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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SON

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

So did Mark also say: "Immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness, and He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him."

While I would not say that Mark brought false message, no more than I would deride those whose gospels came later, still did Matthew, Luke and John also leave errors in

recounting my days. Many were the pious sayings that they gave to me, and I did not say them, and sometimes they describe me as gentle when I was wroth, or they would have me in much anger when I was gentle. They could only relate what old men told them I had said; such gospel is to be leaned upon no more than a bush that is separated from its roots and blows across a field.

So I will give my gospel. If there are some who would ask how my words were written, I would answer: Look upon all that is here as no more than a small miracle; my gospel, like all others, is an account of miracles. Thereby, the presence of my words need give no pause. I speak with regard for what has already been told, yet will I explain more concerning my journeys. Mark, Matthew, Luke, John and all other writers of gospel were laboring to build the spirit of their churches. Some spoke only to Jews who believed in me after my death; some only to gentiles who hated Jews, yet believed in me. And each, seeking to give strength to his own community, lost much ability to sift true from false. Yet, no matter how many discoursed, soon did one church grow larger than others, and, having prevailed, so would it accept but four gospels,

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and would speak of the others as mixing "immaculate and sacred words with most shameless lies." Such was said by Clement in his day but whereby could he understand that all of it was lies, yet did all of it also partake of the immaculate and the sacred? Whether four or forty gospels, none could be sufficient for where the truth is with us in one place, it is buried in another. Whether too soon or too late, I have decided therefore to tell what I know, and indeed what I know is with many turns and was not without surprise for my followers and for me.

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

Once our boards were shaped by much trimming, then could we obtain a communion with the wood. For never did I forget that the first tree in the Garden bore apples with knowledge of good and evil; often it seemed to me that much good and evil was still in the temper of the wood. One had to respect the will therein. A fine piece labored upon for days could betray the tool at the smallest mistake, and sometimes, the wood might split in treachery for no mistake at all, but rather out of knowledge of good and evil (and much desire to do the latter). But then an evil man could not pass by a

fine tree without saddening its leaves.

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

Besides I was taught to be as devout as my father on earth, Joseph the carpenter, who wore white robes when not at labor, and washed such robes frequently, often with travail when our wells became low; still, the aim of each Essene was to live in much cleanliness. Therefore would one of us seldom marry, or, if with wife, was ready to lie with her only when God said to make a child. Often did others speak of us as a sect who must make converts or soon die out.

I, being so raised, was taught to believe that women

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were not to be approached or pursued; God did not wish us to spend hours on such chase. We were warriors for the Lord, or so we were told, and from childhood; a warrior was not to know a woman (since such knowledge would weaken him.) On this, could one rely even if at war for thirty years.

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

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

Nor had I been able to remember what I heard when twelve. Soon after that trip I came down with a great fever and all that Joseph had related to me eluded me as in a dream. Only when I was thirty and mourning Joseph's death did I recall all of his words. And indeed did I then find the need to visit John the Baptist, of which visit there is more to say but in its place.

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

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

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

When they searched for me among kinfolk and neighbors, then were Joseph and Mary full of disturbance and on their return to Jerusalem they did not find me until coming upon my presence in the Temple where I was sitting in the midst of priests and doctors, Pharisees and scribes, and was asking many questions (which was, perhaps, permitted by my garb as an Essene). And to the astonishment of my parents, so was I behaving as if much learned.

In those days was there often much discussion whether

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

For as they would discuss the matter: Had it been the Word of God which created our flesh? Or, was our flesh made by God with no Word even as He had created the flesh of animals? I listened to noted doctors that day in the Temple and they spoke of how in the beginning the Word had to be uttered to form our flesh. Otherwise, we would be no more than the animals.

It was then that I began to speak. According to Joseph and Mary, who had, by then, entered the chamber, these sayings, coming from the mouth of a twelve-year-old, were as a miracle, and they decided that the Lord must be speaking through me.

Indeed, in later years, when I had begun to minister to others, my mother would claim my words were so holy that she

could not give shape to such pronouncements with her own voice no more than she could speak the name of the Lord. But as it was told to me by Joseph, I did say to the assembled priests and doctors that even before the Word was flesh, so did the Word live in water. For as all know, on the coldest day of winter, or on arising in the dawn, the breath of a man is like unto a cloud, and in a cloud is moisture.

So is our breath like unto a small sea, and upon this sea can the vessel of the Word be borne. Therefore is the Word one with God inasmuch as all the waters are His. Even as all the rivers go down to the great sea. Moreover did I tell the august elders that the Word was in the mist which came from our mouths, and that was wisdom enough to astonish them since to that did I also add that in the Song of Songs, we learn that the word of God is the bridegroom of the soul, even as the soul is the bride of the Word.

Afterward would my mother would say that the faces of these priests, Pharisees, and scribes were engraved forever upon her heart. "God has blessed the fruit of your womb. Never in one so young have we heard such wisdom and glory. Indeed, how could it not be that in response to her

happiness, Joseph decided at this juncture on our lonely return to Nazareth, that to gird our safe passage, he would tell me the true story of my birth.

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

In the year before I was born, Joseph, a widower older by many years, was already espoused to my mother, Mary. Yet was he in no rush to marry her for, being much older, so did he say that first he would serve as her guardian. And in that time before their marriage the angel Gabriel came down to Galilee and entered her bedchamber, and Gabriel said to her, even as his words were later told by Mary to Joseph and by Joseph to me: "The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou

among women." Yet my mother was not only a virgin, but in such virginity much fortified by her mother, also an Essene. Here, notwithstanding, was the angel Gabriel, dressed in white, and as handsome as his own radiance. The white of his garments was like the light of the moon; she could see clearly how Gabriel was an angel. Still, did she wonder what manner of salutation was this.

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

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

and she knew more.

Yet, in all her weakness, still did she say to Gabriel, "Shall this come to be, seeing as I know naught of man nor of such desires?" And indeed had she been brought up in her virginity to believe in self-control of the tongue, the belly, and all of that which was below the belly.

Yet the angel said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall be with thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore that which is born of thee shall be called the Son of God, and is holy."

My mother 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 was with child. For she breathed of an air sweeter than any garden, and it was not like other breath.

On the consequence, came the first weeks, and unruliness visited her, and small illness upon small illness; it was forty days from the time she had been visited by the angel that she told Joseph of how she was with child.

Now, Joseph was a man of severe conviction, but he had much belief in the goodness of my mother. Still, when he

learned that she was pregnant, he beat himself upon his face and cast himself down to the earth. And he wept, and bitterly. And knew fear of God. "What prayer can I utter on her behalf?" he asked of the Highest. "For she is a virgin and I did not protect her. Indeed, who was it who came to know her, and in my house? Who has set this trap? As the snake was to Eve, so was this person to Mary." And he asked her, "Why? How did you bring this shame on yourself?"

She began to cry. "I am innocent," she told him, "and have never known a man."

"Then from where is this child that you carry?"

"By my Lord," she told him, "I do not know where it came from."

And Joseph was frightened, and for many reasons. If he protected her and concealed her sin, so was he violating the law of the Lord. Yet if he told the priests, so could she be stoned, and to death, as an adulteress. Thereby he decided, "In quiet will I put her away from me and seek divorce." Nor was he ready to have neighbors pointing at her. So he made plans to hide Mary away with his relatives in another town. Yet before such could transpire, an angel of the Lord came to

Joseph and said: "Joseph, thou son of David, take Mary as your wife. For she has conceived by no man but was visited by the Holy Ghost and so will bring forth a son who will save our people from their sins."

And Joseph awoke from sleep with a 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 did I live until the age of thirty when I went to visit John the Baptist and was blessed by him and spent forty days on a mountain in the wilderness, at the end of which was one day of discourse with the Devil. Then, did I come down from such a mountain to go forth among others with my gospel. But of all that is there much to come.

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

And these generations were many: King David was father to King Solomon who begat Roboam who begat Abia who begat Asa. And by Asa through nine more fathers and sons came Amon who begat Josias, father of Jechonias, in that time when the Jews lost a great war and were carried away to Babylon in captivity. Yet did Joseph's ancestry continue from Jechonias to Salathiel to Zorobabel and for even more generations to

Eleazar who begat Matthan who begat Joseph the husband of Mary and my father on earth. And these later generations had come back to Israel from Babylon. So was Abraham the oldest ancestor of all, and he came from Adam. Yet to make claim of such did Joseph have no need; sufficient that he was a descendant of the house of David.

Thereby did he wish that I be born in Bethlehem which is the city of King David. And so proud was Mary of this ancestry of Joseph that, with me heavy in her womb, still was she ready to travel all three days south from Nazareth in Galilee down to Bethlehem in Judea in order that her first child be born where Joseph had been born, as had been David. And this is the truth of why we travelled, and not as Luke gave to all for explanation that each Jew was to be taxed by edict of Caesar Augustus in the city of his birth. That would have caused journeys everywhere each year and much disruption for which the Romans had no liking in the territories of Samaria and Galilee and Judea which were subject to them.

Still it is true that I was born in Bethlehem and delivered by the light of a candle. So was it also true that

my mother gave birth in a manger because, as all know by now (even should they know naught else) there was no room at the inn.

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

That is the story of my birth and not the plenitude of tales told by my disciples who brought forth a host of angels to surround the hour. No more is true than that a few shepherds were keeping guard over their flocks this night in the fields surrounding us and they did wander in upon the manger soon after I was born. My mother would assert that the moonlight on that eve shone more than on other nights, and in later years, would she speak of an angel who came 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." Then did the Gospel of Luke have the angel saying

even more, but then Luke was by then allied with Paul in founding many churches to worship my name, and all this done long after I was gone. Therefore, did Luke add much to simple matters, and would have had it that the shepherds made my birth known to all. With this, do I seek difference. My years were quiet when I was a boy.

It may be that the shepherds hearkened to the brightness of the moon and did speak to others in places near to Jerusalem. For it is true, as Joseph soon learned, that Herod, King of Israel, spoke to his chief priests and to his scribes of a most holy birth in a manger girding the hills of Bethlehem and much did this vex Herod and put him at great determination to find this babe for he might be a future king. Herod, having made study of the scrolls, knew the words: "Out of thee, Bethlehem, shall come a governor that shall rule my people, Israel."

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In that year was Herod already old, but when young, he had been mighty, and more brave than others; all agreed he was the greatest warrior in Israel, and was with many lusts: He took to himself ten wives. Nor could any noble prove his equal at hunting.

Yet, had his Hebrew people loved him not. For he was also an Idumean from south of Judea and thereby a Jew only in name and pagan by heart; Caesar had made him emperor of all Jews by a declaration from Rome, and 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. Few were the Jews who did not know of his deeds. And none was more ugly than the execution of his wife, Mariamne, his most beloved, and this because he was afflicted with suspicion and could not trust her fidelity; so

did he become convinced that she would destroy him by treachery. Whereupon, he had Mariamne struck down. Afterwards, he mourned her and by so much that he gave large favors to his two sons with her, but each of these two sons now sought to murder their father for having slain their mother. And they plotted, and were discovered, and beheaded. Then was it said by the Emperor Augustus in Rome: "Better to be Herod's swine than his son." And that was much repeated among us.

Later did I learn from Joseph that as Herod grew older, so did he lose more of his reason until the greatest of his fears was that this babe, born in a manger, would replace him. Thereby, even as he was sick and close to dying in that year, still 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 is it told in the Gospel of Matthew: "Search diligently for the young child and when you have found him, bring me word that I may come and worship him as well." Therefore did these three wise men leave the Great Temple for their short journey to Bethlehem. And on the

first night, a star in the east passed above them and moved to the south and they followed the star until these wise men came to our manger near Bethlehem and fell down before Mary and Joseph and worshipped me. So is it told by Matthew. And they opened chests with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh--which is not true, and all should know. For Joseph and Mary would have spoken of such presents in the years that followed. But indeed did the wise men offer a gift of greater value inasmuch as they gave warning to Joseph that he should not live in any land governed by Herod. Indeed, these wise men departed to far-off countries in the hour after recognizing my birth.

Nor did Joseph wait until morning but in stealth took Mary and myself away from Bethlehem and traveled far into Egypt and lived there until the death of Herod which came to pass before another year was spent.

Yet did Herod exact vengeance on many others. In his last year he would suffer from that excess of madness peculiar to those who are in terror of their evil acts and so seek to bury them with more vile deeds. And Herod upon coming to know that his astrologers had betrayed him and were

gone, sent forth executioners to Bethlehem with his command to slay all born in the days of my own birth. And the words of the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled: "Lamentation and weeping and mourning, and Rachel was weeping for her children and would not be comforted because they were not."

So was it only after Herod had expired that Joseph could return to that village in the hills which is Nazareth. And later, on our journey from Jerusalem when I was twelve, so must I have been much grieved by hearing of those deaths of the children of Bethlehem and, for certain, in the year that Joseph died as I remembered all that he had related to me, so could I also recall the powers I had demonstrated before the priests of the Great Temple, and I wondered how much of this wisdom had come to me from the spirits of these many children who died in my place. And I knew that they had left me with a debt and I must now be faithful to the great gifts they had given back to the Lord by such early death.

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Now we had a life that was like others, and Joseph had become such a devout man that he spent much time in our small synagogue and often studied from the scrolls, few in number, that were found in such a modest place. Yet still could he read in the language of the old Israelites that is more elevated than our own speech. So, too, was I sent to school in the house of prayer, and by the age of four, I knew of the laws come down to us from Moses and they were many inasmuch as each commandment had given birth to another ten and this hundred of laws gave issue over a thousand years to another ten hundred whereupon by the year of my birth, the law of the Jews was a compendium most immense concerning prayer and diet and sacrifice on the altar. And we also knew the five books of the Pentateuch which are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and the book of Deuteronomy.

So did I also study the prophecies of Elijah, and Elisha and Ezekiel and Isaiah and much that was not in our

few scrolls was remembered by those who passed on our knowledge from great-grandfather to great-grandchild. Thereby had I not been wholly unprepared to talk to the priests of the Great Temple in Jerusalem, being full of the spirit of the miracles wrought by Elijah and Elisha. Indeed did I say to Joseph on our trip back to Nazareth that the Lord could not be pleased with the people of Israel since He had granted of late no miracles fitting to our needs. Joseph had replied: "Now, under the yoke of the Romans, do we repay the Lord for our sins."

"Can it be that when the Messiah comes," I asked Joseph, "that he will drive off all Romans?"

"Yes, and when comes the Messiah?" he asked of me.

If Joseph had always treated me as worthy of respect it was only through the circumstances of my birth. It was not until the day I spoke aloud in the Temple that he saw me as more than ordinary by other measure. Yet, now, on our return was Joseph's spirit full of joy, and this despite all danger each night of encountering brigands. So he said to me with much light in his eye, "You, who know more than any, tell of when we will see the Messiah."

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

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

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

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

But to myself I said, "I will try to change the hearts of men." A peace full of sweetness came upon me then as if an angel had heard what I did not say aloud.

When we returned to Nazareth, I knew not what to believe, and could not see myself as the son of the Lord. In my heart I could understand no reason why He would choose a woman from a simple family when it was Joseph, not Mary, who could speak of David the King as an ancestor. Moreover was I not only in awe of His majesty but in fear of His wrath.

I thought of the days of the flood, as recounted in our scrolls, when "God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth 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 so did I also think of the great cry that arose out of every house in Egypt on the night when the Lord slew all the firstborn, from the firstborn of Pharoah even to the firstborn of the poorest Egyptian. There was not an Egyptian house where there was not one dead. And I repeated His words: "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." And I knew the Lord even thought of laying 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 rage 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 was occasion for much confusion in me. I wondered how large could such an enemy be if He was a Lord immense beyond measure. Yet still did He see Himself in contest with other gods.

I do not know if His wrath came near me for having such thoughts in my dream but that was the season when the great fever descended upon me and I was ill near unto death in my twelfth year and on into my thirteenth year was I weak. And all this after our journey home from Jerusalem. So it happened that I was without memory of all which Joseph had imparted to me concerning my conception and birth.

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

And the first seven years were spent acquiring the wisdom of how to make mud-bricks and build framing for roofs

and doors and windows. Also did I learn to build beds and tables, stools and cabinets, boxes of all size, and plows and yokes for oxen. In my second apprenticeship did I work, however, in Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee and an hour's walk from Nazareth. There did I finish my education as a young master by learning to work upon fine houses with walls of stone and furniture to be fashioned of the finest kind, and Joseph taught me much for he knew many arts.

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

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

Thereby was I never given tools made of iron until after I had served my first seven years with tools of bronze. Joseph spoke to me always of trials of labor known to carpenters in other lands and ancient times: he would tell of how Egyptians would fashion small chests of great loveliness, yet in their earliest days they had nothing better for wood than acacia and sycamore, or fig and tamarisk, fibrous and knotty, and were obliged to finish all surfaces with plaster, or paint and gold leaf. It was only later, after trade with Lebanon had commenced for cedar, cypress, juniper, pine and yew, as well as ebony from Punt, that these Egyptians could make their fine chests, but by

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

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

Nonetheless did we learn to work with tools of such metal and indeed the use of lead to work iron into steel was known to us. In Sepphoris we would see swords that came from smelters as far away as Damascus where men knew how to shape and sharpen steel into cutlery and fine weapons. And steel was more costly than gold.

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

I had friends in other shops in Sepphoris who were learning to plate fine objects in gold and silver or to use horn and ivory for inlay, and some of us even spoke of travelling to Rome so that we might apprentice our skills to great masters. But such was only the chatter of apprentices, and I received much mockery from others considering how I observed numerous practices of purity, whereas Rome was naught but licentious. It was said that the Emperor and Empress indulged in practices about which none of us dared to

speak else vile sores would visit our tongues. And of this did I have fear. For I suffered from onslaughts of lust, and knew the secret adultery of the heart (even while allowing no practise for my loins.)

 Yet in most hours was my trade enough. For indeed was I proud of all that was within my box, a rasp, a plane, a hammer, an auger, a gimlet, an adze, a cubit rule, a saw, and chisels for paring, as well as a gouge; all such were mine. And I knew how to set the teeth of my saw so that the dust flew out from the cut with each pull and again on each push. Then was I also adept with brace and drill, a claw hammer, and a draw knife. And in the last year of my second apprenticeship, did I even acquire my own lathe, becoming thereby a young master in the craft of carpentry and knew how to season wood by stripping the bark from certain trees to dry them before they were felled. Yet I could also store wood that was too dry under fresh manure, so that when worked, it did not split.

 Also did I learn how to use 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 was too pure in nature to perish underground by rot. And cypress was blessed, for it resisted the worm.

If I speak much of foundations and floorings, so did we also work on roofs, and yet even in Sepphoris was I not only a carpenter but, by times, found myself back in my first apprenticeship, a laborer covered with mud when we made bricks for the walls of ordinary houses and we did employ the Greek measure of dimensions: Five palms square was a brick for public buildings, and four palms square was enough for a man's home. And we covered such bricks with limestone which, being porous, would take a moist plaster. And I knew how to burn fragments of this limestone to make a stucco upon which others could paint.

Much knowledge of my craft was acquired in the art of steaming long thin pieces of a wood of wavy grain around a carved template and of those grains I used, the first in esteem were the tiger-striped, the panther-spotted, and those we called maculate, inasmuch as a swarm of bees could have

been living in the grain. And I would speak of the beauty of citron wood which had many little waves and small spirals as if one were looking upon wine mixed with honey.

Joseph taught me much, and could also instruct us on putting up walls of stone for large buildings in Sepphoris. Much did he understand about red basalt and cream limestone from Tivoli, and travertine marble that will crack in fire yet is immune to ice, which ice came upon us in winter in the hills of Galilee. And Joseph told me, although I never saw it, about a substance called pozzolana, a volcanic earth from 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 volcanoes could yet find a new nature and be determined to hold all stones together. So did I ponder on the nature of the Lord and of all the resources of His Kingdom that we learned to work upon with our hands. For was it not in the measure of how He had made things that we could find many an answer to difficulties that had looked to be without solution? And by such devotion to the bounty of God did I see how we prospered in our work until I even knew that I could find Him in the careful splitting of a piece of wood.

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

Soon after the thirty-first birthday of my life Joseph died, and I mourned him. 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 if the Lord was my Father, so was He still awesome and most strange. Thereby did I look to seek wisdom, and decided to make a pilgrimage to John the Baptist. For now I knew that there was that in me which I

could hardly name, and yet it must be brought forth; whatever was not brought forth, could yet destroy you. And was it not also true that once brought forth, it could save you?

Of John the Baptist, much may be told. It could even be said that I knew him before I ever saw him for he was my cousin; moreover, had I heard that he was a prophet among us, and indeed much had been said about my cousin during this year that my mother had been in mourning for Joseph. I knew that John was a holy man and yet of much ill-repute among the Pharisees in our temple in Nazareth. These Pharisees of Nazareth were, in the main, devout, although never equal in devotion to those wearing the white garb of the Essenes; however, many Pharisees, being merchants, 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; in their voices could little be heard about John the Baptist agreeable to my ear, and this was most true in the last year for John's birth and mine were of a similarity.

His father, Zacharias, an Essene priest, and close related to Joseph, was also a descendant of the family of

David. 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 that grow dry in summer drought; thereby was each like unto an Essene of the Essenes. For both believed that the body was a living temple and so one's prayers could serve in a holy war against the powers of evil. But then where were Essenes who did not believe that they were God's first warriors?

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

Yet, it happened that on a given day, in the half year before I was conceived, that Zacharias stood alone by the altar performing a priest's office, and he saw an angel appear before him. Indeed this angel was that same Gabriel who would speak to my mother in another six months.

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

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

He came back to his house all the same, and marveled how on that same day was he soon able to give issue to his wife Elizabeth, who thereupon conceived, and she was so fearful that she would lose what had been given her that she hid herself for five months.

But in the sixth month of her pregnancy, Gabriel came to my mother, Mary, and she, knowing that God had visited her directly, whereas Joseph was still debating how to hide her among his family, Mary decided to go up into the high hills wherein lived Zacharias, and on this visit she saw Elizabeth,

and gave devotion to her, kneeling before her to say, "Blessed art thou." Elizabeth, on hearing these words, also felt her babe within her, and he would yet be John the Baptist. Now he leaped in her womb for the first time whereupon Elizabeth knew that she was full of the Holy Ghost. She spoke out with a loud voice: "Blessed art thou, Mary, for you have honored me on this day, and all generations to come shall call you blessed."

And these words became so fixed in my mother's ear that even when I had become a man, so was there constraint in living with her. So content was she with having been thus blessed that pride was even greater than her humility. Nor was it easy to contradict her will. She kept saying, "He that is mighty has done to me great things." Nor did she ever show hesitation to speak, and often would add, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich He hath sent empty away." And these are words she said, and they are in the gospel of Luke. Yet if I would ask how Luke obtained such, word for word, and placed it properly, I do not know; unless all is due to the strength of my mother's belief which she

related to many when she was old. I, who would yet believe that the poor are to be exalted and the mighty to be scattered, can say that I owe such sentiments to Mary, and to her repetition of them on many an evening and with many a dawn.

Now, when John the Baptist was born and they came to circumcize him on the eighth day, it was thought by neighbors and cousins that he would be called Zacharias after his father, but his mother said, "No, he shall be called John."

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

Yet when these relatives returned to their homes, so did fear come onto them in the dark hill country where we all lived, and there were many who said, "What manner of child shall this be?" Yet, Zacharias, having regained his 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 was lean like his father and mother. Also did I hear that he lived in the desert and preached near a ford in the River Jordan and would remonstrate with the people of Israel decrying their sins and preaching 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 a Greek word for the Messiah. And many from Jerusalem spoke in Greek and said it was Christ who would come to save the Jews.

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

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

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

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

What sayest thou of thyself?"

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

Now these Pharisees said to him, "You perform baptisms yet you are not Christ nor Elijah nor art thou Isaiah?"

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

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Much curiosity had grown in me about the nature of this cousin. For he would only baptize in the wilderness, out to the east of Judea by the River Jordan, and all who came to him had to confess their sins if they sought to be immersed in the river. Nor was it enough for them to bathe. He must immerse them. Yet did many say that this was a baptism to change people's hearts.

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

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

Yet I also heard that his countenance was most severe. When multitudes came to be baptized, so would he greet them by saying, "Generation of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance."

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

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

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

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

I had come with many people and so I saw John the Baptist before he saw me, and could watch all those others who were baptized and then departed. Yet, I remained. And in the loneliness of this place in the desert he could not see me since I concealed myself behind a rock. And it was only when the sun became hot upon that side of the rock that I walked forward, whereupon he said, "I have waited for you."

In his eyes was more light than the sky yet were they paler than the moon. His beard was long. The hair that grew from his ears was matted even as was the hair that grew from his cheeks. And I saw that the wing and the leg of a locust were also caught in his beard. So I wondered how this man who bathed others and washed himself numerous times a day could still have such detritus upon him. Yet was it meet that his beard was like a forest and small creatures could

live within. And he looked at me and said, "Thou art my cousin." And also said, "I have been waiting for you. Today did I know that you would come."

"How," I asked, "can you know?"

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

Then did I confess my sins and so did they concern moments of disrespect toward my mother, and of battles with lustful thoughts. There had been greed in my thoughts and unkindness in judgment of others. Yet in no way had I sinned beyond such matters.

"Well, repent ye still," did he say. "With sin it is always more than we know." And John the Baptist came behind me as I entered the water and with the strength of a desert lion, so did he seize me by the nose with his fingers and, his other hand pressed upon my forehead, he thrust me back into the river. So quickly did I pass from air to water that I was gasping at loss of breath and water swallowed. Still did I see many things much as if heaven had opened and the

Holy Ghost was descending in the shape of a dove. And, behold, it was as if a whole fountain of the Holy Spirit descended on me. So was was the dove upon my shoulder when I came up from the water and I felt as if much of value had returned to me out of all that had been lost before this day and I was one again with the brother in my soul, a poor man but good. Then did I feel more than repentance. I knew glory. And it was as if a million, nay, a million million of souls might follow me and have understanding if only they could know this instant when God's angel came near.

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

And again the Lord spoke in the same words He had used

with Jeremiah. I heard: "Say not 'I am a child' for thou shalt go to all places that I shall send thee and whatsoever I command thee, shalt thou speak, and be not afraid of men's faces," said the Lord. And was it His hand that touched my mouth even as the beak of the dove touched my lips? For the Lord said: "Behold, I put My words in thy mouth. I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." And His word was not only in my heart but like a burning fire in my bones. And John withdrew his hand from my head and we stood in the river. Away went the dove. And John and I spoke to each other and I will tell of that, and soon. For when I took my departure, 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 across the desert, and it was late in the afternoon. In such light did many rocks about me turn to gold and they lay there much as the overthrown walls of a temple open to desert vultures. And I could still hear John the Baptist.

He knew no song and the music of his throat sounded like the voice of a ram. Such had been the cries that issued from him. Yet I walked on my way to Nazareth with much strength. For I understood why I was not like other men and my legs took larger strides than before. I had been blessed and the Lord had come to me and had been near to me.

A great cloud came over the sky as I walked and it formed with rain even as it passed before the sun. There was downpour. A rainbow rose from one end of the desert to touch at the other end, and above me was the radiance of the Lord. Soon it dazzled my eyes and I lay upon my face in this hot sand and heard the voice of the One who could speak and He

said, "Son of Man, stand upon your feet."

And the spirit entered and set me up again, and He said, "Once I spoke to the prophet Ezekiel in these words and he saved our people in Babylon. Now, these words are for you: Son of Man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a nation that hath rebelled against Me, even unto this very day for they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I shall send you unto them and you shall say unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord God.' And they, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear to hear, yet shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And thou, Son of Man, be not afraid of their words though briars and thorns be with thee and thou must dwell among scorpions, but get thee into the house of Israel and speak My words unto them for thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language whose words you cannot understand but to the house of Israel. Surely had I sent thee to strangers they would harken to thee. But the house of Israel is impudent and hard-hearted. Behold, I will make thy face strong against their face and thy forehead strong against theirs. So, fear them not, and neither be dismayed at their looks."

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

Notwithstanding, I still had many hours to travel across land I did not know well. If I felt exaltation so did I also know exhaustion; the scrolls I had studied since childhood were not as near to me as these words of this high Lord, my God, yet I could only fear Him now that He was near. For His temper was as loud as thunder and His anger was equal to hail that would not cease: the sound of His voice had been in my ear like unto the fall of great rocks even as they reverberate in their fall. And their echoes are like the ancestors of great rocks fallen before them. And I did not know how to serve a Lord who could leave boils upon the flesh of every man and beast in the land of Egypt, cast hail to blight every herb of the field, and set fire in the grass and to every tree of the field until it was consumed and broken. I threw up my hands toward heaven as if to ask whether I was truly the one to exercise His force when He was a Lord so vengeful. And God said to me, "Not yet are you strong. Therefore, do not return to your home. Go up rather into

that mountain before you now. And in that wilderness, pray to Me among those crags, and fast among those rocks broken by Me and My lightning. And drink what water thou wilt. For there is water beneath the rocks. But sup on no food.

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

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

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

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

He replied: "For all but the Christ." And then said John: "Once did the Holy Spirit come to me. And so near that I put my hands before my eyes, but the Holy Spirit said: 'You cannot see My face yet will I turn away and you can look upon My back,' and He allowed me to see that His back was noble, a noble back." Then John grasped my arm. "I have known since I was a child that my cousin must replace me for my mother spoke of your mother," and then he kissed me on both cheeks. "I baptize only with water," he said, "and can cleanse all souls who have truly repented, 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 before I slept, and was shielded in slumber from serpents and scorpions. 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, the odor of weariness cannot be separated

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from the flesh inasmuch as great fatigue speaks of all that has been lost to one's striving. Albeit, his skin was honest in its scent and full of the loneliness of the desert and its rocks. And so did he smell also of the waters of the river Jordan and the heavy wisdom of its mud and its silt.

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

At the summit I sat in the shadow of a great stone and looked out upon the lands of Israel, upon Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Peering through such haze of golden hue I wondered whether gold spires were rising from the hills of Jerusalem. But I was also hungry and did not think long on Jerusalem; my stomach had much eagerness to eat after living without food for a day and receiving so much blessing.

Yet did I also know why the Lord had sent me to the summit of this mountain without a name. For it was not enough to be His son, and cousin to John the Baptist. I must suffer through tests and they would soon come. And the first test was that I did not eat but pass through a fast. Yet

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

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

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

thorns.

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

And Solomon replied: "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, a great people that cannot be numbered nor counted. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart that I may discern between good and bad, for who is able to judge this, so great a people?"

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

And then God gave him all that Solomon had not asked for, riches and honors both until there were no kings like

Solomon in those days, and Solomon had great wisdom, but still I heard the voice of the Lord in my ear, saying: "Solomon did not keep My commandments and his failure rests in the gifts that I gave him. Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were a thousand and five. All people came to hear the wisdom of Solomon for he exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And these kings brought him silver, ivory, apes and peacocks. But," said the Lord in my ear, "King Solomon loved many strange women: the daughter of Pharaoh and the women of the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Sedonians and the Hittites, whereas I had said unto the children of Israel, 'Ye shall not go in to them. For surely they will turn your heart toward their gods.' But Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines and when Solomon was old, his heart was not perfect with Me. So," said the Lord, "I will not give you riches and you will never tarry with a woman or you shall lose the Lord."

And it was then I knew that He had given me Solomon's sins on which to meditate and that was an advantage not given to Solomon. So did His voice enter my spirit and His words

permeate my flesh in its fasting.

And I, being without food, had no desire for a woman, nor did I feel at odds with the Lord's decision. And my fast continued.

The prophets were often with me in these weeks: Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Daniel and Ezekiel. For I recalled these prophets' words as if they were my own, and soon did I dream that I was with the prophet Elijah, and had contests with the prophets of Baal. I became the equal of more than forty such prophets who came to make a sacrifice of a bullock while crying aloud and lacerating themselves with knives and lances to show their devotion to Baal. Blood gushed forth from the wounds of these prophets, yet no voice answered; the God Baal could not speak. And being as Elijah in my dream, so did I restore the altar of the Lord that these prophets of Baal had torn down. And I took twelve stones to stand for the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, and with those stones built an altar and dug a trench about it. And put wood into its place on the altar and cut the bullock into pieces, thereupon laying the raw flesh upon the wood. So did I also fill four barrels with water and pour it on the sacrifice,

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until water ran into the trench around the altar.

And with this deluge of water soaking upon the sacrifice at the altar, so before the prophets of Baal did I say:

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

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

Here it came to me that I was dreaming. Neither was I Elijah but only remembering the scroll of Elijah. And I knew that my fast would continue until forty days and forty nights had passed. But so did I also recall that the Lord had said unto Elijah: "I have seven thousand left me in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hast not kissed him." And such was the end of my first four weeks of fast. And I understood why I was here. For my people of Israel were in peril and in much danger of God's final judgment if they did not change their ways.

And I saw how my youth had passed with more thought given to the wood I worked than to my people, and I

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remembered how Joseph would say: "All share in the sinfulness of Israel because we make no effort to change it."

I was yet to learn that I would care for 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, since I would live with the wisdom of Isaiah, 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 had hope that with such a remnant of good Jews could I recover all that had been lost in the nation, and I would repeat his sayings 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. I pondered over the prayers I would seek to use with sinners and knew I would tell them, as did Isaiah: "Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Not of such a death did I hear."

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

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

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

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

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

nor free of dust. Indeed, that thou art the Son of God," mused the Devil aloud, "is a surprise to me. Why has your Father chosen thee? Say to Him when next you have converse that I salute Him. For, do you know? Thy Father and I have had much traffic and some dispute, and thereby, are eager always to obtain word of the Other and His doings. Indeed, on those occasions when We meet, so do I tell Him that while all people may be His Creation, and the crown of all He hath created among the animals and the plants of the field, and you Jews even His Chosen, still it is I, not He, who hath the better understanding of such Creation. For such Creation has given issue to many small gods and creatures and spirits that He does not know as well as myself. Of course, I was once His servant, His most trusted servant. Contemplate then how well I understand Him. As above, so below. But what is below knows better how it is above, than above can know below."

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

of fast now became as balm in my limbs, and so I could 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 is it possible," I exclaimed. "He is all-powerful. The heavens and the earth, the stars and the sun, bow down to Him."

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

"Know thee," said the Devil, "that the Father is but one God among Many. You might take account of the myriad respected by the Romans. Even so, does your Father not have the power to command His own Jews for whom He is One. Look to His rages; they are unseemly for a great god and swollen in proportion. He issues threats, and they are too many. 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

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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!"

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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 being much unlike men, live with separate understanding. Indeed, your Father hath no inkling of women; His scorn is given over to His prophets. Look to Isaiah! Declare to me that Isaiah does not speak out of your Father's heart when he says: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scabbard the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts--' Not a whit less," said the Devil, "than their secret parts!" And he continued to speak as with the words of Isaiah: "'The Lord will take away their attires like the moon, the bracelets and the bonnets, the ornaments of the legs, the earrings, the

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

"My Father was speaking of the nation of Zion," I said. "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 for 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 offal shall come up out of their carcasses and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.' Wherefore is this rage in your Father? Is it not inchoate? His failures burn in His heart. Does He not suspect that He may not be all-powerful? But then He is without sufficiency of spirit: He cannot say: 'Yea, I have lost, yet 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, and multiplied thy whoredoms. Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians, thy neighbors, great of flesh; and hast played the whore also with the Assyrians because thou wast insatiable.

" 'Wherefore, O harlot, because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered, therefore I will gather all thy lovers with whom thou hast taken pleasure; and will gather them round about against thee, and give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall strip thee of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels and leave thee naked and bare, and they shall stone thee, 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, "and 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 says 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 my Father had been as cruel in His language as Satan, by repute, was in his deeds? And worse. For I had been stirred. My loins were quickened by the fire of my Father's language.

Yet such became my salvation. And it was against this visitor. I could know that such movement within me had not come from the words of my Father through his prophet Ezekiel, but by hearing the voice that belonged to Satan. For with

much relish had he spoken of all that was debauched in these women of Jerusalem. And the Devil knew. At this moment was I still free of him.

Whereupon he said to me, "Do not think of yourself as being here on this summit of this mountain. Rather, are you sitting beside me and we are above the holy city."

I had no need to say yes; I had merely to give assent within. For his embrace of my vision was so complete that indeed I now saw the city of Jerusalem and it was beneath us. And I felt great vertigo inasmuch as we were now on the highest dome of the Great Temple in Jerusalem. At that moment, even as if he was in possession of such vertigo did the Devil say to me, "If thou be the son of God, cast thyself down. Leap that the angels may bear thee."

And I felt much temptation to jump into the fall below.

So did I know that an abyss was opening. And it was before all generations to come. They would stand on a height and quiver like a blade of grass in the wind of that unruly spirit who lives in our breath, and it has much fear of the leap. So did the Devil look at me again with his dark eyes and by the points of light within were these eyes like a

night of stars; he would promise glory. "Stay with your Father and you will labor for Him, and be consumed. Jump, and save thyself. Jump!"

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

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

Indeed, in that instant did I see that greed was godly to him; from crude greed could be brought forth works of great power and rich aroma. "Those who have gained loyalty to me," said the Devil, "sit upon the earth with such command that they never leave little turds fit for a goat of the sort that issues from the bony cheeks of your friend John who will not even shit on the Sabbath. No," said the Devil, "nor will he piss either, though he be doubled in pain. But then he must carry a small hoe to cover his leavings."

To myself, I said, "These are but words." The Devil

could possess me only if I died, and in the manner he urged. So long as I lived, I remained the Son of God.

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

At this moment he opened his lips to say: "In secrecy will you be reborn. God will not know. He cannot keep record of all who are born each day and I have power to distract Him, and constantly."

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

Yet I did not know. If Satan was now emplaced between my Father and me, might he not have the power to steal the wings of the Lord that might be offered to me? So I did not jump. I was in fear. Instead, I said: "It is written: 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'" But I did not know whether I spoke out of my own will or with words imparted to me by my Father.

Then the Devil led me from the spire of this Great Temple on up to an exceedingly high mountain, higher than

all, and I would have shivered in my fast if it had been the peak of a true summit for, yea, we were surrounded by snow. Yet it was but a vision, and from such height did he show me the kingdoms of the world that were to the north, the east, the south and the west. I saw wonders, yet so much passed in procession, 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 that comes from emptiness itself (it being the wisdom of the Lord to show how even in fasting is strength) that I could find resolve to whisper to myself: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." And I had the power to look into the dark eyes of Satan and say: "It is not you I want, but my Father."

At that moment Satan gave a cry like a wild goat who is wounded with a spear. And he said to me: "Your Father will destroy the universe. And for too little!" And he left. And behold, I had another vision of angels. 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. In rejecting Satan, so had I also been scraped sore in my judgment. Nor did I feel desire at that hour to serve the Lord.

Yet was I not wholly distraught. For as I marched, so could I recite the words of Isaiah: "Unto us," I declared, "a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of peace." And if I were not large enough for any of those words, and supposed that God had chosen me for His son because I was in the midst of all men, rather than like a king 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 pass on to me, perhaps the world of men might

also multiply in virtue. No matter the derision of the Devil, so did I believe in my Father; the Lord was still my Father; for Him would I labor. Soon would He come to save Jerusalem. He was Lord of the Universe. For Him would I labor, and with joy. For with Him would comfort also come to those who were sorrowful and so would the hungry be fed, yes, and even those sinners in greatest despair would find their sins remitted, and even the unclean gentiles would be admitted to the table. And I felt such joy at these thoughts. And was no longer in fear of Satan. If some part of me had given ear to him, still had my visitor captured but a small part of me. I had been tested, I had proved loyal--in the main had I proved loyal--and so could I believe that virtue was the finer reward. For now did my tongue feel clean.

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I returned to Galilee and entered Nazareth and came back to the house where I lived with my mother. Being there to greet me, she was much relieved. In all the forty and more days that I had been gone, she had first supposed that I had gone on a journey with my cousin but then she heard fearful stories concerning John, and they had come to pass while I was on the mountain. That son of King Herod who was Herod Antipas lived in much distrust of John the Baptist for he had dreams that the prophet would inspire many people to rise against him. Therefore had Herod Antipas shut John away in a dungeon in the fortress of Machaerus that was on the high cliffs above the Dead Sea in Perea. And by that, if by naught else, did I know that the time had come to leave Nazareth and take up a life of preaching and emulate what John had done.

Yet on speaking to my mother concerning this matter did much go wrong. She thought I should not be a preacher nor

wander on many roads to give blessings to strangers; better to become a devout Essene. So would she propose that I join the desert community of Essenes at Qumran. But that was neither to my understanding or desire since such men as would join must first confess all guilt and all sin. Being Jews, but not of Qumran, so must they have been guilty of practices unfaithful to God. Only the Essenes who joined the community of Qumran were true Essenes--so was it seen in Qumran. Devout Essenes like Joseph who lived in their own villages were less than true Essenes.

And indeed, one must give all that one owned to the brethren at Qumran and perforce must live among them for years as one still impure while observing all rituals of purity even to not touching the pots in which others prepared food. One gave whole obedience to the leaders, and did not speak in their presence unless invited.

My mother knew how the angel had come to her, therefore did I not understand how she would want such a life for me. Was it not the Lord to whom I should submit for tests rather than the high priest of Qumran? But then, my mother was not a woman to know easily. If she was proud of me and most

proud of my origin (about which she chose never to speak), still was she fearful of my well-being and so expectant of catastrophes yet to befall me that fear lived like a night animal in our small house. And indeed, one could almost hear the scurrying of such fear in the dark.

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

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

Yet she was also a mother and knew me very well, even to sensing that it was not only my Father who had been with me, but the Other, and of Satan was she wholly afraid. Being an Essene, so did she know that the Devil was the power of darkness, and therefore did she wish me to be guided by a community of their most devout, she being much possessed of a

sense that nothing less than catastrophe would befall me if I were to wander about. So did she not make my way easier. For indeed, she had the power to foretell many events.

Yet in the midst of much quiet but unyielding dispute between us came a diversion. A marriage was taking place in Cana, a town of two hours' walk from Nazareth, and the father of the bride, being a wealthy man who had but a few years before hired Joseph and his carpenters to construct a fine house for him, so did he now invite my mother, and myself, and her two sons, James and John, to whom Joseph had been father. And it was the first occasion on which she left her home since Joseph had died. Thereby was she so doubtful of whether to go, or not go, that when we arrived, so was it late, and the ceremony having concluded, my mother, most embarrassed, looked about sharply and said to me, "They are without wine." And indeed the village had come to celebrate and many people had consumed all the wine.

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

never yet exercised.

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

And all of this was done with much joy for me. I felt near to the Kingdom of God and knew that this Kingdom was composed of bounty and much beauty and of tenderness as gentle as the concern that rests in the touch of one's fingertips. And so was I overcome with sorrow. For I had a vision of a great feast that I would never see. Before long, therefore, did I depart, and left it to my brothers James and John to take my mother home.

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

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

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

Before going to Capernaum, however, did I decide to speak on my last morning in Nazareth. In my years as a carpenter, so had my tongue had shown no facility equal to the skill of my hands with wood; in truth could this tongue make fine fittings of words only when the Lord offered me

speech. What I uttered by myself was halting and often like an affliction. So, I thought that I might ease such stricture by making a first preachment where some, at least, would know me.

I went to the synagogue and tried to speak but could say no more than: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Unless we repent, the end is near." Upon this came silence from the congregation since how could they wish the Day of Judgment to be on them quickly? And indeed, it was a sunny morning in Nazareth. I, thinking of how faith was most severe, yet must still be made to seem as natural as breath, said also: "I thank Thee, O Father, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

Later would I see what was written in the Gospel according to Luke, and his words were not less than rank with exaggeration.

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

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

Such was said by Luke, but then he was not a Jew, and he was full of wrath against Jews. More was it, therefore, that having spoken in the small synagogue where I had gone for all of my days as a young man, none were ready to laugh at me. Yet nonetheless did I feel their laughter creep out of their feet. And such silent derision was like unto mice scampering over my toes. I felt much shame. Indeed, I could hear the whispers before they were spoken: "The carpenter doth tell us to repent." And others said, "What are these things that the Lord hides from the wise and prudent?"

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

And even if the Devil had sought to induce me to linger upon such improper thoughts, I did my best not to think even once of what nakedness a young woman might carry beneath her robe. In cleanliness would be my joy even if such joy now

had to suffer with the shame I had known in the synagogue at Nazareth. Wherefore had there been so little on my tongue? And with this thought, all pretense had to vanish that I was feeling joy.

At the Great Temple in Jerusalem when I was twelve, the inspiration of the Lord had been with me, whereas now, as I walked on the road from Nazareth to Capernaum, so did I come to understand that my heart was still as bruised as if rocks had fallen upon my chest and from that high place where the Devil had spoken against my Father. Indeed had this Satan 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 but for an instant, that God was not close to me in His sentiments. Might it be that I was too gentle in understanding to obey all orders of the Almighty? As the Devil had said, He was vengeful.

Moreover, had the Devil mocked Him: yet neither had my Father defended Himself, nor struck lightning upon the mount. On that instant, in the midst of such thoughts, did I stumble on the road. It was a misstep most uncommon. For I was lithe of foot, yet I fell heavily. An arm with weight had

cast me to the earth. And a strong voice spoke into my ear:
"Comprehend ye that the words of the prophets are not My words, even when they dare to speak in My name."

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

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

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

"Too well disposed," He said. "Soon will you learn that but a portion are worth the saving."

"Nor am I with eloquence."

"Yes," said the Lord said, "and so did Moses 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? Am I not the Lord?' Therefore, go, and I will be with thy mouth and I will teach thee what thou shalt say. As I have done with Samuel the prophet, so will I not let any of your words fall to the ground. When you are ready to preach, enter the synagogue. And if you are seized and go before magistrates or other powers of the Romans, take no thought what to answer

inasmuch as the Holy Ghost shall teach you in that same hour what will be there to reply."

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 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: know that words are also among My creatures and travel by many roads."

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

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

Lord was now strong. And I came to Capernaum.

On the road had I spoken these words aloud:

"Ask, so shall it be given you.

"Seek, and ye shall find.

"Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

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

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

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

fellows for forty days is also a fast of much emptiness. And if I had seen men and women at the wedding and in the synagogue of Nazareth, still they were not of my choice, not friends nor hard workers and apprentices.

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

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

Yet now with the help of the Lord could I use Satan's

manner when speaking to many. I would address them with the finest courtesy and the most intimate exhilaration, as if we shared among ourselves, and only among ourselves, the wonder of many things.

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

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

diversion than for prayer. In which case, to choose them had been a mistake. Yet did Simon vouch for them and Simon was strong, and would be my rock. Thereby did I soon begin to call him Simon Peter. Which Peter is a name for rock. And Peter would be with me in all hours but one.

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

It was the Sabbath and many were there and I understood that if I had found Peter and Andrew and James and John at

their labors on the Sabbath, it was because they did not keep mark of each day, nor of which days was work forbidden, but as fishermen knew only when their own waters were ready. And with that did I also know how they would not be learned enough to preach with me soon. Yet was I eloquent by myself.

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

Whereas those who betrayed the law, and those who denied the presence of God in their souls, those who chased after sin or folly, would suffer other judgment. And of many shades and depths. For as the stone steps of the dungeon descend into cell beneath cell, so are sinners who do not repent brought down into hell, and know thereby the sides of the pit step by step. So do they also know how the earth can tremble in earthquake as they recognize too late the power of

that Hand which brings downfall to a kingdom. Even as a mouse is trodden underfoot! Words of great strength were in me, and I spoke with the force of a man who hefts a sword. Indeed I had never felt such strength.

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

I said, nor did I know I would speak it until my voice rang forth: "Not every one that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. For I will say, 'I never knew ye. Depart, ye that work iniquity.' Yet if they ask, 'Lord, will thou cast out devils?' then will they be cast out."

And it was as I said. A man came forward from the midst

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

And I saw that his features had once been noble yet had been thickened with the blows he received by way of the unrest within him. So I stood in my place as he approached. And I stared into his eyes and said, "Hold thy peace." And, thereby, did he move no more.

I knew that his foul spirit must be drawn forth from his heart and chest even as a small beast is torn from a burrow, yet did I also know that he had come to me so that all of such might be brought forth. Nor did I have need of a magician's ring nor of secret herbs to place beneath his nostrils, but with the breath of the Holy Spirit I said: "Evil spirit, come forth. Come out of him!"

And it was then that this demon tore out of his throat. And it cried aloud in a bestial voice.

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

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

And in that moment it was true that I felt as if I had hurled a great stone far into the midst of the Sea of Galilee and ripples had gone to every shore. For by the time my new friends Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John and I came out of the synagogue and went back to the house of Simon Peter and Andrew, it was as if I could hear word of my presence passing throughout all the region of Galilee. And such account washed forth in all directions to carry my words unto others.