

At the end of the seventh month after the great battle, it was reported to Michael and Leah that the land had been cleansed of the last of the corpses. They had been gathered and buried in the Valley of Abarim, under the shadow of Mount Nebo. Michael gave the instruction that the valley was to be blocked, so that no one was tempted to treat the place as one of memorial. From that time onwards, it would be known as the Valley of Gog's Horde, in accordance with the prophecy of Ezekiel.

By this time, the healing process throughout the land was beginning to take effect. Crops had been sown, even between the residual rocks of the meteorite shower which had devastated the Plains of Esdraelon, of Sharon and many other localities where there had been a concentration of Gog's Horde. The farmers had been compelled to go back to the old methods, broadcasting the seed by hand, attempting to avoid the outcrops of rock and the stony places. Michael and Leah often went out to watch them, the age old method and processing of sowing and harvesting, had replaced the mechanised methods to which they had become accustomed during the thousand years of the Kingdom of Peace. On one such occasion, Leah had murmured.

"It is as if that time had never been - no more than a wonderful memory, when the Lord and His Firstlings walked amongst us and taught us."

"They still walk amongst us and they still teach us, but we can't see them. The message is still the same - beware of the Second Death - it's a peril we still have to face."

Leah shivered at her husband's words.

"I wonder if any of us will be accounted worthy to enter into the new creation - or if all that is left to us is the lake of fire."

"I see this time of waiting as the last preparation, the final honing of the qualities which Our Father will expect. In many ways, we are back to the situation which existed during the Kingdom, the only evil we now have to combat is that which lives in our own heart!"

They had turned for home and the donkeys were ambling along at their own pace. It was nearly sunset and the farmers were trudging back towards their villages. Leah reined in and faced to the west, where the sun was descending into the rising waters of the Great Sea.

"Do you really think that the only evil left is within us. Isn't Satan still active?"

Michael shook his head.

"If we follow the Book of Revelation, we can read in the twentieth Chapter:

*'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'.*

A little later in the same Chapter, we find the following:

*'Then Death and Hades were flung into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death; and into it are flung any whose names were not to be found in the roll of the living.'*

In the twenty-first Chapter, we can read:

*'But the cowardly, the faithless, and the vile, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars of every kind, their lot will be the second death, in the lake that burns with sulphurous flames'.*

From this it would appear that the Devil is thrown into the lake of fire earlier than those which have still to face the judgement.

To answer your question, yes, I think we are free of Satan and his influence. All the reports we have received confirm what Saul and Eli told us, that there are still groups of men who survived the passing of the comet, but they are threatening no one. If they are armed, they don't use their arms.

The Survivors told us that much the same thing happened a thousand years ago, when the Kingdom of Peace was established. One of the first things to change, was the attitude of men who had once been mortal enemies. They lost the will to fight each other and they settled down to cooperate and live in peace - that attitude was the foundation of the Kingdom and was only disturbed when Satan was released after the thousand years was over."

They nudged their donkeys into the slow amble and urged them towards home.

"I really fear the Second Death, Michael - I fear it for myself and our children - and I fear it for you and all those I love."

"We were taught to fear it - I interpret that to mean much the same as godfear - in other words - respect. We are wise to fear it - there will be no one who can bluff their way into the new creation."

They were within sight of their home, once again, on the highest point above it, they reined in to watch the sun descend like a fireball into the ocean.

"The waters are still rising, faster now, according to the latest measurements. Saul is keeping a close eye on it. We can only guess what is happening further to the west. It's almost sure that the dikes across the Adriatic have been breached - as well as those around the Aegean islands."

"Joshua faced an impossible task. I often think of him, alone and maimed."

"We are all alone, Leah. I know that sounds hard, but we are all alone and we are all maimed in one way or the other. It is part of our final test - to see how we cope with the adversities which followed the end of the Kingdom of Peace. I am convinced of it - otherwise, why would Our Father allow this extra time? He could have made the Last Day to coincide with the Battle, but He has planned otherwise."

The pattern was set for the remaining days of their existence in the physical body. They were not days of comfort, each one brought its own crisis which had to be solved. Michael had assumed the full responsibility for what remained of his Administrative area. In theory, he was still steward over a

vast area, but in practice, it was impossible to reach very far beyond the borders of the ancient Kingdom of Israel.

There were many reasons for it, not the least being that the citizens were now reduced to the limits of where their own two legs could carry them, or, if they were lucky, where a pack animal could take them. In theory, they could travel where they might want to go, but in practical terms, to be isolated from the centre of the Administration in Jerusalem, rendered the longer journeys impractical.

Much the same situation applied in what might have remained of any other Administrator's area of authority. For all intents and purposes, the Kingdom had degenerated into small units governed by whoever could show ability, with vast areas between these isolated centres, where men and women fended for themselves and acknowledged no central authority.

As each month passed, additional resources were added, as soon as they could be repaired or restored. The power supply had been an early priority, but it was never able to provide more than a basic service, which frequently faltered and failed as the load became too great. It was out of the question to recharge the majority of the power packs for suborbitors, transporters and shuttles. The lifeless machines rested where they had been landed from their last flights. They had the appearance of huge, extinct monsters, hoping in vain, to be activated once again into service.

Buildings were slowly repaired, or were demolished when it was seen to be impractical. Life within the cities and towns progressed at a leisurely pace. The frenetic running to and fro, which had characterised the period during which Satan had been released, had slowed to a calm acceptance of each day as it dawned. As the years went on, it became more and more of a surprise to see the dawn of another day - for surely, very soon, the last one of all would dawn.

In the household of Michael ben Levi, a new child was born in the second year after the great battle. When Leah had realised that she was once again pregnant, she had been filled with fear. The pregnancy had been unplanned, it was surely more than ever the case, that it was the wrong time to bring another life into the world. She was well aware that there had been no decrease in the birth-rate, in fact, it was increasing. Until she had become pregnant, she had shaken her head in wonderment that parents would be so irresponsible. She had hidden her condition from Michael for while, but in the end, it had been impossible not to tell him. His reaction had been startling. He had beamed with joy and she had been almost smothered with attention. She had protested.

"But don't you think it's wrong, Michael?"

"How can it be wrong to welcome a blessing from Our Heavenly Father, my darling!? It's a wonderful gift and we can rejoice!"

The child was a girl and there was none of the drama which had accompanied the birth of Adam. She had wanted Michael to name her. He had shaken his head and grinned.

"This time, it's your turn - you will name our daughter."

Leah hesitated.

"Would you object to - Miriam? Joshua's mother was such a wonderful old lady - I loved her very much."

Michael nodded.

"Miriam she will be - and I agree - I loved that old lady - did you know she flirted with me the last time we met, just before the end of the Kingdom?"

Leah laughed.

"I promise to keep an eye on our daughter - but I think she's already flirting with you!"

In the countryside, there was another fulfilment of the prophecy of Ezekiel. The farmers gathered the weapons of the fallen warriors and stripped them of their iron, and the wooded shafts they burned on their fires. They had no need to cut down trees or gather wood in any other way. It was also the case that those who travelled through the land sometimes found the remains of a warrior who had fallen in the hail of fire. For the most part, they would find skeletal remains, picked clean by the birds. In the days immediately after the main burial, Michael had set up a commission to take care of such events. In fact, it was their task to go through the countryside to search for such remains and to take them to the Valley of Gog's Horde and there bury them.

Infrequently, they would have visitors who took the trouble to climb through the Judaeian hills to their home. Michael displayed no desire to live in Jerusalem and Leah never mentioned the matter, she was content to rear her growing brood of children in the peace of the countryside and await what was sure to come. There was only one concession, it was one which Michael's advisors had insisted upon, and that was, that a shuttle should be available to bring them the short distance to the city, when circumstances dictated. It was one of the few whose power pack still had sufficient charge to make the short journey. Michael had protested that he wanted and expected no privileges, but it was of no avail, Malachi Judah, on behalf of the advisors, had insisted.

More than seven years had passed since the great battle. It was the time of harvest and Michael had already been supplied with pessimistic reports of its status. The yield promised to be no more than moderate and he was well aware that the storages which had remained, or had been recovered from Gog's looters, were now becoming empty. For seven years, they had compensated for the demands of an increasing population which could not be supplied from the harvest yield.

He went to his bed still wrestling with the problem. He found it impossible to sleep. The night was very quiet and for a while, he sat at the window and watched the moon move across the sky. Behind him, the still form of his wife was sleeping. Quite suddenly, he felt a great surge of joy at the blessings they had received from their God. He thought back over the years he had lived. The extended lifetime which had been permitted to him. He was now nearly three hundred and fifty years old, not an old man by any means, compared with those who lived into their ninth or tenth century, like Joel and Asher. He had witnessed many marvels and wonders and he had been spared much tribulation. He had walked and talked with the Firstlings of the Lord Jesus - and perhaps, he had even walked and talked with the Lord Himself - it was a proposition which made him catch his breath. How did he know whether one of those he had taken to be a Firstling, was not in fact, the Lord Jesus Himself!? He had no way of telling.

He went to bed, the new thought had driven out the earlier pessimism. He lay awake for a little longer and then finally, he slept. It was still dark when he woke quite abruptly. He sat up in bed very alert. At first, he thought that one of the children had cried out, but the house was silent. He looked across at Leah and found that she too was awake.

"What is it, Michael?"

"I don't know - but I have an incredible urge to get up and get dressed."

He got out of bed and pulled on some clothes.

"Get the children dressed, Leah. I'll rouse everyone else - we must go to Jerusalem - now!"

She didn't argue, it would have been pointless, Michael was already out of the door of their room. She was surprised to find that she agreed with him, she didn't know why, but it was essential to go to Jerusalem without any delay - the thought came to her, the reason would be revealed in due course.

The shuttle had been parked, unused, for seven years, at the side of the landing pad which had seen so many visitors come and go over the centuries. When she led her excited and chattering children out into the cool early morning air, she was not surprised to see that Michael had already readied it for service. Michael had roused the rest of the household, it seemed that they were expected to accompany them. Feodor drew her aside.

"What's happening, Leah. I can't get any sense out of Michael - are we under some sort of attack?"

She shook her head.

"He knows what he's doing - we'll understand when we come to Jerusalem."

Feodor raised an eyebrow.

"Is that where we're going - it's nice to know!"

They crowded into the shuttle. Leah was glad it was for only a short distance, the little ship was grossly overcrowded. In other circumstances, she would have complained about the risk, but, on this occasion, it didn't seem important.

The sun rose as they laboured over the Judaeen Hills. Her home was behind her, she had no opportunity to look at it for the last time - and she knew it would be for the last time. A peculiar sense of unreality seemed to pervade her being. A sense of the rightness and inevitability of what was happening. It was a sense that was confirmed dramatically, as they crested the last hill before the Holy City. Below them, every road and path was crowded with a great concourse of people. They were all walking in the one direction. There was no unseemly haste, but there was no loitering either. It seemed as if the entire population of Jerusalem and beyond, from the fields and hills of Judaea, were moving with one purpose. Their destination was the twin hills of Moriah and Zion.

Michael also knew where he was going. He headed for the summit and gently landed the shuttle close to the place where the hand of Abraham had been held by that of the angel, to prevent him from demonstrating the ultimate act of faith by sacrificing Isaac. They climbed down from the shuttle without a word and grouped around Michael in a sober circle. He looked at each one of them and there was no mistaking the radiant joy he was experiencing.

"Be glad and rejoice, for we have come to Mount Zion!"

Feodor murmured a little shakily.

"Amen - "

And then, a little apprehensively.

"What now?"

"We wait upon the Lord. Look, see how they come up the hill. They have all received the same summons - and they have obeyed. Once again, Jerusalem is the symbol of what is happening all over the world. The physical Mount Zion is the focal point, for a Godly event which is taking place in every realm of eternity - Death and Hell shall give up the dead in them!"

The hillside was soon crowded with a mass of men, women and children. They were very quiet, when they came to their places, they sat. Some whispered to each other, others, quite clearly, prayed. Michael and Leah sat together, leaning upon each other, with their children gathered around them. Piotr sat close to Feodor, who placed his arm around the boy. Leah asked softly.

"What will happen now, Michael?"

He drew her close to him.

"Now! I will tell you how much I love you and how thankful I am for all that we have shared. I thank you for our children and our home and for the comfort and support you have given me. I thank you for your devotion and your loving care - and above all, I thank Our God that He gave me the opportunity to tell you this before everything is changed."

He kissed her and she clung to him. He took each of the children in turn and embraced them. They said their farewells to those closest to them and then they sat down in their places and looked around at the familiar scenery.

"It seems so impossible that it will all cease to exist, Michael. It is so beautiful, so wonderful, so intricate and precise in the way it works. There was so much loving care and precision in the act of creation - and now, very soon, it will simply cease to be."

"It came from the Hand of God. He expelled it by an inflection of His will - by the Word all things were made. I like to think that He will take it back into His hand - as it were, scoop it back into it. His hand has always been a protection, it's a good place to be - how is it said in scripture: 'the hollow of His hand'? A place of protection - and we must always remember that from the same hand will come the creation of a new heaven and a new earth and the former things will not be remembered, all thought of them will be driven out, so wonderful will it be!"

"And for us - will there be - pain - are we to die. I'm not frightened for myself - but the children - "

"I have only thoughts of peace towards you, saith the Lord. He has no reason to inflict pain upon us. He is perfect in his justice as well as in his love and mercy. When the Firstlings experienced the First Resurrection, there was no pain. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they were changed from their mortal body into the immortal. The corruption gave way to incorruption. Our Father once said that no man could see him and live. Human flesh is incapable of existence before the Being of God. It isn't constructed to withstand the power and majesty which is God.

Once, God took the dust of the earth and moulded it and created the human form. It was a definitive act of creation, something quite separate from all that which had already been created. Into that lifeless clay, He breathed and formed man in His own image, and man became a living soul. I have always seen the moment when mankind is separated from this earth, as being the act of breathing in by God, taking back the breath He blew into Adam. I believe that this is the way it will be."

They waited in quietness and in peace and there came a moment of transition. They were not even conscious that something had happened to them. They were not even aware when they ceased to draw breath, or when their hearts no longer pumped. The hills of Moriah and Zion ceased to be a reality. Instead, they were confronted with a radiance which was beyond human thought and perception. In the midst of that radiance was a scene which was beyond the powers of human description.

The flesh was gone, the soul remained. Age and physical condition, had ceased to be a consideration. An infant was equal in stature with the parent. It was as if they were infinitesimal specks of light, being drawn into the eternal intensity of that which was before them.

In the first letter of the Apostle John, the words are found:

*'What we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when it is disclosed, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.'*

And further in the same letter we find:

*'God is love; he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him. This is for us the perfection of love, to have confidence on the day of judgement, and this we can have, because even in this world we are as he is. There is no room for fear in love; perfect love banishes fear. For fear brings with it the pains of judgement, and anyone who is afraid has not attained to love in its perfection. We love because he loved us first.'*