

Marcellus and his small troop were given one night to enjoy the pleasures of Tiberius, before leaving for Capernaum on the following day. He could see his destination along the curve of the coast, from the higher ground away from the shore of the Sea. Dominating the town was the palace of the Tetrarch. he found it disturbing, almost an act of defiance, standing over the quarters of the Roman garrison. Capernaum promised to be a very different place to the raw newness of this alien city on the landscape.

He knew little about Capernaum, apart from the fact that it was a fishing town like so many others around the Sea which had been renamed for Caesar. There was a festoon of towns on this western shore and hardly any on the other side, which was shared between the Decapolis and Gaulenitis. The Decapolis was directly under the rule of the governor of Syria and therefore out of the control of Herod. Whereas Gaulenitis formed part of Bashan, which was controlled by Philip the Tetrarch - whose wife, Herod had now taken as his own.

As they rode casually along the coastal road, Marcellus tried to untangle the convoluted relationships in which the descendants of Herod the Great were involved.

When the old king had died, he had bequeathed his kingdom to his three younger sons - having already had his oldest son, Antipater, put to death. To the next oldest, Archelaus, he willed his kingdom and to his two younger sons, Herod and Philip, he had willed the Tetrarchies of Galilee and Peraea respectively.

Archelaus had proved as brutal as his father, to the extent that he had

massacred three thousand of his subjects in the courts of the Temple, until the place was knee deep in corpses and blood - and even by Roman standards, his use of torture to bring his opponents into submission, was more than they were prepared to tolerate. When the unrest had been at its height, a Roman legion had been despatched to Jerusalem.

Herod's will had to be approved by Augustus and so, Archelaus and Herod set out for Rome to petition their case before Caesar. At the same time, fifty of the Jewish elders hurried there to plead that the monarchy should be overthrown. In the absence of their royalty, unrest assumed greater proportions, a Roman legion had been despatched to Jerusalem.

With unfortunate timing, Sabinus, a notorious hard-liner and an agent of the Imperial treasury, arrived and regardless of all warnings, he took up residence in Herod's palace and proceeded to appropriate the taxes and tribute of Judaea.

Pilgrims were streaming in for one of their feasts and bloody clashes ensued - with fighting erupting in the Temple area. There was the usual stone throwing at Roman troops. The arcades were set alight. The Temple was rushed and pillaged of all that was accessible.

Sabinus was said to have appropriated four hundred talents from the Temple treasury, before beating a hasty retreat to the palace and barricading himself against the mob.

The revolt spread throughout the country. The royal palaces were plundered and set ablaze. The governor of Syria eventually stepped in with troops from Beirut and Arabia and as soon as they came in sight of Jerusalem, the mob broke and fled. Subsequently, two thousand were crucified.

The Roman occupation remained and now, Marcellus reflected, he

was part of it and about to add his strength and that of his men, to the garrison of Capernaum.

They clattered through Magdala and no one bothered to raise their heads. Marcellus considered whether it was a calculated insult, or plain indifference to their presence and decided that it was the latter. There was traffic enough along the coastal road, for yet another military movement to be ignored - yet, this was supposed to be a hotbed of political intrigue, the base of a new movement which was reputedly gaining momentum beneath the surface. he told himself that it didn't pay to accept surface impressions. he was there because Pilate suspected something was brewing - and he was there to identify three leaders of what might become an uprising to rival that which had happened after the excesses of Archelaus more than twenty-five years earlier.

The ride to Capernaum was all too short, it was, after all, no more than a dozen miles from Tiberius, but it was like entering another world. A town of baked clay houses - stone ones, here and there for the more well to do.

There were small concerns providing the essentials for the community - the obligatory market, selling produce from the countryside, and those sellers eyed the passing troop with a little more animation - even hostility.

Along the shoreline of a beautiful little cove, was a line of fishing boats, now pulled up on the shore, with the fishermen working on their nets. All was deceptively and sleepily calm, as if nothing ever happened in Capernaum, which was different from one century to the next. It was the perfect place to foment and initiate a revolution!

Marcellus and his Decade joined the routine observation already established in Capernaum and its surroundings. It suited his purpose of identifying the two men who had talked to the so-called 'Messiah'. At first, his

tour of duty took him into the country areas behind the town, up into the hills and into small villages, where the inhabitants stood brazenly outstaring the alien invaders of their centuries-old pattern of life.

It seemed to the young Roman officer that they needed a good dose of discipline to remind them who were the masters, and that they were a subject race, despite their preoccupation with 'Messiahs' and holy men and their arrogant attitude to anyone who wasn't one of their chosen people.

The Centurion would listen patiently to his observations - either when he reported back on another patrol which had been without incident, or when he invited the young man to dine with him and his family. Urban Phobius was a middle-aged man blessed with a young and beautiful wife, who had given him a son upon whom he lavished the affection of a man coming late to fatherhood. That wasn't to say that he was soft with the boy, for Centurion Phobius couldn't leave aside his requirement for discipline, even if it did involve his own family.

The Centurion's affection was the rough sort, which came from fighting in battles for the divine Caesar and the comradeship of tough men, who had beaten back the Teutons on the other side of the Alps, or the Celts of Gaul. Urban Phobius was a no-nonsense man, who stood no indiscipline from his son, but there was a touching relationship between them which made Marcellus envious - he had never enjoyed such a closeness with his own father.

Marcellus brought the matter of discipline to a head one evening, when he vented his annoyance at the lack of regard shown by the hill people. Urban nodded a few times, before interrupting.

"I can understand your point, Marcellus - but ask yourself, what would be your reaction if a troop of invaders clattered through your home village."

Marcellus halted in midstream and stared at him.

"That's hardly the same thing, surely - we represent Rome - not a troop of invaders!"

Phobius eyed him with a growing smile.

"Tell me, what would the average Galilean know about Rome, her history, her accomplishments, her battles won, her might, her majesty? I tell you the answer - nothing! To them, we are another invader - and make no mistake, there have been plenty - with monotonous regularity, invaders have swept through this country - or they've fought their wars here, rather than on their own ground.

Judaea, Samaria, Galilee, have always been the border provinces of one empire or the other. Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek - now Rome! To the average citizen, we're just another invader - they don't care about what we believe, or our gods, or our victories - they care about nothing but their One God who has always protected them, who will never let them down, who will always come to the rescue.

Even if we sent a dozen Legions and wiped their cities from the face of the earth, so long as there is one Jew left alive, their One God will prevail - and mark this - he will ensure that there will ALWAYS be one Jew left alive!

Marcellus stared at him silently, then.

"You make it sound as if they're a people who can never be beaten."

Urban nodded.

"They can be beaten by the might of the Legions, I'm too good a soldier to say otherwise - the Legions will always prevail - but you will never conquer what matters in this people - their will to survive and their utter trust in their One God. They will survive, even if there isn't one left in Palestine.

Do you know this? In Rome itself - as well as in all the other large

cities of the empire, there are communities of Jews, they keep their heads down, they trade, they fit in as best they can with those around them. They make themselves useful to everyone - but, mark this - they worship the One God! The focus for their existence is the Temple in Jerusalem. They acknowledge no other god!"

Marcellus' eyes widened in incredulity.

"Not even Caesar!?"

Phobius eyed him steadily.

"They might pay lip service, but to answer you straight - No! Not even Caesar."

"That's treason!"

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no - Tiberius has the policy of letting each subject race worship their own gods - so long as they don't challenge our supremacy."

Marcellus asked slowly.

"What about this Messiah, they're waiting."

Urban waved his hand casually.

"As long as they wait, there's no problem - if and when he comes, that might be a different matter."

Urban's wife, Cornelia and their son, Lucius, had been the silent listeners to the conversation. For the first time, she interjected.

"My slaves tell me there is a lot of talk in the town about the coming of a man who is being called the Messiah. They expect him at anytime, it's common gossip in the market."

Urban laughed.

"There you have it, Marcellus - we must be on our guard because of market gossip! Perhaps we should make the slaves our consultants on

Roman policy."

Cornelia joined the laughter, but Marcellus could see that she was uncomfortable. Urban indulged her, but it wasn't the way a woman liked to be indulged.

It took about six weeks before Marcellus finally caught sight of the two followers who had approached the announced Messiah - and when he did, they were right under his nose.

It was simply a matter that his patrol schedule either didn't bring him to where they were, or if it brought him to the locality where they lived, they had been absent. The change came about because he took his Decade on an early morning patrol, which coincided with the return of the fishing boats. He halted his men and watched as the small boats were run ashore and quickly identified Andrew and John. He watched them off-loading their catch and the easy relationship they shared with others in the fleet.

There was no doubt in his mind that these were the men he had seen and the ones whom Lucian had followed. The halted patrol was beginning to attract attention. He gave a crisp order and turned away. Now, he was confronted with what to do next. He badly wanted to keep them under observation and to report their associates. It was more than likely that they would be the nucleus of a revolutionary cell and when trouble broke, it could be nipped in the bud by a speedy response and the arrest of the ringleaders. The difficulty was, that he couldn't keep them under observation without giving his interest away. A Roman soldier watching a group of Galileans couldn't hope to go unnoticed. Six weeks had passed since the incident with the Baptist and he sensed time was running out.

He made his report to Phobius, the Centurion adopted his usual stance when confronted by uncomfortable news, he crossed to the window

aperture and stared out over the calm, blue waters of the Sea. He was a long time in responding and Marcellus remained standing rigidly to attention.

When it came to business, he didn't rely on friendship with the old man to countenance any lack of discipline. it wouldn't be expected and it wouldn't be tolerated.

Urban Phobius turned and flickered a glance at him.

"At ease, Marcellus - you are completely certain that these were the men you saw at the Jordan?"

"They're the ones Lucian Quintus followed, Centurion."

Phobius nodded.

"I suppose I've allowed this place to seduce me - and that is something I ought not to be able to admit! Capernaum is a deceptively peaceful place, but who can tell what's hidden under the surface - like the Sea out there, calm much of the time, but deep down, strong currents which drag men to their deaths.

Very well! I agree, you can't pretend to be a Galilean and I haven't any one I can trust, who even looks like one!"

He stared at the top of his desk

"Marcellus! I have an additional duty for you. As from now, you are the official provisioner for the garrison. Each day, you will be sure that we are supplied with the best fish! Well, don't gape - get to it man!"

Marcellus hastily saluted and retreated, conscious of a roar of laughter behind him. Thus it was, that accompanied by Philus, his slave, he marched militantly through the streets of Capernaum, with his armour clattering to announce his coming. His progress was observed by the locals, who raised their heads to wonder at the sight of a Roman officer on foot and clearly in a hurry.



He bypassed some of the smaller vendors haggling with clients over prices, and made a beeline for John, who was standing by his father's boat with James. Marcellus spotted Andrew a little further along and knew that he wasn't mistaken - these were the two! Thus it was, that John found himself confronted by a man of about his age, who clearly didn't enjoy his mission. Those around them stood upright and watched. John stared quietly into the gimlet eyes of the young officer and tried to remember what he had done which might have excited the attention of the occupying authorities.

"Can I help you, sir?"

Marcellus glowered unhappily.

"Fish! I want fish!"

There was a general relaxation, but the watchfulness remained. John pointed to the baskets holding the previous night's catch.

"Take your pick, sir."

Marcellus flickered a glance and then stared resolutely at the revolutionary.

"I'm here to buy fish for the garrison - on a regular basis."

John stared at him steadily. The man was lying, but business was business.