also adept with brace and drill, a claw hammer, and a draw knife. And in the last year of my second apprenticeship, did I even acquire my own lathe, becoming thereby a young master in the craft of carpentry and knew how to season wood by stripping the bark from certain trees to dry them before they were felled. Yet

could I also treat others, by nature dry, that had to be stored away for a year under cover of fresh manure, which freshness was renewed from time to time, in order that this wood when worked did not split.

Also did I learn how to make fir for flooring, and we offered many prayers over such wood in order that it not burn. For fir seemed attracted to fire. And other prayers were impressed upon winter oak, turkey oak, and beech, all of which were liable to decay. And I knew how alder was excellent for the foundations of small houses since the wood did not perish underground being too pure in nature to rot. And cypress was looked upon as blessed, for it resisted the worm; birch could be chosen for foundations. Heavy, it would not rise with flooding.

If I speak much of foundations and floorings, so did we also work on roofs, and yet in truth, even in Sepphoris was I not only a carpenter but, by times, found myself back in my first apprenticeship, a laborer covered with mud when we made bricks for the walls of ordinary houses and did employ the Greek measure of dimensions, five palms square was a brick for public buildings and four palms square for a man's home.

And we covered such bricks with limestone which, being porous, would take a moist plaster. And I knew how to burn fragments of this limestone to make a stucco upon which others could paint.

Much knowledge of my craft was acquired in the art of steaming long thin pieces of a wood of wavy grain around a carved template and of those grains I used, the first in esteem were the tiger-striped, the panther-spotted, and those we called maculate, inasmuch as a swarm of bees could have been living in the grain. And I would speak of the beauty of citron wood which had many little waves and small spirals as if one were looking upon wine mixed with honey and I learned to polish this citron wood with oil of juniper and oil of cedar compounded well with beeswax; among some of us grew a skill to stain and polish one wood until it looked like another.

Joseph taught me much, and could also instruct us on putting up walls of stone for large buildings in Sepphoris. Much did he understand about red basalt and cream limestone from Tivoli, and travertine marble that will crack in fire yet is immune to ice, which ice came upon us in winter in the

hills of Galilee. And Joseph told me, although I never saw it, about a substance called pozzolana, which was a volcanic earth in the lands south of Rome; pozzolana, mixed with lime, became cement. Which led me to think of the wisdom of the Lord who knew the earth so well that heavy soil thrown out of its bed by the voice of His volcanoes could yet be treated to take up a new nature and now was determined to hold all stones together. And although I did not know whereof I was meditating, still did I think much on the nature of the Lord who was my Father and of all the resources of His Kingdom that we learned to work upon with our hands and how it was in the measure of those ways by which He had made things that we could find, so long as we respected His works, many an answer to difficulties that looked at first to be without solution, and by such devotion to the goodness and bounty of God did I see how we prospered in our work until I even knew that I could find Him in the careful splitting of a piece of wood and to pick up heavy stone was to hear Him in that small sound the rock would make as it was lifted from the earth.

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Nor was it long after the year I became thirty that I began to dream of the Great Temple in Jerusalem which I had not visited since my twelfth year. And I wondered if it were late for me to learn how to cast in gold and silver, thereby to enrich the altar in the sanctuary by gilding the candlestick of light and the pouring vessels and the censers, and other golden ornaments that would be mine to fashion for the Lord. Yet at such times did I also feel the power of greed and know a lust stifling to the throat and wonder if such work was wise for those who would be modest. Yet did I also look for many changes in my life.

So did my years pass, and it was in the thirty-first year of my life that Joseph died and I mourned him. He had been a good teacher and just and he had imparted many skills to me. But so was I also distraught. For with Joseph's death came back to me all that he had recounted about my conception and birth. Now did I know no longer how to look

upon God for if He were my Father, so was He still awesome and thereby strange. I looked to seek wisdom from afar, and began to think of making a pilgrimage to John the Baptist. For now I knew that there was that in me which I could hardly name, and yet it must be brought forth, for whatever was not brought forth could yet destroy you. And was it also true, that once brought forth, it could save you?

Of John the Baptist, much may be told, and it could even be said that I knew him before I would ever see him: After the death of Joseph, I thought often of John the Baptist inasmuch as he was my cousin; moreover, had I heard from all in Nazareth that we had a prophet among us. Much had been spoken of my cousin during the last year when my mother had been in mourning for Joseph, and I knew that John was a holy man and yet of much ill-repute among the Pharisees in the temple in Nazareth. These Pharisees of Nazareth were, in the main, devout merchants although never equal in devotion to those wearing the white garb of the Essenes; many Pharisees grew fat even as we Essenes grew thin. And these merchants had large families and those with wealth even moved to Sepphoris to build fine homes but would come back to our

small temple for prayer and in their voices could little be heard about John the Baptist agreeable to my ear.

Even if he were without relation of blood to me, still would I have known much about John; his birth and mine were of a similarity I pondered upon often in this last year.

His father, an Essene priest named Zacharias, was also a descendant of the family of David and thereby related to Joseph. And the wife of Zacharias, Elizabeth, was of the daughters of Aaron; her ancestors knew Moses. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were as thin as tall blades of grass who dry in summer drought, and thereby was each like unto an Essene of the Essenes. For both believed that the body was a living temple and so could serve in a holy war against the powers of evil. But then few were the Essenes who did not believe that they were God's best warriors in the war against evil.

On such understanding had they been married for many years and were childless, yet Elizabeth mourned on how she was barren, and no longer young.

Yet, it happened that on a given day, in the half year before I was conceived--or so was I told by my mother--it happened that Zacharias was alone by the altar, and

performing a priest's office, when he saw an angel appearing before him. And this angel was that same Gabriel who would speak to my mother in another six months.

Gabriel said: "Do not tremble, Zacharias. For Elizabeth has been heard by the Lord and she shall bear thee a son. You are to call him John and he shall be great in the sight of the Lord and this son will bring many of the fallen children of Israel back to the Lord."

Now, Zacharias lived only by observance and prayer; he saw little of visions. So he said to the angel: "How can I know of this? I am an old man and my wife is without youth." Then the angel grew angry and said: "I stand in the presence of God; I was sent to show you good tidings. Because you do not believe my words, behold, I strike you dumb. You will be unable to speak until the day that Elizabeth bears her child." And when Zacharias came out of the temple, everyone on the steps marveled that he could not speak. He beckoned to them and sought to utter a few words, but they heard naught and could see but the straining of his throat.

He came back to his house all the same, and he marveled how on that same day was he soon able to give issue to his

wife Elizabeth, who thereupon conceived, and was so fearful that she would lose what God had contrived to give her, that she hid herself for five months.

But in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, Gabriel came to my mother, Mary, and she, knowing that God had visited her directly, departed from her family during that time when Joseph was debating how to hide her among his family. It was then that Mary went up into the high hills wherein could be found the house of Zacharias, and she saw Elizabeth, and gave devotion to her and salutation, kneeling before her to say, "Blessed art thou." But Elizabeth, on hearing these words felt that babe within her, who would yet be John the Baptist, and he leaped in her womb for the first time whereupon Elizabeth knew how she was full of the Holy Ghost. She spoke out with a loud voice: "Blessed art thou, Mary, for you have honored me on this day, and all generations to come shall call you blessed."

And Mary replied: "My soul doth magnify the Lord."

And these words became so fixed in my mother's ear that even when I had become a man, so was there constraint in living with her inasmuch as she was so content with having

been thus blessed that no one could say aught to her; her pride was even greater than her humility. Nor was it easy to contradict her will.

Nonetheless, she was an Essene much devoted to our practices, and thereby believed that the lowly were superior to the mighty. Nonetheless, she kept saying, "He that is mighty has done to me great things." Nor did she ever show hesitation to speak, and often would add, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich He hath sent empty away." And these are words she said, and they are in the gospel of Luke. Yet if I would ask how Luke obtained such, word for word, and placed it properly, I do not know; unless all is due to the strength of my mother's sentiment which she related to many when she was old. I, who would yet believe that the poor are to be exalted and the mighty to be scattered, can say that I owe the strength of such sentiments to Mary, and to her repetition of them on many an evening and many a dawn.

Now, when John the Baptist was born and they came to circumcize him on the eighth day, it was thought by neighbors and cousins that he would be called Zacharias after his

father, but his mother said, "No, he shall be called John."

The relatives of Zacharias replied, "None of thy kindred has been called ever by this name." They made signs to Zacharias, but he, still unable to speak, had retained the power to write, and he took a table and upon it put down these words: "His name is John." Then did they all marvel, for at that moment the mouth of Zacharias opened, and his tongue grew loose, and he spoke. And he gave praise to God for the deliverance of his voice.

Yet when these relatives returned to their homes, so did fear come onto all of them in the dark hill country where they lived, and there were many who said, "What manner of child shall this be?" Yet, Zacharias, having regained his power of speech, was mighty in voice and blessed his son John and said, "Thou, child, shall be called the Prophet of the Highest for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord and give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, even as I have been given remission from my sin of doubting the words of the angel."

And John grew up, and, as I was told, was lean like his father and mother. Also did I know that he lived in the

desert and preached near a ford in the River Jordan and bathed often and would remonstrate with the people of Israel and would decry their sins, preaching in such force and determination, that the High Priest sent Levites out from Jerusalem to ask: "Who art thou? Art thou the Christ?" For in those years was that a Greek word for the Messiah. And many from Jerusalem spoke in Greek and said it was Christ who would come to save the Jews.

But John said, "I baptize with water. I am not the Christ."

"Then who art thou?" they asked. "Are you Elijah? Are you that prophet?"

And he said, "I walk in the steps of Elijah but I am not that prophet." Who then was he?

They were wise men, these Levites, yet their anger grew and they said, "We must give an answer to those who sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?"

And he answered, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' and those are the words of the prophet Isaiah."

Now these Pharisees said to him, "You perform baptisms

yet you are not Christ nor Elijah nor art thou Isaiah?"

And John replied, "I baptize with water, no more. But there is one coming whom you do not know. He is coming after me and he is preferred above me by the Lord, and I am not worthy to unloose the straps of his sandals." And this was indeed said by John on the day before I went on my visit to him.

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And it is true that great curiosity had grown in me about the nature of this cousin. For it was said that he would only baptize in the wilderness, out to the east of Judea by the river Jordan, and all who came to him had to confess their sins if they sought to be immersed in the River Jordan. Nor was it enough for them to bathe. He was the first to immerse them.

And they said of him, and such was true as I could see when I met him, that his clothes were of camel's hide, and he had but one girdle of such skin to conceal his loins and he washed every day and many times, being so naked thereby to the sun that he was darker than anyone who came to visit. He was said to be a thin man with a thin beard and he ate nothing but locusts and wild honey inasmuch as meat and wine inspired carnal dreams and such thoughts could be host to many demons. So did John eat the food of the poorest of the poor yet did those locusts give him the power to strip fields

of disbelief in the hearts of those who came to his place by the ford of the River Jordan. Yet the wild honey gave warmth to his voice even as John repeated the words of Isaiah: "The crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Yet had I also heard that his countenance was most severe. When multitudes came to be baptized by him, so would he greet them by saying, "Generation of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance and do not say, 'Abraham is our father,' for that is no more than for God to say to the stones beneath your feet, 'Ye are also children of Abraham.'"

The people would ask: "What shall we do?" And John the Baptist would say: "Let him who has two coats give one to the man who has none, and he that is with meat, let him share." He would always speak of the one mightier than himself who was yet to come, and this person would be Messiah. He would not baptize with water but with the Holy Ghost.

Before making my pilgrimage, I thought often upon the book of Exodus and how the Lord had brought forth an east

wind with locusts who "covered the face of the whole earth, so the land was darkened; and ate every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: so there was not any green thing in the trees." And I wondered whether it could be that the wrath of each locust eaten by my cousin could consume all that was unworthy of the Lord in these Israelites who were unclean.

And when first I saw him before me, I was much taken with how John looked. And I repeated to myself the words of the unknown prophet: "He hath no form nor comeliness. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and a man of grief. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

And the words of this unknown prophet proved true. For I wished to hide my face from John. And it was with pain that I looked upon him. I knew that John would not be long among us. And this I knew as if I had heard a beating of wings overhead.

I had come with many, but I saw John the Baptist before he saw me, and I watched all those others who were baptized together and then departed. Yet, I remained. And in the

loneliness of this place in the desert he could not see me since I concealed myself behind a rock. And it was only when the sun became hot upon that side of the rock that I walked forward, and then he saw me and said, "I have waited for you."

His eyes were with more light than the sky and paler than the moon. His beard was long. The hair that grew from his ears was matted even as was the hair that grew from his cheeks. And I saw that the wing and the leg of a locust were also matted in his beard. So I wondered how this man who bathed others and washed himself numerous times a day could still have such detritus upon him. Yet was it meet that his thoughts were thus far from his body for his beard was like a forest and small creatures could live within. And he looked at me and said, "Thou art my cousin." And he nodded with me and said, "I have been waiting for you. Today did I know that you would come."

"How," I asked, "do you see upon such matters?"

He sighed. His breath was as lonely as the wind that passes between rocks and through empty places. And he said, "I have been told to wait for you, and I am tired. So it is

good that you have come."

Then did I confess my sins and spoke of thoughts of disrespect toward my mother, and of battles with lust wherein even to have lustful thoughts was with sin, and so, too, had I known greed in my thoughts and unkindness in judgment of others. Yet in no way had I sinned beyond such matters.

"Well, repent ye still," did he say, "with sin it is always more than we know," and I blessed God, and John the Baptist came behind me as I entered the water and with the strength of a desert lion, so did he seize me by the nose with his fingers and with his other hand laid upon my forehead, thrust me back into the river. It was sudden, and I passed so quickly from air to water and back to air again, that I was gasping at the loss of the last breath. It was if heaven had opened and I could see the Holy Ghost descending in the shape of a dove, and, behold, so was the dove upon my shoulder when I came up from the water and I felt as if something had come to me out of all that had been lost before me, and I was one with the brother in my soul, a poor man but good. It was then that I felt more than repentance. I knew glory. And so did I also feel as if a million, nay, a

million million of souls would follow me and know this instant when God's angel came near.

And I heard a voice come from the heavens. This voice said: "Thou art My beloved Son and in thee am I well pleased." That way came the word of the Lord into my ear and He spoke in the words of Jeremiah: "Before I formed thee in the belly did I know thee." Now did fear and much exaltation come into contest within me and I looked again into the eyes of John the Baptist, and they gleamed with illumination sacred to me, and I turned my face to the heavens and said, "Lord God, behold, I cannot speak for I am like a child."

And again the Lord spoke in the words He had used with Jeremiah, and I heard: "Say not 'I am a child' for thou shalt go to all places that I shall send thee and whatsoever I command thee, shalt thou speak, and be not afraid of men's faces," said the Lord. And He put forth His hand and touched my mouth even as the beak of the dove touched my lips, and the Lord said: "Behold, I put My words in thy mouth. I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." And His word was in my heart and as

a burning fire in my bones. And John withdrew his hand from my head and we stood in the river. Away went the dove. And John and I spoke to each other and I will tell of that, and soon. For when I took my departure from John, so did I know that I would never see him again. And he began to sing even as I left, but it was to the River Jordan, not to me. And the taste of that brown river was still in my throat and the dust of the desert in my nostrils.

He sang as I went and the music of his throat sounded like the voice of a man. Such were the cries that issued from him. And I walked on my way to Nazareth with such strength. For all that had been imposed on my life was now as new to me, and I understood why I was not like other men and could comprehend the pride of my nation; my legs took larger strides than before.

Yet I knew not what awaited me, only that I had been blessed and the Lord had come to me and had been near to me, withal that his strength was almighty.

A great cloud came over the city as I walked and it poured with rain even as it poured before the sun. There was

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It was a long march across the desert, and it was late in the afternoon. So did I see rocks turn to gold and they lay there much as the overthrown walls of a temple open to desert vultures. And I could still hear John the Baptist singing.

He knew no song and the music of his throat sounded like the voice of a ram. Such were the cries that issued from him. And I walked on my way to Nazareth with much strength. For all that had been unspoken in my life was now as one to me, and I understood why I was not like other men and could comprehend the pride of my mother; my legs took larger strides than before.

Yet I knew not what awaited me, only that I had been blessed and the Lord had come to me and had been near to me, withal that His strength was almighty.

A great cloud came over the sky as I walked and it formed with rain even as it passed before the sun. There was

downpour. A rainbow rose from one end of the desert to touch at the other end, and above me was a great brightness; I knew I was walking through the radiance of the Lord. Soon it dazzled my eyes and I lay upon my face in this hot sand of desert and heard the voice of the One who could speak and He said, "Son of Man, stand upon your feet."

And the spirit entered and set me up again, and He said, "Once I spoke to the prophet Ezekiel in these words and Ezekiel strove mightily and saved our people in Babylon. Now, these words are for you: Son of Man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation, to a nation that hath rebelled against Me, even unto this very day for they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I shall send you unto them and you shall say unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord God.' And they, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear to hear, yet shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And thou, Son of Man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words though briars and thorns be with thee and thou must dwell among scorpions, be not afraid of their words, nor dismayed by their looks. Son of Man, get thee into the house of Israel, speak My words unto them for

thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language whose words you cannot understand but to the house of Israel. Surely had I sent thee to strangers they would harken to thee. But the house of Israel will not, for the house of Israel is impudent and hard-hearted. Behold, I will make thy face strong against their face and thy forehead strong against theirs; harder than flint have I made thy forehead. Fear them not. Neither be dismayed at their looks. Son of Man, go! Get thee to them."

Then the cloud poured great rain and the voice from the heavens said unto my ear: "Those were My words to the prophet Ezekiel. But to you I say that you are My son conceived by Me and mightier than a prophet."

Notwithstanding, I still had many hours to travel and across land I did not know well. If I felt exaltation so did I also know exhaustion; the scrolls I had studied since childhood were not as near to me as these words of this high Lord, my God, yet I could only fear Him now that He was near. For His temper was as loud as thunder and His anger was equal to hail that would not cease: the sound of His voice had been in my ear like unto the fall of great rocks even as they

reverberated in their fall. And it is then that echoes are as the ancestors of those great rocks already fallen before them. And I did not know how much was I ready to serve a Lord who could leave boils upon the flesh of every man and beast in the land of Egypt, cast hail to blight every herb of the field and set fire to run along the ground until every tree of the field was consumed and broken. And these were the least of His acts. I threw up my hands toward heaven as if to ask whether I were truly the one to serve His wish. Could I exercise His force and His command before a Lord so proud and vengeful? And God then said to me, "Not yet are you strong. Therefore, do not return to your home. Go up rather into that mountain before you now. And in that wilderness, pray to Me among those crags, and fast among those rocks broken by Me and My lightning. And drink what water thou wilt. For there is water beneath the rocks. But sup on no food.

"Before the sun sets on the last of your days of fast, thou wilt know why I have chosen thee for the Christ, and as My Messiah will thou then be anointed. For," said the Lord, "no mountain is equal to this mountain without a name."

And He knew whereof He spoke. As I climbed, darkness came upon me, and I had to take my rest on ground covered by serpents and scorpions. Yet none came near. And in the morning I climbed further and for much of the day upward on the slopes of this mountain and it was worthy of the lamentations of the prophet Isaiah, for one could say that the cormorant and the bittern possessed it.

I saw many vultures gathered over these stones, and much emptiness in every direction. And on the ramparts of the rock, did the vultures look down on me, side by side, every one with her mate. It was then I thought of how John the Baptist had spoken again even as we were saying farewell, and he had said: "In the time of your immersion did you see the Lord?"

And I said: "Is it not death and destruction to see the Him?"

He replied: "For all but the Christ." And then said John: "Once did the Holy Spirit come near to me. And so near that I put my hands before my eyes and hid in the shadow of a rock, but the Holy Spirit said: 'You cannot see My face yet will I turn away and you can look upon My back,' and He

allowed me to see that His back was noble, a noble back." Then John grasped my arm. "I have known since I was a child that my cousin must replace me even as my mother spoke of your mother," and then he kissed me on both cheeks. "I baptize only with water," he said, "and can cleanse all souls who have truly repented, and can protect them thereby even as water can extinguish the fire to come, but you will baptize with the Holy Spirit and so bring God's mercy to exorcize evil and heal the sick." And he kissed me again.

I thought of this conversation again as I slept, shielded by the spirit of the Lord from serpents and scorpions. And it was hard not to remember the breath of John the Baptist when he kissed me for it was full of all that is in the odor of an exhausted man. And indeed, no matter how often one seeks water to soothe the flesh, such odor cannot be washed away inasmuch as great fatigue speaks of all that has been left behind and is lost. Albeit, his skin was honest in its scent and full of the dusts and loneliness of the desert and its rocks. And so did he smell also of the waters of the river Jordan and the heavy wisdom of its mud and its silt.

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The summit of the mountain was like unto a place where many had been buried; even as one climbed, so did rocks stand about like tombs. And treacherous were some of the steps between. It was midday and with a sun of much heat.

At the summit I sat in the shadow of a great stone and looked out upon the lands of Israel, upon Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Peering through such haze of golden hue I was left to wonder whether gold spires were rising from the hills of Jerusalem. But I was hungry and did not think long on Jerusalem; my stomach spoke of its eagerness to eat after living without food for a day and receiving so much blessing; by now was my exaltation no longer equal to my appetite.

But then I also knew why the Lord had sent me to the summit of this mountain which was without a name. It was not enough to be His son, and cousin to John the Baptist. I must suffer tests. And the first test was that I did not eat but

passed through a fast. Yet even as I said to myself, "I will not eat for two days, even three," the Lord said, (and neither could I see Him nor feel His presence other than that His voice was in my ear) but He said: "You will fast until I give easement. Then may you return to food."

So I did, and was without nourishment that day and the next. And by the fifth day when the pangs of my stomach were with me still but only in grave emptiness of spirit, so was I weak, and no longer knew if strength remained to climb down from this mountain. So did I say aloud, "How long, oh, Lord?" and He said, "Long. It will be long."

And since I was not there to dispute the Lord, but to follow His will, fasting grew easier; no more did I think of many foods. And I shielded myself from the sun in the middle of the day and came to love the taste of water and the forgotten wisdom that is found in the shadow of rocks, until they became too cold at night for any wisdom. And the chill of the air in the middle of each night was cold, for warmth came to me neither from the rock nor from within. And no plants grew on the summit of this mountain where I stayed. Which was as well for there were hours when I could have

supped on their thorns.

And in the second week so did I have visions of the ancestor of Joseph, King David, and knew that David had committed a great sin. I could not recall the offense, but did remember that in the land of Gibeon, the Lord had appeared to Solomon in a dream and God asked: "What shall I give thee?"

And Solomon replied, "Thou hast shown unto my father David great mercy, and Thou hast kept for him this great kindness that Thou hast given him a son, myself, to sit on his throne, but, oh, Lord, my God, I am but a little child. I know not how to go out nor to come in and Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people whom Thou hast chosen, a great people that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people that I may discern between good and bad for who is able to judge this, so great a people?"

And I recalled that this speech so pleased the Lord that He said to Solomon: "Because thou hast not asked for a long life nor for riches nor begged for the death of thine enemies, but asked for discernment in judgment, then, behold,

I have given thee a wise and understanding heart."

And then God gave him all that Solomon had not asked for, riches and honors both until there were no kings like Solomon in those days, and he had the wisdom to separate two mothers disputing before him over a child, and where is the Jew who does not know how the true mother's bowels yearned upon her son and she pointed to the other woman and said, "Give her the child and in no wise slay it."

Solomon had great wisdom, but now I heard the voice of the Lord in my ear, saying, "I will not give thee the riches and honors of Solomon because he did not keep My commandments and his failure rests in the gifts that I gave him." Those words of the Lord went into my spirit which was still hovering about my empty stomach, and it permeated my flesh in its fasting.

The Lord whispered further into my ear: "Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were a thousand and five. All people came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Indeed, King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And kings brought him silver, ivory, apes and peacocks. But," said the Lord in my ear, "King

Solomon loved many strange women: the daughter of Pharaoh and the women of the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Sedonians and the Hittites, whereas I had said unto the children of Israel, 'Ye shall not go in to them. For surely they will turn your heart after their Gods.' But Solomon had seven hundred wives and princesses and three hundred concubines and these wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass that when Solomon was old his heart was not perfect with Me. So," said the Lord, "I will not give you riches and you will never tarry with a woman or you shall lose the Lord."

And it was then I knew in the midst of my fast that he had given me Solomon's sins on which to meditate and that was an advantage not given to Solomon.

And I, being without food, indeed had no desire for a woman, and did not feel at odds with the Lord's decision. And my fast continued.

The prophets were often around me in these weeks: Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Daniel and Ezekiel. And it was as if all that was meat and was now lost to my bones became rendered into memory of all I had learned in my youth at the

school of the synogogue. For I recalled these prophets' words as if they were my own, and soon could I dream that I was even with the prophet Elijah, and had contests with the prophets of Baal. I became the equal of more then forty such prophets who came to make a sacrifice of a bullock while crying aloud and lacerating themselves with knives and lances to show their devotion to Baal. Blood gushed forth from the wounds of these prophets, yet no voice answered; the God Baal could not speak. Then, as I was Elijah in my dream, so did I restore the altar of the Lord that these prophets of Baal had torn down. And I took twelve stones to stand for the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, saying "Israel shall be thy name."

And with those stones I built an altar and made a trench about it. And put wood into its place on the altar and cut the bullock into pieces, thereupon laying the raw flesh upon the wood and I filled four barrels with water and poured it on the sacrifice, until water ran into the trench dug around this altar.

And in such a moment, with much moisture soaking upon the sacrifice of the altar, so before the prophets of Baal

did I say: "Hear me, O Lord, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God."

And the fire of the Lord consumed the sacrifice of the bullock and the wet wood and the wet stones and licked up the water that was in the trench. And I was able to slay all the prophets of Baal with a sword.

And here it came to me that I was dreaming and not Elijah but merely remembering the scroll of Elijah, and I nodded my head and knew that my fast would continue until forty days and forty nights had passed. And I remembered that the Lord had even said unto Elijah: "I have seven thousand left me in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hast not kissed him." And such was the end of my first four weeks of fast. And I understood why I was here. For my people of Israel were in peril and in much danger of God's final judgment.

And I saw how my youth had passed with my thoughts closer to the wood I worked than to my people, and I remembered how Joseph would say: "All share in the sinfulness of Israel because we make no effort to change it."

And I also thought upon the wisdom of Isaiah who said:

"The Lord of Hosts has left unto us a very small remnant" and I saw that I must live now in the faith and the hope that a remnant of good Jews would enable me to recover the nation.

I was yet to learn that I would love sinners more than I would love those who are pious, and would yet believe that sinners might be of more worth in their saving, especially if one would speak of those who sinned with a light in their eye. For that light, even as they stole back into sin, belonged to the eye of God. But for now, full of the wisdom of Isaiah, I thought of the remnant and I quoted his words to myself: "For though Thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return." And there in my fast in the fifth week and nigh unto the sixth week, full of the spirit of Isaiah, I would repeat his sayings aloud and repeat my words aloud by the hour, speaking even into the eye of the sun until my eyes burned and I was obliged to return to the shade, and like a blind man for an hour. I pondered over the prayers I would soon use with sinners and knew I would tell them, even as did Isaiah: "Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment,

relieve the oppressed, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, sayeth the Lord."

And it was the fortieth day. The Lord said to me as evening came, "Tomorrow you may step down from the mountain and take food," and I knew hunger at his words, as if all I had not eaten in forty days was now ravenous in my stomach.

Yet, even as I was beginning again to know my appetite, so did the Lord also say, "Tonight, thou art to remain on the mountain. For a visitor will come to thee."

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I do not know what understanding was between Them, but the visitor soon arrived, and he was as handsome as a prince. He had gold bracelets and a gold ornament on a gold chain about his neck, and in this ornament was the face of a ram, most bestial yet handsome, more handsome than any ram I had seen. The hair of this prince was as long as my own and lustrous and he was beautiful, indeed, a man of much beauty.

Now I recalled a thought apart from all others that had come to me in the middle of my fast, and it had been my own thought and not from the lips of John the Baptist, nor of any prophet of other times albeit the Lord may have been instructing me in many of those matters that were without boundary between His wisdom and my understanding. Still, in the middle of the night in the midst of my fast, had I said to myself, "The devil is the most beautiful creature God ever made." And since the visitor who came to see me now was dressed in robes of velvet that were as purple as the late

evening, and wore a crown as golden as the sun, he could be no other than who I thought, and indeed he soon introduced himself as Satan, and by his common name, the Devil. But then I knew it was he inasmuch as he had climbed the mountain yet there was no dust on his robes nor sweat upon his skin.

His first words, as he spoke to me, were these: "Dost thou know," he asked, "how the prophet Isaiah met his death?"

And I, overcome with silence for I had not seen the Devil approach, nor was certain of how he could stand so easily before me, was obliged to hear him say: "Isaiah was killed by a Jewish king, the pagan Manasseh, cohort of Amon. A vassal of Assyria, was Manasseh, and a bad Jew." And the Devil nodded at this as if he, too, were a Jew (which I knew he was not, but must be a pagan.) Then he held up one finger as if it were a ray of light and spoke more: "This Manasseh, wishing to destroy the religion of his fathers, sent out a royal order that Isaiah, who was much revered and of much culture and lived with comfort in the city, must be uprooted from his home and hunted like an animal. And so Isaiah, hearing of this, fled from his comfort in the city, and the soldiers of Manasseh set out to chase Isaiah in the

wilderness whereupon the prophet, desperate in his peril, looked to find a tree that would contain a hollow large enough for a man to stand within. This sanctuary," said the Devil, "was found by Isaiah in a stout oak with a rotten center, and he chose to hide therein. But the officers of Manasseh discovered this concealment, and brought a great saw to the tree and cut it in half even as Isaiah was concealed therein. In which manner, did Isaiah die. And he screamed in his death. Did you know?" said the Devil.

"Not of such a death did I hear."

Whereupon he laughed. "For gods as for men, is knowledge but the part of a part."

I was disturbed by these words, and thereby was weakened more than by any deprivation of the fast.

He, however, was comfortable, and kept speaking. "The manner in which Isaiah met his death need not leave you in large concern," he said, "since you are not a prophet but, indeed, the Son! To my recollection, which is not small, the Lord has performed an act of a new kind. And it is much to be contemplated upon."

Saying which, he looked at me fondly. His eyes were as

black marble, but there were lights within like stars. He said, "Are you hungry? Are you in need of drink?" And he brought forth a jug of wine and a leg of lamb, well cooked, which I would not have known were beneath his robes yet did he produce them. And approached me closely, so closely that I took in the spirit of the wine by my nostrils and the gravies of the lamb, yea, even the smell of the Devil himself, although I could only perceive it through a small cloud of perfume rising from his neck, his armpits and out of the folds of his robe. Despite all such scents, so could I also perceive how greed came forth from his body. For that was as the odor which lives between the buttocks and rouses offense in us from those who do not wash. Therefore did I refuse his food, even as the odor of his greed entered into my appetite, but such odor was like the savory that comes from an oven when food long roasted is ready for the table. And he, seeing such deliberation, smiled once more and said, "But of course, thou hast no need of this. Being the Son of God, thou can command these stones to be bread. Which, by all measure, is proper food for an Essene. Although thy garment, for shame, is neither as clean as would befit thee,

nor free of dust."

"That thou art the Son of God," mused the Devil aloud, "is a surprise to me. Why has your Father chosen thee? Say to Him when next you have converse that I salute Him. For, do you know? Thy Father and I have had much traffic and some dispute, and thereby, are eager always to obtain word of the Other and His doings. Indeed, on those occasions when We meet, so do I tell Him that all people may be His Creation, and the crown indeed of all He hath created among the animals and the plants of the field, and you Jews even His Chosen, yet still it is I, not He, who hath the better understanding of such Creation. For it has given issue to many small gods and creatures and spirits that He does not know as well as myself. Of course, I was once His servant, His most trusted servant. Contemplate then how well I understand Him. As above, so below. But then what is below knows better what is above, than above can know below."

Now, was I amazed by this Devil, for he did not inspire fear but comfort. And by such comfort did I know, as I had not known before, how it might be to feel like a sinner in a low canteen drinking much wine. The labors of this last day

of fast now became as balm in my limbs, and so could I talk to the Devil; he was comfortable. If his odor was not without disturbance for my nostrils, so was it also not without agreement to desires in me I had not yet encountered. All such granted, I could not allow that God, the Lord of the Universe, did not understand His creation better than my visitor. "Not ever it is possible," I exclaimed. "He is all-powerful. The heavens and the earth, the stars and the sun, bow down to Him."

I had given vexation. Now did Satan snort like a horse unwilling to accept the bridle.

"Know thee," said the Devil, "that the Father is but one God among Many. Merely count the myriad respected by the Romans. Even so does your Father not have the power to command His own Jews. Look to His rages; they are unseemly for a great god and swollen in proportion. He issues too many threats. Nor can He bear disputation of mind and spirit from any He would call His own, whereas I confide to you that a hint of disobedience and a whiff of treachery are among the joys of life, and are to be ranked with its spoils rather than its evils."

"Never so," did I say. "My Father is God and of many dimensions, and of all dimensions."

But the Devil replied, "He is not in command of Himself!"

"Therefore," said the Devil, for he did not cease to speak, "your Father hath not the right to ask whole sacrifices from his people. For even He comprehends how women are created other than men and therefore live with separate understandings of all that they would be loyal to. Indeed, your Father hath no taking of women: his power is given over to every word of his prophets. Look to Isaiah! He alone to whom Isaiah does not speak out of your Father's heart when he says: 'because the daughters of Zion are parched and walk with stretched-forth necks and swollen eyes, weeping and mourning as they go, and having a striking with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scorpion the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts.' Yet a little later," said the Devil, "when their secret parts are laid bare" And he continued to speak on with the words of Isaiah: "The Lord will take away their attire like the wool, the bracelets and the ornaments, the ornaments

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"Wherefore," said the Devil, for he did not cease to speak, "your Father hath not the right to seek whole exactitude from His people. Nor does He comprehend how women are creatures other than men and thereby live with separate understanding of all that they would be loyal to. Indeed, your Father hath no inkling of women; His scorn is given over to every word of His prophets. Look to Isaiah! Declare to me that Isaiah does not speak out of your Father's heart when he says: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scabbard the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts--' Not a whit less," said the Devil, "than their secret parts!" And he continued to speak as with the words of Isaiah: "'The Lord will take away their attires like the moon, the bracelets and the bonnets, the ornaments

of the legs, the earrings, the rings and the nose-jewels, the fine linen, the hoods and the veils. And it shall come to pass that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle, a rent; for lovely hair, there shall be baldness, and burning instead of beauty.'" *and you shall be*

"My Father was speaking of the nation of Zion," I said. "And so was it taught to us in the synagogue."

"No," replied the Devil. "He would fain speak of the nation of Zion. But it is women He calumniates. For when He would address the nation of Israel, then are His comparisons without dispute; then He speaks only to men: 'The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and His fury upon all their armies: He hath utterly destroyed them, He hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.' Wherefore is this rage in your Father? Is it not rage inchoate? His failures burn in His heart. Does He not know that He is not all-powerful? But then He is without sufficiency of spirit: He cannot say: 'Yea, I have lost, but my soldiers were honest and fought well.' No, He is

vengeful. And beyond measure. 'The palaces will be forsaken,' says Isaiah, 'the forts and towers shall be dens forever, until the Spirit be poured upon us from on High.'

"But when," asked the Devil, "will the Spirit be poured upon us and from on High? Thy Father would send you forth to improve the hearts of men when His own heart is caked with the blood of those He has slaughtered. His love of all He has created is choked by the curses He has laid upon women. If His rages are mighty, yet do they never accomplish His desire; His language is burdened with much adoration of the grandeur He pretends to despise.

"Discover the face of thy Father in these words of Ezekiel even as Ezekiel heard them from the Lord! Tell me that your Father hath not adoration of women, yet doth hate their power to entice Him: 'I swore unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee,' saith the Lord God, 'and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also in brodered work, and fine linen, and I covered thee with silk, with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands and a chain on thy neck, and

earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thou wast decked with gold and silver; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceedingly beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy reknown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee,' saith the Lord God.

" 'But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and played the harlot because of thy reknown, and poured out thy fornications on everyone that passed by; thou didst deck thy high places with divers colors, and played the harlot thereupon:

Thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way, and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred, and hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms. Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians, thy neighbors, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms to provoke me to anger. Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians because thou wast insatiable; and yet could not be satisfied.

"Wherefore, O harlot, because thy filthiness was poured

out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, therefore I will gather all thy lovers with whom thou hast taken pleasure; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness.

"And I will judge thee, and give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eniment place, and shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels and leave thee naked and bare, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thy houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot."

"Yes," said the Devil when he had concluded this recitation, "yea, all of this is but to scorn Jerusalem? Say rather that thy Father's language is not without the reek of desire."

"Your words are pollutions even as you utter them," said I to the Devil, and it was the voice of my Father speaking through me.

Satan answered: "Your Father tells thee not to fornicate. Yet is His tongue as ripe with lust as my own."

I was in great confusion, for I knew whereof he spoke; could I deny that the Lord, my Father, had been as cruel in His language as Satan, by repute, was in his deeds? And I had been stirred. My loins, quiet for so long, were now quickened by the fire of such language.

Yet such became my salvation against this visitor. For by such movement within me did I know that in hearing the words of my Father as He had spoken in ancient years to the prophet Ezekiel, still the voice I heard in my ear had not been His, but belonged to Satan. For with much relish had he spoken of all that was debauched in these women of Jerusalem.

Then the Devil said to me, "I have the power to offer visions. You will think of yourself no longer as being here on the summit of this mountain. Rather, you are sitting beside me and we will be above the holy city. Do you come on such a journey?"

I had no need to say yes; I had merely to give assent within. For his embrace of my vision was so complete that indeed I now saw the city of Jerusalem beneath me and felt

great vertigo inasmuch as we were now on the highest dome of the Great Temple in Jerusalem. And at that moment did the Devil say to me, "If thou be the son of God, cast thyself down. For is it not written by the prophets that 'He will give His angels charge concerning thee.'? Leap that the angels may bear thee."

And I felt much temptation to jump into the fall below. So did I know that an abyss was now opening before all generations to come. They would stand on a great height and quiver like one blade of grass in the wind of that unruly spirit who lives in our breath with much fear of the leap. So did the Devil look at me again with his dark eyes and by the points of light within were these eyes like a night of stars; he was promising glory. "Stay with your Father and you will labor for Him. Stay with your Father and you will be consumed. Jump, and save thyself. Jump!"

By this vision did I know that extinction would be quick, but as quick would be my return to the living. The Devil did not have to utter yet one more word. He had entered into me. Much was I amazed at how I could live within him and know his speech, even when he did not utter it.

Whereupon, he was telling me now of a future life. It would be bountiful with the joy of women and riches. "All is mine!" cried Satan into the silence we shared.

Indeed, in that instant did I see that greed was a godly good to him; from crude greed could be brought forth works of great power and rich aroma. "It is the smell of the pits," said the Devil. "Those who are loyal to me sit upon the earth with such possession that they need not leave little turds fit for a goat. I speak of what issues from the bony cheeks of your friend John who will not even shit on the Sabbath. No," said the Devil, "nor will he piss either, though he be doubled in pain. But then he must even carry a small hoe to cover his leavings on days that are not the Sabbath."

To myself, I said, "These are but words." The Devil would possess me only if I died in the manner he urged. So long as I lived, I was the Son of God.

Whereas if now I jumped and was broken at the bottom, so could the Devil make all arrangement for me because I had gone to my death at his bidding.

And at this moment he opened his lips to say: "In secrecy will you be born. God will be unknowing. He cannot

keep record of all who are born each day and I have power to distract Him, and constantly."

And in this moment did I think of performing a miracle. I would leap but I would not fall. I would fly. By the power of the Lord would I fly.

Yet I did not know. I was like the nestling and not ready to leave the nest. If Satan now stood between my Father and me, might he not have the power to steal the benefices of the Lord? So I did not jump. I was in fear. Instead, I said: "It is also written: 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'" But I did not know whether I spoke of my own will or with words imparted to me by my Father.

Then the Devil led me from the spire of this Great Temple on up to an exceedingly high mountain, higher than all, and I would have shivered in my fast if it had been the peak of a true summit for, yea, we were surrounded by snow, yet it was but a vision, and from such height did he show me the kingdoms of the world, all of those to the north, the east, the south and the west. I saw wonders amid an orgy of joy; yet so much passed in parade and so fast that I knew such promises need never be kept. So, I said, "Get thee

hence, Satan." And to myself did I say, out of the strength which comes from emptiness itself (it being the wisdom of the Lord to show me at that moment how even in fasting was strength) for even out of emptiness could I find resolve to whisper to myself: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." And I had the power to look into the dark eyes of Satan and say: "It is not you I want, but my Father."

At that moment Satan gave a cry like a wild goat who is wounded with a spear. And he said to me: "Your Father will destroy the universe too soon. And for too little!" And he left. And behold, I had another vision of angels. And they gathered about to minister unto me and bathe my eyes. And I slept.

In the morning did I wake to see myself on this same mountain whereon I had lived for forty days and I was ready to come down from such a high slope and return to Nazareth. That proved to be a long road and I passed over it for the next day and the next, yet no brigands attacked. Which was as well for I knew that I was much spent by my hour with the Devil, and in my nostrils was my own breath foul. Nor did I

feel that I had escaped altogether from him. In rejecting Satan, so had I also been scraped sore in my judgment. Nor did I feel desire at that hour to serve the Lord.

Yet was I not wholly distraught. For as I marched, so could I recite the words of Isaiah: "Unto us," I declared, "a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of peace." And if I were not large enough for any of those words, and supposed that God had chosen me for His son because I was in the midst of all men, rather than unusual or like a monarch in any way, yet was I also close to many small virtues and common weak habits in others.

Whereby, if I could now increase in my powers, given all that He would now pass on to me, perhaps the world of men might also increase and multiply in virtue. No matter the derision of the Devil, so did I believe in my Father; the Lord was still my Father, and for Him would I labor. Soon would He come to save Jerusalem. He was Lord of the Universe. For Him would I labor, and with joy. For with Him would comfort come to those who are sorrowful and so would

the hungry be fed and even those sinners in greatest despair find their sins remitted, yea, even the unclean gentiles would be admitted to the table, and I knew God was good for I felt such joy at these thoughts. And I was no longer in fear of Satan. If some part of me had given ear to him, still had my visitor lost by the greater portion. He had captured but a small part. I had been tested, I had proved loyal--in the main had I proved loyal--and so could I believe that virtue was the finer reward. For now did my tongue feel clean.

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I returned to Galilee and entered Nazareth and came back to the house where I lived with my mother. So was she there to greet me and was much relieved. In all the forty and more days that I had been gone, she had supposed in the beginning that I was on a journey with my cousin but then heard near to mortal news of John, and that had come to pass while I was on the mountain. That son who was Herod Antipas lived in much distrust of John the Baptist for he had dreams that John would cause the people to rise against him. Therefore had he shut John away in a dungeon in the fortress of Machaerus in Perea. And by that, if by naught else, did I know that the time had come to leave Nazareth and take up a life of preaching as John had done.

Yet on speaking to my mother on such matters did much go wrong. She thought I should not be a preacher wandering on many roads to give blessings to strangers, but would do better to become a devout Essene. So would she propose that

I join the desert community of Essenes at Qumran. But that was neither to my understanding or desire since such men as would join must first confess all guilt and all sin.

Inasmuch as they were Jews, but not at Qumran, so had they been guilty of practices unfaithful to God. For only the Essenes in their community of Qumran were true Essenes--so they saw it. Devout men like Joseph who lived in their own villages were less.

And indeed, one gave all that one owned to the community at Qumran and lived among them for years as one who was still untested, and observed whole ritual of purity even to not touching the pots in which others prepared food, and one gave whole obedience to the leaders, not even speaking in their presence unless invited.

Since my mother knew how the angel had come to her, so did I not understand how she would want such a life for me when it was the Lord to whom I could submit for tests rather than the high priest of Qumran, but then my mother was not easy to know. If she was proud of me and most proud of my origin (about which we chose always not to speak), and if I were her favorite over her other sons John and James, causing

much rivalry between us as brothers until we were like a divided kingdom. Were all families thus divided?

Still was she fearful always of my well-being when I was away and was so expectant of catastrophes to befall me that fear lived like a night animal in our small house and indeed one could almost hear the scurrying of such fear in the dark.

Besides, she was modest and yet most vain, and I would suffer by both for her will was as if graven in stone, yet still did she see herself as small, and I as her favorite she saw as unready for the world which offered me small confidence for all I must now attempt.

And if I did not tell her where I had been nor what I had done for those forty days, still she knew that I had been near to my Father, and of that did she wish small part. Being a small woman with a heart of importance sufficient to fill the breast of a queen, so did she not enjoy what she could not understand.

Yet was she also a mother and knew me very well, even to sensing that it was not only my Father who had been with me, but the Other, and of Satan was she wholly afraid. No Essene who did not know that the Devil was the power of darkness.

Small wonder that she wished me to be guided by a community of the most devout where I could be found in one place.

Since she had a sense that catastrophe could befall me if I were to wander about, so were there times when I was most angry with her since she did not make my way easier. And indeed, she had the power to foretell many events.

Yet in the midst of much quiet but unyielding dispute between us came a diversion. A marriage was taking place in Cana, a town of two hours' walk from Nazareth, and the father of the bride, being a wealthy patron of the work of Joseph who had built his house, so was my mother invited as guest. And it was the first occasion on which she had left her home since Joseph had died. Thereby was she so uncertain of whether to go or not go that when we arrived, it was late, and the ceremony having but concluded, my mother, most embarrassed, looked about sharply and said to me, "They are without wine." And indeed the village had come to celebrate.

There was that in her voice to tell me how the spirit of happiness is prepared to depart quickly when a nuptial feast is dry. For that is an omen of misery upon a new husband and wife. So did I think to try such powers as might belong to

me even if never yet exercised.

Before me were six large stone jars of water, and on a table did I see one red grape which I ate slowly and with much contemplation of the spirit that resides in the grape. And indeed was an angel at my side and he was invisible to others. And in that instant did I know that the water in the jars had become wine, and this accomplished by no more than a clear recollection of such a taste.

If it was my first miracle, so was it done with much joy and I felt near to the Kingdom of God and knew that it was composed of much bounty and beauty and tenderness as gentle as the touch of fingertips. And so was I overcome with sorrow for I had a vision of a great feast that I would never see, and before long I departed and left it to my brothers to take my mother home.

But even as I left did I hear the toastmaster speak thus to the bridegroom: "Every host at the beginning doth set forth good wine, but when men have well drunk, then that which is less than good is presented. But thou hast kept your best wine for the end and your marriage will be blessed."

That was the commencement of my miracles and it took place in Cana of Galilee; howbeit I was not quick to feed upon praise since the angel sent by my Father was there to whisper into my thoughts, "Even as a barrel overflowing with honey is soon emptied, so does the foolish son scatter his store of miracles." But my mother was pleased that I had been able to show such wondrous courtesy to a rich bride, her groom, and their families, and it may be she knew what I had done for she accepted my departure next morning. And I left with no more than a staff, and a cloak, my sandals, and the tears of my mother.

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Now I had thought of preaching in Capernaum, more than half a day's walk from Nazareth, for it is on the Sea of Galilee between Cherazin and Magdala. Despite all that the Devil had told me concerning Isaiah's death, still did I think of the prophet as a guide, and he had written that "by way of the sea beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the gentiles, the people who sat in darkness saw a great light. And for them who sat in the shadow of death, light has sprung up." So, I chose Capernaum for its situation by the Sea of Galilee (which is not a sea but a great lake) and I liked Capernaum also for the river Jordan which flows by it south to Jerusalem, a city where preachers hope to arrive with all the power of all that they would say.

First, however, did I decide to commence with an effort more modest. My tongue had shown no facility equal to the skill of my hands with wood; my tongue could make fine fittings of words only when the Lord offered me speech; what

I uttered by myself was halting and often like an affliction. So, I thought before moving to Capernaum that I might ease such stricture by making a first preachment in Nazareth where some, at least, would know me.

I went to the synagogue and began to speak but could say hardly more than: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. We are close to the end of all we have known. Unless we repent, the end is near." Upon this came silence from the congregation since they expected more (and less--how could they wish the Day of Judgment to be on them so quickly, and indeed, it was a sunny morning in Nazareth.) I, thinking of how faith was most severe, yet must still be made to seem as natural as breath, said also: "I thank Thee, O Father, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

Later would I see what was written in the Gospel according to Luke, and his words were rank with exaggeration.

"And all they in the synagogue when they heard these things," wrote Luke, "were filled with wrath. And rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of a hill whereon their city was built that they might cast him

down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way."

Such was said by Luke, but then he was not a Jew, and full of wrath against Jews, and full of desire to teach others about matters he had neither seen nor understood.

In truth, having spoken my words in Nazareth in the temple where I had gone for all of my days as a young man, none were ready to laugh at me in such a place. Yet nonetheless did I feel their laughter creep out of their feet and such silent derision was like unto mice scampering over my feet. I felt much shame. Indeed, I could hear the whispers before they were spoken: "The carpenter doth tell us to repent." And others said, "What are these things that the Lord hides from the wise and prudent?"

So I knew that I must leave and move to places where I was not known. Thereby would people listen more to the words that God would give me so long as I could feel much joy that God was my Father and had chosen me for His only Son. And if this Son was simple, still would he strive to do the Lord great honor. So I vowed.

And even if the Devil had sought to teach me how to

linger upon such thoughts, I did my best not to think of women and tried not to care what spirit of nakedness a young woman might carry beneath her robe, nor how all of her might seem when revealed. In great cleanliness would be my joy even if such joy now had to suffer such shame as I had known in the synagogue at Nazareth. Wherefore had there been so little upon my tongue? And on this thought, so did all pretense vanish that I was near to joy.

At the Great Temple in Jerusalem when I was twelve, not one word had come halting to my tongue. The inspiration of the Lord had been in my veins on that day, whereas now, as I walked on the road from Nazareth to Capernaum, so did I come to understand that my heart was still as bruised as if rocks had fallen upon my chest from that high place where the Devil had spoken against my Father. And indeed he had uttered words so powerful that neither the conviction of my limbs nor the dedication of my spirit had been in my replies; the Devil had convinced me, if only for an instant, that while God might be my Father, He was not close to me in His sentiments. Might it be that I was too gentle in understanding to obey all orders of the Almighty? As the Devil had said, He was

vengeful.

Thereby, on the road to Capernaum, was I also with understanding that I had never felt great nearness to my Father. He was the Lord and, of necessity, far away.

Moreover, the Devil had mocked Him: yet neither had my Father defended Himself, nor struck lightning upon the mount. On that instant, in the midst of such thoughts, did I stumble on the road. It was a misstep most uncommon. For I was lithe of foot, yet fell heavily, as if a heavy arm had cast me to the earth. A strong voice entered my ear, and said: "Comprehend ye that the words of the prophets are not My words, even when they dare to speak in My name."

"But how do they dare?"--I did not declare these words, but merely thought such.

To which the voice grew softer and remarked: "My prophets are honest yet full of passions that bring them to excess."

I wished to ask if this was due to the work of the Devil. But I only said, "My Lord, I am well disposed toward men."

"You are as too well disposed," He said. "Soon will you

learn that but a portion are worth the saving."

"Nor am I with eloquence."

And the Lord said: "Moses also said: 'O Lord, I am slow of speech and with a slow tongue,' and I told him as I tell you: Who made man's mouth? Am I not the Lord? Therefore, go, and I will be with thy mouth and I will teach thee what thou shalt say. As I have done with Samuel the prophet, so will I not let any of your words fall to the ground. When you are ready to preach, ye enter the synagogue. And if you are seized and go before magistrates or other powers of the Romans, take no thought what to answer inasmuch as the Holy Ghost shall teach you in that same hour what will be there to say."

With that did I now know less uncertainty than in the synagogue at Nazareth, whereupon my Father also said, "You can do well in Capernaum. Get thee unto thy people, and speak unto them and tell them again and again for they are like stones and deaf, so tell them again: 'Thus saith the Lord God.' Be not concerned with whether they hear or forbear to hear, because words are also among My creatures and know how to travel by many roads."

Even as I came to my feet from the ground upon which He had thrust me, so did I feel the Spirit lifting me higher. My heart was full with joy again and much greater was this joy than before; it was like the Lord's reward for forty days of fasting.

And I heard the noise of living creatures who flew about me, and they were invisible, but I could hear their wings and then the sound of a thousand of chariots, a noise of great rushing that came to me as if from over the other side of a hill; so I knew the Spirit while uplifting me had also dissolved much that was lacking in faith. The hand of the Lord was now strong. So I came to Capernaum.

And on the road I spoke these words aloud:

"Ask, so shall it be given you.

"Seek, and ye shall find.

"Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

And was this true? The Lord spoke to me again: "When you believe in Me, miracles are in your hands, your eyes, and your voice."

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And there, my feet upon the small stones of the pebbled shore by the Sea of Galilee, did I see two fishermen. And they were casting their nets. I was much taken with how they appeared to me. For they were large men of much power in their shoulders, and with large hands, and the oldest of the two, who was yet younger than myself, was, I would soon learn, named Simon and the other was his brother Andrew. And I noticed how Simon, once he had pulled in the fish and emptied his nets, came upon a tear in the net and with strips of rawhide did he mend this flaw with dexterity, and quickly.

And I thought to myself, there is need of a man who can mend nets; if by one skill he captures the fish, by another does he prevent the losing of them. And I said without caution, and yet did my voice have to carry what distance it would take to cast a small stone, still I said, "Come ye after me and I will make you fishers of men." And I said it

with great merriment and joy for I realized that to be without other men for forty days is also a fast of much emptiness, and if I had seen men and women at the wedding and in the synagogue of Nazareth, still they were not of my choice, not friends nor fellow hard workers and apprentices.

So I saw these two fishermen as good men, and loved their hands as they cast their nets with a quiet wisdom and thereby put a small spell upon the sea in order that they might bring back many fish. And since I was a carpenter and knew less of water than of wood, thereby was I taken with their work and it was clear to me that fish might live in a spell within the spell of water that is about them; so must a fisherman be with his own powers of spirit if he is to take such creatures into his net.

And so, "Yes," I said, and was like a man of wealth in my enthusiasm, "come ye after me and I will make you to become fishers of men." And between their eyes and mine was a compact across this space of water. Now, for the first time could I feel how many powers had God helped me to wrench from Satan. And that was in equal measure to how much Satan had been willing to offer of his secrets in seeking to

capture me.

Yet now with the help of the Lord could I use Satan's manner when speaking to many. I would address them with the finest courtesy and the most intimate exhilaration, as if we shared among ourselves and only ourselves the wonder of many things.

And I recalled that before Satan departed he had said to me, "I am with high regard for you and would touch your hand," and I had done so. Being afraid of Satan and anxious for him to depart, so, therefore, had I touched my right hand to his, and knew then that I had surrendered a small share of the Lord's protection.

Yet had God also wrenched much power from Satan. For no sooner had Simon and Andrew, his brother, brought their boat to the shore and cast their catch into bags of cloth, and picked them up than they came with me down the road to a small house. There was I introduced to James the son of Zebedee and John his brother (even as I had two brothers with such names) and they, also being fishermen, were by the shore mending their nets. Yet so soon as Simon called to them, did they leave their father Zebedee alone with his hired

servants, and they came along with us. Yet, these two, James and John, were the sons of a rich man, and so I had to wonder if they were more ready for diversion than for prayer. In which case, I had made a mistake. Yet did Simon, whom I soon began to call Simon Peter, vouch for them and he was strong, and would be my rock. Which Peter is a name for rock. And Peter would be with me in all hours but one.

So did I march to Capernaum with my four followers, and if we did not speak, still there was understanding between us for I looked at each of them, and saw more to honor than to despise. And as we walked, Peter chose to draw me aside and he said, "Two nights ago did we have a great catch of fish and the nets were so heavy our boat nearly foundered, yet I prayed and we were saved, and in my prayer did I see your face," Whereupon did Peter fall on his knees, and declare: "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord," whereupon I took his hand and told him that he was a good man as well as I could measure it. And I added that his presence would strengthen me in Capernaum where we would do well for it would not be as Nazareth. And so did we go to the synagogue where I preached the wisdom of John the Baptist.

It was the Sabbath and many were there and I understood that if I had found Peter and Andrew and James and John busy at their labors on the Sabbath when all work was forbidden, it was because they did not keep mark of each day but labored as fishermen who know only when their own waters are ready. So I also knew they would not be learned enough to preach with me on this day. Yet was I eloquent by myself.

I spoke to that congregation in the synagogue of Capernaum of how much of God's heart was heavy inasmuch as He had created Adam and Eve and then, from the multitude of men and women He had created, so had He selected His own chosen people, and if these people were His Jews, now were some faithful but many were not, even most were not, and were sinners. Yet God had prepared a heaven for those Jews that He could judge with respect and happiness, and such would He accept in His Kingdom after their death.

Whereas those who betrayed the Commandments and the law, those who denied the presence of God before them in their souls, those who chased after sin and folly, would suffer judgment of other shades and depths. For as the stone steps of the dungeon descend into cell beneath cell, so are sinners

who do not repent brought down into hell, and know thereby the sides of the pit step by step. So do they also know how the earth can tremble in earthquake as they recognize but too late the power of that Hand which brings downfall to a kingdom. Even as a mouse is trodden underfoot! Words of great strength were in me, and I spoke with the force of a man who hefts a sword, indeed had I never felt such strength.

"Repent," did I say, "and ye will have remission of all your sins." And by this doctrine of John the Baptist, did I speak as one who had authority and my voice was lifted above the singsong of many Pharisees and scribes who in this synagogue of Capernaum as in all others would only read from the scrolls in a weak and whining song, even a droning of the spirit as if their throats had been dulled by much compromise in themselves until now they could not speak out but from the dying coals of their spirit as it hissed and expired. Whereas I was with full voice.

And I said, nor did I know I would say this until my voice rang forth: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, wilt thou cast out our

devils?' And then will they be cast out. For I will say, 'I never knew ye. Depart, ye that work iniquity.'"

And it was as I said. A man came forward from the midst of the congregation and I could see that he was fearful to others, and looking much like a brigand. His nose was broken, and he had scars on his face, an old brute with a spirit so unclean that the stench of his body came before him. Yet he cried out, saying, "What have we to do with thee, thou Yeshua of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us?" And mockingly did he say, "The holy one of God!"

And I saw that his features had once been noble but had been thickened with the blows he received by way of the unrest within him. So I stood in my place as he approached. And I stared into his eyes and said, "Hold thy peace."

He stopped.

I knew that his unclean spirit must be drawn forth from his heart and chest even as a small beast is torn from a burrow, yet did I also know that he had come to me so that such evil thoughts might be seized and brought forth. Nor did I have need of a magician's ring nor of secret herbs to place beneath his nostrils, but with the breath of the Holy

Spirit I said: "Hold thy peace, evil spirit. Come forth. Come out of him!"

And it was then that this demon tore forth from his throat. And it cried aloud in a bestial voice as it came out of him.

This unclean spirit was invisible, yet still was it thrown into the midst of the synagogue, and benches fell over. There was a wind on the floor, and dust, and then all such disturbance was gone.

The good Jews of the synagogue were amazed. In the main were they were pious people and their greatest fear, and none greater, was to be closed into a room with unclean spirits; they knew not how to resist them; so would they have no traffic with people who gave entrance or egress to such. Therefore did they now say, and they were amazed: "What thing is this? What new doctrine? Doth he even command unclean spirits?"

And in that moment it was true that I felt as if I had hurled a great stone far into the midst of the Sea of Galilee and ripples had gone to every shore, for by the time my new friends Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John and I came

out of the synagogue and entered into the house of Simon Peter and Andrew, it was as if I could hear accounts of my presence spreading throughout all the region of Galilee and such words washed forth in all directions to pass my words unto others.

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So full was I with the strength of all these matters that when we came into Peter's house, and the mother of his wife was lying there sick of a fever, I had only to take her by the hand; that was encouragement sufficient for her to rise from her bed. When she stood, so did I feel how her fever had left and she was much heartened by this ministrations and cooked for us and we were well fed.

In that evening, friends of Simon and Andrew and James and John came to the house with a few of those who were diseased or who thought themselves possessed of devils and I felt ready for many missions.

Cures came quickly that night and brought me great joy for I had no more than to put my hand upon someone or kiss them on the cheek and out came many small devils and by each of these who came out so was the person before me able to say farewell to divers diseases. And the devils, much frightened, did not even have to speak as they issued--which

is just as well, for they make a terrible sound when aroused enough to protest.

Then in the morning, did Peter say to me, "All men now seek for thee and I fear excess, and would caution thee against the curious. They seek to witness miracles. And they will form thy throng, and bring great attention to you. But will that give power to change men's souls?"

Feeling much impressed with such wisdom, I asked after his thoughts, and he told me how in these years of laboring as a fisherman, he had been waiting for a sign from the Lord; thereby, on seeing me had he known that I was a prophet.

His speech gave me cause to think of John the Baptist in the dungeon of Herod Antipas. And on my next breath did I know pain like a knife within my chest. If the Lord had given me great powers, thereby was I also open to sudden catastrophe, and I encouraged Peter and Andrew and James and John to leave with me so that we might go to other synagogues in Galilee and cast out devils there, as if fewer the devils surrounding us, safer was my cousin. And myself. Besides, it would be better to do the deed and leave others behind with wonder than to remain in their circle until this wonder

had been converted to dissension. And I knew I was thinking with the wisdom of Peter.

In the courtyard of another synagogue in another town, a leper came to me and knelt and asked, "Canst thou make me clean?" When I was silent, he said, "Until I am clean, I cannot enter the synagogue. Yet if I cannot enter, how may I become clean?"

I did not know. To cure a leper was a miracle of higher order, much higher. But so did I also know compassion because of the pain in his eyes. And I whispered to the Lord, "Grant me such power on this day."

As I looked at the leper, God gave me to remember the rod of Moses, and how God said to him: "Cast it on the ground." And Moses did so, and the rod became a serpent, and Moses fled before it. But the Lord also said: "Put forth thy hand and take it by the tail," and when Moses caught the serpent by the tail, it had become again a rod in his hand. And the Lord said: "Put down thy hand unto thy bosom," and Moses did as he was told, and when he took his hand out, behold, it was as leprous as snow, and God said, "Put thy hand in thy bosom again," and Moses put his hand into his

bosom again, and plucked it out, and behold, it was like his other flesh.

Having remembered this, I heard God say to me, "Do it, and it shall be done even as if I did it," and I realized that my Father was now offering those powers once given to Moses.

So, when I put forth my hand and touched the leper, I said no more than, "Be thou clean."

And leprosy departed from him and he was cleansed. And so great a miracle was this that I told him: "Say nothing to any man. Go thy way and be a testimony unto the commandments."

But he went out and in the hour began to blaze abroad on this cure of his leprosy whereupon he caused such excitement in the multitude that I knew it was time to go back to the desert or I would be inundated with lepers. I did not need the Lord to tell me that there were grave obstacles to curing them all.

For if it was true that the diseases of man were also ranked and much like the angels in hierarchy of powers, so to cure the highest disease, which is but another way of saying

the lowest, or the worst, was to ask the Holy Spirit to descend by ten more dimensions into the pit and I was weak already from curing my first leper. And so might God be diminished as well for it was by the aid of the Holy Ghost that I brought forth my cures and what was the Holy Ghost but the bond between my Father and myself?

So, I fled to the desert and told my followers that I would meet them in Capernaum.

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For a night and for another night I was with snakes and scorpions and did my best to live next to them without fear. In which practice I was not wholly successful, but did recall that John the Baptist could pick up a scorpion and converse with it while in his hand, nor did it sting.

My return to Capernaum was with good omen. The first man to speak to me was a centurion with handsome armor upon his chest, and on his helmet was an eagle. This Roman stood before me, a proud man; who could say how many were dead by his sword? Yet was he polite to me, saying, "Lord, my good servant is sick of a palsy and grievously demented."

And without pause I replied: "Let me come and heal him."

In increase of my respect did the centurion now answer, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof, but if you speak the word, my servant shall be healed. I am a man who has authority to command a soldier to go, and he

goeth. And to another, I tell him 'Come,' and he cometh. So, my sick servant will do what needs to be done should ye give me the power to tell him to rise."

And this centurion had tears in his eyes so that I marveled, and turned to my followers and said, "Have I found so great a faith in anyone so early in these days? No, not in all of Galilee." And I said to the centurion, "Go! Your servant will be healed."

And thereby was it done. As others came to tell me. And by this I knew that if all was well, so could I pass some of God's power over to others.

And I was pleased with the warmth of those who welcomed me in the market and on the streets of Capernaum. Many passed to give greeting, and Simon Peter told me that Capernaum, though but a small city, was of great attraction for men who did not know women but only other men. So also was I told that such men would cover their lips with the juice of red berries, and in the taverns, they would speak of how the bravest of the Greeks were Spartans who lived entirely as men in the arms of each other.

To which others would dispute as follows: "So did these

Spartans also live with the sword. Whereas you live with such coloring as women seek for their lips?"

Nonetheless, did I feel affection for these sodomites even as I encountered them in Capernaum. They were tender in spirit and gave welcome to me, and would congregate about me beneath a tree inasmuch as they were not welcome in the temple.

There, each day I preached of the incarceration of John the Baptist who was with me in spirit at all times and all but upon me, and I spoke with the clarity that comes from not knowing what gives fire to one's speech but only that one's thoughts are full and no word goes in search of the next. And more gathered each day at the synagogus until there was no bench to receive them, not even in the vestibule nor outside the door. And one day came a man with palsy wholly paralyzed and he was borne toward me by four other men who could not even find approach because of the press of those listening, so in their desperation did these four take a ladder and climb upon the roof, and even broke a hole between two rafters so they could lower the bed of the man with palsy nearer to where I spoke.

And when I saw such exhibition of faith in me, so did I also know that the desperation in his bearers could also show proof that their concern for this man was worthy. Without pause, did I say: "Thy sins be forgiven thee." For by dint of the cures I had already accomplished, I knew that those who are ill and have undergone much torment and now came to me were accepting the weight of their sin; a man paralyzed by palsy was equal in his suffering to the evil he had disseminated. In his case, it was great for he did not believe he had sanction to move a limb. So I forgave him without hesitation; his repentance was present in his arms and legs, and they were stricken.

Yet among the scribes of the synagogue there was much affront. I heard one say, "Why doth this man Jesus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins? God only, and no other."

So did I know that I had been in error to speak without caution. Yet already did I find it difficult to bear the presence of those who were pious. Even more noxious to me were the most pious; the odor of their sanctity was like unto the death of shellfish when they die by the shore of that sea which had once been of nourishment to them.

Whereupon I said, and still was I without caution: "Why seek to reason these things? Know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins. So I say unto this man with palsy: 'Take up your bed, and go to your house.'" And the man arose, and neither was he a large man, but his bed he took up and carried it forth from the synagogue before them all; if he staggered it was only by a little. So were they much amazed.

And on leaving the temple that day, a multitude from Capernaum chose to follow me and again I did my best to teach them in the shade beneath a tree.

Each day did I come to understand better why Jehovah had chosen me. I could see how God, my Father, in the breadth of His dimension would be sore tried for patience with us considering how often we had consumed His charity by repeating our sins and much repeating them. So were men too small to comprehend Him. Thereby, did He have need of me to understand their errors, even as I had known great emptiness when I had fasted and so could now comprehend those waste-places in the temple of our bodies where no pride can stir over one's good deeds, and the soul is as a void before the

memory of its sins.

Now, I could not say that the Lord spoke to me on every day for there were many occasions when I was alone and without Him. Yet when I roused myself from sleep, it was as if He had always been there to impart much.

And later in the day I would know when the Lord's voice was speaking through me for then my tongue was with felicity and my mind with prowess I did not know at other times. And my utterances were of peril to me for many were the words my heart would not have dared to utter if unsupported by the Lord.

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Soon did I begin to contemplate my need for disciples who would follow me on every day of the year, and would work at those daily tasks of which I had much ignorance, and would have much to say to people of many kinds. So, when I saw Levi sitting at the customs house, I said: "Follow me." And said it for no more than I could understand in this but that he had a good and merry face. And there was light in his eyes.

Levi arose and came with us. Nor did I concern myself that his duties were as a tax collector. Thereby would I yet learn that nigh to few men in Galilee and Judea were as unpopular as these publicans who worked in customs houses collecting taxes for Romans. Rather would I measure a sinner by what gleamed in his eye. For even a man who would cheat others or would work for the Romans often revealed more of God to me than I could see in those who were sinless but downcast.

Moreover did I have need of twelve men, so that there by one for each of the tribes of Israel, twelve men who could return my look when I stared at them and allow me to see what was in their souls. For in that manner was I always able to forgive them. Nor did it mean I saw such men as free of much warping of the soul within. Yet could I also recognize, as if God had given me the power to journey to the bottom of the sea, that in their eyes was a soul who would walk down every road with me. Or so I thought.

There was one for whom I could not declare such, and he was Judas, yet so beautiful with his dark beard that I wished him to be among my twelve even if I could not perceive what was in his expression inasmuch as his eyes were too full of fire; indeed, I was as if blinded by the smoke and fumes of his spirit. But then he was the son of a wealthy man and hated his father. Notwithstanding, I welcomed him. For he claimed to love the poor, saying that he had been long close to the rich, and long enough to despise them.

By such means did I choose twelve men who should be with me, and I had hope that I could send them forth to preach once I could gird them with the power to cast out devils.

And for that must they come nearer and nearer to me. If I had already Simon Peter, also did I have James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, and Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas, and another named James, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot of whom I have spoken.

Yet in choosing these disciples had I encouraged much dissatisfaction among the Pharisees. When I would sit at meat in the house of Levi, so with the rest of my twelve did many publicans and sinners sit also with us, and many tax collectors now followed me. Being full of shame before other Jews, and heavy in their hearts that they worked for the Romans, such publicans had much need of me.

But when the scribes and Pharisees saw me eating with them, so did they speak to my other disciples, saying: "How is it that he eateth and drinketh with those dregs?" I was not eager to widen what separation was there between myself and these Pharisees of Capernaum, yet did I say: "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick need much. I am here not to call the righteous to repentance, but the sinners."

And I debated how to tell these righteous Pharisees that sinners, having encountered the Evil Spirit, may even come to know surfeit of their appetites. Whereas the pious fester in the weariness of their wars against Satan.

Therefore was I happy in the house of Levi even while speaking to many sinners. Some, indeed, were of disreputable pursuits, and some were poor and unwashed, (for Levi was generous) yet by coming to know such people, so did I begin to ponder a grave question. And that was the absence of my Father's presence in many who were rich. They did not use the bounty of their wealth for others, whereas here, at the table of Levi, among these poor sinners who were his friends, did I see how there was much petty injury each could do upon another yet also much of simple pity would they feel for poor friends beside them; so, the faces of these poor guests at Levi's table shone for me with a dignity not unlike the grain of unpolished wood that has known much exposure to the goodness and wrath of sun and rain.

Such argument would not suffice when with scribes and Pharisees; so would they say to me, "The disciples of John the Baptist did fast. Why do thy disciples fast not?" And

so pious were their voices that at night I would brood over those Jews who spoke for my religion and drove away sinners. And I would reply: "New wine must be put into new bottles."

Yet were there many questions for me. If sinners were those who no longer observed the law, then why was I with men who would rather eat and drink than pray? Still those who prayed in the synagogue often thought of no more than that they were children of Abraham and no more was needed, and this at a time when God needed much from all of His people. And I would say to myself that a feast would come when all the pious would be cast out and the poor and the sinful would be invited to the banquet. And with that would I drink my wine even noting that wine, to which I was not accustomed, the drinking of wine in my family being saved for ceremony and solemn custom, had now become much wine-drunk and at every meal since these publicans, having money, drank wine so often they were rarely solemn.

Still did I trust the spirit of warmth and rich fellowship between us. The wedding of my Father with his people might be soon to come, and at such time who could fast

when there was so much yet to do in preparing the way for the Lord and too much ministry yet to be accomplished for me to fast. My ministry would be joyful and have God among us, or so would it fail since to fast would bring down gloom among us and we would be like all those pious who accomplish nothing but to fear God, praise Him with their words, and yet be so full of fear of men that they can never praise Him with their deeds.

Such thoughts would I have with the wine. There was so little time. One had to sup with the sinners.

Yet did I also know that the pious would look upon me as eating with the unclean and so would they believe I was becoming unclean myself; so would my mother see it, and my brothers.

I knew otherwise. With the gifts given to me by my Father could I now bring salvation to sinners, and for that did I need men who could go among them. Yet did my head whirl with the joy and vertigo of the wine for so many were the problems and obstacles I could foresee. For every pagan who would seek baptism and cast out his allegiance to pagan gods, would there be a family, his family, to cast him out

for renouncing his pagan gods. Yes, "New wine must be put into new bottles," but where was the artisan who knew the shape of the bottle?

This difference was made worse on the day that my publicans walked through corn fields on the Sabbath, and plucked ears of corn. Whereupon the Pharisses said, "To pluck corn on this day is not lawful." And when I gave answer, my voice was in a race with my cautions, so that my speech was almost not uttered, yet did it gain a victory after all, saying: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

Then, on the next Sabbath, when I entered into the synagogue so was a man there with a withered hand; many Pharisees now watched to see if I would seek to heal him for they were ready to accuse me.

Still, was I confident that I could not serve my Father if I did not speak what was in my thoughts; had these thoughts been in error, so would my Father have rebuked me; no rebuke had come. Therefore, on this Sabbath in Capernaum did I say to the man with the withered hand: "Stand forth."

And I asked of the congregation, "Is it lawful to do

good on the Sabbath? Is it lawful to save life?"

No one among them could answer. They had not the courage to say "Cure him." Now, the hardness of their hearts (wherein no heart is so hard as the cautious heart) did infuriate me. I spoke to the man, saying: "Stretch forth thine hand," and when he did, so did I not even have to touch it; at once could I see how his hand was restored to him as whole as the other. Yet did I also feel a great anguish. For in the mystery of this power to heal which the Lord had given me, had something been injured by pride in myself? For now did I understand, even as many Pharisees in much displeasure stood forth and left the synagogue, that a time might come when I must go to war with some of my own people. Would they then be lost forever to what had been prepared for me to teach?

And indeed, later that night, one of my disciples made claim to have heard how that day two Pharisees in the synagogue took counsel with officers of Herod Antipas living in Capernaum; among them had been discussion of how this Yeshua of Nazareth might be stilled. And on hearing such words, I knew that I must flee from Capernaum and go to those

shores of the Sea of Galilee which are empty. For Yeshua of Nazareth would not seem like a god to the officers of Herod, no, more like a poor Jew.

Yet was I far from alone. My disciples accompanied me to these wildernesses, and with them, came many from Galilee. So did the word announced by John the Baptist pass through the hills and valleys of Israel, even into the mountains; already were there men and women in this solitude who came from Israel and even beyond the Jordan, a great multitude. And as they gathered about me, I was not ready to speak for fear of being engulfed by their needs; indeed, my disciples were now obliged to compare themselves as soldiers, and become as my guard. Yet still did I feel the contemplation of many people and such agony to reach as did to touch me, until as they were about that I was deprived of the power to care, and, truth, I had braved enough to think of my own work when they were done.

So I told my disciples to find me a small ship that could wait in a cove of the Sea of Galilee so that I could be near to shore, but apart, and would preach from the prow.

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Yet was I far from alone. My disciples accompanied me to these wilder shores, and with them, came many from Galilee. So did the word commenced by John the Baptist pass through the hills and valleys of Israel, even into the mountains; already were there men and women in this multitude who came from Idumea and even beyond the Jordan, a great multitude. And as they gathered about me, I was not ready to speak for fear of being encompassed by their need; indeed, my disciples were now obliged to comport themselves as soldiers, and become as my guard. Yet still did I feel the consternation of many people and much agony to reach me and to touch me, until so many were about that I was deprived of the power to cure, and, truth, I had bruises enough to think of my own sores when day was done.

So I told my disciples to find me a small ship that could wait in a cove of the Sea of Galilee so that I could be near to shore, but apart, and would preach from the prow,

yet return to land long enough to touch a few.

And while waiting, I went up onto a mountain, but many followed. I came down by another path to a town near Capernaum and entered a house where I was welcome, and still did a multitude surround the house and there were scribes from Jerusalem in the multitude.

Soon did I hear that one of these scribes had said to another, "By Beelzebub, prince of the devils, doth he cast out devils." And I knew great danger was there for me and my disciples. Such word could overflow the land. Even as I was gaining knowledge of how to cure, so was a plague of ill spirit swelling in readiness to oppose me, and it would thrive in the hearts of the righteous; they would see my efforts as Devil's labor: For how could a poor man like myself command miracles? And many were saying that I would deny the Ten Commandments and much of the law surrounding those sacred tablets. And indeed, good Pharisees and their scribes and their priests looked to make a world where people were law-abiding. So did I know that I must speak to these two scribes from Jerusalem who had come to look upon me, for by their eyes did they appear to be of some wisdom.

So, I said: "You call me Satan. Yet how then can I cast him out and leave his devils upon the floor like a wind of dust? If I am a demon and destroy other demons, how am I not destroying myself? If Satan casts out Satan, then he is a house divided. But a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, nor a house divided; how then can Satan rise up against himself?"

It was then, feeling the force of such argument, that a rage was in me, and most unexpected, for it brought even stranger words to my throat, and I said: "I would warn you. All sins can be forgiven, except for he who shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost. Such a man is in danger of eternal damnation." And these scribes went away without reply for they heard my speech as a threat. But then they did not wish to enjoy the good news I brought which was that I came from He who was at war with all demons and their leader, the Devil who commanded demons.

Indeed, had I spoken in tones so baleful that I no longer knew whose voice I uttered. For my Father had not seemed near to me in that instant, and so I was not without thought that the Devil had slipped into my argument. Still

did I know that one must not blaspheme against the Holy Ghost for His Spirit was the bond between my Father and me.

It was a day of many ills. To this same house now came my mother, and my half-brothers, James and John, and standing outside they called for me, but the multitude were pressed all about, and I could neither see them nor hear them. Then one man in this multitude said, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren are without and seek for thee," and I heard them call, but so had I also heard of what my brothers had been saying and my mother Mary in fearful argument with them, that by performing cures on the Sabbath and consorting with publicans and sinners, so must I now be mad and full of my own devils. Thereby did I know that my mother had come with my brothers to lead me home. So when they called again, for they were pressed to the outside by the multitude surrounding the house, I could neither see them nor hear them, but one man from this multitude insisted upon them and said, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren seek for thee," whereupon I was as if in a fever, for I uttered these words: "Who is my mother or my brethren?" And looked around the room as if I had need of every man and woman in it, and said,

"Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and my mother." And to drive her away in my thoughts did I think of how Mary when young had filled me with fear of Romans and of wealthy Jews who were of more consequence than ourselves. Whereas I had need in this hour of much confidence and no fear.

Later did I hear that my mother wept when my words were repeated to her, and then did I wish to gather such words back. For I owed much to her even if those roads traveled together had never been smooth, not from my birth, and especially with my half-brothers, but then could I also know that she had lived in much anxiousness over the great secret of my birth and was never without her most intimate visions of catastrophe yet to befall me.

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In the evening, sorrowing over these harsh words concerning her, so did I feel much need to be calmed by the sea and said to my disciples, "Let us pass over to the other side."

Now, they had been feasting in all houses that bid us welcome and I had noticed that the rich in these towns near Capernaum were ready to welcome my disciples. So they ate much and drank much and with few cares. But I had need of peace. I was weary.

In these weeks they had brought unto me many taken with diseases and torments, and many possessed with devils, and those who were lunatic and those with palsy; with all I had worked to heal. And in each such moment when the Holy Spirit came to me and passed from my heart to my hand, thereby did my touch make them well.

Yet, in each of such instants, did I have memory again of the leap that I did not take on the fortieth night at the

invitation of the Devil. Now, therefore, must I leap out with the spirit of healing given to my hand onto the body of whoever was before me. Yet did my cowardice also accompany me with each cure. For it is cowardly to fear death as I had feared it with the Devil. Now must I make amends by recalling that moment each time, and that was just; later, I did not feel unseemly pride over my cures. And I would wonder whether in that moment when I had looked to save my body had I thereby been joined to the Devil in some manner I could not fathom, so that, no matter my loyalty to God, still would a part of me, no matter how reduced, belong to Satan.

A new unhappiness of spirit commenced. And it increased yet even as more people came toward us, so did I heal many. Not all, but the better part of all. Yet were there a few I could not cure. For these had a great and evil light in their eye dark as the darkest angels of Satan. I knew I had need again of the sea, or even of a lake so large that it might be like the sea.

And so I told my nearest followers to send away these multitudes. For it was evening. And when most were gone, we went quickly to a ship, albeit still were there some who

followed us in smaller ships. And all came close to disaster when a great wind arose on the Sea of Galilee.

The waves beat upon our vessel and near covered it. And even if it were tumult for others, I knew naught of this for I slept like one newborn; peace was given to me by the rocking of the water. Yet when they brought me awake, it was to say, "Many boats will soon founder. Master, dost thou not care if we perish?"

So, I made ready to rebuke the storm, and said unto the sea, "Bridle thy wind. Be still," and there was calm. But in truth, I do not know if I can take such making of a miracle unto myself for in the midst of this storm, still did I sense on awakening how a calm was coming and so knew before others that the end of the storm was also near. Nonetheless did I take the pleasure of saying: "Why so fearful? Have you no faith?"

And I could hear them, one to another: "What manner of man is this? Even do the seas obey him."

And the wharf where we landed was in the country of the Gadarenes near the shores of Decapolis, a pagan city in the land of the gentiles, and I felt much cleanliness of

excitement yet also know uneasiness for this was neither our land nor friendly and we had come to a beach in back of which were cliffs with many tombs.

Out of one of these tombs now descended a giant of a man with a torch, and his spirit was most unclean. The fire of the torch was fierce from his breath. And quickly did he come toward me. No man among my followers, not even Peter, was ready to resist this man nor bind him, for as all could see, he was a son of the nephilim who are the fallen ones. And his ancestors had been angels who had come to earth and lusted after women and male children. And they were giants and brought much violence upon us, and were also pagans. Such was this giant.

Yet even as I said, "Peace," so did he stop.

But he said, "No man can bind me. Not by chains. Chains I break asunder. No man can command me."

"Then from where comes your fear?"

"I am afraid of all things," he replied. "By day I live in the darkness of the tombs, and I weep. I tear at myself with sharp stones. I cut my flesh. But of you have I heard word. So, I worship you. I know of you."

"What have you heard?" I asked.

"That your eyes have a great light," he said, "and your name is Jesus. And more have I heard from those who dare to speak to me." And by the trembling of his lips did I also know that he was ready to call out the name of my Father, and this was a warning unto me that I not abuse his fear and that I seek for no power over him even as he desired me to exercise such power and free him of his demons. (Yet also did I think that it took a gentile rather than a Jew to recognize me.) And all the while did he keep speaking, and indeed it was of his devils. "All speak in terror of who I am. Know ye who? I am he who contains more devils than any other has been strong enough to support in his heart. So, I adjure thee: Torment me not, Jesus! This is fair warning."

I was not without much fear of my own in speaking to this man; he had more strength even than Peter whose strength was kin to a bull. Moreover did this fellow live in great filthiness of person. His hair met his beard and these locks were like fards of the great rope that is used to hold ships with much cargo to their mooring.

Now he said: "I have fear of myself. I live in the

tombs of those who are damned."

"What is thy name?"

He answered, saying: "My name is Legion. We are many, and the sum of this many are in me."

In truth, I knew that he was with many devils, yet was I still forced to speak directly, as if the hand of the Lord was upon my back, and urging me forward: "The devils who devoured King Herod are now in you," I said. "Release yourselves, unclean spirits! Release yourself from Legion." An I growled like a beast, even as Essenes do to enforce any commandment they receive from the Lord. And as I growled, so did a great herd of wild swine come rushing out of the tombs, and a great turmoil of devils issued from the throat of Legion, screaming as they were put out, and in their tongues I heard, or so seemed it to me: "Give us entrance! Entrance into the swine of Gadarene." For that they saw as their safety since a demon must inhabit a body whether a human or a beast. But so then did I trick these demons for I gave leave, yet did I also know that not even the swine could bear such a foul invasion. Whereupon these unclean spirits having poured forth out of Legion, rushed with a great noise into

the herd of swine, and they in revulsion (for they could not abide the entrance of so many devils) now ran violently down a gorge into the sea. These swine were in numbers two thousand. And all such hogs and sows were choked in the sea, all these swine of Gadarene. And they drowned. And the demons with them. Nor can I say that I took thought for the pagans who owned and lost such beasts.

Others soon came to look at this man who had been possessed by so many devils. But now they found Legion clothed and bathed and returned to his right spirit. Yet were the elders of the town of Gadarene afraid, and they entreated me to depart from their coast.

As I returned to my ship, Legion began to beg of me. He wanted to come along. I was near-tempted, for he would have made a mighty apostle. Yet their number was already twelve--no more could I increase such a sum, no more than I could add another tribe to the twelve of Israel. Moreover, was he a pagan. Moreover, did I expect that the separation of Legion from all of his unclean spirits might not last through a long night. Yet also did I wonder whether this was betrayal of the Lord's ministry to send such a man away; therefore, did I

feel no pride in my heart at saying to him, "Go to thy friends and tell them what happened today." Yet, in part, did I still abhor the man, for I had heard the uproar of much horror in those demons as they passed into the swine, even as they perished.

After he departed, Legion spoke well of me among the gentiles in the town of Decapolis, and I also heard of those who did marvel at his words inasmuch as they had known Legion in former days and all had been terrified of him.

Now, on my return, as we journeyed by ship back to Capernaum, again were many people gathered and I had to preach to them from my boat.

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When I came finally to shore, one of the rulers of the synagogue, and his name was Jairus, came forward to meet me and this man Jairus fell at my feet; no one of the elders of the synagogue had heretofore offered more than a place to teach (and this most grudgingly). Yet here was Jairus. And he besought me greatly, saying "My little daughter lies near death. I pray thee, come and lay hands on her that she shall be healed and shall live."

And in that way did I learn how faith was not unlike loss of faith, inasmuch as both stole in silently around the corners of the heart. I understood that if the rulers of the synagogue had not shown me approval, so did it not mean that I had failed to enter into the secrecy of their hearts. And feeling much strengthened by this, I went with Jairus to his house, and without hesitation, and many people made a throng around us. Still, at that moment, did I know that someone had done something ill to me, for I felt all virtue leave me,

and I turned about and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

One of my disciples said: "Thou seeest the multitude and thou sayest 'Who touched me?'" But then a woman spoke in fear and with much trembling and fell down before me even as she spoke the truth and said, "I have had an issue of blood for twelve years and have suffered many bad things with physicians. I have spent all that I have saved and have only grown worse. But I have heard of you, and was among those who were about you. From behind, did I reach through to touch your garment. For I thought: 'If I reach his cloth, I shall be whole.' And it was so. The fountain of my blood ceased to pour forth."

By her face could I see that she spoke the truth, and I felt gentle toward her pain. Such constant issue of blood left her ritually impure and so she could not go to the synagogue, no more than the leper. So it was not hard to forgive her for stealing up behind me.

I told her, "Daughter, go in peace and be healed again tomorrow of this plague." And even as I spoke, came servants of the house of Jairus, and said to him, "Thy daughter is dead."

Nor did I know what to say, for now I could fear that the ailing woman had seized all virtue I had been garnering to save the child.

Yet in that instant was my Father there to speak through me, and I felt more of His strength than I had known before and saw how such power could be drawn from the bowels of the earth and the light of the sky, inasmuch as my own sight was now luminous to me, and I turned to the ruler of the synagogue and said, "Jairus, be not afraid. Only believe," and at that moment, I had hope the daughter was not dead but rather rested in that long shadow of sleep which comes to those who have need of death. For out of such state could I save her. But I did not know if I could bring her forth to return from those who are truly dead.

Whereupon I recited to myself the words of the prophet Isaiah, as indeed I would on each other attempt I would make to raise those who were gone and departed. I said to myself: "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs."

Then, suffering no man to follow me save Peter and James, and John the brother of James, we came to the house of

Jairus and saw a great tumult within where many wept and much wailing arose. And when I entered, I said: "Why make this ado? The damsel is not dead but sleeps."

And I said this to calm their voices. I knew that to raise the dead was a matter for silence; tumult can drive the dead further away. Therefore did I ask all mourners to go out from the house and I told the high servants of this ruler of the synagogue to return with Jairus and his wife, and by their side did I go in to where their daughter was lying. And I took her, and held her hand, and recited those words I remembered well from the scroll of the Second Kings, saying: "When Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his rest, and Elisha went in and shut the door and prayed unto the Lord. And he lay upon the child and put his mouth upon the child's mouth and his eyes upon the child's eyes and his hands over the boy's hands, and he stretched himself upon the child and the flesh of the child was now warm, and the child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes."

"And this," I said to the father and mother, "having been spoken, need not be done again." For I knew that if I

lay upon the child and she failed to stir, incalculable would be the damage. But, feeling the power of the Lord in my hand, I said only, "Damsel, unto thee I say arise." And straightaway she arose and she walked, a young girl of twelve years. And her parents were astonished and ready to praise me but I told them to give her to eat, and give with much love.

The child, however, looked to me as one in misery, and not happy by more than half that she had returned to the living, although, for truth, even at this moment I did not know if she had been dead. But I did understand that much unhappiness between husband and wife had laid a pall upon the girl and indeed it was apparent that she had lived in a house of many unclean feelings; no air was sweet in these rooms, and those miseries which feed upon themselves were in each scent; so were the scents full of all that is stale. And before I left, I also told them to fast and to pray and to leave a flower in a small jar by the child's bed each morning.

And if it had all seemed simple when I told the young girl to rise, now was there a weight on me; I realized much

had been drained from my limbs by the woman who touched my garment and drained again by arousing this child who may not have wished to live. So was I returned to my own gloom. For now I must wonder if I had done such deeds for my glory and had called upon God when it would have been better to save His efforts for other matters. Indeed, I felt a desire to return to Nazareth, and be back again among my own people, where I could apologize to my mother for that hour in which I had wounded her love.

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So I came back again to my own country and my disciples followed, and in Nazareth did I spend two days with my mother. And I do not know if matters were much eased for how could she forgive "Who is my mother?"

On the Sabbath I began to teach in the synagogue, but at once did I hear clear sounds of discontent, people saying, "From whence has this man come? What wisdom is this?" And when I told them of my works, of the leper and of the storm, I felt a loss of modesty (and such loss was equal to uncleanness for me) yet it was for naught. I was not believed. It was as if word had reached everywhere in Galilee but for Nazareth. And I could hear them say, "Is this not the carpenter, who is the son of Mary?" They were clearly offended, and I wondered if any blow to pride is greater than to be obliged to honor a person who has been for years no more than equal to oneself, whereas now he is greater. So I knew that whatever word had reached Nazareth

concerning what I had done had brought forth jeers from my own townspeople. And I was wroth that they would offer me no love. "A prophet is without honor in his own country and among his own kin and in his own house," I said. Yet had I already spoken here of my deeds with such vain emphasis that in Nazareth I could do no mighty work. I laid my hands upon a few who were not sore ill and could but barely heal them.

Still, there came the next Sabbath and I awoke with the strength of my Father as on few mornings and was able to cure a woman who had lived in a spirit of infirmity over eighteen years and she had been bound in her limbs to such degree that she could not lift up from her seat. Yet when I saw her, I had only to say, "Woman, thou art loose from thy infirmity."

Whereupon I laid my hands on her and immediately was she made straight and her voice was as sweet as the innocence of birds who talk to each other in the morning. Yet was I scolded before evening by the ruler of this small temple for healing on the Sabbath day--once more had I done just so!--and he was a rich man, much pleased with himself, and said: "There are six days on which men are to work and in such days can they be healed, but not on the Sabbath."

To which I answered, "Do you not loose your ox from the stall on the Sabbath and lead him to water? Yet this woman, stricken over eighteen years, cannot be loosed from her bonds on that day when we celebrate the works of the Lord?"

However was this rich man one Pharisee ready to debate, and he replied: "Some of us do not loose our oxen on the Sabbath. Faith is a narrow road." Which offended me. I should have said: "Hypocrite! You, too, lead your oxen to water on the Sabbath in order that they do not suffer and thereby decrease in value," but I was silent on this, being without witness, and said merely: "Narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it. Whereas broad is the way that leads to destruction."

To which he added, as if he would come closer to the sweet meat of the question: "The broad highway of simple faith is without peril, but only on fair days. For when it rains, this breadth is as treacherous as a trackless mire. Seek ye, Yeshua, for the narrow road that mounts between the rocks, and do not look for cures on the Sabbath. For that is the broad highway."

And he laid his hand upon my shoulder as if he were

fatherly and I was of simple faith; in the touch of his fingers was the confidence of those who are wealthy. His hand said to my flesh: "Respect my words. Much position rests beneath."

I was shamed by him. My powers now left me. In my own synagogue was I without strength.

Yet was I in great need to overcome all weakness. I was beginning to understand that the task set for me by the Lord was immense, and I could not carry all of His word alone. Many would oppose me and I would need an army of apostles to stand forth against them. Yet if each of my twelve could find his own twelve and each of these new apostles bring to us another twelve, then soon would I have an army to carry the word of the Lord. So I knew that I would have to send out my apostles without me in order that they learn to make cures and bring back others.

Yet with large armies comes discord and confusion. So did I now see that faith might be simple for some, yet was it now a labyrinth to the Son of Man who now must wonder whether each turning brought him closer to the light or nearer to darkness.

Yet did I sleep well on the thought of sending out my apostles.

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So soon as I left Nazareth, belief returned to me upon all that we could do, and indeed I had decided that the time was come to send my messengers forth without me. Nor did I think it unlikely that they might gain power over unclean spirits, and could perform such acts as mine. Word of the cures I had wrought was now disseminated among many; so the power of my apostles would be multiplied; is not the commencement of every cure belief in the physician?

I told them to go out with no possession on their journey but a staff; they were to be without bread or money, and would have but one coat. And I said: "Wherever you enter into a house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you nor hear you, depart from them, and for a testimony, shake off the dust from your feet. Yet, go your way with ease because I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all who would look to hurt you.

If I was the only one to whom the Lord would speak, and thereby was I possessed of an incalculable good, might it be that I could bestow a part upon my apostles?

Yet did I also know that to be happy as the Son of the Lord was possible only if I never rested in my labors, and never felt sorrow for myself, inasmuch as the destruction of each man was to be found in pity for oneself. And this was twice true for the Son of the Lord; so would it also be twice-true for my disciples.

Therefore to them did I say many other things as well. There was much to learn and in short time, and much that I said was harsh. For I was coming to understand that to repent of one's sins generates much turmoil; the soul debates with itself and goes to and fro; thereby, a gentle word is not always to be chosen when giving alert to men on how to save themselves or others.

So I also told them to listen to what I said, but not to ponder upon it. For if there would be much they did not understand, yet would it be enough to say the same to others. "What ye hear," I told them, "is the wisdom on High, and that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them who can kill

the body but are not able to kill the soul. Rather fear God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. For God knows all. Not one sparrow shall fall to the ground without your Father's knowledge. So are the very hairs of your head all numbered. Fear not, therefore. You have more value than many sparrows."

What I told them next would not come without effort to my tongue and was prideful. Nonetheless were these the words of the Lord, and they were in my mouth, and I said, "Whosoever shall confess unto me, him will I confess also to my Father which is in heaven, but whosoever shall deny me, him will I also deny before my Father." Then did some of my apostles draw back for well did they know that they had denied me in separate ways and some had not been ready to declare to all they met that they were of my cohort.

So did the words that came next partake even more of God's wrath. I looked into the eyes of each of the twelve, and said: "I am come not to send peace but a sword." And if such was at variance with all I had said before, if I had cured many and calmed a storm at sea and raised a young girl from the dead, so had I come to bring peace on earth. Yet,

had I also had visions of battles, and many battles, before peace could come. And my body was even sore with the pain that I had made no fine peace with Mary when last in Nazareth. Yet still did I say, and I knew it was not only by way of the Lord's anger, but from my voice as well for my own family had left me divided in purpose. So I said: "I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and a man's foes shall be they in his own household. He that would love father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, for he that does not take his cross and follow after me is also not worthy of me. He who would find his life shall lose it; he that loses his life for my sake shall find it."

And now could I see my apostles weeping. No thought offers compassion for oneself more than the belief that one is losing one's life for a friend; in such an instant, can one feel noble, and it is natural then to mourn for oneself. So, with those words, did I send them out to preach.

And I lived alone in a hut abandoned by shepherds that I found high in the hills above Capernaum. And prayed for many days concerning those fears that I still held.

Also can I say that each fear was terrible. Each came upon me in the middle of the night when my limbs were heavy and my heart sought to flee. Yet no road appeared and there was darkness in my dream.

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Concerning these fears, the first was the worst, for it was not a dream. I knew that John the Baptist was dead. He had been slain in his dungeon at Machereas and King Herod Antipas had commanded the deed. Nor in all the time that I had heard of John's imprisonment had I failed to believe that God would set him free for the time must be near. And if there had been anything like doubt in me, it had come only because John from prison had sent two of his disciples to me and they had asked, "Are you the one who is to come? Or do we look for another?" And my disciples argued much about the question for they were distrustful of John's disciples and said John was jealous of me, whereas I knew that if John was not certain, it was due only to what he would have heard of my judgments, they being of less fire than his, and I was sad that John no longer knew (even as the walls of a dungeon weigh upon thought and bend certainty) who I was, nor could he have understood how my power to work miracles was as a

sign that the Kingdom of Heaven was near and I was its messenger.

Still did I suffer at how he must wonder if I was the one to come after him, or must he search for someone else? And how to do that from his dungeon?

Or had he been disappointed on meeting me and could not see me as the one to follow? So I said to his disciples: "Blessed is whosoever shall not be offended in me," and to my own disciples I defended John: "Verily I say unto you, 'Among them who are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist,'" and when they did not understand, I added: "Notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John."

And finally I wondered if he had also known dismay that I supped with sinners for by his understanding, how, then, could I be the one to come?

Out of such lack of readiness to understand John's peril in the dungeon at Machereas grew a second fear following his death and it was of grave consequence for me: Many said that John was now risen from the dead, and was now bringing forth mighty works and miracles. Soon did others say that John and

Jesus were one. And I knew a fear not far in magnitude from the awe occasioned by God's voice. For Herod Antipas was mighty and of ugly conscience; if he had slain John the Baptist once, so could he murder him twice.

These were the circumstances as related to me by my disciples: First had Herod imprisoned John because the preacher had said to him, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy dead brother's wife." And it was true. The Lady Herodias, once wife to his brother, Philip, was now espoused to Herod Antipas; thereby did the Lady Herodias form a great animus against John, and would gladly have had him killed. Indeed, was Herod Antipas now obliged to send forth his guard against John and bind him in prison. And this done for her sake. Rare is the monarch who is not weak before the righteous wrath of a wife who knows she is not righteous.

Yet, Herodias could not bring Herod Antipas to order execution for the Baptist. By this much did the king still fear him.

On the birthday, however, of Herod Antipas, a feast was given to him in the fortress of Machareas. And before his lords and high captains danced the daughter of Herodias,

Salome, and with ardent movements that so pleased this Herod Antipas that when she was placed in a seat of honor beside him, he said: "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt. I will give it." Then Salome made light mockery teased him upon the solemnity of such words, saying as how they had been spoken to the air. Why were they not inscribed on parchment?

Whereupon Herod Antipas took a vow: "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom. That is my oath."

Thereby was my cousin's death determined and made certain. When the coward offers an oath, it is like unto the keel of a ship that he builds for his soul and for his kingdom; the oath strengthens him. Whereas to break an oath, is to be damned by the bloody acts of one's followers and the filth of one's own deeds.

Salome went forth to her mother, asking: "What shall I request?" and Queen Herodias said, "Nothing less than the head of John the Baptist."

Whereupon Salome returned with haste unto Herod Antipas and made her demand. Now, for his oath's sake, could the king not reject her. Immediately did he send for an

executioner and declare that the head of John be brought to him on a bowl of silver; on receiving it, did Herod Antipas give this salver to Salome. And she is said to have danced with the head on its salver and before all.

Hearing of such matters, I did not sleep. Between my love of salvation and my fear of Herod Antipas, I looked for solace in the thought that God was often near to me while Herod Antipas was in his palace and far away.

Yet, in darkness, in that hour after I was told of John's death, I wept. His way had been hard, and he had prepared a path for me. Of John, who knew naught of sweetmeat or wine, still did they say that he had a devil; now of me must they say, "Behold, a man bibulous and gluttonous, a friend of publicans and sinners." My apostles would have many enemies who would see me as belonging to the devil.

And I knew, even as I dared to look upon of it, that I had much terror of the Romans. For with all else, who was I but a poor Jew? So I blessed the centurion who had come to me, and had had faith in me. Thereby had he lightened my burden and made smaller, if only by an iota, my fear of all

centurions and their legions and their masters.

Yet I could not deny that Herod Antipas had fear of an uprising of the Jews and so would I be seen as the leader of such an uprising. So was my ministry imperilled by John's death, and so was I linked with him.

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And in my grief and in my fear, in that time when I sought to calm my thoughts upon the death of John the Baptist, there came a day when many of my apostles returned and had much to tell me when I came to meet them of what they had done and what they had taught. With much woe did they tell me of their travels and of attempts to cure others. For with few had they succeeded. And I, wishing to learn more concerning such failure, yet could deterine little. For so many were surrounding us that we did not have peace to sit together. And concerning such failures did they indeed have a father and son among them, whereupon the father said to me: "Withal does my son have a dumb spirit for wheresoever I take him does he foam from his mouth and with much gnashing of teeth, and thy disciples could not cast out his demon for he has been with it even as a child, and it seeks to destroy him for he falls into the fire and into the waters, and all seeks to destroy him."

Indeed did the boy fall to the ground at this point and from his mouth he foamed.

I said to the father: "Canst thou believe? All things are possible to he who believes."

The father was in tears. Then he cried out, "Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief."

And by this was I moved more than by anything other he could have said, for from it did I learn that even in faith which is absolute are there portions without faith, yet with honesty of reply can much be remedied. And so I rebuked the spirit that was in the boy and charged him to come out and enter no more. And the foul spirit made many sounds of the beast and by such ferocity that I could see the boy's body being racked sore by the convulsions, and then did it come out of him and the boy lay as if dead until I took him by the hands and lifted him and gave him back unto his father.

Later, when we were among ourselves, so did my disciples ask me, "Why could we not cast him out?"

And I hardly knew what to tell them and murmured no more than "by prayer and fasting." Which I did not believe. It was by the father's honesty that I was given my means to

cure, yet by what means could I tell my disciples how to search for a cure?

Therefore, we departed by ship, inasmuch as Matthew knew many ship owners and thereby was owed many favors; as a publican he counted their taxes. Still, as people saw us departing so did they follow on foot around the Sea of Galilee, and even as we landed on an empty shore adjoining the desert, a group came toward us, and there many among them, and hundreds.

I was moved with compassion and ready to teach, and I felt the spirit of John the Baptist within me; what he had commenced I must strive to finish, and I told myself once more that I had all things great to protect me, being not a prophet but the Son of God. Moreover was the need of these people as quick in their hearts as sheep without a shepherd. So I sought to teach that day but do not know that much was learned for when seed is cast in handfuls and by haste, one cannot say where it falls nor how much will take root. I knew only that when the day was spent, my disciples said, "Send them away now that they may go back into the villages and buy themselves bread. For they have nothing to eat, and

here is but a desert."

But I was feeling exaltation that so many people had walked over so many sharp stones to join us, and I wished to have nothing of the spirit of nay-saying. (In concord could I feel the Lord's hand on my elbow.) So, I said merely: "Give them to eat."

My disciples said unto me: "Here we cannot find two hundred pennyworth of bread. It is you who must provide. Did you not say to us on the last Sabbath: 'Take no thought of: "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" For your heavenly Father will know that ye have need of all these things. Take therefore no thought for the morrow.'"

And I said: "How many loaves are among you?"

And upon looking, they told me five barley loaves and two dried fish.

Whereupon I told my disciples to seat all our followers in companies upon the ground. And I took the five loaves and divided them exceedingly small so that there were a hundred pieces of bread from each loaf, and each piece of fish gave up twice two hundred and more small morsels, and with the five hundred of the bread and the five hundred of the fish,

each morsel not so large as the tip of a thumb, so did I pray oover them before passing all of such to each of the followers, doing it myself for all five hundred, laying one flake of fish and one bit of bread upon their tongues, and each person took these fragments into him, and in so doing, so did their morsels expand within my own head, and each fragment was filled with much of the strength of what God gave me; this strength was shared with each of my followers.

And so completely that few among these hundreds of followers did not believe that he been given a fish whole and a loaf of bread entire to himself, a triumph of the Holy Ghost rather than an enlargement of matter. Which for the Lord is also but a small deed, since the heavens and the earth did He make out of nothing.

Later, I can say that this story was much multiplied by Mark and by those who would say more than Mark such as Matthew and Luke. No angel appeared in the sky, nor aught of the manna that God gave to Moses and his people. But then such was the power of the blessing that the Lord had given into my hands that all, as I say, were satisfied and we shared in the fellowship of a banquet even as once a year in

earlier years, artisans who had worked with wood and stone in Nazareth would gather, and there were many of us, and we would eat in a green field with much joy and wine. So was this feast in the desert equal, even if Mark gave me not less than five thousand loaves and hundreds of fish and burdened my disciples with twelve baskets of fragments to bear home, whereas we were five hundred, not five thousand.

But then, exaggeration is the currency of the Devil, and no man is free of Satan, not even the son of God (and certainly not Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), so I knew that my followers would exaggerate my feat. Yet I also knew better than all that by His will, did He prefer each miracle to be appropriate to the need thereof. For, even as waste exists in all forms, so in the working of miracles can also be extravagance.

Yet, again, was I wrong. For, a little later, to separate myself from the people, I debarked with my disciples in the ship and we went to Bethsaida on the other side of this Sea of Galilee.

And when we landed, so did I tell my disciples to sleep on the ship in the Sea of Galilee while I was alone on the

land. And this was from my own need because the strength to be more than a prophet comes not only from the Lord but out of knowledge gained in one's work from day to day; so did I have need of hours to meditate, whereas my disciples would have chattered about me like a throng of children and none would have found benefit. If I would have them ready to work miracles, so were they still like children.

I went up therefore into a mountain apart to pray and would have laid me to sleep, but as evening came, the ship was tossed with waves, and much wind. And as I saw them rowing out, I could see that my disciples were ill at ease and without rest and so I came down from the mountain and commenced to swim to the boat, but felt in me much which would lift my spirit, and thereby was I up and above and beyond the waters, and lo, I was waling upon them and full of the buoyance of my Father and I could hear His laughter at my pleasure in so walking upon this water, and His laughter even more upon my supposition that in miracles there can also be extravagance for even as is said in Job, so had the Lord in creating the world tread upon and trampled upon the back of the sea wherein are the high places and the great waves, and

by such force, I, now walking upon water (if with a gentle step) had inkling of the power of the Creation. For when He spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, so had he told him, "Here shall the proud waves be stayed," and He had "entered into the springs of the sea" and He had "walked in the search of the depth," and much had I read of that in the Book of Job but knew it now as the waves beneath my feet and upon these mighty waters had but prepared my path and He was laughing and in joy at my admiration of Him. And so did I know of the extent of His domain inasmuch as before the day was born and the water and the earth, so was He, and He had brought my seed from the east and had gathered me from the west, and so could He control the waters of chaos. And I knew joy beyond all vision of the Kingdom of Heaven when truth I had been filled of late with many cups of wine, and with such beatitude did I take long strides and was so immersed in the presence of my Father, the creator, (even as I walked on water) that I did not wish such joy to end and would have passed by the boat of my disciples wherein all were rowing and with great fear of the storm, but could not for they were in great fear of me and unable to perceive of much in the

dark and so thought I was a ghost, but then had they been separated from me by afternoon and night, and for certain could not expect to see me in such a manner and walking upon the water. And I heard many voices crying out in fear that I was a ghost, but I said, "Have courage. It is I. I am." Which was to say that I was not a spirit. And I added, "Be not afraid."

And Peter being much aware of the small miracles he had worked in curing the ill over these last weeks, now said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water."

And I said, "Come."

But when Peter stepped out of the ship with the thought that he would also walk, so did he also see that the wind was boisterous and he was sore afraid then that he must sink, and thereby did he sink, crying out, "Lord, save me!"

I stretched forth my hand and caught him and said: "O thou of little faith! Wherefore didst thou doubt?" And I was back with them. And my Father was no longer so near.

It was then I knew how Peter's wish was to be loyal. Yet would he fail me. For his faith was in his mouth but not in his legs; so did I know the woe of understanding that it

was not the sentiments of men that revealed the presence of the Lord, but their deeds; this did I not only know to be true, but worse: The Devil, having made much study of the Lord's words, had become skilled in the art of good speech; thereby he could utter glorious sentiments worthy of the Lord and stirring to the heart, yet naught that was good could come of his words. So, thinking this did I feel that I had come further away from Satan than before, and I was heartened.

When Peter and I had both come back to the ship, the disciples worshipped me in a way that they had not before, and said, "Of a truth, is it that thou art the Son of the Highest?"

Now they had said this many times and on each occasion I could hear in their voice a small part that spoke the truth, and indeed were some coming to believe that I was not less than what they asked; yet was there another portion in their voice: by that did they not yet believe in me even if through many a day had they come nearer. So I understood that my good Peter might wish to be loyal but could fail me. Before the presence of great joy, it is the nature of the heart to harden itself when it cannot share such wonder.