

S.D.G.

Chapter One

“Cousins”

Book Two

THE KING ARRIVES

By Stephen H. Funck, March 29, 2020

Cleopas¹ and Mary came to Zechariah and Elizabeth’s home in Ein Karem². They had been asked to take young John with them. Cleopas’ brother, Joseph had suggested it years before.³ Taking care of a young child had gotten beyond them. A large number of priests kept offering to take John. Everyone wanted the miracle child. John was very unhappy. His parents had told him what was to happen and why. The families spent time at the festivals together and knew each other. John did not want to leave his parents no matter how much they assured him that they would continue to be seeing each other not just at the festivals but in-between as well.

Passover, Pentecost, Sukkot ⁴ , God commanded His people to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year. It was a grand time, a great party, families visiting and a great Fair. Everyone brought things to sell, and buy. It was crowded, packed. The weather was good, mild temperatures, sleep on the ground. Their unheated, open window homes were hardly more comfortable. Cleopas, Joseph, Zachariah’s extended families all camped together. No need for a tent, all they needed was a screen so the women could change their clothes. What they had to bring was mostly things to sell. There were special worship services, prayers, singing, activities, scholars teaching. A few had to stay home to care for those too ill to travel or watch over the animals, turns were taken.

The cool rainy winter had been hard on Zechariah and Elizabeth. They felt it would not be long before they would have a hard time taking care of each other. It was such an honor that God would chose them to give this miracle child. Everyone know that. However, they did not tell anyone what the Angel told Zechariah about John when he was burning incense in the Temple. They did not even tell John. God Himself would reveal that when the time came. They assured John, Passover was coming and they would see him then. Also Emmaus was not too far from Ein Karem. Somedays they could come back and see each other.

They did come back several times before the Passover. That Passover was especially joyful because Joseph, Mary and Yeshua were back from Egypt. All of Joseph’s children were with them and Mary’s mother Ann, Elizabeth’s cousin. There was so much to talk about, so much to catch up on. John and Yeshua had heard of each

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleopas> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zechariah_\(New_Testament_figure\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zechariah_(New_Testament_figure))

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein_Karem

³ King of Kings Bk 1 Chapter 4 The Second Visitation page 11

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Pilgrimage_Festivals

other and got along as small boys do. They overheard their parents talk about adult things. Elizabeth and Zachariah, Ann were honored elders.⁵

They were observed. Men remembered, Zachariah came out of the Temple waving his arms, not talking, Nine months later, his aged wife had a miracle child. They would be watched. Then they were joined by Mary, Joseph, Yeshua. Who were they? How did they fit in? Questions were asked in Nazareth and later in Bethlehem. Bits and pieces, nothing to put together. Yeshua also was supposed to be a miracle child. His family defended him. No father was known, but Joseph, Cleopas, Zachariah, Joachim Mary's father before he died, all defended him. Mysterious. Actually only a few were watching Yeshua. There was nothing special to see and few cared about anything in Galilee, in Nazareth.

As the years went by Anna, then Zachariah and Elizabeth became too feeble to come to the festivals and finally died. John became comfortable with Cleopas and Mary. He was their oldest child. Yeshua was the youngest for Joseph and Mary. The families were pious, observing all the commandments. In the villages old men taught boys to memorize the Torah and Prophets. It was the only subject to learn. Not all boys studied hard, a few girls hung around at times. Singing Psalms was always fun. Yeshua's oldest brother James was an excellent student. He was becoming a scholar. John was a priest, even though he was being raised in a laborer's home. Yeshua's grandmother was priestly stock but that did not count.

Passover, Pentecost, Sukkot, the festivals were family reunions. John and Yeshua were especially close. They had much in common. They felt the weight of expectations. Their parents said, they did not know what they were to become. They would have to pray to God for guidance. At the proper time the Father Almighty, King of All wisdom would lead them. For now and every day they were to do their best, worship, serve and obey. Learning God's scriptures was the key. Do not worry, trust God's unfailing love and mercy. John and Yeshua felt the weight of expectations. As boys do, they wrestled. Sometimes one or the other would win. Boys had contests who could throw the heaviest rock the farthest, pick up the heaviest rock? They helped their fathers.. Students played memory games, one would start a verse and the other tried to complete it. Yeshua won more than he lost. John said "They gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord," Yeshua completed the verse, "And fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord."⁶ John joked about the Wisdom of Yeshua ben Sirach⁷. Would Yeshua someday write one Book of the All-Virtuous Wisdom of Yeshua? Yeshua said he didn't expect to, ever. What, when, did the Lord of all reveal what John was to do, to be? John teased Yeshua, how great would he become? What would he do? Yeshua replied, the Father had not revealed anything to him. They both kept praying for wisdom, guidance, protection from error. They prayed that for many years.

Singing Psalms was just fun. There were old Psalms and new ones. They tried to figure out what the words were referring to, what situation or prophecy was meant. They were specially intrigued by the new Psalm

⁵ <https://katachriston.wordpress.com/2011/06/07/richard-j-bauckham-on-the-relatives-of-jesus/>

⁶ 1 Samuel 7:6 It was normal for a boy to have memorized the Torah and Prophets. There were other religious books. Some are called Apocrypha and others exist. Some we have only titles or portions.

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sirach>

that said: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."⁸ Some boys played synagog, taking the different parts. Actually playing soldier was much more popular. Priests from John's father's course would come to talk to him. Cleopas did not permit that when John was young. Later, they came to talk but John tried to keep distant. It was uncomfortable enough to be a miracle child, being someone to be used for their purposes was worse. John would make his own way, prayerfully God's way.

The Nazareth synagog had a regular place near the top of the Mount of Olives. Synagogs kept the regular daily prayer services, they did at home. Men did take turns attending the services in the Temple. Since there were far more pilgrims than what would fit in the Temple Courts, only a few went any one time, some women too. Those services were glorious. The mount overlooked the Temple Courts. They could see and hear the services in the distance. The olive oil from the mount was reserved for the sacred services in the Temple. The Master of the Oil had divided the mount into sections supervised by his staff, all priests. At the bottom of the hill was the oil press in a cave with room to store many jars of oil. The Master of the Oil would walk through, talking with the pilgrims, making sure everything was good.

At the bottom of the hill between the brook and Temple wall was one of the great fairs. There were things to buy from all over. The fair by the great palace even had silks, ivory, luxuries from far off lands.⁹ Everyone brought things to sell and everyone came to buy. That made packing for the journey easier. They did not have to bring a little of everything. Bring a large amount of what they have to sell and buy the small amounts of what is needed. The heavy oven and cooking pot were left with the steward. Some kept a large mill stone and ground grain for a small portion. The women were very happy they did not need to spend hours each day grinding. It was much more pleasant to spin as they talked with each other.

Some camped on the back side of the mount going down toward the Salt Sea. The animals grazed below them on grass and brush from the winter rains. Most pilgrims came three times a year. They knew how to manage. The Council oversaw and regulated all that needed to be done. Their major issues were behind the scenes determining who and how the profits were spent. This was the major source of income and required major construction. The rebuilding of the Temple, expansion of the Temple platform, and the water supply were only the most visible works.

James studied with the scholars. He tried the various schools of Pharisees. The Sadducees, did not accept sons of laborers. The Pious Ones¹⁰ appealed to him the most. Their leadership were celibate priests but they had married and laymen on lesser levels. They were deeply concerned with the apostasy of the official priesthood and expected the imminent appearance of the Messiah in judgment and restoration of righteousness. James followed the usual route, traveling, teaching in synagogs and at the festivals. He acquired a good reputation

⁸ Psalm 110 The Dead Sea scrolls have the first three books of Psalms up to Psalm 90. The rest were not fixed in the Canon until later. It seems the whole Psalms was set before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. See http://thesignofconcord.com/uploads/The_Psalm_and_Qumran.pdf

⁹ http://thesignofconcord.com/King_of_Kings_Suppl_s.php "What was it like to be a Passover Pilgrim?"

¹⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essenes>

among the Pious Ones and outsiders. When people heard James was speaking at a synagog of the Pious, there was always a crowd. In time he became highly regarded and was called James the Righteous.¹¹

John and Yeshua would worship in the Temple. That usually meant being far back in the crowd. Sometimes they could glimpse through the gates to see inside the Middle or Inner Court. The heralds repeated the words of liturgy and readings. The Trumpets, musicians and choir were drowned out by the 150,000 voices of the great congregation. The most prominent teachers had regular places in the Temple court for their followers. Outside the Temple Courts, synagogs had different speakers either a visiting scholar or one of their own leaders. The great houses of the members of the Sanhedrin featured more speakers. Some places were by invitation only, political intrigue.

Yeshua and John especially like to listen to the merchants pilgrims that came from far away. They came from Spain, North Africa, Yemen, Aksum, and across the sea from Cochin India. Beyond Babylon, beyond the Medes and Parthians were the trading cities of the silk road. All across the Diaspora the hope was to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem once in a lifetime. The merchants had endured long and expensive journeys and still faced the return. They carried the news of the world. They told of far off religions, stories of great birds and beasts, spirits and lamps. Yeshua learned the wisdom and folly of the world. Some synagogs featured the ideas of Greek Philosophers. Some took the new ideas as reasons to reject the old faith, others tried to merge them all together. New books, new psalms, new ideas, news of the world, John and Yeshua were fascinated by the tales. They listened carefully and prayed for wisdom, discernment, and understanding. They had long exciting conversations and exhausting, hours of prayer.

Joseph had arranged good marriages for his sons and daughters. Festivals were grand family reunions. When John and Yeshua were of age Cleopas and Joseph talked with them about marriage but both said maybe later. Not to marry was socially unacceptable but the Pious ones, James, did not marry. They considered that a mark of deep devotion to God. John felt he ought to connect with his father's course in the priesthood. He went to them for a number of years. That was not the way. He went to James and spent years with the Pious Ones in the desert. He never did fit in. They knew he was a miracle child destined by God for something.

Yeshua remained in Nazareth working with his father Joseph until he died. Then he took care of his mother. She still sang with the choir in synagog. Yeshua was elected to minor positions but never president. He was respected and quiet. Always helpful, yet there was something about him, different, remote. No one said anything unkind, talked about the old events anymore. John and Yeshua met at the festivals, prayed for wisdom, discernment, and understanding. They had long exciting conversations and exhausting, hours of prayer. They were much alike, set apart from everyone else in the world. They were burdened. They felt the weight of expectations. The silence of the Lord of Heaven was the hardest to bear. What was His will for them? How would they know? Keep praying, serving, doing their best, loving God and loving all God's people.

The Pious ones cut themselves off from the erring, from the Temple priesthood, from the pharisaic houses, from the ways of the world. They were dedicated to be holy before the Lord, uncorrupted by the ways of the world. God, the Messiah, would soon return in judgment, burning the evil in fire and restore the faithful of

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James,_brother_of_Jesus

Israel. It was both true and too harsh. God was the God of all compassion, the saving God, forgiving sins, healing all burdened, crushed, lost. John could no longer remain with them. He felt driven to go to the crossing of the Jordan to proclaim the coming of the Messiah and invite all to repentance, to return to the Lord. The message of judgment and hope, good news, gospel.

John was a crazy man in the desert by the Jordan, calling to those who passed by. For a long time no one stopped, no one listened. One, then another, a few, asked what should they do? Repent and be baptized. Baptism, mikveh,¹² was getting to become popular in Jerusalem. There had been one for the Chief Priest, then more were made for high officials. More were being built in Jerusalem and they were spreading farther away. It was a sign of cleansing, preparation for official holy duties. It was required for converts. It signified their birth as Jews. no longer part of the outside nations.

The connection was made, people remembered. This John was the miracle child of Zechariah, long ago. Many more people came, not just from Judea. The news spread. Some who came stayed to learn of John, to be disciples. There was an excitement that God was moving, the Messiah was coming. Fire and destruction of all evil, the restoration of all that was righteous, all that was holy. It was for everyone who repented, who came to God. The news reached the Council. They sent delegates to investigate.

Yeshua heard in Galilee. He understood God had answered John's prayers. Yeshua prayed that the Father would now answer his prayers. His mother heard, she understood. She prayed. Anticipation, something new was happening, something promised long ago. It was not all comfortable, almost frightening. The world was being changed transformed to the core. What would it mean for the old to be overthrown and the new come forth? Yeshua would be great and a sword would pierce her heart. Many would rise. Many would fall. What would her son do, become? What could she do? She decided to weave him a new robe, while she prayed.

Yeshua came to think he should go see John and talk with him, pray with him.
After He was baptized, He felt He should go out in the wilderness and pray.

Questions. These are questions that were in my mind that I attempted to answer as I was writing.

Jesus lived a normal life as he grew up. What was a normal life like in His Day?

What was it like for pilgrims at the festivals? What did it all involve?

What would happen in Jesus' life from the time he returned from Egypt till his baptism?

How could the miracle children be obscured as they grew older?

What would have happened to John since his parents were elderly?

How does this fit in with the expectations of the people for the Messiah?

The Gospels record the events of Jesus life. They do not include the background information everyone knew at the time they were written. This is one of a series of stories that includes that background faithful to what is known about the history and culture. I hope this provokes-in a good way-the reader to think deeply about the Scriptural account. Go to my web site for more. <http://thesignofconcord.com> . These are in the section titled "King of Kings". There is also a section titled "King of Kings Supplements" with additional information.

If you do not think this reflects the culture and historic situation, how would you tell the story?

Many thanks to my patient wife Lynne for repeatedly proofreading.

This is meant for non technical readers. The footnotes are links to the documentation.

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikveh>