

The moon rose from out of the mountains of Moab and flooded the scene with the light of the sun. Marcus sat on the terrace and watched the hills pick up the first rays. It was a silver light and it contained no heat. He found it hard to imagine what the world must have been like before the Kingdom had been established. In earlier times it had been a time of darkness, when the sun, moon and stars had been hidden under a thick cloud for three and a half years. As a child, he had listened to the tales told by the Survivors, when they would group together under the trees in the square. Even then, it had seemed to him that they were exaggerating, trying to outdo each other with their personal tales of horror.

He watched the moonlight grow in intensity, flooding down the flanks of the hills and pushing back the darkness of the valley floors. He wondered where the truth lay. It was hard to believe that there had ever been such a time. A time when God the Father had allowed a set of circumstances to arise which would culminate in a destruction so terrible, that millions perished in the matter of hours and the rest were subjected to extreme privations for three and a half years.

In the answer to that question lay the future. If God would allow it once, then it could happen again. Marcus shivered, it had nothing to do with the air around him, which was still warm from the heat of the day. It was a shiver of uncertainty, even apprehension, that maybe, Joel and his contemporaries might be right after all, and they were all facing an unimaginable end.

He knew he had to try to sleep; nothing had been said about the hour they were to rise - except the hint of a nine hundred hour meeting in Jerusalem. It implied a very early start and Marcus was determined to thwart Joel, who would like nothing better than to present himself at his bedside, fully dressed and insisting that they were to depart the house with five minutes notice. He returned to his room and drew the heavy curtains over the window. It helped to cut down the increasing intensity of the silver glare, otherwise it would be impossible to sleep.

Sleep did not come easily, so much had already happened since their arrival. He found that he had the girl, Leah on his mind. It was disturbing, he had no reason to be preoccupied with a girl young enough to be his granddaughter. It had to be a result of the subtle conditioning Joel was bringing to bear. He had a fitful rest and rose very early, long before the dawn. The moon was still quite high in the sky and would add its light to that of the sevenfold brilliance of the sun when it made its appearance.

Someone had once said that it was like having two suns in the sky. He supposed that there were other worlds, circling other stars and that some of those worlds would have two suns - or even more. Once again, he contemplated the unreality of destruction on such a large scale. Would God really destroy such an immense creation for the sake of events taking place on a small planet orbiting around an insignificant star?

He tried to rationalise the reason for such a fitful night, perhaps it was anticipation for the coming meeting. Everyone, Father Joel included, had been noncommittal about who would attend. Quite suddenly, he wondered if the Firstlings had been consulted. Even as the thought passed across his mind, he realised the stupidity of the question. The Lord Jesus and His Firstlings knew everything that was planned and executed. Marcus also knew that they rarely saw fit to intervene in the arrangements for feeding and housing the population. This was work for the Administrators.

It had been made clear right from the beginning, the primary task of the Lord and His Firstlings during the time of the Kingdom, was to fulfil the biblical promise that all men would be taught of God. To what end? The answer was chilling - To prepare them for the day when they would be confronted with a choice and the Judgement which would follow soon after. His thoughts had led him back full circle.

The end of the Kingdom!

Breakfast was delivered to their suite, it was a light meal which was consumed thoughtfully. Father Joel was not in a communicative mood and the usual barrage of suggestions concerning the love life of his kinsman, was missing. The lack of jocularity did nothing to lighten the feeling of anticipation.

They joined Asher and Leah in the Pod which had brought them from the spaceport. Once again, Leah functioned as the driver. Marcus found himself manoeuvred into sharing the front seat with her. He was sure it was a contrivance of Joel, but Asher seemed to be quite agreeable. In all likelihood, it was a conspiracy hatched between the two old men.

A line of markers took them over the ridge of the range. The need for a road had long since disappeared, Pods skimmed above the ground. For ease of navigation, it had become the practice to mark out the route with a line of guidance markers, which also transmitted route commands from the Central Computer.

They were traversing an artificial landscape, fashioned to replace the devastated nuclear wasteland, which had been all that was left after the destruction of Old Jerusalem. It had been a literal fulfilment of the prophetic word: '...every mountain and island was moved from its place' and 'Every island vanished; there was not a mountain to be seen'. The devastation must have been horrifying.

There came a point when the silence which had persisted since they left Asher's house, was broken by Joel.

"May we stop now, Asher?"

"Of course, my friend - I had not forgotten."

Leah brought the Pod to rest just below the brow of a hill. Marcus looked around to see what the attraction might be - there was none - nothing outstanding, that is. The Pod doors swung outward and upward and the warm, sweet-scented air invaded the cabin. Joel was already out of the vehicle. Marcus quickly joined him.

"Don't you feel well, Father Joel?"

"Thank you for your solicitude, my boy, but everything appears to be in working order - for the moment."

"Then why - ?"

"Why stop in the middle of an excellent crop of potatoes?"

"I think they might be turnips, Father Joel."

"That agonising habit of precision must be in your genes. As I remember, my father was similarly afflicted!"

Marcus closed his mouth.

Joel took his kinsman's arm and led him forward.

"We have stopped here to commemorate a people who once passed this way - a people of whom Asher ben Jacobi is a descendant, by the way. I want you to cast your mind back three thousand and more years, to a time when these hills of Judaea were very different. Imagine the road from Jericho to Jerusalem crossing the hills behind us and then continuing to the brow of that rise just up yonder. Once every year, there was a great movement on that road - mind you, it was always busy. It was a main artery for the traffic of the time and Jerusalem was a centre for commerce and trade.

At one time in the year, the traffic was vastly increased. The people came up to Jerusalem for what could arguably be called their most solemn feast, when they celebrated in the Temple, their delivery from bondage and the Egyptians."

"The Passover - "

"Precisely - the Passover. Imagine the throng. They came with reverence, bringing with them their sacrificial lambs and doves. The first fruits, the finest they could present for the sacrifice. They toiled and laboured up these steep ascents to the Holy City - the City of David. They came out of a deep conviction, to the focal point of their worship. Is it small wonder, that one year, when the Lord Jesus saw how their sacrifice was treated by the authorities in the Temple - how it was rejected with contempt, and how they were made to exchange their little wealth for the Temple Shekel, at extortionate rates of exchange, and how their lambs and doves were rejected as being blemished and they were made to pay through the nose for those traded in the Temple forecourt, He was moved to anger. Can you understand why he blazed into a righteous wrath and plaited rushes to whip those traders out of his Father's house and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers?"

"You paint a colourful picture - "

"But an accurate one, my boy! Those people had nothing going for them excepting their faith. They toiled up this last rise, knowing that beyond they would see the pinkish-golden stone, native to these hills, from which the city was built. They would see the City of David crowning the hills. From that rise, they could see the Temple - their focal point. Do you know what those travellers did, Marcus? I will tell you - They burst into a psalm of praise and thanksgiving. They sang and they wept in their joy at seeing the evidence of their faith. It isn't so hard to understand how, in that year of which we spoke, they burst into loud cries of Hosanna, when they saw one riding on the colt of an ass, and threw down their cloaks and stripped palms from the trees, so that he could enter the city in glory."

They were walking slowly towards the rise. Joel went ahead. Asher touched Marcus's arm and drew him back a little.

"He likes to do this every time he comes to Jerusalem - which is not often these days. It is a personal thing for him, let him savour the moment.

Sometimes, I wonder what he sees. I'm sure it isn't the new city which was built to replace the old. I think he sees walls of pink-gold stone, and the

towers and minarets of an earlier age - and in his ears is the sound of pilgrims singing their paean of praise to the Father."

The old man stood in the brow of the hill in front of them, with the breeze tugging at his long tunic. He looked like one of the ancient patriarchs who had once walked in this land. It was a place steeped in history. It was not too far a flight of the imagination to think of prophets and lawgivers who might have stood on this very spot, or even the armies of kingdoms, which had long since disappeared into history, pitching their camps on these very heights, as they laid siege to the city of David. Joel turned and beckoned them forward.

"Come and see Jerusalem."

Marcus joined him and stared at the conglomerate of buildings which occupied the flank of the hills on the other side of the valley. Joel eyed him without blinking.

"What did you expect, Marcus? A city built as a square, as wide as it was long - its length, breadth and height being equal, being twelve thousand furlongs in all directions, 'that is, by human measurements which the angel was using' - a cube in other words - a cube fifteen hundred miles long, wide and high? A wall one hundred and forty-four cubits high? A wall built of jasper and a city built of pure gold? Twelve foundations of precious stones and jewels encrusting the walls themselves? Twelve gates, each a single, great pearl - streets of pure gold? Is that what you expected, Marcus?"

Marcus looked at the modern, large town sprawled along the side of the hill. It was typically structured of stone from the hills - pink-gold certainly, but unspectacular. There were dwellings and business buildings. There was nothing remarkable about it, which would have singled it out as being exceptional. It was simply a typical administrative centre and would not have been out of place in any location in any other part of the world. Joel murmured.

"Someone once said that Old Jerusalem had a water supply which was adequate for a large village. Even in the time just before the Destruction, they were pumping water up the mountainside from forty kilometres away.

"It's certainly not what I expected."

"Oh! Come, Marcus! Surely you understand that the city referred to in the Book of Revelation, is a description of the Bride of Christ! What did the angel say to the Apostle John? 'Come, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' So in spirit he carried me away to a great high mountain, and showed me the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.'

When the Lord returned to establish His Kingdom, He led His Bride to this earth. The holy city of Jerusalem came down out of heaven from God. That spiritual city has been evident amongst us for this last thousand years. The Kingly-Priests are that mystical city and have been our refuge. Invested in them, has been the benevolence of the Father and the Son."

"I understand that, but - "

"But! - But, you are disappointed - It isn't what you expected. You are not alone in that. I have a theory that it has something to do with the mystique of the name - Jerusalem - the Hill of Peace. Don't be misled by the modest appearance of the place. Jerusalem is still a focal point. This area is still geographically, the meeting point of three great land masses, Asia, Africa

and Europe. In the tongue of the Israelites, this area has been described as the 'navel' of the world. The word 'navel' has been translated as the 'centre' of the world, and of course, has lost some of its deeper meaning.

We are still standing on the ancient land bridge between the three landmasses. At one time it was described as the Fertile Crescent, which stretched from the land between two of the rivers of Paradise - that is, the Tigris and the Euphrates - Mesopotamia, curving round through the land of Canaan, where we stand, and then onward into Egypt and the Nile.

David the king was an astute man, he chose Jerusalem as his capital, because of its strategic importance of being a fortified centre between the squabbling tribes of Israel, which eventually became the northern and the southern kingdoms after the time of his son Solomon.

As I say, Jerusalem has always had a great significance. Before we press on, have you noticed something? They have avoided building over the old site of the city. Do you see those two rises in the ground? - The one is Moriah and the other, Mount Zion."

Asher was starting to fidget, Joel took the hint and shepherded Marcus back to the Pod. They made up for lost time, with a wild ride down into the valley of the Kedron and across into the suburbs of the city. They came to a halt amidst a great deal of traffic, which was disgorging the participants of the mysterious conference. It looked as if everyone was arriving late. Marcus couldn't help wondering if their inward journey had also been interrupted by a long-winded guided tour.

Joel took his time climbing the shallow steps leading to the portico of the building, it wasn't entirely due to his advancing years. Marcus had the impression of it being a manoeuvre to allow others to precede him. A long colonnade ran across the front and provided a welcome pool of shade after the intense brilliance of the sun, coupled with the setting moon. Marcus began to recognise a few people, and with that recognition, the importance of the gathering, but it wasn't until they were actually ushered to their places in the conference hall, that he began to get some feel for its real scope.

A ring of tables had been assembled together, at which there were places for twelve main participants. Behind them were seats for their advisers and assistants. Joel took his place at the main table and Marcus sat just behind his right shoulder. Asher was similarly placed, with Leah in the equivalent position to Marcus. The rest of the places filled and the assembly became silent. Joel took the initiative.

"My dear brothers, I greet you all. I think we are well aware of the reason why we have gathered. We have had many discussions during the last decade through the medium of the Holograph. Admirable though this invention may be, I think we are all agreed that it can never replace a face to face discussion.

We assemble as the assistants of our Kingly-Priests. We know that nothing is hidden from them, or from the Lord Himself. We meet as those who follow in their instructions. We have received a commission to serve the people of the Kingdom in the wisest way, for their ultimate benefit."

Joel paused and looked around the table.

"I believe that we all share the belief that the prophesies of God must be fulfilled. Our conviction is based upon a confidence that thus far, they

have never varied. When God has declared His intention, we must rest assured that it is irrevocable. Before we proceed further, perhaps we would be advised to look at the passages in scripture which are relevant to our time."

He touched a control on the console in front of him. The cultured, impersonal voice of the computer intoned:

"This is the passage contained in Revelation 20: 7-10:

'When the thousand years are over, Satan will be let loose from his dungeon; and he will come out to seduce the nations in the four quarters of the earth and to muster them for battle, yes, the hosts of Gog and Magog, countless as the sands of the sea. So they marched over the breadth of the land and laid siege to the camp of God's people and the city that he loves. But fire came down on them from heaven and consumed them; and the Devil, their seducer, was flung into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been flung, there to be tormented day and night for ever.'

So ends the quotation."

Joel continued.

"There is more."

He touched the controls again.

The dispassionate voice intoned:

"This is the text of Revelation 20: 11-15:

'Then I saw a great white throne, and the One who sat upon it; from his presence earth and heaven vanished away, and no place was left for them. I could see the dead, great and small, standing before the throne; and books were opened. Then another book was opened, the roll of the living. From what was written in these books the dead were judged upon the record of their deeds. The sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up the dead in their keeping; they were judged, each man upon the record of his deeds. Then Death and Hades were flung into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death; and into it were flung any whose names were not to be found in the roll of the living.'

So ends the quotation."

Joel paused, one of the other twelve had risen. He was younger than Joel, nearer to Marcus's age.

"Perhaps the point should be made that we have one obvious instance in scripture where God changed His mind - I refer to the commission of Jonah to Nineveh - "

Joel nodded.

"We will seek clarification of the text."

He gestured to Marcus to enter the reference. His assistant swallowed and hoped he got it right.

The computer responded:

"This is the text of Jonah 3:1-10:

'The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh, go now and denounce it in the words I give you.' Jonah obeyed at once and went to Nineveh. He began by going a day's journey into the city, a vast city, three days journey across, and then proclaimed: 'In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown!' The people of Nineveh believed God's

word. They ordered a public fast and put on sackcloth, high and low alike. When the news reached the king of Nineveh he rose from his throne, stripped off his robes of state, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'This is a decree of the king and his nobles. No man or beast, herd or flock, is to taste food, or graze or to drink water. They are to clothe themselves in sackcloth and call upon God with all their might. Let every man abandon their wicked ways and his habitual violence. It may be that God will repent and turn away from his anger: and so we shall not perish.' God saw what they did, and how they abandoned their wicked ways, and he repented and did not bring upon them the disaster he had threatened.'

So ends the quotation."

"I think you will agree, Father Joel - a very pertinent reference - '... and he repented and did not bring upon them the disaster he had threatened ...'"

"I am sure we thank you, Brother Joshua - indeed, it is a very relevant passage, which we must consider in conjunction with the rest. The two passages I brought before you, are from the twentieth Chapter of the Book of Revelation, the second follows on from the first. You are aware that they are pertinent to our time, for we are living in the nine hundred and ninety-fifth year of the Kingdom - and unless something similar happens, to that which occurred in Nineveh, we can anticipate a sequence of events, for which we must prepare the citizens of the Kingdom!"