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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SON

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In those days, I was the one who came up from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the River Jordan. And Mark, in writing his gospel, said that when I was with John the Baptist, and rose up out of the water, so did I see the heavens open "and 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.'"

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

That is not untrue, yet its truth is like unto an acorn wherein the great oak is its verity. I would not say that

Mark brought false message, no more than I would speak ill of an acorn. Nor would I deride others who come later such as Matthew, Luke or John. Still did they leave errors in recounting my days and many were the pious sayings they gave to me which were often never said, and sometimes did they describe me as gentle when I was wroth of voice. They did not know me, and so told no more than what others related as my sayings; such gospel is to be leaned upon no more than a bush separated from its roots that blows across a field like a dry thing. Besides, I am the Son of Man, and can speak for myself, nor have I forgotten even one hour of what happened to me, no more than a new coin would forget the die who minted it.

So I will proceed with my true account of the gospel as it was witnessed by me, and if there are some who would ask how the words I speak were written, I would answer: That is a mystery but of no great import; the Lord often spoke through me and I uttered many words that were not mine but His. Nor did I lack for scribes in the hundred years after my death nor in all centuries following. Look then upon this gospel set down by one who is no longer among the living as no more than a miracle of small dimension. But then, my

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gospel, as is true of the others, is an account of miracles. So my words need give no pause. Look upon them as a warrant of my days. May it be set down with respect for much of what has already been told, yet still must my gospel explain more concerning my journeys than others are able to reveal.

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In the early years of my apprenticeship as a carpenter, the work would be heaviest when splitting a log to shape our planks. We would use the head of an axe to strike upon a wedge until the wedge divided the trunk along its length, whereupon we split it by the length again, and then again, until eight or sixteen such divisions had been made. And it took a master carpenter to guide the placement of the wedges.

Once, however, that our planks were shaped, which involved much trimming with axes, then could we obtain a communion with the wood. For never did I forget that the first tree in the Garden grew apples endowed with knowledge of good and evil; often it seemed to me that much good and evil was still in the will and temper of our wood: One had to respect the spirit therein. A fine piece labored upon for days could betray the tool upon the smallest mistake; sometimes, one's wood might split in treachery for no mistake

at all, but rather out of the knowledge of good and evil and much desire to do the latter.

And I also knew wood that was kin to a dear friend who served my wishes and guided my chisel, and there was wood that resisted the drill whereas other planks would yield with comely grace as if enabled by the hole to breathe, and breathe better. There was wisdom to be respected in this treatment of wood and I used to feel honorable doing such work, and did it so for many years. The scent of a good plank properly shaped for placement gave pleasure since there was concupiscence of spirit between the wood and one's hand-- I know not how else to say it, but then being an Essene did not give much to say of such matters; of all Jews we were the strictest in observance and certainly did not believe in gods of various description as did the Romans; so it was not meet to speak of communion with wood.

Besides I was as devout as my father on earth, who was Joseph, and he wore white robes whenever not at labor, and washed such robes frequently, and often with travail at such time as our river would run dry and our wells became low; to wash our clothes when there was scarcity of water was to suffer with one's skin from the harsh ashes of limestone that

we used then to cleanse ourselves.

Thereby was it said of us as Essenes that we were a sect which must soon die out considering how the aim of each Essene was to live in such cleanliness that he would never take a wife for too little, or, if with wife, would lie with her only on such occasions as God said to make a child, whereby, if the Lord never spoke, children could not be forthcoming among Essenes.

And therefore was it also said of us that we needed always to make new converts, in order that we not die out. I, being so raised, was instructed to believe that women, if one did not know their nature, were not to be entered, and I even thought seldom on such matters, although, given the nature of my mother's conception of me, it was meet that I, in such great part His son, if not indeed entirely His son, did comprehend that God would not wish me to spend my hours on lascivious pursuit.

So it is that my communion with other spirits in those years was nearest while working with the wood of God's trees and much they taught me about good and evil, until I was even ready to notice that an evil man could not pass by a fine tree without saddening its leaves.

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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 of apprenticeship, but on certain days, when I would do well and be most scrupulous among the young men of our shop, Joseph would then 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, inasmuch as 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 truly a secret, since 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. But now I was a man, and he was old and his memory had grown weak. So maybe he could not recall that he had related it to me.

Nor was I able to ponder for long upon what I had been told when I was twelve and we were returning from Jerusalem since I came down with a great fever upon reaching our home in Nazareth, and so all that Joseph had told me became curious like a dream one cannot remember but knows, and 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 much 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 it was without purpose in my life and most disturbing on such rare occasion as I recalled it like a dream. Yet Joseph had told me all I needed to know even if I had not known what to do with such knowledge, yet did he impart it to me on our return to Nazareth from the Great Temple when I was twelve. 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 travelling in a host wearing our white garb to show our dedication to observances of the law, and we were comfortable in the size of our numbers; we did not fear brigands on the road; we were many. And it was a journey of three days on foot from dawn to dark to traverse the hills and valleys between Nazareth in Galilee and Jerusalem in Judea. And my parents went to this Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem every year until I was twelve, and then they went no more.

Yet, on that last year was it different. For when they turned to go back to Nazareth from Jerusalem, I was not ready. Nor can I explain how it was, but I stayed behind in the Great Temple and since most of the other children from Nazareth were walking together, my parents did not notice. Nor did my mother take awareness of my absence until a journey of half a day had been spent on the road back.

Yet when they looked for me among kinfolk and neighbors, then were Joseph and Mary full of disturbance and on their quick return on foot to Jerusalem still did they not find me until coming upon my presence in the Temple where I was sitting in the midst of priests and doctors, Pharisees and

Sadducees and scribes, and was asking of them many questions (which was, perhaps, permitted of me, a boy, because of my garb as an Essene). And to the astonishment of my parents, so was I offering answers to my own questions and behaving as if much learned.

There was long discussion in such days whether the Word had been with God from the commencement and indeed, when John would later write his gospel, all remembered 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 before the beginning?

For as they would discuss the matter: Was it 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? So, I listened to noted doctors in the Temple that day and they spoke of how in the beginning the Word must have been said in order to form our flesh; otherwise, we should be no better than the animals. Whereupon, they argued, could there be any reason not to raise slaves in order to consume such slaves afterward as meat like tame beasts of a flock? How else, unless the Word made our flesh?

It was then I began to speak. According to my Joseph and Mary, who entered the chamber even then, such utterances 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 my mission, 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 later by Joseph, I did say to the assembled priests and doctors that even before we had need to look upon the Word as flesh, we did well to gain understanding that the Word lived 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.

So is our breath cousin to a small sea, and it is upon this sea that the vessel of the Word can be borne. Whether of flesh or spirit, 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 did I know 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 procreative matters 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 such wisdom proved astonishing to them. My mother would always say that the faces of these doctors, priests, Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, was 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, while walking much alone (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.

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Yet for me to understand what he imparted was not simple. For Joseph would not only bathe all of his body even to three times a day, but always wore white, and sometimes even when at work, and he adjured me constantly that it was better not to marry but to be seen by the Lord as even more devout than other Essenes. So it could not 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 at the age of thirty and praying at his funeral. Clear as each word had been when I was young, so was it again and I remembered it all and knew for the first time to a certainty whose son was I.

Joseph, in the year before I was born, had been already espoused to my mother, Mary. Yet at 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 Joseph said them to me upon hearing them later from Mary: "Hail, thou that art highly favored; the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." Yet my mother was not only a virgin, and in such virginity much fortified by her mother, but also an Essene, knowing much on how to safeguard chastity before marriage. 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 she felt weak before Gabriel as if her virtue were already in flux, and all her walls of determination were crumbled like sand. It was then that this angel, so near in her small room, which no 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 and Luke thought they had been uttered from the mouth of the angel Gabriel, and 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 any other breath she had taken.

On the consequence, came the unruly passages of a woman who is pregnant, and they visited her in the next weeks and small illness followed upon small illness; it was forty days

from the time she had been seen by the angel that she told Joseph of how she was pregnant.

Now, Joseph was a narrow man, and few Essenes were more observant, but Joseph had much belief in the virtue of my mother, having prayed beside her often; thereby was he ready not to have neighbors pointing at her, and so he made plans to hide her away with his relatives of another town. Yet as it transpired, was no such need. 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 only by the Holy Ghost and so can bring forth a son who will save all of 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

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go forth on my mission. And it was then that others began to speak of me as Jesus. But of all that is there much to come.

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Joseph was of ancient ancestry from the descendants of the house of King David; thereby was he very proud; so was it necessary before I was born that Joseph and Mary should travel with me heavy in her womb all of three days south from Nazareth in Galilee down to the very city of King David that is called Bethlehem, and such a journey was meet because of Joseph's desire that the first child of Mary be born in Bethlehem where Joseph had been born, and the noble ancestors of his family. So, there in Bethlehem, was I delivered to the light of a candle, and was wrapped in swaddling clothes, and my mother gave birth in a manger which, as all know by now, (even should they know naught else) was due to our need for shelter since there was no room at the inn. And indeed Mary and Joseph were turned away because of all that accompanies the birth of an infant in a strange place; indeed, who will be there to clean all linen after such delivery?

I do not know if that is why the odor of gentle animals and the smell of hay 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, so that 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 multitudes?

That would be the true 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 little 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 come 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." And Luke in his gospel was bound to have the angel saying more, but then Luke was allied with Paul in the building of community among those who would

worship my name in many churches throughout the world after I was gone; so did Luke add much language to simple matters, as in declaring: "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 of this would I take exception. My years were quiet when I was a boy.

So may it even be that the shepherds hearkened to the radiance of the moon outside the manger and spoke much of it in all the places near to Jerusalem. It is said that Herod, King of Israel, heard of such matters and was troubled, and spoke to his chief priests and to his scribes of how word of a new and most holy birth was descending upon his court from many places. Indeed, by the extent of these tales, did King Herod hear of my being born not only in Bethlehem but 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:

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"For out of thee, Bethlehem, shall come a governor that shall rule my people, Israel."

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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 as are few, and was brave more than others; all agreed he was the greatest warrior in Israel, and with a multiplicity of lusts: He had ten wives. Nor could any noble be his equal at hunting or sport, indeed, none.

Yet, the Hebrews loved him not. For he was also an Idumean from south of Judea and thereby a Jew, but only by half, and Caesar had made him emperor of all Jews through 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 bad deeds. Yet, none was worse than the manner of execution of his beloved wife, Mariamne, and she was his most

beloved, but he was afflicted with suspicion so dark that he could not trust her fidelity, and became convinced that she would destroy him by treachery, whereupon he had this beloved Mariamne struck down. Afterwards, he mourned her and so much, that he gave large favors to her two sons with him, each of whom now sought to murder their father even as he had slain their mother, and they plotted and were discovered and were, in turn, beheaded by Herod. 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 the Jews.

Also did I learn from the account of Joseph that as Herod grew older, so did he lose more of his reason and more 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 moved to the south until in a few hours they 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 offered 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, which would ensue before another year was spent.

Yet did Herod exact vengeance most terrible, for he was wroth in that excess of madness peculiar to old men who are in terror of their old deeds and so seek to bury them with more evil acts, and Herod sent forth soldiers to Bethlehem with orders to slay all children born nigh upon the time 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 are not."

So it was only after Herod had expired that an angel of the Lord came again to Joseph and said to him in the midst of his 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 returned in the direction of Judea.

Yet, when he heard that Herod had been followed by still another of his sons, the cruellest, named Archelaus, Joseph again felt great fear and turned aside from Bethlehem to go north for three days until he had returned to that village in the hills which is Nazareth, and as such was it written before it ensued; in the words of the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

And when I was told this story in my twelfth year on our return from Jerusalem, so must I have been much aware of the deaths of the many children of Bethlehem and the lamentations and mourning that followed upon it, wherefore I decided at the funeral of Joseph that the powers I had demonstrated before the priests of the Great Temple in my twelfth year 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 inasmuch as I must now be faithful to the great gifts they had relinquished to the Holy Ghost by such early death.

Now when I speak a little of my life from the time I was born until the time I was twelve. For in Jerusalem we had a life like others and Joseph who, in all ways but one, was my father, had become such a devoted man that he spent much time in the quiet hours of prayer that was our small synagogue and often studied from those few scrolls to be found in the synagogue of such a small place, and he would read in the language of the ancient Israelites. And from that time when I was four and I went to school in the house of prayer and there instructed, so I knew many of the difficulties that had come to us from Moses inasmuch as one of the Ten Commandments had given birth to another ten and those hundred in turn hundred another ten hundred, until the law of the Jews by the year of my birth was a compendious work inasmuch of laws and we knew the first books of the Pentateuch which are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and the Book of Deuteronomy.

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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 the modest house of prayer that was our small synagogue and often studied from those few scrolls to be found in the synagogue of such a small place, and he would read in the language of the ancient Israelites. And from that time when I was four was I sent to school in the house of prayer and there instructed, so I knew many of the ordinances that had come to us from Moses inasmuch as each of the Ten Commandments had given birth to another ten and these hundred in turn produced another ten hundred, until the law of the Jews by the year of my birth was a compendium most immense of laws and we knew the five books of the Pentateuch which are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and the book of Deuteronomy.

And I also studied the sayings of Elijah, and Elisha and Ezekiel and Isaiah and much of what had not been written in our scrolls was remembered and spoken by those who passed on the word from great-grandfather to great-grandchild. So 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, inasmuch as 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, and Joseph had replied: "Now is the time of the Romans, and Israelites must live under the yoke. It is meet. For thereby we repay the Lord for our sins."

"But when the Messiah comes," I said to Joseph, "he will bring miracles,"

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

If he still treated me as a child, nonetheless did he deem me 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 way. Yet now as he recalled how even the High Priest had come to

listen before I was done, Joseph's spirit was full of joy on our return and this despite our danger each night of encountering brigands. And so he said to me with a light in his eye, "Ye who know more than any, tell of when we will see the Messiah."

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

"All powers are possible for the Almighty," said 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 there was that in his tone to tell me I must now be silent for fear of giving great 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, for 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 ancestors back through many generations 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 those of us who were Essenes looked so upon rich women, but 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 that every imagination and the thoughts of his heart was evil continually and the Lord even repented that He had made man upon the earth for it grieved Him in His heart 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 hut in the sand, even to

the captive in the dungeon. 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 me great confusion. For in the midst of God's wrath, yet would He still take cognizance of the wrath of His enemy? So 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, but still did he also see Himself in contest among other Gods?

I do not know if I felt His wrath because of having such thoughts in my dream but a 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 after our journey home from Jerusalem and I forgot almost all of that which Joseph had imparted to me on those three days of travelling back to Nazareth.

And when I recovered from fever, I was again like other children although now a young man for I was a day more than thirteen. And so 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

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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.

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Joseph used to say: "Where wood is joined to wood by that 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."

So 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, and Joseph spoke to me always of obstacles faced by carpenters in other lands and ancient times, and he would tell of how Egyptians would fashion small chests of great loveliness, even if in their earliest days they had no better for wood than acacia and sycamore, or fig and tamarisk, all knotty and too fibrous, and thereby were obliged to finish all surfaces with plaster, or paint and gold leaf, so that 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 joints and their work knew mitres, shoulder mitres, dovetail mitres, and the dowels of hard wood and bronze pins.

Now, in our work, we had iron and indeed the use of lead to work the iron into steel was known to us, and in Sepphoris we would see swords that came from smelters so far away as Damascus where men knew how to turn steel into cutlery and fine weapons, but then, steel was more costly than gold.

Still, 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, even as with steel, was more expensive than gold, but we used it for the fine veneers of chests, as also were 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 migrating 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 since I, like my family, observed numerous practices of purity, (even to abstention from the use of iron tools when building an altar) whereas Rome was licentious. It was even said that the Emperor and Empress indulged in practices about which none of us could speak for fear of sores on our tongues.

For that matter my trade was often enough for me, and I was proud of the tools within my box and they were 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 in all seasons by stripping the bark from certain trees to dry them before they were felled yet could separate others who by nature dry, had to be stored away for a year under cover of fresh manure, which we renewed from time to time, in order that such 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, was put 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 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 with oil of juniper and oil of cedar compounded well with beeswax and among some of us grew an art to stain and polish one wood until it looked like another.

If Joseph taught me much, yet did he also give instruction on those arts where he was not a master; still, much did he understand about red basalt and cream limestone from Tivoli, and travertine marble, which cracks in fire although it is immune to ice, which ice came upon us on occasion in Nazareth in winter, for we lived among the hills. 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.

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Nor was it long after the year I was 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 too late now for me to learn such crafts as casting in gold and silver, thereby to work upon the gold altar in the sanctuary and the candlestick of light and the pouring vessels and the censers of gold, and other golden ornaments within the Temple that would be mine to fashion for the Lord, who would see that I was able to fashion His vessels and His altar. In such times did I feel the power of greed in me and so could know how lust was stifling to the throat and not for those who would be modest in life.

So did my years pass until the thirty-first year of my life when Joseph died and I mourned him. He had been a good teacher and just and 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

and I was as reborn. Now, I did not know how to look upon God if He were my Father, and so awesome and thereby strange. And I looked to seek wisdom from afar, and began to think of meeting John the Baptist.

Of him, much may be told, and it could even be said that I knew him before I could meet 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, but then these Pharisees, being merchants of Nazareth and priests, were devout, but never as equal in devotion as 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 would little be said of John the Baptist agreeable to my ear.

John was my cousin, yet without relation of blood still would I have known much about him: his birth and mine were of

a similarity I pondered upon often in this last year.

His father, a priest of us Essenes 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 must serve in a holy war against the powers of evil.

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

Yet, as I was told by my mother, it happened that on a given day, in one half year before I was conceived, Zacharias, alone by the altar, and performing a priest's office, saw an angel appearing before him and this angel was that same Gabriel who would speak to my mother in another six months. And 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 for this son, John the Baptist, will bring

many of the fallen children of Israel back to the Lord their God."

Now, Zacharias lived by observance and prayer; 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 unto him, "I stand in the presence of God, being sent to show you good tidings. But because you do not believe my words, behold, I now strike you dumb. You will be unable to speak until the day that Elizabeth bears her fruit." And when Zacharias came out of the temple, everyone on the steps marveled that he could not speak; when he beckoned to them and sought to utter a few words, they heard naught and could see but the straining of his throat.

He did return to his house all the same, and quickly, and marveled how soon after on that same day was he able to give issue to his wife Elizabeth, who thereupon conceived, and was so full of shame (yet 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 home during the

time when Joseph was debating how to hide her among his family. It was then that Mary went up into the high hill country to the house of Zacharias, whereupon she saw Elizabeth, and gave devotion to her and salutation, kneeling before her to say, "Blessed art thou." Elizabeth heard these words and her babe, who would yet be John the Baptist, leaped in her womb for the first time whereupon Elizabeth knew how it was to be full of the Holy Ghost; she spoke out with a loud voice and with length of breath: "Blessed art thou, Mary, for you have honored me on this day, and my babe has turned in my womb and with exaltation and joy. All generations to come shall call you blessed."

And by these words did the voice of Elizabeth become so fixed in my mother's ear that even when I had become a man, so was there difficulty in living with my mother inasmuch as she was now 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 and much devoted to our practices, and thereby believed that the lowly were superior to the mighty although 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 words, word for word, and placed them properly, I do not know; unless it is due to the strength of my mother's sentiment which she related to so many when she was old, and I who would yet believe that the poor are to be exalted and the mighty to be scattered, can say that I owe much of the strength of such sentiments to Mary, and to her repetition of them.

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 they would call him Zacharias after his father, but his mother said, "No, he shall be called John," and the relatives of Zacharias replied, "None of thy kindred has been called ever by this name," and they made signs to Zacharias who still could not speak, but he, having retained the power to write, asked for a table and upon it put down these words: "His name is John." Then did they all marvel at that moment for the mouth of Zacharias opened, his tongue grew loose, and he spoke. And he gave praise to God for the

deliverance of his voice.

Yet when all neighbors and relatives had 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, became as lean as his father and mother, and I never met him until my thirty-first year. But also did I know that he was strong in spirit and lived in the desert and preached with much belief and bathed often and would remonstrate with the people of Israel against their sins, preaching in such force and with such 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 our word for the Messiah. And 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." Yet, did he not know? Who then was he?

They were wise men, these Levites, but their anger grew and they said, "Tell us who you are for 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 the laces of his shoes I am not worthy to unloose." 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 that all who came to him had to confess their sins if they sought to be baptized in the Jordan. 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 open thereby to the sun that he was darker than anyone who came to visit. He was a thin man with a thin beard and he ate nothing but locusts and wild honey.

So was it also said that he had the power of such locusts, and could devour fields of disbelief in the hearts of those who came to him. Yet the wild honey gave warmth to this 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 more severe than the face of anyone in Israel. When multitudes came to be baptized by him, he would greet them by saying, "Oh, generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance and do not begin to say within yourselves, 'Abraham is our father,' for that is as 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 hath two coats impart one to the man who has none, and he that is with meat let him share it." He would always speak of the one mightier than himself who was yet to come and this Messiah would not baptize with water but with the Holy Ghost.

Before making my pilgrimage unto John, I had thought often upon the book of Exodus and remembered 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

nor in the herbs of the field through all the land of Egypt." And I wondered whether it could be that the wrath of each locust eaten by my cousin could stir fire in him to consume all that was unworthy of the Lord in Israelites who were unclean.

And I was much taken with how John looked when first I saw him before me, 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 had borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

And the words of this unknown prophet were true. For I wished to hide my face from John. And it was with pain that I looked upon him, and knew that John would not be long among us. As much I knew as with the beating of wings overhead.

I had come with many, but I saw John the Baptist before he saw me, and those others were baptized together and then departed. Yet, I remained. And in the loneliness of this place in the desert he did not see me since I now concealed myself behind a rock. And it was only when the sun became too hot in its descending upon that side of the rock that I walked forward, and he saw me and said, "I have waited for

you."

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

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

He sighed and 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 thee, and I am tired. So it is good that you have come."

Then did I also scruple to confess my sins and spoke of thoughts of disrespect toward my mother, yet confessed that I had not sinned beyond such matters.

"Well, repent ye still," did he say, and I blessed God,

and John the Baptist came behind me as I entered the water and with the strength of a desert lion, did he seize me by the nose with his fingers and with his other hand laid upon my forehead, did he thrust me back into the river, and it was so sudden, and I passed so quickly from air to water and back to air again, and was gasping at the loss of the last breath that 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 heard a voice come down from the heavens. Mayhap John the Baptist also heard it. The 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 with the same words that He spoke once to Jeremiah, having said: "Before I formed thee in the belly did I know thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb did I sanctify thee, and ordain thee a prophet unto the nations." Fear and much exaltation came into contest then within me like mighty warriors and I looked again into the eyes of John the Baptist which were as pale as moonlight, and they gleamed with illumination sacred to me, and I said, "Lord, oh, Lord," as if I were speaking to John, and then turned my face to the heavens so John should not

misunderstand, and said, "Lord God, behold, I cannot speak for I am like a child."

And again the Lord came to me 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 for I am with thee to the limit, to thy limit," said the Lord. And the Lord did 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 I knew His word was in my heart and as a burning fire in my bones, and John withdrew his hand from my head where it had been placed for baptism as we stood in the river. And away went the dove. And John and I spoke to each other and I will tell of that when I am ready, and it will be soon, but as yet I cannot speak of it inasmuch as 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.

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It was a long march back to the valley and 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 once built of yellow marble now rests 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 throat of a ram and such were the cries that had issued from him. And I went my way of return to Nazareth walking with as much strength as I had ever possessed. For many of the mysteries of my life were as one to me now and I understood why I was not like other men and had no appetite for sin yet could feel no virtue that I was empty of sin. And I understood the pride of my mother, and my legs took larger strides than before.

Yet I did not know what was expected of me, nor of what awaited me, only that I had been blessed and the Lord had

come to me and had been near to me, and close 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 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 desert and heard the voice of the One who could speak and He said, "Son of Man, stand upon your feet and I will speak unto thee."

And the spirit entered into me as He spoke 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, and 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. They and their father hath transgressed 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 (for they are a rebellious house) 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 be dismayed by their looks though they be a rebellious house. Son of Man, go, 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 but to the house of Israel, not to people of a strange speech and of a hard language whose words thou canst not understand. Surely had I sent thee to strangers they would have harkened 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; as an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead. Fear them not. Neither be dismayed at their looks for they be a rebellious house. 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 also that you are My son conceived by Me and mightier even than a prophet."

Notwithstanding, I still had many hours to travel and

lands I did not know well to traverse. If I felt great exaltation so did I also know exhaustion for as 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. For His temper was as loud as thunder and His anger could scourge the body more than hail that would not cease, and the sound of His voice was in my ear like unto the fall of great rocks even as they reverberated in their fall until their echoes are as the ancestors of those already fallen in the canyon. 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, then offer to Moses no less than the power to stretch forth his hand to heaven and lo, there was hail over all of Egypt to blight every herb of the field and fire to run along the ground, and every tree of the field was consumed and broken. And these were the least of His acts. It was then that 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 and His desire when He was 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.

It is there!

"And in a wilderness of crags, pray to Me alone, 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. Not for forty days.

"And I will promise a new vision before the sun sets on the last of those days and thou wilt know why I have chosen thee for the Christ, and as My Messiah wilt thou be anointed. For," said the Lord, "no mountain is equal to this one; this mountain is without a name."

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

And I saw many vultures gathered over these stones, and much emptiness in every direction, and nettles and brambles. 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: "Have you ever seen the Lord?"

And I said, "No. Is it not death and destruction to see the Lord?"

And he replied: "Yes, 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 in front of my eyes and I hid in the corner 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 me by the arms. "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 those souls who have 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

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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 odors 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 many 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 rock and looked out upon the lands of Israel, upon Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Peering through such a haze of golden hue was I 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 and was eager to eat after living without food for a day and receiving so much blessing; my exaltation was now not equal to my appetite.

But then I also knew why the Lord had sent me to the summit of this mountain which had no name. It was not enough to be His son, and cousin to John the Baptist. I must be tested. And the first of such tests 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 without easement that day and the next. And by the fifth day when the pangs of my stomach were still with me but only in grave emptiness of spirit, so was I weak, and no longer knew if strength remained within to climb down from this mountain. So did I say aloud, "How long, oh, Lord?" and He said, "Prepare thyself. It will be long."

And inasmuch as I was not there to dispute the Lord, but rather to follow His will, in truth, 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 indeed, for warmth came to me now neither from the rock nor from my chest. 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 eaten their thorns.

And in the second week so did I have visions of King

David who was my ancestor if Joseph were my father (but he was not), and I knew that David had committed a great sin. I could not recall the offense, but did remember that in earlier days 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 thyself a long life nor for riches nor begged me for the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for understanding and discernment in judgment, then, behold, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, for there were none like thee before thee, Solomon, and neither after thee shall any arise

like unto thee."

And then God gave him all that Solomon had not asked for, both riches and honors until there were no kings like Solomon in those days, and from such a dream he awoke and had the wisdom to separate two mothers disputing before him over a child, saying he would sever the babe in two so that each mother, thereby, could possess her half, whereupon one could ask: where is the Jew who does not know that 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 that he showed to God, 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 riches and honors I gave him," and those words of the Lord went right into my spirit which hovered still about my empty stomach and permeated my flesh in its fasting.

And the Lord whispered further into my ear: "Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were a thousand and five. He knew the cedar tree in Lebanon and the hyssop that springest out of the wall. He could speak of beasts and

of fowl and of creeping things and of fishes and all people came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and all the kings of the earth. 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. Women of all the nations concerning which I had said unto the children of Israel, 'Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you. For surely they will turn away your heart after their Gods.' But Solomon cleaved unto these women and he had seven hundred wives and princesses and three hundred concubines and so these wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass when Solomon was old that 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 which was an advantage not given to Solomon.

And I, being empty without food, indeed had no desire

for a woman, but then having lived without the disturbance of carnal desire for all of my thirty years, I did not feel at odds with the Lord's decision and was content to receive the wisdom of Solomon while sparing myself his sins. And my fast continued.

Next did I dream that I was the prophet Elijah, and as Elijah did I have contests with the prophets of Baal and 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 devotion to Baal. Blood gushed forth from these prophets, yet no voice answered; the God Baal did not speak. Then, as Elijah, for so was I in my dream, I did restore the altar of the Lord that the 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 Elijah built an altar in the name of the Lord and made a trench about it. And he put wood in its place on the altar and cut the bullock into pieces, thereupon laying the raw flesh upon the wood and told his followers to fill four barrels with water and pour it on the sacrifice and they did, and for a second time and a third,

until water ran all around into the trench he had dug surrounding this altar.

And in such a moment, in the depth of much moisture soaking upon the sacrifice of the altar, before the prophets of Baal and this prophet of Israel, even as evening came, so did Elijah say: "Hear me, O Lord, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God and Thou hast turned their heart back again."

And the fire of the Lord rose and 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 after such service to the Lord, Elijah was able to slay all the prophets of Baal with his sword.

And he wandered in the wilderness until he saw a little cloud arise out of the sea, no larger than a man's hand, yet that cloud became a heaven black with clouds and winds followed by a great rain. And Elijah traveled into the wilderness and sat beneath a juniper tree and requested the Lord that he might die.

And so I, on the twenty-eighth day of my fast, feeling weak but without hunger, assumed that I must be close to those who are ready to go into heaven or to fall below and I

remembered the prayer of Elijah, for he said, "It is enough now, Lord. Take away my life; I am not better than my fathers." But then an angel of the Lord gave him food and on the strength of the meat did he climb onto Mount Horeb, the mount of God, and lived on the strength of that meat provided by the angel for forty days and forty nights.

And behold the Lord passed by in a great and strong wind and rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks. And after the wind came earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, a still small voice, and it was so when Elijah heard it that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entry room of the cave. And lo, there came a voice unto him and said, "What dost thou hear, Elijah?"

And it was here that it came to me that I was dreaming and I was not Elijah but merely remembering some of the words of the scroll concerning Elijah, and I nodded my head and knew that my fast would be also for forty days and forty nights. And I remembered that the Lord had then 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 so passed the first four weeks of my fast.

And I also thought upon the wisdom of Isaiah. The prophets were often around me in these weeks: Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Daniel and Ezekiel, and the meat that left my bones was rendered into memory of all the knowledge I had gained in the synagogue school of my youth and I recalled these prophets' words as if they were my own and could see the wisdom of their instruction, even as those seven thousand good Jews left to Elijah could explain why Isaiah had said, "The Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant" and I took a vow that I would not desert such a remnant for now I could live in the faith that a remnant of good Jews would yet enable me to recover the nation.

If these were the words of the prophets, 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 in preparation for the mission I must undertake so soon as the Lord gave me permission to eat again and I could come down from the mountain.

So would I speak 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 from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, sayeth the Lord."

And would add, and I could see them before me, and hear my own voice as it would yet be uttered, "Yes," I would say, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool, if ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the

land: but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword." But I did not know how to construe the wisdom of this last since I had but small love for the sword, having learned rather the art of cutting in small with the chisel and the gouge, fine instruments for the flesh of wood. So could I not comprehend the crudity of the sword upon the flesh of men and women.

But then Isaiah also said, "He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

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 there as spirits ravenous in my stomach to remind me of their sacrifice.

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

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And I do not know what understanding was between Them, but the visitor soon arrived, and he was as handsome as a prince and as well dressed. He had gold bracelets and a gold ornament on a gold chain about his neck, and in this gold ornament was the face of a ram, most bestial yet handsome, and more handsomely 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 such beauty as many a king would emulate.

And now I recalled a single thought apart from all others that had come to me in the middle of my fast, and I believed it had been my own thought and was 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 middle 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 was there 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 so did the Devil nod 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, "being found by Isaiah in a stout oak with a rotten center, he chose to hide therein. But the officers of Manasseh also discovered this concealment, and brought a great saw to the tree and cut it in half even as Isaiah was sequestered therein. In which manner, did Isaiah die. And he screamed in his death. Did you know?" said the Devil.

"I had not heard of such a death."

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

I was weakened by these words, and by more than any deprivation of the fast. I knew pain in the bottomless depth of my stomach.

He, however, was comfortable, and kept speaking. "That manner in which Isaiah met his death need not leave you in great concern," he said, "since you are not a prophet but, indeed, the Son! To my recollection, which is not small, the Lord has thereby 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 could take 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 would perceive it through no small cloud of perfume rising from his neck, his armpits and out of the folds of his robe. Despite all of such scents, so could I still 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."

I answered, "Man shall not live by bread alone." And those words I knew were not mine for they were strange to me and indeed had issued from the mouth of God; thereby was I hearing my own speech even as I was seeking to understand what I might be saying.

"That thou art the Son of God," mused the Devil aloud, "is a surprise to me. Why is it that your Father has chosen thee? Say truly to thy Father when next you have converse with Him 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 many of these peoples may be His creation, and the crown indeed of all He hath created among the animals and the plants of the field, yet still it is I, not He, who hath the better understanding of such creation."

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. Satan might be before me, but still did he snort like a horse unwilling to accept the bridle.

"Know thee," said the Devil, "that the Father is but one God among Many. There is need merely to count the myriad of gods respected by the Romans. Nor does the Father have the power to command His own Jews. Look to His rages; they are unseemly for a great God and swollen in proportion. 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!"

"Wherefore," said the Devil, for he did not choose to speak, "your Father hath not the right to seek whole sacrifices from His people. For does He comprehend how women are dissatisfied other than men and thereby live with constant dissatisfaction of all, but they would be loyal to. Indeed, your Father hath no liking of women; His secret is given over to every word of His prophets. Look to Isaiah: He says to us that Isaiah does not speak out of your Father's mouth when he says: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and swollen eyes, walking and dancing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a rod 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 attire like the bark, the bracelets and the bonnets, 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 well-set hair, baldness, and burning instead of beauty."

"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 not His rage inchoate because 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 also taken my fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and made to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savor: and thus it was.

"And in all thine abominations and thy whoredoms thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, and wast polluted in thy blood. And it came to pass after all thy wickedness-- woe, woe unto thee,' saith the Lord God, 'that thou hast also built an eminent place, and hast made thee a high place in every street. 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; yes, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet could not be satisfied. How weak is thine heart, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious and whorish woman; and hath not been as a harlot, in that thou scornest hire; but as a wife committeth, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all whores: But thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers, and hirest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom.

"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, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them, behold, 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, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down their high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels and leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up a company against thee, 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 stirred by the fire of such language.

Yet such became my salvation against my visitor. For by this stirring did I know that in hearing the words of my Father as He spoke 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 you such visions that you will think no longer of yourself on the summit of this mountain, but rather as 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 but 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 from the height we occupied 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," said the Devil, "that 'He will give His angels charge concerning thee.' Therefore, leap and cast thyself down that the angels may bear thee."

And I felt much temptation to jump into the distance 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 before taking the leap and 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 his eyes like a night of stars; I knew he was promising extraordinary glory. "To stay with your Father is to labor for Him. To stay with your Father is to be consumed. And by Him. Jump, and thereby seek to save thyself. Jump!"

In this vision Satan had just given to me, so did I know that extinction would be quick, but as quick would be the glory of 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 full of joy and riches. "Concupiscence is mine!" cried Satan into the silence we inhabited.

Indeed, in that instant did I see that greed was a godly good to him, and that from rough greed could be brought forth works of great power and rich aroma. "It is the smell of the pits," said the Devil. "My people sit upon the earth with such possession that they do not leave buttons of turd fit for a goat such as those that issue 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 even carries 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 be able to 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 of the leap, so could the Devil make arrangement for my birth. Such power would be possess because I had gone to my death at his bidding.

And, indeed, at this moment did he open 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 I said: "It is also written, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'" But again 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 even surrounded by snow, yet it was but a vision. Yet from such height did he show me the kingdoms of the world, all that were kingdoms to the north, to the east, the south and the west and I saw glories amid concupiscence and 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 (for it was the wisdom of the Lord to show me at that moment how even in fasting was strength) that 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."

And at that moment Satan gave a cry like a wild goat who

is wounded with a spear. 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, had I also been amputated of many faculties and was scraped sore in my judgment. Nor did I feel desire within me 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

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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. If some little part of me had been encircled by Satan, still had my visitor lost by the greater portion. 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.

-14-

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 because 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 it had come to pass while I was on the mountain. Herod Antipas, who was the son of the same Herod, Tetrarch of Israel, who had slaughtered the children of Bethlehem and Bethany who had been born on the day I was born, was not unlike his father, and so Herod Antipas lived in much fear of John the Baptist and had dreams that John would cause the people to rise against him. Therefore had he shut John away where he was not to be rescued from his dungeon. 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 and be there for all men as John had been there.

Yet in the midst of forming such resolve came a diversion for me on the third day after my return to Nazareth. A marriage in the place of Cana was made near to my home, and my mother, being an honored guest of one of the two families, asked me to come. Yet when I arrived, was it late and the ceremony having commenced, my mother whispered to me, "They are without wine." And indeed both families were of poor means.

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 of wine. 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, and indeed was an angel at my side. For at that instant out of the clarity of water was I able to make red wine, and this done by no more than a clear recollection of such a taste. And when the honored guest of the feast had imbibed this water made over and become wine, he spoke 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 wine 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 to perform."

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Now I had thought of preaching in Capernaum, which is more than half a day's walk from Nazareth, and 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 him as a guide, and the prophet 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 which is that city to which all 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 not a facility for words equal to 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 often halting and 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, and mayhap applaud my words.

I went to the synagogue and began to speak but could say hardly more than: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Upon this came silence from the congregation since they expected more, and I, thinking of how faith was most severe, yet must still be made to seem as natural as breath, then 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 the words from the Gospel according to Luke, and they were rank with exaggeration and untruth.

"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 written by Luke, but then he was not Jewish, and full of wrath against the Jews, and was one born,

moreover, after I was dead. So he was 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 even ready to laugh at me in such a place. Yet nonetheless did I feel laughter creep out of their feet as with an invasion of mice. And it is true that their derision, if silent, might still have run up my back considering how I felt much shame. Indeed, I could hear the whispers before they were uttered: "He speaks like a carpenter, yet doth tell us to repent." And others said, "What are these things He hides from the wise and prudent?"

So I knew that I must leave and move into places where I was not known for thereby would people listen more to the words that God would give me. And I need merely be certain I believed; by now I knew that to repudiate what the Devil had told me would be done best by feeling much joy that God was my Father and had chosen me for His only Son. And if this Son was still 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 not think of women and did my utmost and it sufficed not to know or care what spirit of nakedness women carried beneath their robes, nor how all 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?

For when I had last spoken in a temple. those listening had been more learned by far than these priests and merchants of Nazareth. At the Great Temple in Jerusalem when I was twelve, no words had come halting to my tongue. Howbeit, the inspiration of the Lord had been in my veins on that day, whereas now, as I walked 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, we were not allied as parent and son in our sentiments inasmuch as I was too gentle in understanding to obey all the orders of the

Almighty. For, even 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, mayhap because He was the Lord and, of necessity, far away, and with a rage in many of His judgments to destroy multitudes; I knew so little concerning that.

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

"But how do they dare?"--yet 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. Yet I did not dare. 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: "So did Moses also say: '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? And who among any of thee maketh the dumb or the deaf or the seeing or the blind? Am I not the Lord? Now, 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. And when you are ready to preach and ye enter the synagogue or if you are seized and go before magistrates or other powers of the Romans, take no thought what to answer nor what ye shall say 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. If some are slowed by swamp, others will strain mightily to climb each palisade that separates from understanding."

Even as I came to my feet then 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 any 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."