Yeshua

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The Untold Story of Jesus’ Journey East to link with the ‘Lost Tribes of Israel’
This book is dedicated to my late wife
and dear friend- Geraldine.
PREFACE

*Yeshu’a*---Whilst this book is basically a novel chronicling the life of Jesus’ so-called lost years, it contains many truths that have long been forgotten or seriously ignored. However, a great deal has already been written about His life in sources other than Christian. It is important to stress that the Master Jesus is revered by all religions, and has joined the ranks of the ten Celestial Avatars, who have come to assist mankind throughout history; e.g. Malseini, Rama, Krishna, and now Kalki, in His triple incarnations as Sai. It was from these ‘others’ that I have sourced a great deal of my research for this book.

Down through the ages it has been repeated that the Jews crucified Jesus. I dispute this, as Jesus never had reason to feel in any danger from His own people; the Jewish people. He was a Jew and not a Gentile. Neither was He a Nazarene, for that is a name given to one who was not of the Jewish faith, or one who had converted from Judaism, -and not taken to be a place called Nazareth.

The danger came from the Roman authority of the time and their fellow travellers, -wealthy Jewish merchants, -for the latter had protection under the Roman/Jewish Treaty. That treaty also allowed for the Romans to put on trial, and execute, criminals on behalf of the Jews, for Jews were not allowed, by their own laws, to perform the act of
killing except in the form of sacrificial animal slaughter, as offerings to their God.

The Jewish people became the ‘scapegoats’ for centuries to come, by those who chose to side-step the responsibilities for their actions and blame others. The truth is that the Romans exercised a brutal regime throughout the middle east.

But it was when Jesus over-turned the tables of trade and banking which were being practised within the confines of the Temple in Jerusalem, that His fate was sealed. Arrested, He was starved and tortured for seven days, weakening Him and making it difficult for Him to carry the cross to the site of execution. Also, it was the followers of Barabbas who called out for the release of their leader, when the choice between Jesus and Barabbas was presented to them by Pilate, not the general Jewish population, who saw Him as a teacher, a rabbi.

Whilst Jesus is known today by that name, He was called by different names at different times and cultures; e.g. Yessu, Yusa Asaph, Isha Natha, Issa or Isa in Tibet. Asaph denotes that He healed lepers. At birth He was Immanuel, later Joshua. In Aramaic as Jesu, in Urdu as Yusu, to the Greeks as Iesous, and the Romans as Iesus. I chose to call Him Yeshu’a, “The Help of Yahveh’.
Chapter One

The caravan train consisted of eighteen stately camels, and a number of obstinate donkeys, wending their way along a well-worn route through deserts of ochre landscapes, rock strewn valleys and across the dried river beds of the vast Sinai. The merciless sun treated the rich and poor travellers with equanimity, as they journeyed from Alexandria in Egypt, through Judea, and on to Assyria. This was a trade route that stretched from north Africa, on up to Damascus, to link with the routes travelling East, such as the Silk Road.

Water was the ‘scarcity’ commodity between the few oases and water holes, on this slow torturous route taken by merchants and travellers for centuries who, invariably consisted of people representing various middle-eastern tribes and cultures.

Some of these desert wells could be extraordinarily deep. Leather buckets and straw ropes were needed to bring the water to the well-head, where it was tipped into a trough, from which empty goatskin water-bags were replenished. All Bedouin families carried their own buckets and rope for this vital purpose, and would removed them immediately after use. A traveller without such life-saving implements, could possibly die of thirst at the well’s very edge.
Travelling this dry deserted landscape by oneself would be a foolish venture indeed, which is why most travellers chose to join with others for the security of a caravan. One could encounter many dangers travelling by oneself on such a journey; indeed, affluent merchants had their own well-armed guards to protect them, but all, rich and poor alike, were provided with the protection of fierce scimitar-wielding Arab outriders, being part of the package which guaranteed a high degree of safety for which the traveller had invested in the trip. These guards also went on ahead scouting the route for marauding Saracen bandits, who chose to see the barren Sinai territory as their domain and the merchants, and travellers, as easy prey for their rich pickings.

Most of the poorer families had to either walk alongside the camel train, or share the humble donkeys from time to time. They were not treated with the same degree of consideration as those better-off families. Sometimes they would fall behind and would be encouraged to keep up upon hearing loud whip cracks splitting the air.

And so it was that on this occasion one of these poorer families was that of Murree, whose family consisted of sons; Yeshu’a, James, Joses, Judah and Simon, -and three daughters, Fatima, Anna and the youngest being Miriam, now returning after a long exile in Egypt to their old home outside of Jerusalem, in Judaea.
Murree was a tall, refined, good-looking woman, of barely thirty years, -not beautiful, but she radiated goodness. She had a cousin, -- Elizabeth by name,-- who lived in Judaea, whom Murree had not seen since she and her husband Joseph, fled Palestine, -formally Canaan, - twelve years previous. They had journeyed to the land of Egypt after the birth of her son, Yeshu’a, to seek sanctuary from a country which was in turmoil, and ruled by Herod the Great, the despotic King of Judaea.

Her husband, Joseph, was a skilled wood-carver and carpenter and a prominent member of the Essene Jewish sect, and a direct descendant of King David. But now the family’s homeward journey was prompted by the changes in the country’s ruling structure. Joseph had gone ahead to Jerusalem to prepare a home for the family.

In her deep spiritual nature Murree had once retreated to a nearby mountain-top where she stayed for twelve days in meditation to enquire into the nature of attachment, eventually reaching the clarification that it is of our own making. Attachment is not a gift from God, she concluded, -unlike bliss, peace and truth, -which are the gifts of God. Everything else is as passing clouds!

It was Murree’s reluctant wish to leave the hospitality of Egypt and return to the homeland few of the children had only heard of, but had never seen. Three of the children were Joseph’s from his first marriage, for he was a widower when he was betroth to Murree. While Yeshu’a
was not the eldest he did assume the role of most responsibility; caring for the younger ones and helping his mother and Joseph, where possible.

Travelling in the searing desert heat, with its cutting sandstorms, and freezing nights, made for an arduous journey. But the children never complained. They were sustained with good humour by their brother Yeshu’a, -whose name means “The Help of Yahveh”. He was a tall, lean young man of twelve years, and strangely wise for his tender age. He dressed in a short plain tunic, tied at the waist with a twisted wine and gold cord, and beneath this he wore a linen loincloth. Neither did he wear jewellery, amulets or any ornaments, and like others, he walked bare footed. His brothers and sisters would tease him and ask, “Who is your best friend, Yeshu’a?,” knowing all too well his reply would be, “the Lord”, for he was a devoutly religious young man. With shoulder-length hair almost a pale orange in colour, he stood out as being different from the rest of the family, -with a calm countenance and a far-away look. During the periods of rest along the journey, he patiently taught his brothers and sisters, the Word of God. Others would join them while seated on the sands, in the cool starry evenings, glad of the cool air after the blistering heat of the day, and would listen in a respectful silence as they soaked up the spiritual wisdom imparted to them.
When the caravan party made camp for the night, the chattering groups huddled close together around the many camp-fires that were strung-out along the desert valley, against the chill of the late evening.

Wrapped in warm blankets the wealthy merchants, dressed in their dishdash robes, would eye young Yeshu’a, impressed by his manner and the knowledge he communicated to the younger children. They saw in him, even at that young age, a suitable suitor for their daughters, while the daughters giggled to each other, not unhappy with their fathers’ choice. Parents vied with each other in making their daughters suitably presentable, and would sweetened the proposals with offers of handsome dowries.

It was the custom, particularly amongst the Hebrew community, for the betrothal of their sons at age thirteen, but Yeshu’a was not desirous of such a commitment. He saw his destiny being elsewhere, and chose not to be entangled in the domestic affairs of others. He distanced himself from such talk and chose to follow his heart.

A mother would whisper in the ears of her daughter, and the graceful young girl would jump up immediately to dance to a slow evocative air played on a distant flute. She would slowly whirl and whirl, gradually increasing the tempo as her willowy arms traced snake-like movements above her head; she clapped, clapped and stamped her feet to the exotic rhythm as her shadow, cast from the light of the camp-fire, fell from time
to time on the ground in front of Yeshu’a. Parents would smile and nod secretively to each other as the dance progressed. But when the realisation dawned that Yeshu’a was no longer seated in his place, their expressions changed; “What a strange young man”, they would whisper, “Has he no human longings for the girl dancing before him?” Their disappointment was now apparent and coupled with anger that their daughters were not pleasing to him. They saw it as a personal affront.

Each evening, Yeshu’a would slip away into the darkness of the night, to sit and pray under the stars, while the distant music receded from his consciousness. He would slip into an extreme meditative state, where nothing touched him while in communion with the Lord, until the first rays of the dawn sun would alert him to a new day, refreshed.

The sun’s golden rays moved slowly across the sand, with an undulating movement, down the valley to the sleeping encampments. The tinkling bells tethered to the necks of the camels was the signal to the travellers to rise and eat before once again packing their belongings for the recommencement of their journey. The sound of voices reached a crescendo as everybody busied themselves.

“Where did you spend the night, Yeshu’a. I was worried,” asked Murree.

“I was in communion with the Father,” he replied, as his brothers and sisters looked quizzically to each other.
“Please don’t go off like that, it could be dangerous.”

“There is no fear when you’re with Him.”

Murree sighed with irritation. “Help me pack up these things, or we’ll be left behind,” she said, as the caravan train started to move off. All were now busy rolling up tents and blankets and tying cooking utensils to racks on the backs of camels and donkeys.

Donkeys would, with mincing quick-steps, move quickly out of the way of roaring camels that refused to move aside from the straight route they were taking. Camels knew their importance to the train, and were not side-stepping for any lowly donkey. They could travel for days on one fill of fresh water, unlike humans, whose first duty each morning was to check the drinking-water supply. Since it was life and death to the caravan, the overseers of the train rode up to check each group, assuring themselves they had ample daily supplies. Those who travelled alone, with just a blanket over their shoulders, would have to resort to the generosity of their fellow travellers.

This, however, was not always forthcoming, and there were gruesome stories of lone travellers falling by the wayside and dying of thirst. “Charity begins at home, or at least with one’s own family,” was the defensive retort of the merchants, as they glanced back over their shoulders at the poor retch who succumbed to dehydration and a parched desert death. Each family, or merchant group, however, carried ample
food supplies. There was no shortage of fruits, fresh and dried, as well as meats; some even had their own small flocks of sheep, baa’ing their way alongside the train.

The journey took many weeks, and required great stamina on the part of those who ventured. All were advised, indeed required, to partake of several swallows of fresh drinking water every hour to sustain themselves against the ferocious heat of the desert. Non-compliance could mean rising fresh at sunrise and lay dying by sunset!

While the journey’s stages were well placed along the way with water holes, or oases, governing the precise route to be taken, one could not always be guaranteed that there would be water available upon arrival. This meant severe rationing, as well as great anxiety, until arriving at the next watering stage, which could be several days hence.

So it happened upon this very trip, that a water-hold was dry, sending fear and trepidation throughout the entire train. Merchants demanded of the overseers that something be done. Their lives, and the lives of their families, were at stake, they exclaimed. However, the overseers could do little, other than advise them to conserve all water until they reached the next hole; for they too were gripped by fear of its lack. “We must give the children whatever we can spare,” mothers moaned, while fathers licked their dry lips in alarm. No amount of coins in their purses could change the circumstances that had now befallen them. Water was beyond price!
The hour was late, so it was decided to make camp for the night, at the parched hole. No sounds of merry-making that evening. No music to send joy to the heart, only the low moan of prayers from small family groups, as they huddled around the fires fuelled by camel dung.

Murree was glad, indeed, that she chose to take the family goat on the journey; at least her children would have milk to sustain them should the water run out. She joined the nearby group by the camp fire, and pulling the cloak around her head and shoulders against the night chill, recited prayers with the other women, while their menfolk sat and grumbled about their misfortune.

The shrill bleat from a sheep split the night air, sending a start throughout the camp, as an elder slit the throat of the hapless ruminant animal, as an offering to God for their merciful deliverance. All looked skyward in fearful prayer, as they bargained with God for His help. “Deliver us, oh merciful Lord, from this plight that has befallen us,” a booming voice announced as he promised to help to feed the poor, and cloth them with his finest silks. “Have mercy, oh Lord, on your humble servant.”

Yeshu’a sat and listened to the hypocritical mouthing of the rich merchants fearing for their pathetic little lives, and knowing all too well that these prayerful promises would soon be forgotten when water was once again plentiful.
“Yeshu’a, will we die here in the desert, for lack of water?” asked Miriam, his youngest sister.

“Hush! Nothing shall befall you. Our Father, in heaven, is a merciful Father.” He arose and walked slowly away from the lights of the camp fires towards the nearby rock face, and placing both hands on the sandstone rock, he prayed silently. Miriam watched in wonder as he stooped and picked up a large boulder and slammed it with force against the rock face, the noise of which echoed down the valley, as he cried aloud something which nobody understood. A slight crack appeared upon the face of the rock and water began to trickle forth tracing its way down the side of the dry rock face to the sand beneath. At first it was small quantity, as Miriam rushed forward with her cupped little hands outstretched to catch the flow of crystal clear water. Yeshu’a pulled her back in time as the crack split apart sending forth a great fountain of water arching its way over their heads and appeared to hasten across the parched sands to refill the empty water hole.

A gasp of astonishment by those nearby, alerted others to the amazing phenomena that had taken place. For a moment everyone stood still, then, as if propelled by an invisible hand, they rushed forward to the hole to replenish empty water bags.

“The Lord has answered our prayers,” cried the elder, with blood-soaked hands raised skywards.
“Hamdullah,” cried the excited Arab crowd, as they rushed passed Yeshu’a, knocking young Miriam to the ground in their haste to the water hole. Yeshu’a wondered if the poor would now be enriched, as promised, and be clothed in the finest silks. Sadly he knew all too well such promises were as dry as the dust beneath their feet.

The following morning saw the approach of A’bel, the caravan train’s supervisor. He was a tall, lean man with aquiline features, dressed in the black robes and headdress of the Bedouin tribe. An awesome figure to behold. He commanded the respect of the overseers and merchants alike. While he rarely moved away from the side of the rich merchants, he now stopped in front of Yeshu’a and without dismounting from his white Arabian steed, looked down on the slim-built twelve year old.

“What is your name? To whom do you belong? Are you a holy one?” he asked, with a profound voice that seemed to come from a deep cavern. He spoke through the black linen cloth that wound down from his turban, covering the lower part of his face.

“I am called Yeshu’a. I belong to God alone,” replied Yeshu’a, -a reply that startled his mother, who stood nearby shielding her eyes as she looked up at A’bel silhouetted against the glare of the early morning sun.

A’bel remained transfixed in silence with his dark eyes staring down at Yeshu’a, for several minutes. Breaking the silence A’bel said quietly as he lowered the black cloth to his chin, “I am told you have just now
performed a miraculous deed. I have no understanding of such things. We must speak.”

Yeḥsu’a looked up at a face with deeply etched features the result of many years exposure to the hot sandblast of the desert winds. He asked Yeḥsu’a to ride up front with him and the merchants, for the rest of the journey that they might discuss Yeḥsu’a’s beliefs. This was deemed a great honour by most travellers, so everybody was astonished at Yeḥsu’a’s refusal, as he indicated that he had responsibility for his mother and his younger brothers and sisters, on the journey, as he took his father’s place.

A’bel immediately wheeled his horse around and without a word, headed back in a cloud of golden sand to the head of the train. Murree was fearful that her son’s refusal of this honourable invitation might be taken as an insult, but choose to say nothing. She did not understand her son’s ways and his words. She was beginning to see him change under her eyes. She always knew him to be a pious person from a young age, but recently he had became distant, more solitary, even when with the family group. Maybe the responsibilities thrust upon him at such a young age was proving too much, she thought to herself. This worried her.

Chapter Two
“Yeshu’a! Yeshu’a!” The whispered call awoke young Yeshu’a from sleep. Raising his head and peered from under his blanket, he looking around and asked in a sleepy voice, “Who speaks?” Nobody replied. The only response was the heavy breathing of his brothers sleeping close by. Arising, he wrapped the blanket around himself against the chill of the desert night and laid down to sleep again.

“Yeshu’a!” This time the voice seemed to come from a distance.

“Who speaks my name?” asked Yeshu’a, looking around him as he rose to his feet and stumbled further and further into the darkness. Still no reply came, but he sensed it was his inner voice.

He could just about make out the shapes of those sleeping by the dying embers of fires nearby. “Answer me. Who speaks?”

Again, receiving no reply, he began to doubt himself. He sank to his knees and thought of his father, Joseph, whom he had admired greatly. He recalled being told of the flight Murree, -then in her ‘teens, and Joseph in his mid forties, -had made to this land twelve years previous. They had settled in the Egyptian coastal town of Canopus, in a house close to the temple of Serapis, a Roman deity.

Yeshu’a fingered the small wooden carving of a sheep, hanging around his neck by a leather thong. It had hung there since he received it from his father when he was aged two. His father, while being a carpenter by trade, was particularly skilled at wood carvings. His fame spread, not
for the quality of the household furniture he made, but for the exquisite polished carvings of exotic birds and animals. These graced the homes of the wealthy and many other examples held pride of place in the temples of the major cities along the North African coast, including the temples in the Royal city of Alexandria.

Yeshu’a called the little sheep carving, ‘Baa-Baa’, to the delight of his mother. “Be a good shepherd to him now, Yeshu’a,” she would say, with a tender smile.

“Baa-Baa,” he would say sweetly to it, as he lovingly stroked the carving.

He recalled when he was of four years old being enrolled into the school of the Essenes, a esoteric Judean brotherhood, whose members embraced non-violence, enjoying a high moral reputation, and who were opposed to the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The monastery was in Mataria, many miles distant from his home, so to be near Yeshu’a, Murree and Joseph departed with the family from Canopus, and settled near the monastery, where Joseph resumed his work under the shadow of a mountain where Romans had built a temple dedicated to their god Jupiter.

Mataria, which lies just six miles from Cairo on the right bank of the Nile, near Heliopolis, was sheltered by rows of balsam trees which were reputed to have been planted by Cleopatra many years previous, from
cuttings taken from Jericho and tended by Judean gardeners brought from Judaea for the purpose. When Joseph arrived there, he felt kinship in the community of his fellow-countrymen, all, like him, exiles from their homeland.

This area was known far and wide for its herbs and balms used in healing; balsam from Mataria formed the basis of the ingredient in the elaborate holy oil, prepared by the Essenes, for healing and comforting the sick. The Essenes also created a communal social structure which involved sharing their grain harvest, which was kept in a common stock treasury.

This structure within the Essene Order was, generally speaking, monastic and was divided into four degrees, or levels. The lowest level was often made-up of adopted children, since many Essenes rarely married. Neither did they speak to each other upon rising before sunrise, but met for prayers prior to their breakfast. After working day-long in the fields they would wash feet and hands, before dining together and change into white robes which they never discarded until they were thoroughly worn out! This Brotherhood was widely spread throughout Egypt and the Middle East.

Yeshu’a felt an emptiness within as he contemplated all this, knowing he may never return to this haven of peace. The dry sand that flowed now through his fingers as he sat in the dawning light of the desert, gently
fingering ‘Baa-Baa’, made him long all the more, for the rich earth of the Nile basin, and the sweet smelling herbs from which the sacred myrrh ointment, the special pink spice, was made. This exquisite and expensive oil, eagerly sought by the rich, was important to the ceremonies in temples throughout the Mediterranean area, and was also used for embalming, (*the symbolic gift of death*). While it was highly prized it was equally highly complicated in its preparation. The herbs and spices, including lilies and cassia, mixed with balsam from Mataria, were steeped in fresh water for a full day, while on the following day eight pounds of pure olive oil is being poured over the herbs to boil all day over a fire lit with olive wood. While it continues to boil, other aromatic herbs, rose petals, and white sandal-wood, are added and boiled, for three days, -four days, -and on the fifth day, having had many more herbs and spices added, the mixture is allowed to cool, then strained through a linen cloth and the chrism becomes ready for consecration; at this stage being worth a king’s ransom, it is said.

The sands surrounding Yeshu’a, now began to glow with the golden light of a new day. Standing up and throwing the folded blanket over his shoulders, he headed back to the family group without discovering the source of the voice that called his name. A black raven, which was perched nearby, took flight at the sound of on-coming riders.
“Haar! Haar!” cried two young riders to their camels, as they came close to Yeshu’a. They stopped in a swirl of sand dust some distance from him, and as one of them walked his camel up close to Yeshu’a, saying, “Salaam. Are you the one known as Yeshu’a? I am Yusuf, son of A’bel. I heard my father speak of you to others last evening.”

“Blessings upon you, Yusuf,” relied Yeshu’a.

“You have been spoken of as doing wondrous things.”

“Others have done far greater things in the past than I, and others will do more in the days to come.”

Yusuf’s companion, Sabaat by name, chose not to dismount. He looked contemptuously towards Yeshu’a, but slowly drew closer. He was fifteen years, and of an age to Yusuf though with a rougher manner and dress. He wore no head-dress. His wiry curly black hair and thin beard, gave him a sinister and aggressive appearance. He called out, “Water my camel, Judean!” as if speaking to his servant. At which point James and Simon rose and walked slowly over to stand behind Yeshu’a, in a challenging pose.

“Sabaat!” Yusuf called to his friend, “One does not ask such things of a holy one.”

However, Yeshu’a replied with withering humour, “Your animal is amply watered and will carry you much further. But when you choose to
carry the camel upon your own back, then I will be honoured to water you,” he said, bowing sarcastically.

The reply angered Sabaat, who saw Yeshu’a as no better than the dry sands of Sinai. Yusuf stifled a laugh, as Sabaat wheeled his camel angrily and galloped back to his place in the front of the caravan.

“You must excuse my friend, Sabaat,” Yusuf said. “He does not mean harm. He is my cousin and quick to temper.”

“Step down and eat with us before the journey.”

Yusuf tapped the front leg of the camel with his whip, the animal lowered itself to the sitting position allowing Yusuf to step off. His black and gold embroidered robes bellowed in the light morning breeze as he joined Yeshu’a and his family to a light meal of goat’s milk and figs.

“Where do you journey to,” asked Yusuf, as he bowed to Murree.

“To my sister Elizabeth’s home in Judea, and then to Jerusalem,” replied Murree, as her younger daughters inspected Yusuf’s rich robes.

“Judea is a beautiful place of peace, surrounded by hills,” Yusuf announced, as he described the fields of wheat, and gardens of date palms, figs and pomegranates. “I have been there many times, as we took the old Roman Military road through to my beloved Damascus.”

“It is many years since we journeyed to Egypt. It was during the reign of Herod,” Murree recalled, with sadness. “My husband is Joseph, the carpenter of Mataria.”
“Indeed, I have heard his name as one who created many rich carvings, much admired for their grace and beauty. He is admired by all lovers of beautiful things.”

Yusuf knew of Herod of Idumaea, called the Great, who ruled the land of Judea, as tetrarch, from 37 BC. He had built many fine buildings, he recalled, and was remembered for beautifying the temples in the area.

Murree bowed her head as she recalled a harsher King Herod in a different time. She gestured to Yusuf to eat. Just then the sun darkened and all saw the evidence of a forthcoming sand storm. Camels began their hoarse roar as the wind whipped up suddenly and whirled the cutting sands about them.

“You must cover yourselves quickly,” Yusuf shouted above the noise of the wind and flapping clothing. “Do you not have a tent?”

“No, just our blankets,” replied Murree, as she assisted the younger children under their blankets. They burrowed into the sand, with only the covering of the blankets for protection. It wasn’t long before they felt the weight of sand over them, reducing the sound of the wind’s ferocity. The fine sand seemed to shift beneath them; it was in their eyes, mouths and ears, making them cough and gasp for clean air.

No sooner had the storm started, that the swirling sands slowly settled down, and its swishing noise cease, just as suddenly as it commenced.
Heads started to pop up out of the desert, one after the other, from the security of their burrows. Yeshu’a helped his mother and sisters, as they shook their blankets, and their matted hair, free of sand.

Looking about they observed that the storm had altered completely the topography of the landscape surrounding them. They busied themselves retrieving their scattered possessions that were now strewn about for some distance. James and Simon went in search of their much valued goat.

“I had better return to my father,” voiced Yusuf, as he hastily sought his camel. “With your permission I will call upon you again, Yeshu’a. I will take you to the caves on the mountain yonder.”

“I look forward to our meeting again, my friend,” replied Yeshu’a, as he watched the light coloured camel return its rider to the front of the caravan at an ungainly trot. These camels strutted with their noses in the air displaying a sense of self-importance, knowing they were superior to the darker coloured pack camels!

The unpacking and packing for the umpteenth time during the course of the journey, was completed in a routinely, absent-minded fashion. Thus began another day of survival in the unrelenting heat of the Sinai desert. Never a cloud to be seen in the sky to break the heavenly blue. Not that anyone bothered to look upwards into the glare, preferring to keep their eyes lowered, and sometimes even closed as they trudged their
way following the route Moses took during the Exodus in the wilderness, many decades before.

It was some days later, in the mid-afternoon, when they came upon the Oasis of el-Lejah; a large pool of fresh clear water surrounded by palm trees, making it a most inviting and picturesque setting within a harsh, arid, desert landscape. Nearby stood single-storey whitewashed buildings, once used by sheep grazers but were now standing empty. This oasis was to be the travellers’ resting stage for two days, so tents were set up adjacent to the water’s edge, while others, like Murree and her family sheltered in the buildings which offered protection from the heat.

“Soldiers!” cried Murree’s eleven-year-old daughter Fatima, as she rushed into the sanctuary the family had made for themselves. “There are soldiers coming!”

The word ‘soldiers’ always sent waves of fear and unwelcome excitement through the travellers, just as much as the cry ‘bandits!’ did. This party of ‘maniples’, a small company of about 120 Roman soldiers, were on patrol along the main caravan routes. Neither Arab nor Judean had any love for them. Their presence in this land was much resented, and in particular their heavy taxes levied upon every household, to maintain their garrisons.

The soldiers approached the oasis and halted. Their metal armoury flashed in the sunlight, and perspiration rolled down their faces from
under their bronze pot helmets. Each man carried a ‘T’ shaped pole, called a kite pole, upon which were attached a hide water bag, mess tins, and their personal gear. Over their shoulders they carried two javelins, a shield called *scutum*, and the *gladius*, -the twenty inch long sword originally used by Roman gladiators who gave it its name, -was sheathed at the waist. Two mules carried the troop’s supplies took up the rear, minded by the *velites*, a few poorish recruits used by the army for light duties. Their Captain, riding in front on horseback, surveyed the scene on the opposite bank, checking for a possible ambush. They chose to camp on the far side of the pool, opposite the caravan party. Just then A’bel rose, and, in the company of his three guards, strolled over to the Roman camp, where for several minutes, he conversed with the officer in charge, Captain Corsini. The soldiers, and the Arab guards, eyed each other suspiciously but kept their distance.

The warm orange glow of the setting sun lit up the sky as it descended behind the distant hills. A’bel and his guards returned to the caravan with the assurance that all was well. The Roman party would be moving on the following morning, when they had replenished their water supply, and A’bel promised to supply them with fresh meat for their journey.

Tension began to relax on both sides and singing could be heard from the Romans as they sat around their fire eating and drinking.
“Nobody is to get drunk this night,” commanded the Roman officer, to his men. “We have an early start.”

Captain Corsini rolled himself in his cloak for warmth against the cold air of the night and drew closer to the fire. He thought of his mother and father, and of his own wife and children on their estate in the country of Romeles, also known as the land of Romulus, or Rome.

The grapes would be ready for picking now, he thought, as he sipped red wine from his silver goblet. “The most beautiful place in the world,” he murmured, “Not like this devil’s hole.” Why did he have to end up here, of all places, he wondered. After all, his uncle was a Roman Senator, and could have done much to advance his military career.

Gazing up at the gem-like stars strewn across the black night sky, his eyelids grew heavy and the cup slipped easily from his hand as he drifted into a deep sleep, exhausted from the heat of the day and the long march.

Those in the caravan and the military party, eventually settled down for the night, but it seemed no length at all when a loud scream rent the cold night air. The soldiers were instantly alert and on their feet, fearing attack. Forming a phalanx formation and looking deep into the moonlight for the source of the scream, peering across to the travellers’ camp, where they also were now equally alert, fearful of what might be. Both sides were frozen into silence and eyed each other suspiciously at a distance.

Eventually, the tall black shape of A’bel holding aloft a flaming torch,
could be detected, strolling quickly towards the Roman camp, calling out to Captain Corsini that one of his guards caught a Roman soldier sneaking into the caravan camp.

“What was that scream?” asked Corsini, now fully awake.

“My guard challenged your soldier, who made a run to escape,” came the reply. “He struck out with his sword and cut your man’s hand off.”

“What! I’ll go and see,” said the horrified Captain, addressing his men. “The rest of you stay here…and stay alert!”

A’bel escorted Corsini to the caravan’s camp, where they found the soldier writhing in pain, blood gushing from the arm stump, cleanly cut just above the wrist. The bloody hand lay on the sand nearby. By now the entire camp was gathering in a semi-circle around the unfortunate scene.

Corsini knelt beside the soldier, “In the name of Jupiter what were you doing here, man?” he hissed through his teeth.

“I wanted to visit a girl I had seen earlier around the camp…I meant no harm, Captain.”

“You young fool. You could have had others killed by your action,” came the Captain’s sharp retort. “I’ll get some of the men to carry you back to the camp.”

Yeshu’a, standing close by, observed the scene in the company of his mother and brothers, as the young soldier slumped into unconsciousness on to the blood-soaked sand.
“The poor man,” Murree whispered to Yeshu’a. “A soldier is of no worth with one arm.”

Without a word Yeshu’a quietly went across to where the hand lay, half buried in the sand, and picking it up, he took it to the water’s edge and washed it clean of sand.

“You! What are you doing with that hand,” barked Corsini. The gathered spectators ceased whispering in the background, as Yeshu’a went over to the young soldier who was moaning in pain. Captain Corsini reached out to grab the severed hand from Yeshu’a, only to be stopped by A’bel. “Let the boy be. He’s a holy one.”

“I have no interest in such things,” Corsini hissed through his teeth. “I will take my man and his hand back to our camp. Now stand aside.”

Yeshu’a, ignoring the Captain, proceeded to place the hand against the severed wrist and pressed them together, mumbling a prayer as he did so. Almost instantly the blood ceased to flow and the fingers began to move gently into a clinched fist.

A gasp went up from the witnessing crowd, “Another miracle!” they exclaimed excitedly. Corsini could only look on, shaking his head with incredulity, wondering if he was still asleep and dreaming.

The soldier, now weak from loss of blood, raised himself to a sitting position, and stared at his hand as he clinched his fist and quickly moving his fingers in disbelief.
“Look Captain! Look! It moves! My hand moves!”

“Black magic, that’s it,” declared Corsini, roughly. “I’ve seen it before.”

“I don’t mind what it is, Captain,” the soldier screamed hysterically. “I’ve got my hand back, thanks to this young man. Let me reward him with something,” he added, struggling to untie his coin pouch.

Yeshu’a turned his back and walked away without a word, as many eyes watched and wondered who it was they had in their midst.

Chapter Three

Camel foals were contentedly eating thorns from the nearby bushes, while the flock of sheep grazed on small shoots at the pool’s edge. Family groups welcomed this break at the oasis, while the smell of cooking of exotic spicy dishes assailed the nostrils of those resting in whatever shade they could find against the heat of the sun. Murree busied
herself baking bread in a large flat pan over an open fire; the bread she later wrapped in damp cloths, to keep fresh, for the days ahead.

Yeshu’a, his four brothers, and Yusuf, son of A’bel, surveyed the scene from the top of the nearby mountain. It had been a strenuous climb over rocky slopes of loose stones, taking two hours to reach the summit. Far below, the caravan camp stretched out on one side of the oasis, while the opposite side, where the soldiers rested, was now deserted; the Roman soldiers having decamped at sunrise. Looking down from their lofty position, Yusuf pointed out landmarks familiar to him, while Yeshu’a’s brothers idly threw stones at passing birds, with their slings-shots. Below them the Bedouin tents were spread-eagled on the ground like black bats, beside the pool of blue water which, in turn, was surrounded by sparse greenery.

“Two years ago I climbed Mount Sinai, with Sabaat,” remarked Yusuf. “It is the tallest mountain in this entire Sinai. One could see far across into Egypt; a truly inspiring view. Looking down on the desert below was like looking down on a turbulent sea of brown.”

Yusuf fell silent, and staring intently at Yeshu’a, speaking eventually after carefully weighing his words.

“I saw what you did in the early morning with that soldier’s hand,” he said in a low confidential voice. “I have no knowledge of such wondrous acts, but I would truly wish to learn.”
Yeshu’a smiled gently and said, “We will, in time, speak of it, but not now. There is much to do in the days ahead. Now, my friend, let us see the inside of these caves before we return.”

It took several minutes before their eyes adjusted to the darkness of the interior, as they stood at the cave’s entrance. Yusuf explained that this cave, and several others nearby had been used by hermits over many, many years. The mountain was honeycombed with such caves, he explained. They remained deserted now, awaiting, perhaps, the latest contingent of those who sought solitude from the world, for prayer and fasting. The floor was carpeted with dried palm leaves, while small animal bones were piled into one corner, indicating a non-vegetarian diet. It was cool inside this hewed-out rock sanctuary, a welcome relief from the heat of the desert far below.

“One could be happy here,” said Yeshu’a, “away from the rude world.”

“I don’t know how anybody could stay for any length of time in a place like this,” said James, as he look around the darkened interior of the hermit’s den. “It’s only fit for animals.”

“I was born in a place such as this,” replied Yeshu’a, with a smile. “I shall stay awhile to meditate, but the rest of you may return below.”

Their retreat down the same stony path took less time than the climb earlier, as the young men slipped and slid in a joyful race to the foot of
the mountain, eventually collapsing on the warm sands, with laughter, next to their mother's fire.

“Careful. You might put the fire out. I haven’t finished cooking,” she called out. “James, where is Yeshu’a? Why is he not with you?”

“He chose to remain for a while in one of the caves.”

“Always praying!” she sighed. “Then, go fetch more twigs for the fire.”

“I will go and help,” said Joses, as he and James scoured the oasis edge for anything that might burn, including dried camel dung, of which there was plenty. Spreading out in different directions in their search, Joses moved in the direction of where the Romans had camped. Litter was strewn about after the soldier’s night’s revelry. He thought he detected something shiny protruding from the sand, and putting down his bundle of twigs, he stooped and retrieved from the sand a dagger which, which must have been dropped by the Roman Captain. Judging from the quality of craftsmanship it was from a wealthy source; perhaps a gift from his family, Joses thought. It had a broad double-sided blade that came to a sharp point, while the handle was made of gold with a large ruby set into the hilt. Must be worth a fortune, he thought to himself. After looking about him quickly, Joses hastily concealed it inside his tunic and returned to his task.
Yeshu’a sat quietly in the cave high above the valley and sat in prayer, as a green lizard scurried across the floor and up the wall face. He saw, stretched out before his mind’s eye, the future that lay before him and listened to the inner voice directing him; a voice which was now becoming familiar, though he never knew from whence it came. It was, however, comforting to know that he would be protected and guided throughout his life, while his mission would be for God; yet, he had no idea where it would take him.

A raven flapped its wings, steadying itself as it landed at the cave’s entrance, its shiny black form silhouetted against the bright sunlight.

Yeshu’a was unaware of this winged intruder and remained in deep thought as the raven walked slowly into the darkened cave and up close to where Yeshu’a was seated on dried palm branches on the cave floor. The raven’s dark eyes stared with curiosity up at Yeshu’a, moving its head from side to side, as if quizzically examining the situation. Indeed, it was as if the raven presented itself as a messenger from ‘on high’, to convey its sacred communication of guardianship to young Yeshu’a, on another level of being. The bird stayed with Yeshu’a until he awakened and opened his eyes, just in time to see the raven spread its wings and fly out into the blinding sunlight. This black feathered friend was to be a frequent visitor to Yeshu’a, in the unfolding years to come.
It is written that cocks crow, donkeys bray, horses neigh, -and camels bubble! Thus the sounds of animals in the early-morning light created a cacophony of disagreeable sounds, as everyone busied themselves with the recommencement of their journey.

Once again Murree and her family plunged into the dry heat of the Sinai desert, and positioned as they were at the rear of the lengthy caravan, it was always a great effort to keep pace with the fast moving camel group ahead. Walking in the desert sand was like wading through waist-deep lake water; -the legs move heavily.

Their departure was witnessed by a lone shepherd perched high on a craggy rock overlooking the panoramic scene below, as a camel and its rider approaching Murree and family, leaving a trail of sand clouds in his wake. Yusuf approached waving his whip in greeting, to his new friends.

“It is good to be moving once more,” Yusuf announced with a cheerful smile. “It will be no time ‘till we will be in Judah.”

Murree nodded and asked, “Have you eaten, Yusuf?”

“Indeed, yes. But there is never any fear of hunger in the desert. It is really a matter of knowing where to look,” Yusuf smiled, referring to the manna, the food that the Lord gave to the Israelites when Moses led them out of Egypt. It was in the Wilderness of Sin, it is written, when the people murmured against the Lord, blaming Moses for bringing them to
such a dismal place. This same ‘manna’ is still picked by insects and birds from the tamarisk bushes to this day.

Yusuf reached down and lifted dark-eyed and pretty Fatima to sit with him. She had never been on a camel before, least of all sitting on one with a young man. Her clothing appeared simple and colourless beside Yusuf’s richly coloured flowing robes.

Murree rode astride the donkey which was led by Yeshu’a, and his brothers and sisters followed a pace or two behind.

“We will be coming to a fresh water lake in a few days,” said Yusuf. “You can replenish your food supply there with duck meat.”

“We have no means or knowledge of catching ducks,” laughed Fatima.

“I will stun them with my sling-shot,” replied Simon, to the jeers of Judah and James.

“No need for such things,” laughed Yusuf. “We Bedouins have an age-old method of catching ducks. My father taught Sabaat and I when we were quite young. All you do is place a decoy amongst the reeds near the shore, where the water is not too deep. Then you scatter rice or grain on the water’s surface and slip into the depths with a reed to breath through. You would need to secure your feet to heavy stones, to anchor yourself at the bottom, and wait.”

“Do you spear them from underneath?” a voice asked, jokingly.
“You wait, for perhaps a half an hour. As soon as the ducks land to eat the grain we pull them down quietly by the legs. If you can manage to do it quietly, you could succeed in capturing three or four ducks before the others become aware.”

“You must have the patience of Job,” said Simon.

“I have no knowledge of this Job. Is he a good fisherman?” asks Yusuf, to a burst of laughter.

“Ignore them, Yusuf. You spoke well,” said Yeshu’a. “Do you have other examples of seeking food?”

“Indeed,” replied Yusuf. “One may collect truffles which grow in the desert after rains. Bedouins have no trouble finding them.”

Murree smiled and said that they were pleased to have him with them on this journey. It gave her comfort to know that food could be found in such a desolate place.

By late afternoon they passed another caravan, one which was making a return journey to Egypt, then on to the port of Alexandria. Shouts of greetings passed to and fro, swapping news as they went.

“They have journeyed from as far as Ur and Babylon, judging from the carpets they carry,” said Yusuf, “They would have passed through Damascus. They may have spoken news of it to my father. If you will excuse me I shall rejoin him. Salaam.”
Chapter Four

“You cannot love God, unless you first love your fellow man,”

Yeshu’a said, teaching a small group of children one evening seated in a
arc around him, close to a brightly burning fire, the warmth being
welcome against the chilled night air.

“But what if they want to fight and hit us?” came a young voice in
reply.

“Turn the other cheek.”
This was too much for one father seated nearby, listening to the discourse. Jumping up angrily and grasping the hand of his child seated within the gathering, he voiced annoyance and anger that such teachings should be uttered to one of his sons.

“I teach my sons to be men,” said the Arab merchant loud enough for those who chose to hear. “We turn the other cheek to no man!” he trumpeted, as he stomped away, pulling his bewildered son behind him.

Wondering what his response would be, all eyes now turned to Yeshu’a, who remained unmoved by the disturbance.

“He who lives by the sword, shall die by the sword!” he said, in a quiet confident voice. “But enough of fighting. What story would you like me to tell you this night?”

“Tell us the story of the hoopoe and Solomon,” asked a shy little girl, who sat in the midst of the group.

“Ah! We’ve heard that story so often,” moaned her big brother, with irritation.

“I shall say it once more, just for you,” Yeshu’a said, with a smile to the little girl as she shyly covered her face with her hands.

“The great King Solomon was making his journey across the vast desert, with so little shade from the heat of the sun. A shadow fell upon the King as a great hoopoe flew overhead. The king welcomed the shade it’s great wings offered him. All day long the shadow followed him,
shielding him from the sun, -and for the following day also. When the
great King came to the end of his journey, he asked the hoopoe to come
before him, for we all know Solomon could speak to birds and beasts. He
said he wished to reward the hoopoe for its loyalty and kindness, and
asked the bird what it would like as a reward.”

“A crown, a crown,” interrupted the children, with glee.

“Let me continue, for I fear we shall be here all night,” laughed
Yeshu’a, continuing the tale.

“The hoopoe replied that he would like a crown of gold, like the
crown the great King wore, for he was a cheeky bird and feared no king.”

‘Oh, hoopoe,’ replied Solomon, ‘I believe you are a foolish bird, for a
crown will not bring you happiness, but if that is what you wish, then a
crown of gold you shall have,’ he said. With the wave of King Solomon’s
hand, a gold crown appeared, which the king placed upon the hoopoe’s
head to the delight of all.

“Many months passed and the hoopoe appeared before the King once
again, and Solomon asked him what he now requested, ‘Oh, king, please
take from me this troublesome crown of gold, as unkind men wish to
covet it and my life is in peril. I have no peace from dawn till dusk’. King
Solomon smiled in understanding, not wishing to say, ‘I told you so!’
Waving his hand the gold crown disappeared from the hoopoe’s head.
“However, in order that the hoopoe would not go unrewarded for his service, the king replaced the crown of gold with a beautiful crown of gold feathers, which the hoopoe proudly wore, for ever more.”

The children smiled with joy at the beauty of the story, little realising the great depth of the tale Yeshu’a just related.

“The hoopoe, to thank the king for his kindness, placed the crown of golden feathers upon the king’s head, and then he said, ‘Now, away to sleep all of you, for tomorrow you have an arduous journey ahead.’”

“Yeshu’a!” a voice called out from the darkness. It was Yusuf, walking slowly into the light of the camp fire. “I have come to warn you of the danger your teachings may have on those with closed minds, particularly these Arab merchants.”

“I teach only truth, to young enquiring minds,” answered Yeshu’a.

“I overheard angry talk and criticism of you and your teachings, from he who took his son away from your gathering,” Yusuf said. “I felt I should warn you. Be careful, for such people have evil hearts.”

“I thank you, dear friend, for your timely warning. But I have no fear, for it is impossible to have fear and also to have faith in God.”

Yusuf grasped Yeshu’a upper arm in friendship, and in turn, Yeshu’a grasped his, in Roman style. They parted, with their bond of friendship strengthened.

Dawn came, heralding another blistering day; another day of hot sands, dry air and relentless heat. The heat dulled the mind, requiring one
to plod along in a dazed fashion, speaking to nobody. Those fortunate enough to ride a camel could nod off and still hold balance without falling. Sometimes one would come across the dried skeleton of a camel or donkey, lying half covered in the drifting sands, a sobering reminder to all travellers that the desert was master here.

“Not long, now, ‘till we end this intolerable journey,” was the grumbled remark along the route. “And we will be entering through the gates of glorious Jerusalem.”

They knew they were drawing close to habitation when a young Arab boy came riding along on a tawny coloured donkey, singing to himself a wailing song with his eyes closed, oblivious of the passing train, his singing was accompanied by the sharp clap, clap sound of the donkey’s hoofs striking stones on its way.

The merchants called out to the boy, if Jerusalem was nearby. His response was to the wisdom of camping for the night and entering the city the following noon. This lifted the hearts of all the travellers. Their journey had been a strenuous one for young and old; battling against sandstorms, lack of water, and tolerating the unremitting heat of the desert. Thankfully they were spared the dread of a bandit attack.
Chapter Five

“Captain Corsini! Over here! Come and join me for a little wine”, a booming voice rang out, as Corsini strolled along the beach deep in thought, as the sun set, and the sound of gentle Mediterranean waves whispered along the shoreline in front of a small fishing village, where he and his men had made camp.

“Commander Lorenzo! I did not expect to see you here,” replied Corsini. “It’s a while since we shared wine together.”

It was early evening and the light was golden, making the village appear far more precious and picturesque than it really was. The village was a few leagues along the coast from the great city of Alexandria, and
was frequently used by Roman officers in need of recuperation after their military duties in the eastern provinces. Alexandria was more a Greek city, rather than Arab or Roman. It was like a piece of Europe grafted on to North Africa. Through its harbour came many of the great names of history; Caesar, Cleopatra, Antony, including the one to whom it was founded and named in his honour, Alexander, referred to as the Great. He was of noble title being the son of Philip of Macedon and his queen Olympias. In his youth, he was taught by Aristotle, and while not yet twenty years of age, ascended the throne, and went on to defeat the greatest army in Asia Minor, the Persian army, to become the most powerful person of his time. Before his death at thirty-three, he had built an immense empire which set standards for future times.

The splendid city of Alexandria was famous for its library and also for its lighthouse: one of the wonders of the world.

It was there that the Roman officers had built a bath house to relieve the rigours of army life, but while the baths in Britain and northern Europe consisted of hot mineral waters, here in north Africa the cooler waters were frequently more preferable after the heat of the day. The bath houses were built to accommodate four rooms; a steam room, a hot room, a warm room and a cold room. The heating was supplied from under the stone-flagged floors, conveyed by a complex network of underground channels.
Corsini had known Lorenzo since he was a young man. The Commander had visited the Corsini estate in southern Italy on a number of occasions, and was a close friend of Senator Corsini.

“I fear I must apologise,” said Lorenzo, as Corsini seated himself at the table. “For the wine is not up to the excellence of the Corsini wine.”

They spoke of happier days, and joked of political intrigues, which were many in the Roman capital. Nothing much had changed in all the years, they agreed. The expansion of the Roman territory was simple enough, given their military expertise, but holding on to it was quite another matter. Their outposts were getting more distant, requiring expert logistics in supplying them. But when those posts were threatened by local militants, then strength was the only sure way of success.

The Romans had the manpower, they paid well with coin and a quantity of salt, -a much prized and needed commodity in hot climes. Other offers of handsome rewards, such as large, lush estates to their officers and farms to the other ranks, or at least to those men who were prepared to sacrifice returning to their homeland.

“In how many lands have you served during your military career Commander?” Corsini asks, curious to learn more of his elderly host.

“Too many, Corsini! Gaul, the low lands, and even that damp place they call Britain. All-in-all I’m more comfortable here in the sunny shores of our Mediterranean.”
Lorenzo had a splendid house outside Alexandria, with every comfort, including servants, but it was no compensation for the long absences from his beloved Rome and his family, though it was common knowledge, he was estranged from his wife these many years.

“I want you, Captain, to join me and my men,” said the Commander. “I have instructions to go to Jerusalem to strengthen the garrison there. They feel there could be further attacks by the rabble followers of a young rebel called Barabbas. Do not distress yourself, you won’t have to go on foot; we’ll be returning by sea.”

“When do we leave?”

“Noon tomorrow,” replied the Commander. “But now, I must take my leave of you, for I have a young woman who has promised me rest and recreation this night!” Lorenzo stood up, stretched himself and smiled genially at Corsini, as he headed indoors.

Corsini slumped in his chair with his arms folded across his chest, as he gazed out upon the choppy sea, in the evening light, and was inwardly annoyed at having to travel so soon. He thought of his wife and children on his vineyard estate, whom he left almost two years before. He visualised the children playing on the vine terraces and wished he could embrace them. His memory was of his deep love for the green hills of southern Italy, -anywhere, he thought, but the desert! He hated the desert; the sand, the heat, the smell. The greatness of the far-flung Roman
Empire and its exotic postings, was beginning to pall. When he was young, yes, he never ceased thinking of being part of it, and of being of service to the Emperor. Now, after twelve years of military service, fighting and killing, he was weary; -for battle ages a man.

“Would you like me to read your fortune, Captain?” a dark-haired gypsy woman called to him from the beach. “Your fortune for your smallest coin?”

Corsini sat upright in surprise, and without a word wearily extended his palm as she knelt before him.

“The gods have been good to you and yours, Captain, but greater things will come your way,” she said, the gold bangles on her wrist clinked against each other as she traced the lines of his palm with her long thin finger. She was tall, thin and middle-aged, with black shiny hair, and wore a gypsy robe of many colours. “I see a career advancement, and then a change of direction, …you will…” her voice trailed off. “I see no more!” Corsini tossed her a coin, showing no interest in her prediction and rose to go indoors for the night.

The bath house was crowded at day-break and echoed with loud conversations and the splashing of water. The building was constructed of ochre coloured sandstone and a high wooden roof, a much simpler building than those back home. They were built with yellow and green
marble walls and pillars, and the floor of mosaic designs and pictures, depicting the power of Jupiter and other deities.

Captain Corsini nodded dutifully to Commander Lorenzo, as he entered, while he and other officers relaxed before the long sea voyage to Palestine. Corsini, however, did not feel like talking and would nod, smile or grunt, in response to remarks by others, but declined to join in the army banter. He was growing impatient with his fellows and discontent with his military duties. Even the loss of his precious dagger, added to his moroseness. It wasn’t because of its intrinsic value, but more its sentimental family connection. He hated loosing anything that reminded him of home.

He dressed quickly and had a simple meal, before joining his men who were loading one of the four longboats with supplies including the tall “amphorae” clay jars, with pointed bases, used for transporting wine, olive oil, or a popular fish paste called “garum”; these were used only once then thrown away.

He was answered with a shake of the head when he asked his page, who was strapping on his body armour, if he managed to trace the lost dagger among his gear. Accepting his loss, he joined Lorenzo at the tiller of the Pharos, called after the Isle of Pharos, on which once had stood the lighthouse of Alexandria. A cluster of Arab children stood and waved their good-byes from the shore, as the boats slowly pulled away. The
boat, or galley, rode low in the water, with the gunwales lined with the legion’s shields that were decorated with Gorgon’s heads or lightning flash designs. Sometimes they would usually carry the unit’s colours or insignia.

The idea of a Roman navy was stolen from the Carthaginians, whose fleet had commanded the entire Mediterranean Sea. When Rome decided to extend its territorial area, they knew they would require an amphibious military machine. They trained their men over a period of sixty days on dry land on rowing machines, in ‘oars-man-ship’, until they acquired the correct ‘rhythm’ for rowing successfully, and when the soldiers were sufficiently experienced, they were transferred to the newly constructed ships, which took approximately the same sixty days to construct the fleet needed for war. However, they were no match for the Carthaginians in sea battles.

The single large square sail of these vessels were a common sight in the Mediterranean waters. They had a smaller sail in front to help in the steering of the vessel. Some of the Roman galleys had a carved goose head low on the bow; the symbol of Isis, the goddess who protected sailors and seafarers. This ram or beak, usually of heavy bronze, was the weapon by which the Romans rammed the warships of their enemies. They usually deployed their ships in a defensive triangle formation, keeping their slow moving, heavily laden transporters situated in the
centre, for protection. A broadside attack was sufficient to hole the enemy vessel below the waterline, before boarding it over the boarding-bridge; a plank device placed between the two boats, which the Romans had invented.

The galleys were manned by ordinary legionaries who regularly doubled as sailors, when needed. Slaves were not used for this military purpose, as they proved to be unreliable in battle. The soldiers, naturally, preferred to fight and face death on dry land and often grumbled when they were commanded to man the oars of the warships, frequently spending many days or even weeks in open boats, in all weather.

These crafts were different from the Roman merchant boats moored nearby, which were the most common type of boat to plough these seas, and were called “corbita”; the much slower vessel and difficult to manoeuvre, but being a cheaper form of transporting goods, than travelling overland.

The sea was decidedly choppy when Lorenzo’s fleet of three boats pulled away. The command was issued not to unfurl the sail, but keep them stowed. A steady pull on the oars by the oarsmen, made each ship slice swiftly through the blue waters of the eastern Mediterranean. It would be several days before they would make land-fall, at the harbour of Caesarea, on the coast of Palestine.
“May I ask you, Commander, why you continued your interest in a military career, and not go into politics?” asked Corsini, cautiously seeking guidelines regarding his own future.

“I prefer the military life and the freedom it offers me,” he replied coarsely. “Dammit, what have the politicians done for us? Politics is too full of intrigue, -too dishonest. It is the military, not the politicians, who hold the Empire together. Rome is full of corruption.”

“But you must surely miss your …eh, family,” Corsini remarked, correcting himself, after realising his error.

“My wife is my wife in name only,” replied Lorenzo, knowing what Corsini meant. “She has her life, and I have mine. That is why I am perfectly content being away from Rome. But, yes, I do miss my children. My sons are growing-up fast. I pray they don’t enter politics!” he said, with a chuckle.

There was silence now between them, as they both went deep into their respective thoughts. Military life may have its compensations for some men, but for others, like Corsini, it would never fill the emptiness of being away from his homeland for long periods.

Eventually towards the evening the wind began to increase, allowing the sail to take over from the weary oarsmen. The pace now became a race between the three boats, with playful shouts and jeers from the men to each other, across the choppy waters.
“Signal to the others to keep close, or we will be separated if this wind increases further,” Lorenzo shouted to the naval captain, over the now howling wind.

All that evening and into the next day, the wind blew with ferocious force, driving the boats further apart until they were lost in deep troughs. Some of the younger soldiers, unused to sea travel, became violently sick. They were, after all, foot soldiers, unlike the more experienced older men. Corsini handed out large chunks of lemon to his men, to suck, which would combat the stomach wrenching nausea. It always worked for him on rough sea voyages, helping to neutralise the acidity of sea sickness.

The Commander looked on at this act of brotherliness, with curiosity; he could never, he thought, bring himself to be as familiar with his men, but Corsini had a special relationship with them, gaining the respect of the men under his command after having been together through many battles and sharing numerous military hardships.

Lorenzo retired below deck to his cramped sleeping quarters, for a few hours rest, while Corsini wrapped himself in his cloak and crouched in a corner of the deck leaving the command of the Pharos in the hands of an experienced centurion.

Corsini awoke in shock when a wave crashed upon him over the gunwales, alerting him to the wind’s increased velocity which tore at the
large sail. The order was given to have it taken down and stowed, for fear of it being ripped to shreds. But it was too late! With a heart-stopping crack the mast split and crashed with a suddenness, crushing under its weight, one of the oars-men. Two others were swept overboard by the wildly flapping sail and stays. Their shouts of help could barely be heard over the screeching wind, as they became lost in the hills of sea. It was impossible to order the boat about in the vain effort to save the two men. No expression of regret at their loss was expressed by the centurion in charge. Such was the way of men at sea. Corsini was decidedly uncomfortable with the lack of concern.

Lorenzo appeared on deck roaring at the men to cut the stays and heave the mast overboard and to row hard, in a effort to stabilise the ship in the rough conditions. He searched the sea for the other two ships in the convoy, without catching sight of them. The Pharos continued to plough its course through the grey waters, with waves rising to eight meters in height. The driving rain added to the misery of the long night and the sunless day that followed, but by late evening of the third day, the storm began to abate.

Muscles ached after the prolonged battle with the sea. The salt-water spray cracked lips, as well as adding to their thirst, as the men checked for damage and assisted in bailing-out the ankle deep water. Lorenzo calculated they were blown many leagues off-course and began to
compensate for the loss of time and direction. In a few days, he reckoned, they would have shelter in a port along the coast. He was content that no more men were lost on the journey. Highly skilled Roman soldiers were too costly to replace.

Chapter Six.

The sunrise that morning in Jerusalem was like any other; golden, warm, and full of hope. The city awoke slowly, and gradually the occasional sound of a dog barking, a cock crowing or clang of metal, upon metal, and the cry of tradesmen, increased gradually to a crescendo that would deafened the gods who listened.

A black raven swooped down towards the open window of a small house, on the stony waste-land at the outskirts of the city. It perched on the window- ledge jostling smaller birds out of its way to get to the bread crusts placed there for all feathered friends, by Yeshu’a.

Upon catching sight of young Yeshu’a through the open window, the raven spread and flapped its wings as if reassured about something no mortal would comprehend, and flew off into the morning sky.
Murree rejoined her husband in the house he found for them, and the family was pleased to have the stability of a home once again, after their long and wearisome journey from Egypt. Their return journey took them through Judaea, where Murree visited her sister Elizabeth. It was a joyful reunion, full of hugs and tears.

“You’ve changed, my sister,” Elizabeth said, with delight, as they embraced. “And such a beautiful family you have.”

Elizabeth was married to Zechariah, a high priest, who had married Murree and Joseph. Both girls were daughters of Hanna and her husband Joachim, a wealthy farmer, of the family of Aaron.

“What of your eldest, John?” Murree asked.

“He is a good boy, but I hardly see him, these days; he spends so much time in the desert. He lives a primitive, but prayerful life, in caves,” throwing up her hands in despair. “He eats only fruits, honey, berries, and dresses simply. Much of his time is spent in the company of Banus, who is also a Brother of the Essenes. He’s also trying to grow a beard! I hardly recognise him any more.”

“He sounds so like my Yeshu’a. Always praying. Does little around the house. He has made strange things to happen. Miracles people call them.”
Perhaps we have given birth to a couple of rabbis,” Elizabeth laughed, as she began to prepare a meal. “Still you have Joseph’s sons and beautiful daughters to console you.”

Murree fell silent, then confided, “Fatima has grown attached to a young Bedouin boy. He is a nice young man, but much older than she. He is educated, and comes from a rich family. I hope nothing comes of it. He is not of our belief, -if he believes anything.”

Murree giggled as she described his skill at catching duck, and collecting “manna” in the desert.

“At least they will not starve,” said Elizabeth, joining in the laughter.

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Yeshu’a could be frequently found in the city’s great Temple, where he listened to the rabbis teaching scripture, and debated with others on the steps outside. From time to time he would interject, correcting or interpreting, what was being taught by the elders. This was not appreciated by the learned men, much less by his mother who later heard whispers of the incidences. Miriam would sometimes accompany Yeshu’a, and would relay, with a giggle, back to the family the encounters in the sacred Temple.

“Yeshu’a, you should not question the teachings of the elders,” his mother would pronounce. “You will make them angry and only cause trouble for yourself.”
“Their teachings may be correct, but the emphasis they place on earthly things, troubles me. And why kill animals inside the Temple? God does not want His creation sacrificed to Him. These animals are as beloved of the Father as is all nature.”

“They must know what they are doing,” said Murree. “Is it not the teachings of Moses?”

“No. God wants us to sacrifice the animal tendencies within ourselves, not those creatures beloved of the Father.”

“Oh, you’re like your cousin, John. Wandering about in the desert… Living on berries… Praying in caves! What will become of you both?”

his mother sighs. “When are you going to settle down, and marry a nice girl? You are good with your hands. Your father has taught you some of his skills at carpentry, did he not?”

“Mother, I cannot marry. I have so much to learn, so much to do for God.”

“Not marry? Yeshu’a, why do you speak like this? If you wish to study and be a rabbi, you can still marry,” Murree pleaded. Yeshu’a being a descendent from the House of David, with his royal origins and rare intelligence, would make him an ideal suitor for many of the daughters of the rich local families. For any learned young man, or rabbi, it was an honour to marry one of their daughters.
“Many wealthy merchants admire you,” his mother argued. “They would welcome you as a husband for their daughters, and you would have a position in society. I hope you are not going the way of your cousin?”

Yeshu’a smiled at the thought. He was not as yet reacquainted with his cousin, John. Although they were of an age and it was his hope that he would meet with him before long.

“Mother, I shall be leaving home soon, but not to go with John,” Yeshu’a said. “I am going east to the land of the Buddha. I wish to study in Bharath (India).”

Murree dropped the terracotta bowl she was holding, with the shock, splattering its contents at her feet. She stared at Yeshu’a in disbelief. Miriam and Ann, rushed into the house and stood with wide open eyes at the scene.

“Going east? Surely not! Yeshu’a, we do not follow their religious beliefs, their practises,” Murree pleaded. “We follow the ancient teachings of our forefathers.”

“I too wish to follow the teachings of our fathers, but I equally wish to learn of other roads to God,” he replied. “I have no wish to follow our custom of betrothal next year. Marriage is not for me; it is not my destiny.”
“How will you live? How long will you be away?” so many questions came tumbling out. When his brothers entered they too joined in, as they searched Yeshu’a face for answers. “How will you travel? Can we come?”

“I have no wish to cause you distress, mother. I will eat simply, and sleep where I find myself. I do not know how long I shall be away, but I will return,” he assured them. “Humanity is lost. It is in distress…in a no-man’s land! I want to help give it direction.”

The news of Yeshu’a’s intended departure, came as a shock to all. Word was carried to others; Elizabeth, his aunt, his mother’s uncle, Joseph, and not least to the merchants who had such plans for him! Since the family’s return from Egypt, their home was a place for rich and noble to gather, who desired the young Yeshu’a for a son-in-law, for he was now renowned for his edifying discourses in the name of the Almighty.

To the orthodox Jew, however, celibacy was considered repugnant to God, and accordingly an unmarried man could not claim to be a teacher. But as an Essene, Yeshu’a would have gone against the rules of the Order, should he have married, --taken of himself a wife! It would have retarded the sacred work he was to undertake, as the prophesies foretold.

On the Sabbath, which was several days later, Yeshu’a visited the Temple once again, while on this occasion coming face-to-face with Joseph, his mother’s uncle, who came from a place called Arimathaea.
Joseph was a counsellor to the Jewish Sanhedrin, and a close friend of Nicodemus, also a member of the Sanhedrin and leading lawyer of a portly stature. They were each Brothers in the Essene Order.

It had been Joseph’s ambition to invite Yeshu’a to join him in his import and export business. He was rich and influential, being an importer of tin from mines in as far-flung places as, Phoenicia, and Cornwall, in the land called Britain. He always took a deep interest in the welfare of all of Murree’s children, even while they lived in Egypt.

“Ah, the bright young man, who teaches the elders holy scripture,” announced the jovial Nicodemus, upon sighting Yeshu’a, at the Temple’s entrance. “Have you come again to teach these tired old men the ways of the Lord?” Lowering his voice slightly, he said, “The elders were disturbed by your answer to the question, ‘Can blood sacrifices wash away sins?’ I understand you refuted the suggestion.”

“No. I merely wished to contribute to the discussions,” replied Yeshi’a obediently. “I said that it is never right to offer human or animal blood sacrifices to God; that he who kills, kills himself, and he who eats the flesh of the slain beasts, eats of the body of the dead.”

“Joseph, do you know this young man?” asked Nicodemus, with a quizzical smile.

“I have not had the pleasure of meeting him since his return from Egypt,” replied Joseph, who was setting sight on Yeshu’a for the first
time. “However, I do know him to be my niece’s son.” Addressing
Yeshu’a, he said, “We must talk, you and I, about your future.”

Nicodemus made his excuses and left the two to converse privately on
family matters.

Joseph and Yeshu’a strolled into the gardens adjacent to the Temple
grounds and seated themselves on a marble bench, amidst heavy scented
flowers and under the shade of palm-fronds, pierced by shafts of sunlight.

This was their first meeting, the first of many, as time would show.
Yeshu’a had only heard of Joseph as his mother’s uncle, with great
influence in society, and rich in worldly goods.

As Yeshu’a sat next to Joseph, not really listening to him speak, he
saw a tall muscular man in his early fifties, well groomed in rich robes.
His face was slim with a dark trimmed beard, turning grey.

Joseph had hoped that some day Yeshu’a would join him in his
business, and travel with him on his long trade sea-voyages. Joseph’s
own son, also called Joseph, was reluctant to share in his father’s
business, preferring instead a career in law, and possessing a small farm.

“I was informed of your plans to leave home and travel east,” Joseph
said, in a slow quiet voice. “We, in the Essene Order, are concerned as to
your decision to travel to Bharath so soon. It is indeed a cultured and
spiritual country, but you are still young and have no knowledge of their many languages, nor their cultures and customs. We are responsible for you, for it is written, that God has noble plans for your future life.”

“I do not understand,” Yeshu’a replied.

“Your mission during your last life upon this world, was incomplete. Your duty now is to reconnect with your last incarnation, --as Moses, when you failed to complete the journey to the Promised Land, --Kashmir! You will learn, in time, of the prophecies. I shall not speak of them now other than to say that you have a most important role to play in this life, and it is our bounded responsibility, as elders, to watch over you until you have grown to full maturity,” Joseph informed him. “That is why your father, Joseph, took you to Egypt as a babe, to reconnect with your incarnation as Moses.”

“But why? Why must I have to -‘reconnect’- as you say,” asked Yeshu’a.

“When you, as Moses, received the Commandments, and saw those whom you were leading to their new land in the act of idolatrous worship, you became so angry and disgusted, that you cast down and broke the sacred tablets,” Joseph explained. “By that very act you were deemed to have a another incarnation, to fulfil your Mission. Furthermore, you were only to glimpse, but not enter, the Promised Land.”

“When I complete this life’s event, will I have a further re-birth?”
“It is written that you will be re-born in the Advent of Sai, which will be known as Prema Sai, -when the Lord Himself will again take human form,” Joseph announced, stunning the young Yeshu’a into wide-eyed silence.

As an important member of the Essenes, a strict ancient esoteric Jewish order, Joseph of Arimathaea knew of the destiny which lay ahead for young Yeshu’a, and the suffering he would have to undertake for mankind’s sake, but had not reckoned on its commencement at such an young age. For now he was only concerned for his immediate welfare, offering whatever was needed for the journey, -but that offer Yeshu’a declined.

Yeshu’a felt that he needed room to expand and had no wish to be hemmed in at this stage of his progression. While he respected the Order to whom his father belonged, he knew inwardly, of the wider road along which he had to travel.

They conversed quietly together for some time.

Upon taking his leave to return home, Yeshu’a strolled through the noisy market place, by means of a warren of twisting alleyways, examining items as he went. Stalls catered for every household need; food stuffs of every description, cloths of every hew, and pristine cooking utensils. Circus side-shows were a feature of most bazaars, with acrobats, fire-swallowers, animal acts, and -- quietly hidden aside -- the usual
games of chance. All goods were paid for by coin; gold, silver or brass, and one had to have one’s own basket to take away their goods of vegetables and fruit, as no containers were offered.

It was here that Yeshu’a suddenly came upon Yusuf and Sabaat, whom he had not seen since their caravan journey for Egypt. The former had a welcoming smile and a warm greeting, while Sabaat, on the other hand, showed nothing but a stiff acceptance, assumed more for his cousin’s sake.

“Yeshu’a! It is good that we meet again. How are you and yours?”

“All are well, Yusuf. Have you travelled far?” asked Yeshu’a, eager for news.

“The caravan is journeying to Egypt again, from Damascus. We will be returning two moons from now. What have you done since we last met?”

“Study mostly, Yusuf. I am intending to travel east to Bharath, very soon. It is my wish to study there,” Yeshu’a said, with more than a degree of excitement in his voice.

Yusuf stared at him in surprise. Why would anyone want to travel such a distance just to study, he thought, least of all a young man of barely fourteen years? Were there not excellent schools of learning in Jerusalem, Alexandria, or indeed, Rome! After a brief thought, he suggested for Yeshu’a to await his return, and they would journey
together to Babylon, recommending it as a much safer route. Indeed, it was sometimes necessary to pay safety-money to warrior tribes, including Bedouins, along the route.

“I will travel with you as far as Babylon, and assist you in joining a worthy caravan from there, to wherever the journey takes you,” Yusuf promised, as they said their ‘farewells’.

Yeshu’a proceeded to walk out towards the edge of the great city of Jerusalem, to his home on the outskirts, while a light wind blow the fine dust, as fine as talcum-powder, through the streets. He noticed as he went the decline in the quality of housing, the further he went from the magnificent stone buildings in the city centre, housing the rich in worldly wealth, compared with the smaller mud-walled structures housing those who were rich only in hope.

The home his mother made for the family was a single storied building, with just enough room to accommodate the entire family. They kept livestock in pens at the rear, consisting of their faithful goat, a few sheep and some laying chickens. Murree tried growing vegetables on a small patch of common land nearby, with some success. Weaving and fine needle-work, which were skills she learned from her mother at a young age, were a source of family income. Her husband’s workshop was a short distance from the home and the children would gather there pretending to assist, but in Joseph’s eyes they were more of a hindrance.
“It was a surprising day. First meeting uncle Joseph, and later the smiling Yusuf, then the dour Sabaat,” Yeshi’a said, with a chuckle, to his mother over the evening meal. “All seemed interested in my journey east, I don’t know why.”

“Everyone is naturally concerned for you. You are still much too young to be travelling such a distance, into a strange country,” Murree replied, with more than a hint of worry in her voice.

“But, mother, you must know we are never alone. We need never fear, for fear itself, is the only fear. The protection of our dear Father and His angels, is always with us.”

His mother could only sigh and hope he was right, for she knew it would be many years before she would see him again. She lay awake for hours most nights, worried as to what would become of Yeshu’a on such a perilous journey. Murree had the other children to consider, she told herself, so she attempted to remove Yeshu’a’s trip from her mind and concentrate on the household chores.

Joseph nodded in acceptance upon hearing the news. He always knew that this day must come, but dreaded it when it did. As a prominent Essene he was aware of the destiny that lay ahead for Yeshu’a. However, to assist Yeshu’a on his journey of study to the east, Murree quietly sold some family possessions, during the course of the next few weeks, including pieces of jewellery she received from her mother, Anna, on the
day she wedded Joseph. While not agreeing with the decision to go, she respected it, but was deeply anxious for his safety, as any mother would be.

Market-whispers were that there had been an outbreak of plague far to the east, many dead. Fearful of it spreading, the camel train overseers took the precaution of restricting the number of travellers from further east. “Probably rumours,” Murree consoled herself, more for comfort that from any knowledge or fact. Anyway, she thought, it takes so long for news to filter through by camel caravan train, perhaps the danger had ceased long passed. She could not help recalling all she knew of the plagues of Egypt, in former times, that gripped with fear the minds and hearts of the people.

“With God’s Grace, Yeshu’a will come to no harm,” Joseph would mumbled to her as they lay together awake at night.

At mid-morning, the following day, her daughter Anna came dancing lightly into the house; she always danced and hummed to herself, as young people have done down through the ages. She was artistic, a talent she inherited from her father, but unlike her father, she preferred to work mostly with metals, rather than wood, with a future ambition to work with gold and silver, when fortune dictated it. However, it was unlikely she would ever be apprenticed to a smith who would give her the training she desired, because of the social stigma associated with women working
in these male dominant crafts. For the present, she was content to treat it
as a hobby.

“I have made a present for Yeshu’a, to take with him on his journey,”
she announced, holding high a Star of David, made of polished brass. “He
can wear it on his girdle cord.”

“That was a kind thought, Anna,” her mother said, without looking up
from her needle-work.

“But I do not know why he has to go, mother, -and journey so far. We
may never see him again.”

“Yeshi’a feels he has to go. I tried reasoning with him. Even uncle
Joseph offered to take him into his business, to no avail.” Murree sighed
her answer. “He is determined to go, and feels he is guided by God in
doing so. He goes with my blessing. Would you feed the chickens for me,
Anna?”
Chapter Seven

“Shall this be your first visit to Damascus, Yeshu’a?” Yusuf asked, as the long camel train pulled away from Jerusalem, at dawn of that fateful day, East. While his heart was full of hope and yearning for knowledge, Yeshi’a could still feel the pull and heartbreak of the family he was leaving behind.

“I have no memory of anywhere other than Egypt and Jerusalem, my friend. I feel my life is about to begin,” replied Yeshu’a, as he rode high on the spare camel, swaying back and forth, along-side his friend Yusuf. As they travelled together with the camel train to Damascus, Yusuf promised to journey further with him, as far as Babylon, where he would quietly pay for a place on another train continuing further east.

“Your journey will be a long one, I fear. It could take you many moons to get to Sind,” Yusuf advised. “I wish I could go further with you.”

The route between Jerusalem and Damascus was a well-trodden one, with merchant trains going back and forth almost every day. Trade was the main purpose for their existence, both cities enriching themselves in the process. They would travel along the route, which was under the protection of Roman garrisons, then on through Samaria, and to the Galilee, before swinging north-east to Damascus.
It was quite clear to the average onlooker that the Romans had no time for Israelite or Arab. The high taxes that the Roman authority imposed upon the Jewish people, to maintain their military forces, created much tension between Roman and Judean. The Bedouin Arab, being nomadic visitors, unlike their merchant cousins, simply kept clear of the conflict. The Roman’s saw them as being no better than the smelly camels they rode upon. The Judeans were different, however, they were educated, and many held important positions within the Roman political structure and were beneficially used as “go-betweens”, to keep the peace.

The first two days were, generally speaking, uneventful. The air was now beginning to cool, as the caravan train proceeded slowly up to the high ground close to the Sea of Chinnereth, more recently referred to as Lake Galilee, where one could observe and marvel at its cobalt blue waters standing out in stark contrast to the burnt brown of the surrounding desert landscape. The lake was glass smooth in the sunlight, as fishermen worked their nets as they had done for aeons, around the Jordan inlet to the north of the lake. Farmers tended their crops as black and white kingfishers flashed and dived over the waters from the shelter of the little nearby wood of eucalyptus trees. It was a scene of great tranquility and beauty.

The camel caravan train proceeded to pass village after village, many of which were set in exquisite picturesque groves of date palms. Women
sat outside their brown box-like houses pounding maize for bread or baking in outdoor dome-like ovens. The small dusty patches of land between the houses were crowded with chickens, camels, donkeys, water buffalo, and scampering brown children. Some of these brown-mud homes would have two or even three storeys, while on their flat roofs elaborate pigeon houses were built, around which thousands of blue and white birds fluttered.

The town of Hazor lay ahead, which was fortified many years before by Solomon, but occupied now by Romans. The train had no need to stop there. Their route swung north-east to Damascus, where they would sojourn for a couple of days to replenish supplies and rest, before pushing on to Babylon.

The nights were beginning to be much colder now, and Yeshu’a was grateful for his warm blanket, the only possession he carried and much valued as they traversed higher ground. He declined the hospitality of sharing a tent for the night, preferring to wrap himself in his blanket under the shelter of the acacia trees. The acacia tree was equally welcome during the blistering heat of the day, as it was against the chill winds of night.
Yeshu’a and Yusuf huddled around the night’s camp-fire in idle conversation, eating a light meal.

“Yeshu’a. May I ask if you see me as a pagan, because I have no knowledge of your God?” Yusuf asked, hesitantly.

“Indeed no,” replied Yeshu’a, somewhat startled by the question. “I know you to have a pure heart. God loves all men, of every religion and none, whether they believe in Him or not. He is the Father of all. Indeed, it does not matter if you do not believe in God, as long as you believe in yourself.”

Yusuf sat in silence as he contemplated the reply, and eventually looked across through the flames at Yeshu’a and asked, “How then does one worship your God?”

“Work is worship! If you serve your fellow man, you serve God. Except for God in man, there is no other God! Man is God. God is man. There’s no difference between the man and God. One can call Him by any name and He responds. As I said, my God is the God of all.”

The answer made Yusuf smile, as if the reply filled a deep void within him. He could see the logic behind Yeshu’a’ words. Being of service to others must certainly be more important than just praying or giving alms, he mused.

“If you are rich and you give a coin to a poor man,” Yeshu’a continued, “It is of little loss to you, as it soon passes from the hands of
the poor man, and once again he has nothing. Whereas giving him food, clothing and service, these sustain him, and you are greater in the eyes of God.”

Yusuf was silent for a moment, and said, “What you say is good, but is it in accordance to the teachings of your rabbis? They seem inflexible in what they preach, it seems to me.”

“I have gleaned much from my own studies and my own conscience,” said Yeshu’a. “However, there is much that I disagree with in the teachings of our priests. Is it wrong to think for one’s self?”

Yusuf smiled and nodded, “Thank you, Yeshu’a, for those words of comfort. I’m beginning to see things differently. We will talk again,” as he placed some further twigs upon the fire before retiring to his tent.

Yeshu’a laid back against the tree, wrapped the blanket tightly about him, and surrendered to slept.

His father, Joseph, came to him that night in a dream. He wore the gleaming white robe of an Essene and in his left hand he held a long staff, as he stood in the middle of a dry, dusty road. No word was spoken.

Yeshu’a saw him raise the staff and point it along the road ahead, and as he looked the road seemed to lengthen, rise upwards and become rougher.

Puzzled, Yeshu’a looked back to Joseph, but he had gone.

Yeshu’a awoke from his sleep with a start, sitting bolt upright and breathing heavily. What does this mean, he thought. It slowly dawned
upon him that his father was pointing the way to the future. A future that was going to be a long, up-hill journey, on a rough, dusty road. This was a similar image to that which he was given in the cave those many months previous. However, he knew in his heart that he would be sustained on that journey, by the love of his Lord.

The night was still, as he looked around him. The fire had long done out. Now the only illumination was by the half moon that cast a dark light upon the surrounding tents and animals. He could detect lights from fires in the villages, far below on the edge of the lake. Yeshu’a slept no more, ‘till the sun’s rays of orange light came rushing up from the eastern horizon. His thoughts turned to his home and his mother, who would now be up baking the day’s bread before anybody else in the house stirred. His nostrils could almost detect the aromatic smell of fresh bread, -almost.

Chapter Eight

The Pharos tied up in the harbour at Caesarea, on the shores of the Mediterranean, having been driven much further north, along the coast,
than was intended. The galley looked a sorry sight after the severe battering it received in the course of the voyage. Lorenzo and Corsini, were glad to be back on dry land once again, but no more so than their men who had been through an ordeal they wished to forget. The experienced crew laughed and jeered at the young foot soldiers as they staggered ashore, still swaying from the motion of the boat, and swearing they would never again set foot upon a ship.

Commander Lorenzo ordered Corsini to rest his men for a couple of days before proceeding, for it would mean a long march back down the coast, then inland to Jerusalem.

Corsini welcomed the opportunity to see the town. He had always an interest in the architecture of the places he was assigned to during the course of his military service. In the meantime Lorenzo sought out accommodation for himself, and chose an inn a short walk from the harbour, more for its young women and good wine, than its soft beds.

The town itself had been enlarged from being a sleepy fishing village into a city of major importance by King Herod. Caesarea, a mighty outpost of the Roman Empire, had a large harbour of military importance, and they also built a great stone aqueduct to channel fresh water from the northern hills, into the city. For their entertainment the Romans constructed an amphitheatre on the hill overlooking the sea. When the
city was taken over by the Romans as their headquarters, where the standard was placed above the main gate entrance.

A party of soldiers patrolled the general area around the fort, while children with long sticks, marched in copycat style, immediately after them. Corsini watched the pretence-game the children played with amusement and couldn’t help being reminded of his own children, back home. Boys the world over, he thought, will always play such games. He recalled his brother and himself doing precisely the same thing at their age, and later, both he and his brother joined the service of the Emperor as soon as they were old enough. But now his heart was no longer in it, since his brother was killed in a fierce campaign in Gaul five years previous. His body had been returned to the family estate in Italy, where a tomb was erected on a hillock overlooking the vineyards.

Corsini moved with his men into quarters in the fort and began straight away to exercise them in armed combat. The journey by sea did not allow for such training and it was now necessary to be ready for any rebel attack.

The discipline of the Roman army was being tested time and again by the rebel tactics of “hit-and-run”. While the latter’s tactics proved successful in confined areas such as woodlands, but in the open spaces and in the defence of their forts, the Roman soldier had no equal. Their
battle tactics had been proven highly successful, again and again, in many campaigns.

The fort was comparatively small by Roman standards, housing about one hundred men, making it rather cramped for the combined force of Corsini’s and Lorenzo’s men.

The Centurion in charge, Mario Clemente, welcomed Captain Corsini; new faces were always welcome in out-of-the-way postings. Clemente had worked his way up through the ranks of Roman legions to be, at twenty-five, one of the youngest Centurion in the Roman army. He invited Corsini to dine with him that evening, being more hungry for news, than his meal.

Clemente was from humble origins and came from the city of Capua, in Northern Italy, famed for its Gladiatorial training centre and amphitheatre. This arena was extravagantly laid out having elephant tusks surrounding the ring, onto which security nets were suspended to protect the audience from the wild beasts used for the sporting occasions. Training the gladiators could take many months; perhaps years and they were treated as heroes by the women who often wore talismans containing the blood of their favoured gladiator, for protection.

Slaves from many countries, had been trained there in the arts of self-defence and close combat, ever since Spartacus and seventy other gladiators, rebelled and challenged the might of Rome. This small band
of rebels took on 5000 highly trained Roman soldiers and defeated them at Mutina. The military were never to forget this humiliating and embarrassing defeat at the hands of mere slaves!

“It’s so good to talk to another officer after all these months, Captain,” Clemente said, as he hastily poured wine after the meal. “I so need intelligent conversation. People here are so dull. What news have you from Rome?”

“I have little news, other than what I gleaned over my stay in Egypt. I have orders to journey to Jerusalem, with Commander Lorenzo and his men, to put down a possible rebel uprising there,” replied Corsini. “As for Rome, there’s the usual political intrigues, jostling for power and suspicious deaths.”

“Ah! Things haven’t changed much, then. There’s less chance of us soldiers being stabbed in the back, unlike those politicians! It’s a rough business. But if one hankers after power, one must expect the consequences.”

Corsini could only nod in agreement. He did not wish to discuss political issues, as it might involve referring to the fact that his uncle was a Senator.

“Have you ever toyed with the idea of entering politics, yourself, Captain” asked Clemente.
“Yes. But I have long been dissuaded against such a course of action,” replied Corsini, with a gaze as he seemed to be looking into the future. “My ambition now is for an easier life and spend my days in peace in the vineyards with my children. Except they’ll not be children any more by the time I again see them. The years have passed so quickly.”

With drinks in hand, they strolled out on to the veranda, and sat watching the stars and the shimmering dark blue sea beyond. Torches moved too and fro in the darkness as sentries patrolled the walls, barking responses to commands from time to time. A cool breeze that blew around their bare legs was a welcome relief after the heat of the day. Clemente spoke of his parents and young sister back home. He never married; I am married to the army, he would say, whenever asked. He was now the chief supporter of the family back home. He was, also, paying for his sister’s education as his father, who had also served the Emperor, being unable to work owing to a spinal injury he received during battle.

“Welcome to Fort Caesarea,” said Clemente’s adjutant, as Commander Lorenzo came through the main gate, the following morning. “I’ll take you to Centurion Clemente’s quarters, immediately.”

The centurion was a powerfully built man, standing six foot six in his sandals, a career soldier, but with little battle experience being more
involved in administration. The two men marched quickly across to the white single-storey building used as the officer’s residence, as the early morning wind blew plumes of fine sand around them. Clemente and Corsini stool up immediately from their breakfast, as Lorenzo clumped his way up the steps.

“Have you eaten, Commander?” Clemente asked, rather stiffly.

“Take your ease, gentlemen. I will have no more than a little of your coffee,” Lorenzo replied. “I had rather too much wine last evening. My tongue feels like sand!”

The sun was dramatising its presence as it slowly rose above the horizon, and was beginning to feel hot. Soldiers were breaking off from their early morning military exercises, in the quadrangle, and retreating to cool shades of the walls while a company of soldiers dragged two young men into the fort. “Trouble makers”, mumbled the soldiers seated in the shade, and the hapless youths were halted before the residence, as Clemente rose and went down the steps, and after a short discussion ordered the prisoners to be taken to the underground cells.

“Sorry for that disturbance, Commander, but I had to deal with a couple of intruders.”

“Don’t be too severe with them. They might make good slaves,” Lorenzo said. “Or perhaps you could send them to the Gladiator’s centre in Capua. Ah! Capua. That centre of Gladiatorial excellence!”
“I prefer to call it the centre of Gladiator scum”, replied Clemente, to the puzzlement of Lorenzo.

Corsini interjected by explaining that Clemente was from Capua.

“Ah! I see you are recalling our defeat by the Gladiators at Mutina, Clemente,” remarked Lorenzo. “Never forget that we eventually defeated Spartacus and his band of warrior slaves. Defeat does not always mean weakness or failure. It can inject you with the will to win, which we certainly succeeded in doing. There’s a saying, ‘To become a Gladiator, is to make a pact with death’.”

“However, a Gladiator needs only to have one successful fight to be rewarded with the annual wage of one of our soldiers. I see no justice in that”, Corsini remarked angrily.

Turning to Corsini, Lorenzo asked, much to Corsini’s intense embarrassment, “Tell Clemente about the miracle of your soldier’s hand.”

“Not a lot to tell, really,” was Corsini’s embarrassed reply. “One of my men intruded into a Bedouin’s camp after a young Arab girl and lost his hand for his troubles.”

There was silence.

“Go on,” encouraged Lorenzo. “There’s more.”

“Well,” Corsini was by now decidedly uncomfortable as he continued, “A young man they called a ‘holy one’, retrieved the hand
and replaced it back on to the wrist…as good as new! Don’t ask me to explain it, I can’t.”

“Well let’s hope he put it on the right way ‘round!” said Lorenzo, to loud laughter. “Or he’ll never be able to draw his sword again!”

“You mean the hand functioned perfectly, after being severed?” asked Clemente. “By Jupiter that was some trick!”

“That was no trick,” replied Corsini, now rather annoyed for having to defend an act which he had referred to, on the occasion, as ‘black magic’. “I saw it with my own two eyes. It was… miraculous. He still has that hand, and there’s not a mark on the wrist!”

“A young man did that, you say? I’d like to have met him,” Clemente replied in wonderment.

After a momentary ponder, he stood up and made his excuses as he left to check the day’s duties of the garrison.

Chapter Nine.

“Aram is some six day’s ride from here,” announced the camel train overseer, in answer to queries from a family travelling to a settlement
near the town of Aram, which was no more than a rural village, situated about half-ways between Damascus and Babylon.

Yeshu’a and Yusuf arranged to joined this camel train which would take them through to Babylon, from whence Yusuf would finally leave Yeshu’a to continue his journey alone to Bharath.

They rested for several days at Yusuf’s home, on the outskirts of Damascus. A large house made of stone, uncommon in that area, and being well furnished with rich Persian carpets and colourful cushions and with an opulence befitting a successful, yet somewhat ruthless business man.

Abel, Yusuf’s father, made his fortune running camel caravan trains, all over the middle east, as well as trading with the many Roman forts, particularly in mountainous areas. He also traded in livestock, with dealings in far-distant places as Rome and the cities of Persia.

He was well aware of the disregard in which Romans held him; seeing him, and his fellow Bedouins, as being no better than the jerboas, -the rats one sees scurrying about in the desert in the evening light.

Yeshu’a was treated as an honoured guest by Abel, who expressed great interest in the long journey the young man was about to undertake. He seemed so young, they thought, and possessed so little in the way of clothing, for such an arduous journey, and declining all offers of clothing and money which were pressed upon him.
“When you reach Babylon, south of Ctesiphon, stay a while, -you should find it of interest,” suggested Abel.

Abel appeared less fierce now than when Yeshu’a first met him on the train from Egypt; indeed he seemed almost fatherly and caring. The younger children gathered around to hear him relate the story he had told them so many times, of events that happened in Babylon, over 300 years previous.

“You may have heard of the great military leader, Alexander,” Abel stated. “It was in the swamps just south of Babylon, where he caught the fever which eventually killed him. He was thirty-three, and in only twelve years he created a new world; uniting the many tribes under his banner. He is a legend and still spoken of by peasants in Persia, Bharath, and in his own Macedonia. Few men achieve such greatness in one lifetime, let alone in such a short one as his. Had he lived, -what he might have achieved!”

After a brief silence, Yeshu’a spoke, “The life of each person is written before birth. We come upon the stage of life to play our role, then leave when it’s concluded. We stay no longer than the role requires.”

The children looked to each other, not understanding what was said. Their father pondered on Yeshu’a’s remarks. This was new thinking which he had not considered previously. Perhaps we all have our chosen roles, he thought to himself. Why, even he could make his mark in this
life, in some humble way. He was developing a respect for this young man.

“It is time for bed children,” their mother announced, clapping her hands. “These young men have to journey tomorrow.”

The dawn broke behind dark grey clouds, and the air was decidedly cooler. To have rain now would make the journey’s commencement uncomfortable, to say the least. While rain would be welcome by farmers, this would not be so of those in the caravan train. Sheltering under wet robes as camels plodded their way along muddy roads, was not a agreeably prospect.

The two young men left the hospitality of Yusuf’s home, and the city of Damascus, far behind them. Mountainous terrain and desert plains lay ahead for many days to come. Most of the travellers were, once again, merchants plying their trade, carrying an assortment of goods needed in the towns and cities beyond.

Conversation was brisk for the first day and evening, but this gradually subsided into long periods of silence, amongst the travellers, as they rocked back and forth upon their camels. They drifted deep into their own thoughts, and they welcomed this disconnection from the hardship of reality. It gave them the opportunity to dream; their businesses, family, home, all swam into their arid thoughts.
“I welcome these journeys,” said one merchant to another. “I’m better able to sort out problems while away from home. I need the space.”

“Space? You certainly have plenty of that out here!” came the reply, to roars of laughter, “And the leisure of time for your thoughts,” others joined in.

Young Arab boys rode by on the bare backs of their tawny donkeys, holding out their hands, to the merchants, in the hope of catching a coin tossed their way, more out of mischief than for any sense of need. Smiles would dance on their faces, showing white teeth offset against their brown skin. When no coin was forthcoming, abusive words were shouted back, but only when the boys were at a safe distance.

“What is this world coming to, that we should be subjected to such vulgar abuse,” a merchant voiced loudly, glaring after the ragamuffins. “There is no respect from young people any more.”

“We will camp for the night, by the water-hole yonder,” a booming voice called out, from the front of the train.

The flat, earthy-coloured, terrain made the journey undemanding. They could see, in the fast-receding light, the shape of a small village close to the water-hole where they would camp.

It was dark now. Torches were lit to prepare camp, as Yusuf and Yeshi’a unrolled their few possessions from their blankets, and drew water from the well in preparation for a meal.
They sat with others around one communal fire, to eat and rest after their journey. As a young Arab man played a haunting melody on a bamboo flute, a few hummed in accompaniment. Yeshu’a noticed that Jewish travellers sat apart from their Arab fellow-travellers, which made no sense to him, as both groups were merchants, travelling the same rough, dusty roads, and drinking water from the same wells. Both groups came from the same desert traditions. Indeed, they had so much more in common, than that which separated them, thought Yeshu’a. He prayed that they would some day find their common denominator, and share in the heritage of this great land.

The little town of Aram was the half-way point and they would stop-over there for two days before proceeding. The caravan train wend its way through the main street of stalls and rest-houses at a nomadic pace. With the animals finally corralled into pens for the duration of the stay, the travellers set about finding accommodation in the rest-houses or inns. But Yusuf did not wish to embarrass Yeshu’a, knowing his limited funding for the journey. He suggested instead bedding down the loft of the hay barn overlooking the animal pens. There it was warm, at least, from the cold of the night.

The following morning yielded to bright sunlight as the two young men bargained at the stalls alongside rich merchants from east and west.
Persian merchants mingled with traders from Iraq and Syria, while Arab women sold live chickens in cages, and fish.

“Fish in the middle of the desert?” Yeshu’a commented to Yusuf, in surprise.

“It comes from near Babylon. The river Tigris. It’s not good fish, rather coarse, in fact,” replied Yusuf. “Also, its freshness would leave much to be desired.”

“I will settle for the dates and figs. I do not eat meats of any kind.”

Yusuf nodded in understanding, and joined him in purchasing fruit instead, for the final stage of their journey East together. They filled a small sack, sufficient to sustain them for the five remaining days.

“I shall be leaving you in Babylon,” Yusuf said, as they strolled casually through the market. “You could travel on to Ur, or you could take a boat down the river to the port of Charex, (Basra). From there you could board a dhow to Sindh. This would be an easier, quicker and safer journey than overland.”

“Then I will take the boat as you suggest. I thank you for your help, Yusuf. I will miss you, - you have been a good friend.”

It was to the city of Babylon that many Jews had been taken into captivity, many centuries previous. Indeed, the Jews were not the only people taken into captivity in those days. It was common practise to deport whole populations and have the land settled by their own people. It
is said that the Jews were deported in sections, over a period of sixteen years, while the longest period of captivity was about sixty years; amongst them was the prophet Ezekiel.

Yeshu’a felt that Ezekiel must have been aware that the Tribes of Israel would be scattered throughout distant lands; for as he put it, “…and (I) will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloud and dark day…” Yeshu’a’s journey was fired by the desire to find those ‘lost sheep’, and his journey was about to begin.

Shouts from a nearby stall attracted their attention. A small crowd had gathered in amusement, watching a black raven battling with a cat for a piece of fish-head, that had been discarded beside a fish stall. One would have imagined the bird would have been no match for the cat, but not so. Bets were made as to the outcome by the bystanders. The raven flapped his shiny black wings furiously and danced back-and-forth, till it finally outwitted the brindled cat, catching the fish-head in its beak and flying to the roof of a nearby building to the cheers of the winning onlookers, whereafter the usual commercial activities resumed once again.

The final journey to Babylon was generally uneventful, apart from the arrival of the caravan at the banks of the great Euphrates. This crossing point, had, for many centuries grown into a respectable sized town, with palm groves lining the river banks, and grassy areas that ran right up to the water’s edge. It was pleasant, with a cool breeze blowing across the
broad water’s surface. The branches of the overhead palm trees seemed to gently fan those seated beneath them on the hot sands, while women carried clay pots on their shoulders to the water’s edge to refill and carry back to their homes, or vegetable plots. The Euphrates served its people, in this manner, since the beginning of time. As they sat beneath the shade, with dragon-flies coloured red, green and orange darted and quivered over the waters, Yeshu’a and his friend watched a strange contraption called a djird, the arm of which dipped a large leather bag into the river to be filled, while an ox, moving slowly, lifted the dripping bag ashore to empty itself into an irrigation channel. This was done with such hypnotic regularity, that the watcher might be tempted to drop-off asleep in the heat of the day.

It was then that Yeshu’a observed for the first time, the gufa; the unusual craft by which travellers were carried across to the opposite bank; a round basket-like coracle. Being large enough to carry as many as twenty people, the gufa was equally used to ferry animals. Paddled skilfully by the gufachi (ferry-man), with a single long oar, and from time-to-time, jumping into the shallows to tow it free of sand-bars, eventually the traveller would step ashore dry and in safety on the opposite bank.

Yeshu’a and Yusuf, in company with several other travellers, boarded the gufa, while their camels were tethered to the side of the craft and
floated across with the camels’ long legs almost touching the river-bed, in places. On the opposite side the party collected themselves for the final couple of days journey to the city, only this time travelling through fertile and much busier countryside. It was now apparent that one was approaching a truly large city, with traffic of merchants and officials moving in and out of its precincts. This was the major city connecting not only the East to the West, but also the distant past, to the very present.

Babylon was large city, steeped in commerce, which was signified by the earliest roots in banking and mercantile transactions. It consisted of grand estates and elegant households on one hand, and slave trading on the other, but for young men of ambition, it opened up glorious opportunities and golden horizons for the prospect of wealth and positions of importance beyond their dreams. Nothing disturbed their way of life; not invasions, nor plagues. They merely picked themselves up and continued with ‘business-as-usual’.

No sooner had our young travellers set foot in this ancient city, that they were assailed from all sides with outstretched hands seeking alms. Most were ‘professional’ beggars as well as skilled pick-pockets, but as Yeshu’a had so little in the way of coinage, he was reluctant to part with even the smallest coin so early on his journey. His father always taught him to serve the poor by giving them food or clothing, but not by way of giving coin, which he believed perpetuated the poverty cycle. “Man
should seek nobility through self effort, and not be always reliant on others,” he would say. Soon, those begging hands relented and went in pursuit of more affluent victims.

The city of Babylon, consisted of two separate communities. The rich merchants dwelled in white painted houses with ornate balconies, standing amidst green fringes of date-palms; while the less-well-off occupied the smaller houses that cluttered the narrow lanes and minor streets. It was obviously a divided city from the stand-point of wealth and business, on one side, and small shops and stalls on the other.

The narrow lane-ways became even narrower with merchant’s stalls erected on both sides. These stalls, piled high with fresh fruits and vegetables, were the function of the womenfolk of the local families, while their menfolk smoked home-made cheroots and leaned against doorways viewing the passing scene. The general scene was colourful, but extremely noisy, with stall owners calling out their wares, water-carriers with large clay urns on their backs, offering cool water drinks, and Arab slave-owners, all competing for the attention of the rich purse.

Yusuf set about immediately booking of a passage for Yeshu’a on the next available boat, travelling to the Persian Gulf, from where the Arabian Sea beckoned, beyond the Strait of Hormuz.
Yusuf little realised his connection with the chain of events to which he was bound. He knew nothing of the true purpose of Yeshu’a’ journey, or of his being the instrument of the Spirit of the Essenes.

It was about then that Yeshu’a started to feel, for the first time, the apprehension of the task that lay ahead. He did not wish to voice his feelings to Yusuf, but Yusuf could sense of gnawing fear that Yeshu’a felt in the pit of his stomach, but he chose to keep silent.

“Oh, Lord! What lays ahead for me, now that I have commenced this journey?” Yeshu’a would ask of himself. “What fate will become of me?”

So little was known, then, of those distant countries that lay to the east, except from the garbled accounts from occasional travellers, or just hear-say. Yeshu’a, none-the-less, chose to placed all his trust in the God Whom he felt was directing his feet.
Chapter Ten.

As Yeshu’a stood upon the deck of the Arab dhow, roughly painted in two shades of blue and with yellow floral designs; which was more of an attempt at concealing the weather-worn wooden hull beneath. Its single graceful triangular sail pointed to the sun, making it quite distinctive, compared to the square red sails of the Roman vessels, at anchor nearby.

Yeshu’a was allowed to travel for half fare since he agreed to work during the passage, commencing by helping to load goods aboard and stowing them below deck. When not working, his ‘quarters’ was sleeping
upon the bales of Egyptian cotton immediately beneath the beams of the wooden deck.

The following morning, as the dhow pulled away, and the sails were unfurled to catch the light breeze, Yeshu’a did not expect to see the lone figure of his dear friend Yusuf, standing at the shore, with his hand raised in farewell. Many years would pass before they would have sight of each other again. Yeshu’a felt a deep gratitude to his Bedouin friend, for the many occasions he assisted him. Looking upwards to the sky, Yeshu’a noticed a black raven perched on the very tip of the mast above him. Gazing down from its lofty perch, the raven surveyed the scene below, as if checking to see that all was well, before taking flight.

The dhow moved slowly out into the deep waters of the river Euphrates and almost immediately, orders were barked to the crew, who jumped to setting about coiling ropes and other such sailing duties. The boat was primarily a cargo vessel, but it also carried a few paying passengers on this occasion.

By way of his passage duties, Yeshu’a was put to assisting the cook; a tall, well built, mild-mannered African of middle-age, who had been enslaved to his Arab master since he was a young man. It was part of Yeshu’a duties to prepare the meals for passengers and crew. Cooking was carried out on deck, where it was cooler, since during the day it was impossible to stay for any length of time below deck, in the oppressive
heat. Thus it was his practise to rest on deck, when finished his duties, for
the duration of the entire journey to Sindh, where the Indus river and its
tributaries, the Ravi, Beas, Chinab and Jehlum rivers, joined the Arabian
Sea, while at the Indus delta there stood the flourishing merchant city of
Patala.

During the long sea voyage, Yeshu’a was befriended by an elderly
Indian gentleman, who was more of a philosopher than a merchant. He
enjoyed his evening’s discourses with our young traveller and suggested
that Yeshu’a should stay with him, and study with a little-known
religious group called the Jains, who were followers of the god Djaine.

“You would be more than welcome to stay in my home for as long as
you wish,” the merchant suggested. “I have young children of your age.
You will fit in nicely.”

“I am grateful for your kind offer, but I have no knowledge of
Jainism,” Yeshu’a replied.

“Oh. We live more by principles, than by mere worshipping of a
deity. Indeed, I suppose our principles are a form of worship,” said the
merchant, Shiv Kumar by name, as he continued to explain the Jains
beliefs

“It is one of the oldest religions in the entire world, dating back 3000
years, when is was established in the Indus river valley region. The word
Jains comes from Jinas, meaning “conquerors”; who have conquered all
their desires and feelings, and obtaining in return infinite knowledge and wisdom."

Impressed, Yeshu’a asked, “Do you have infinite wisdom?”

There was a long pause before Kumar replied, and a faint smile dawned upon his lips as he stretched his legs and leaned against the gunwale of the boat.

“I must be honest and say that I aspire to that level of wisdom, but I need still to continue the quest, -having much further to go!” he chuckled.

Kumar went on to explain, in more detail, the main principles of their religion; Ahimsa, being non-violence, -Satya, to speak the truth, -Asteya, not to take anything without permission, -Bramacharya, limiting possessions to those needed. The most important being Ahimsa, - which should be practised in both thoughts and actions. Life is dear to all living creatures therefore no one should kill, nor harm, nor talk or think of killing, or harming any form of life.

Fasting for up to eight days is also an important duty.

“You are of the Jewish faith, are you not,” inquired Kumar.

“Yes, that is true,” Yeshu’a replied.

“Well, part of your worship consists of the killing of birds and some animals, as sacrifice. This is abhorrent to us.”

“It is written in the Holy Book that Moses built an alter surrounded by twelve pillars, which represented the sons of Jacob, and the twelve tribes
of Israel. Blood was a part of that offering,” Yeshu’a replied. “I am saddened to agree with you, for I never felt it was a correct thing to do,” he continued, weakly.

“You are so right, my young friend. It is not the creatures of creation that should be ceremonially sacrificed, but the animal within us that should be destroy,” Kumar said, echoing the identical thoughts he expressed to Yusuf some time before.

The practice of sacrificing animals in an attempt to appease God, was part of the ritual worship experienced by Yeshu’a since he was a child.

It contrasted dramatically with the principles by which Kumar and his people lived. The Jains’ belief was that all life was sacred, divine, and of equal value in the sight of God, as was human life. This was new thinking for Yeshu’a. It was his first concrete experience of another faith: a new way of perceiving God.

“But enough talk of killing. You will join me in my home, when we arrive in Bharath,” invited Kumar.

The weather for this journey was nothing less than perfect. The dhow sliced through the deep blue waters of the Persian Gulf, stopping briefly for fresh supplies in the port known today as Hormuz, before sailing bravely into the pirate-ridden waters of the Arabian Sea. The journey, altogether, normally took about two, perhaps three weeks, but on this occasion with the gentle, but steady winds, it was reduced to just twelve
days. Their arrival on the north-east coast of Bharath, brings to mind another occasion, many years previous, when followers of Zoroaster chose to leave Persia due to persecution, arriving in Mumbai, bringing with them the sacred fire. Their leaders sent a request to the King of this land for permission to settle peaceably in this blessed land, only to be rebuffed. The King demonstrated to the Persians his refusal by returning to them a milk-container full to the brim with milk, illustrating in this simple way, that his State was “full-to-the-brim”!

Pondering this refusal, the Persians returned the milk-container to the King after sprinkling it with sugar, thus showing that it wasn’t their intention to “over-flow” the King’s domain, but to sweeten this new land with their presence. The King was suitably impressed by their argument and permission was granted for them to settle! Thereafter these Persians (in India) became known as Parsees: -meaning the people of Persia.

The city of Sindh was much further in-land than Yeshu’a had previously envisaged. It would have been a goodly journey on foot through the delta, but fortune shone on him.

“You will ride with me, my young friend,” Kumar insisted. He had a small party of servants who travelled on foot, or on camel, while Yeshu’a and Kumar rode in a wagon drawn by two black horses, with an overhead awning that protected them from the harsh sun.

“You travel light, with little possessions, I see,” Kumar commented.
“I have no need of heavy bundles, such things only slows one down. My blanket is all I need.”

Yeshu’a stayed with the Kumar family and the Jains community, learning a good deal of teachings that were new to him. They had advocated the purification of the soul through living a good and pure life, of non-violence, noble actions, thoughts and deeds towards all creatures, both animal and human. Their monks also vowed a celibate life, and a vegetarian diet, being essential to their spiritual goal.

During his six month’s stay with the community, Yeshu’a spent many hours in discourses with the head monk who always wore a gauze mask over his mouth and nose, thus avoiding any possibility of breathing in, or harming, any living thing that may be in the air. He also carried with him a broom with cotton tassels that swept the floor before him as he walked, so as not to harm any living creature, -big or small!

When it was time for Yeshu’a to leave the many kindnesses he received from this compassionate community, great pressure was put upon him to stay and live the rest of his years among them. He explained that the chief reason for his sojourn was to make contact with the “lost” Tribes of Israel, and also to learn much of the wisdom from schools in this sacred land.

“You will always have sanctuary here should you be in need,” was their joint counsel, as Yeshu’a directed his feet eastwards to the great city
of learning, Jagannath (Puri), in the province of Orissa, on the far coast of Bharath, where he was to dwell for six years.

From time to time he would visit the marvellous caves of Khandagiri, which were carved out of a solid granite hillside, about a century previous, now used as a Jain monastic retreat, and located just four miles from the temple of Jagannath.

While the journey was a long and an arduous one for a young man of fourteen years, he was sustained by the God-given love he had for all mankind. He spoke uplifting words to small groups along the way, being rewarded with meals and places to rest. On one such occasion, as he spoke to young children by a village well, a black and white abandoned kitten coiled itself around Yeshu’a’ legs and grew attached to him wherever he went. Yeshi’a would lift him up and place him inside his tunic with its beautiful head, with large eyes, peeping out. It became Yeshu’a’ constant companion on the long journey, and he would share with his newfound friend whatever food he had.

It was about this time that people began to gather to listen seriously to Yeshu’a and the teachings he expounded. His fame spread all along the route, from the west side of Bharath, to the east coast, up to his final destination in the province of Orissa, where the mortal remains of Hindu’s revered deity, Lord Krishna, lay.

Yeshu’a was welcomed enthusiastically upon his arrival, by
the white priests of Brahma who gave him a joyous greeting. “So young, yet so wise,” the priests would whisper to one another, as they sat, with rapt attention, listening to the young man they called the ‘Soul of God’, -- or Hazrat Isa.

(During the course of his travels Yeshu’a would be called by many different names; names which would describe him and his holy work, in many areas of India and Tibet, and beyond. The Greeks would speak of him as Iesous, and the Romans, Iesus.)
Chapter Eleven.

Yeshu’a had not seen such a mammoth temple before; the temple of “Jagan-nath”, which means “Lord of the Universe”. He strolled slowly along the broad avenue at Puri, stopping from time to time, to gaze in awe at its size and grandeur. Consisting of one main sandstone temple building in the centre, while being surrounded by numerous smaller temples, halls and cloisters, on four sides.

Each year many thousands of people gathered to view the three Hindu deities carried in procession, -Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra, and their sister Subhadra. These were unfinished carvings, which were normally positioned inside the main temple, while one or two of the carvings were without limbs. Outside the walls of this pivotal centre of Hindu faith, gathered clusters of retched poor, old and young lepers, some equally limbless, mirroring the deities they worshipped, but prevented from entering the holy-of-holies! These outcasts were required
to live on the margins of a struggling society; beggars on the Lord’s doorstep!

Such images confronting the young Yeshu’a, left him to wonder in amazement, as the young Lord Buddha had done before him, how man could sink so low while surrounded by so much wealth.

This was to be his home for the next six years!

Yeshu’a proceeded to study in the school adjacent to the Temple; his prayers, meditation and fasting, strengthened his desire to change the fortunes of the poor and the downcast. During this period he also visited Rajariha, Varanasi (Benares), and many other holy cities.

Varanasi being the centre of Hindu learning, was situated on the banks of the river Ganges, and it was here that he was introduced to the ancient scriptures, the Vedas, by the Hindu priests. He wore the ochre robe of a young student priest, a Brahmin, as he sat on the banks of the sacred river, while behind him a terrace of fine buildings rose from the water’s edge. He observed the pilgrims who came from afar to bathe in the sacred waters, cleansing themselves of their sins, and sprinkling the water in the air as they faced the sun. Funerals to the river-bank were frequent. Families were required to purchase, at great cost to them, the necessary wood to prepare the pyre for cremation, an expensive exercise, indeed, after which the ashes of the departed-one was tossed into the slow-moving river at sunset.
It was here in Varanasi that Yeshu’a gave his first sermon to a small gathering of the poor outside the temple where he spoke of the equality of all humankind before God. His words were sweet to the ears of the unfortunates gathered before him, but less so to the Brahman priests observing him from nearby. He said: “God the Father establishes no difference between His children, who are equally dear to Him. Respect God, bow down your knee before Him only, and to Him only may offerings be made.”

Not realising the difficult position he was putting himself into with regards to the Brahman priests in giving his discourse, young men laughed, saying, “You will not be very popular with your priests, with whom you share your meals.” While those elderly men and women amongst them said, “We are grateful for your kindness, young priest, but you must be careful lest you fall foul of your superiors. They are powerful to friends, but fearful to their enemies.”

Setting aside these comments Yeshu’a continued: “The eternal Judge, the eternal Spirit, is the One and indivisible soul of the universe, which alone creates, contains and animates the whole. He alone has willed and created. He alone has existed from eternity and will exist without end. He has no equal, neither in the heavens nor on earth.

“The Great Creator shares His power with no-one, still less with inanimate objects, for He alone possesses supreme power. He willed it
and the world appeared. By one divine thought He united the waters and separated them from the dry portion of the globe. He is the cause of the mystic life of humanity, in whom He has breathed a part of His being. And He has subordinated to humanity the land, the waters, the animals and all that He has created, and which He maintains in immutable order by fixing the duration of each.

“The wrath of God shall soon be let loose on humanity, for it has forgotten its Creator and filled its temples with abominations, and it adores a host of creatures which God has subordinated to it. They that deprive their brothers of divine happiness shall themselves be deprived of it.

“Help the poor, assist the weak, harm no-one, do not covet what you do not have and what you see in the possession of others.” He continued, that man should guard against arrogating to himself the authority to deprive his fellow beings of their human and spiritual rights.”

“Verily,” he continued, “God has made no difference between his children, who are all alike and dear to Him.”

Those who listened to Yeshu’a’ words, be they be on the steps of the temple, or in the market place, were up-lifted in spirit, but the priests standing quietly at a distance, were enraged and felt their authority threatened. They needed the rich merchants, as well as the political “establishment”, for the financial support. Equally they resented the ideas
he was preaching to the sudras (untouchables), as they began to turned away from the Brahmins and the rich Kshatriyas.

Brahmins taught that Brahma created all things, including man, whom He divided into four classes according to their colour: white (Brahmans), red (Kshatriyas), yellow (Vaisyas), and black (Soudras). The teachers instructed their people that God gave the first group the government of the world, the laws and the power to heal and judge mankind. While the second caste, the Kshatriyas, were made warriors, with responsibility for defending and protecting society; Kings, governors, troops, etc. belonged to this group. The third, the Vaisyas, were destined to plough the fields, breed the animals, carry on trade and commerce, with the authority to enter the temple and listen to the Vedas on feast days only.

Finally, the Sudras, or blacks, which were deemed the lowest caste, were to be the humble servants and slaves of the first three castes. They were forbidden to attend the readings of the Vedas; and to come in contact with them meant contamination. They were robbed of any human dignity, human rights or care by a physician. For only death, alone, would free them from the consequence of their harsh life of servitude.

Because of these injustices, Yeshu’a spoke out, and in time the priests reproached Yeshu’a, demanding that he refrain from preaching to the low-caste sudras, or leave the school forthwith.
“How can it be wrong to up-lift the down-cast?” he asked. No reply was forthcoming as the priests turned their backs and walked away.

An old lady approached Yeshu’a, as he sat on the steps pondering the annoyance of the priests, she pressed a small coin into his hand saying she wished it was more, for he had given her hope and peace in her heart. When he looked into her eyes and he could see the few short days she had left.

“I shall keep this coin with me always,” he said, with a tender smile, and this he did till his dying breath, being an offering made with love.

The following day he was warned by humble people, who grew to love him, that his life was in great danger and was advised to depart quietly from Varanasi, by night, thereby reaching the nearby mountains, and safe sanctuary.

He had now gained in strength and confidence, and with the divine knowledge he was receiving, he would speak in public places of God’s love and compassion, and entreating the people to “return good for evil”, -a radical teaching in such an age. He left behind in every village and town he journeyed through, a happier uplifted people, and his fame spread abroad as his feet took him northwards to the Buddhist monastery in Kapilavastu in Napal, -the birthplace of Sakya-Muni Buddha.

The journey was a rigorous one being over steep rocky terrain, and with many exhausting days followed by bitter cold nights. He joined a
small group of pilgrims on their way to monasteries in the Himalayas. Light flakes of snow heralded the oncoming of winter, so different from the smothering heat of the plains further south and in the cities of Jagannath and Varanasi.

At night, wrapped in his thick woollen blanket and huddled around the camp-fire, Yeshu’a thought of home, -his father, his mother, brothers and sisters. He recalled their journey from Egypt in detail, and his good friend Yusuf, whose generosity assisted his travels, and also, the black raven that witnessed the many stages of his life’s journey. What of John? -he would think to himself, -is he too preaching in the wilderness?

He and his cousin, John, were of an age, who spent his years in the deserts and hills of Judaea, preaching, fasting, praying and baptising those who came to him. All this was in preparation for the day when he would serve his Master Yeshu’a. In the meantime, John was hunted from the cities by the priests and the religious teachers who felt equally threatened by the words of love and repentance he preached, and his condemnation of corruption within the temples and priesthood. There was no peace for anyone who would preach of love and freedom. He did, in fact, find some peace in the isolated regions in this land of Judaea, where he lived on locusts and wild honey, while attracting a large following, thirsting for his words of salvation. He knew his every move was closely
monitored by the priest’s spies, and that they reported back in some detail, everything he preached. Dressed as he was in plain clothing of camel’s hair and a girdle of skin about his loins, and deeply tanned from life in the open, John appeared as one who might threaten authority. They saw him as a troublemaker, with possible political ambitions. They need not have worried, for he was only interested in changing the hearts of the people, not their politics.

For the rest of his journey, Yeshu’a slept wherever he could find warmth, be it at the pilgrims’ camp fire, or under the straw roof of a shepherd’s hut, for during those nights the cutting cold winds blew down from the Himalayan slopes. He missed the company of his kitten friend, which he was obliged to give up to a child when he entered the temple school at Varanasi. Now he had only his thoughts as companions.

He had long been aware of the bond that existed between the Essene communities in Israel and Egypt, and the Buddhist monks in Tibet and Nepal. It was during the 3rd Century BC, that Emperor Asoka saw Buddhism as a missionary religion and sent missions to many countries west, including Greece, where the followers of the noble Pythagoras welcomed the teachings.

The Emperor forsook military campaigns after the Kalinga battle of 261 BC. in which 100,000 were slain and over 150,000 taken as slaves.
This was a major turning point in his life as well as of his people. He instructed his soldiers in the “righteous” teachings of the Buddhist philosophy. He even appointed “Officers of Righteousness” throughout his Empire, and personally oversaw the local officials.

For this reason Yeshu’a wished to study with the Buddhists, firstly, in Kapilavastu in Nepal, Rajgriha and later move on to the Buddhist monasteries at Leh and Lhasa in Xizang Zizhiqu (Tibet). However, the journey to Lhasa was a long and arduous one, over mountain ridges, sometimes covered in snow and ice. Mountain paths for the most part were narrow ledges overseeing precipitous drops of many hundreds of feet. He frequently came across long rows of cylinders, with carved invocations, placed at intervals along river-banks, so that the constant flow of water would keep them in motion. These were Buddhist prayer wheels, normally turned by hand, but these exempted their owners from the obligation of constant praying.
Chapter Twelve.

“You are most welcome to join us,” the quiet-spoken young Buddhist monk, with bowed head, said in greeting as Yeshu’a was shown inside the walls of the mountain retreat. The monk was dressed in a yellow robe and wore a hat of the same colour, with ear flaps. He held in his hand a small prayer wheel, which he sets in motion, from time to time, sending forth his prayerful requests. This was the great monastery of Lhasa, which was to be Yeshu’a’ home for many months to come.

Yeshu’a was given the customary meal and rest, before being taken to the chief monk.

A large golden statue of the Lord Buddha Gautama, had stood for many years overseeing the rows upon rows of young Buddhist monks as they ate their daily one meal, in pure silence. Now the dining hall was empty, except for Yeshu’a eating with his fingers from a bowlful of rice and vegetables, while seated at a long plain wooden table. His eyes wandered over the interior walls and ceiling decorations, all painted in bright red and gold floral patterns. Periodically young monks would
glance coyly through the open door, to glimpse the new visitor, whisper comments and depart.

“If you have had sufficient to eat, I will take you to the Chief Lama, who wishes to meet you,” an older monk said, gliding silently to his side.

Rising from his bench, Yeshu’a simply nodded and followed the elderly lama along dimly lit corridors, lined with prayer-wheels, ornamented with colourful ribbons, and up to heavy wooden double-doors which opened into the meeting hall. The elder monk walked ahead and mumbled a few words to the middle aged Supreme Lama, who was seated in a simple chair positioned on a platform raised slightly from the floor level, before stepping aside and beckoning Yeshu’a forward.

On each side of the broad aisle was a row of elders, seated upon cushions, with heads bowed, as Yeshu’a walked slowly, and rather hesitantly, up to the Principal Khutuktus, or Supreme Lama.

“You are welcome, young man,” said the Supreme Lama quietly.

“What is your name?”

“I am Yeshu’a,” came his reply. “But since arriving in this land, some have called me Isha Natha,” he hastily added.

“You have travelled far, I understand,” the Supreme Lama politely stated. “We have known of your coming.”
“How would you know of my coming, since I come from the land called Judea, -on the shores of the Mediterranean. I left home to study and gain in spiritual knowledge and wisdom.”

“We are aware of your intentions and the work that lays before you. You had tried to come before, in your previous incarnation as Moses. You failed then to enter the Promised Land of Kashmir, with your people, whom you were leading to freedom from their bondage in Egypt. You must now stay with us and study yogic discipline and spiritual meditation. This science of meditation is the ultimate authority and based upon the control of the senses, the inner vital force, and the eventual discipline of the mind, so that it is trained to gradually become ‘no-mind’. During your stay you shall be called Isa, (Divine Mother),” the Lama said, as he instructed a younger Lama to take Isa and introduce him to the other young students.

“We will speak together again, Isa. You have much to learn and study, for it is your destiny to go out into the world and bring to man the knowledge and guidance of the way to Liberation. In time all the world will hear of your name.”

Yeshu’a stepped back, blinked with confusion, bowed and retreated through the large double doors with the elderly Lama. He sensed that he was now opening an inner door, one that was linked to his destiny.
That night his mind was restless. He shared a small poorly furnished room with another young pupil called Tseng, who was to be his companion for the rest of his stay. Yeshu’a couldn’t sleep and rose from his bed.

The only illumination was from the shaft of light from the full moon shining through the nearby window. As he stood gazing out at the snow-covered mountains surrounding his retreat, he could just make out the awesome sight of the distant Sagarmatha, known as the Goddess of the Sky, *(in later years to be called Mount Everest)* - the source of the Ganges and Indus rivers, - mantled in snow and set off against the dark blue of the night sky. Yeshu’a stood gazing upon the scene for some time, ‘til the cold air sent him scurrying back to the comfort and warmth of his bed.

The community of monks gathered in the main hall, after being summoned by the Chogzot *(managing lama)*, the following morning. One of the young pupils was accused of being lamentably lax in his studies, and being habitually late for prayers and meditation. In the company of his colleagues and senior monks, Yeshu’a/Isa looked upon the scene before him, as a young student held on to the feet of the lama, whom he knelt before. Puzzled, Yeshu’a/Isa leaned and whispered the question to Tseng, what the significance was of holding the feet.

“The practice is of long standing. When one seeks forgiveness from one’s master for a wrongdoing, one holds the master’s feet. Indeed, one
holds the feet of the person you have wronged, -in this case the Chogzot, until forgiveness is granted,” Tseng explained, in a whisper, the significance of the proceedings.

Later, Tseng was able to explain further, as they strolled together, that it is as if one is holding the feet of the Lord Himself.

“The Lord’s feet are glorious in many ways, but they will confer blessings only if they are sought with real faith,” he explained. “Just as the feet of the individual bears the burden of the human body, equally the subtle body of the Divine bears on its feet the entire universe. Without the feet, the body cannot move. Merely holding the feet is not enough; one must genuinely repent and promise not to commit similar offences again. Only then will one secure atonement, -forgiveness.”

The air was cold and crisp as Tseng and Isa strolled along the veranda immediately outside their bedroom, and viewed the very scene of snow-capped mountains Isa had watched the night before, only now the sky was bright blue and without a cloud, except for those surrounding the peak of Sagarmatha which was like a white spear-head piercing the clouds surrounding it.

Despite his initial lack of familiarity with the Pali language, Isa made excellent progress. Indeed, there were occasions when he would hold the class enthralled with his own interpretation of their holy works, and in time he would be permitted to make changes and improvements to those
ancient teachings, during the course of his stay there, and later within the monastery at Leh.

For six years Isa studied and practised the ways of the Buddhist beliefs, while adding much to his standing amongst them, and being frequently referred to as the ‘Hebrew prophet’, who brought them the knowledge of God. He eventually attained the level of adept in the science of Raja Yoga, -later known as Astanga Yoga, or Patanjali Yoga, having eight states of discipline, the ultimate being siddhis.

“Cease to seek for heaven in the sky. Open up the windows of your hearts and like a flood of light, heaven will come and bring a boundless joy,” he exhorted.

At the age of 26 years, Yeshu’a/Isa attained Christ Consciousness, having merged with the Father, -“I and my Father are One.” He spoke, as Lord Krishna had done before him when he said; “My delusion is dissolved; I have become aware of My Reality, which is God.”

Yeshu’a had been away from his home for13 years, and now felt ready to return to his homeland to fulfil the mission that lay before him.

Once again great pressure was put upon him, by his fellow brethren, to stay longer with them, for by now the monks had a great love for Yeshu’a and included him in the list of outstanding masters, and later as a Bodhisattva. It was with great reluctance that they accepted his decision to leave them for his westward journey, whereupon they concluded that,
“Buddha has chosen him to spread his holy word.” It was about this time that he learned from the Supreme Lama of the death of his father Joseph, back in his homeland, for the Lama had received this knowledge while in deep meditation and was charged to inform Yeshu’a of this fact before his departure.

Yeshu’a left Tibet, and the many friends he made there, with a sad heart, but he was carrying with him to the West, the light of the East; the knowledge to uplift an oppressed and down-cast people, -his own people, -the Jewish people.

Descending from the harsh rocky landscape to the grassy valleys with the grazing herds of yaks, zos and zomos (*oxen and cows*), was a startling contrast. Such herds were common now, as well as wild animals and bird life of every description.

He passed through many countries, with differing cultures, -spreading wise words and wisdom as he went. Once again the priests of these lands felt threatened by his pure teachings of love and forgiveness given with such authority. They demanded miracles of him instead of words, for accounts of his miracles swept ahead on excited tongues, but he chose to answer their requests saying that “…miracles of God have happened since the beginning of time, -since the very creation of the universe.”

“These miracles occur every day and every moment of that day. Instead, one should offer everything to God, your thoughts, words and
your deeds, and do it for the good of the world. Believe in God with your hearts and not with your eyes,” he entreated them.

Such gems of enlightenment were treasured by the people, but the priests were not satisfied. They tested him on many points in an effort to entrap him and discredit him in the eyes of those who followed him, and those people who were now beginning to question the authority that their own priests had over them. Most importantly, the people knew Yeshu’a never asked anything for himself, unlike their own hierophants!

His route homewards, took him through Punjab where he joined a caravan of merchants, travelling through the beautiful land of Kashmir, and there he visited briefly the tomb of Moses, located in Nebu Ball, in the Booth area. Moses was buried where he died looking down upon the ‘Promised Land’, that final resting place on the red mountain, called Bethpoer, or Bandipur, some 34 miles from Srinagar; a city situated in the Kashmir valley on both banks of the Jhelum. The people who lived in this area are said never to have faced famine; always had an abundance of food and other commodities, which is why it is referred to as the “Land of Milk and Honey”!

Later, Yeshu’a knelt and prayed at the nearby ruined remains of King Solomon’s Temple, where barely a stone stood, one upon another.

Srinagar (the city of the sun) is situated on the Jhelum River with its banks covered in velvety verdure. The valley in which it nestles is called
“The Vale of Kashmir”, and is eighty-five miles in length, and twenty-five miles in width. A place of great peace and beauty with two-storey houses made of wood, skirting the water’s edge where women daily washed and cleaned their cooking utensils.

Yeshu’a’s words to all who listened were as a prophet, and he was revered by many who became his devotees. He showered his love upon the sick, and they were healed. When they heard him speaking as a prophet they were instant followers and his discourses attracted many hundreds of people, as they sat listening to him, mesmerised by his teachings of hope. Many men, women and children stayed, not realising the hour, whereupon he materialised food, sufficient for all those present to partake of.

On this westward journey, Yeshu’a stopped a while at a wayside pond, near Kabul, to wash his hands and feet. Today that very pond is revered as “Isa-pond”, where, up to recent times, a fair was held every year! Resting for a day or two from the arduous journey, he once again preached, as he never failed to do at every opportunity, to gatherings - small or large, -thirsting for the spiritual knowledge he wished to share.

Learning that Yeshu’a was to travel through Persia and southern Russia, his humble audience of poor men and women, elected to gave him the gift of a horse on which to ease his journey on the stony terrain. But having rode the animal for a day, he chose to return it, being unable
to make provision for feeding it. For the remainder of his journey, he would eat wild vegetables and fruits, drink from the streams and travel on foot.

Chapter Thirteen.

“Have you journeyed far?” a voice called out from a crude shelter nearby. Yeshu’a shielded his eyes against the light of the setting sun that gilded the summit of the surrounding Elburz mountains, as he rode along the edge of the desert plateau which lay south of the Caspian Sea.

“Have you come far?” the voice repeated with louder emphasis. Yeshu’a observed an old man leaning against the frame of the door of a mud hut. Up to then he had seen neither the house nor its occupant as he rode deep in thought, head bowed against the evening light.

“Greetings to you, brother,” Yeshu’a replied.

“If you would care to take your rest for the night,” said the diminutive shepherd. “I would be happy for the company. I was about to prepare a meal.”

“I am pleased to accept your kind invitation,” Yeshu’a replied. “What name do you go by?”

“I am cursed with the name of Siwa,” he replied, as they were seated around a fire in the middle of the clay floor, with the smoke and steam from the cooking pot, coiling slowly through an opening in the straw
roof.

“Why do you say so?” asked Yeshu’a, “I know of such a place in Lower Egypt called Siwa. It is an oasis of great beauty in the dry desert, far inland from the port of Mersa Matruh.”

As they sat huddled close to the fire eating a hot meal of grains and vegetables, -for Yeshu’a did not partake of meat, -his elderly host related the strange tale of a fifty-thousand-man Persian army, which perished in the Egyptian desert 525 years before.

“They were sent by Cambyses, son of Cyrus the Great, to sack the town of Siwa and destroy the shrine of Oracle,” the old man related, as he stroked his thinning grey beard. “They never reached there and had not been heard of, -not from that day to this!”

“A strange tale, indeed,” commented Yeshu’a. “Perhaps they were overwhelmed in a sand storm,…it’s so easy to get lost in the desert. They are certainly now with the Lord!”

“Fifty-thousand men, lost in the desert?” Siwa roared a crackling laugh at such a thought. “Surely there would be some hope of a single soldier surviving the ordeal,” Siwa croaked, as he spat into the fire’s flames. “No, ‘twas the curse of the Oracle, I do believe.”

Yeshu’a remained silent, choosing to believe a less mysterious and sensational solution to the mystery of the lost Persian army.

After a few minutes silence Yeshu’a said, “The town of Siwa, is a
beautiful place; golden sands, vivid green trees, unspoilt under a blue sky. No need for you to feel cursed with such a name,” Yeshu’a said, in comforting tones. “It is a place of date orchards with many areas floored with dates drying in the sun.”

He went on to detail the many springs that abound the area, which were the life-blood of Siwa, and surrounded by tall green date palms.

“Each spring of Siwa had a channel which carried water into the gardens to irrigate the date crop,” Yeshu’a recounted. “And each spring had a guardian to take account of the amount of water due to each strip of land.”

He went on to describe a miniature canal system of water channels. Mud dams held back the water until a further supply was needed. The guardian would kick down the mud dam to release a good flow of water in the required direction. It is said, that that was how the Jews, in captivity in Egypt, watered the gardens there, in times past.

Legend had it that black sightless fish once lived in the spring and had a connection to the worship in the nearby temple of the Oracle of Ammon. It was here that Alexander the Great paid a personal and, some say, a romantic visit before the statue of Ammon, which is depicted as the body of a man with the head of a ram. When he emerged from the shrine, Alexander had changed, for whatever he received by way of advice, affected him for the rest of his life.
Yeshu’a retired into his blanket near the only window in the small hut, having been sufficiently warmed by the hot meal and the fire. He gazed out upon the mountain landscape scene now being lit up, from time to time, by distant lightening flashes. From the far corner Siwa snored in unison with the distant sound of thunder.

The following morning saw Yeshu’a’ departure with a fond farewell to old Siwa, now left to ponder a different image of his Egyptian name.

Persia was a rich country, because of its situation on the trade route between the East and the West. Upon hearing of Yeshu’a’ coming, the Zoroastrian priests became fearful of his mesmerising influence over the multitudes, for they were the followers of Zoroaster, who was born in 6,300B.C. in the province of Bactria, (now northern Afghanistan) whose God is called Ahura Mazda, and many asked questions of their teacher and prophet, Zoroaster.

“Of what new God dost thou speak?” the priests demanded of him. “Art thou not aware, unhappy man, that Saint Zoroaster is the only just one admitted to the privilege of communion with the Supreme Being, Who ordered the angels to put down in writing the word of God for the use of his people, laws that were given to Zoroaster in Paradise? Who art thou to dare here to blaspheme our God and to sow doubt in the hearts of believers?”
“I preach of no new God, but our celestial Father,” Yeshu’a quietly replied, sensing their intention to entrap him. “It was He who existed before the beginning and will exist until after the end. You pretend that you must adore the sun and the genie of good and evil, but I say to you that the sun does not act spontaneously, but by the will of the invisible creator, who made it. There is no God other than the God of good! He, like the father of a family, does only good to his children. He forgives their transgressions if they repent: honour the day of Judgement, for God will inflict a terrible punishment upon all those who have led His children astray.

“Your doctrine is therefore the fruit of your errors; for desiring to bring near to you the God of truth, you have created for yourself false gods.”

Angered by his reply the priests forbade their congregations to listen to him further. Once again, the threats made against him would come from those of the priesthood and the rich merchants, but not from the common people, who consumed his words like nectar upon their lips. Because of the increased danger in that land of the Peacock, his stay was brief. The magi decided to do him no harm, but by night, when all the people slept, they conducted him outside the walls and abandoned him on the road, in the hope that he might succumb to the ravages of the wild beasts abroad in the countryside.
But, Yeshu’a, being protected by the Grace of God, continued upon his way in safety, puzzled how the magi now treated him, in contrast to the gift-laden magi who sought him out as a babe, less than three decades previous.

Having journeyed through Mesopotamia and Assyria, Yeshu’a arrived back in his homeland, the land of Israel. He stayed in many towns and villages speaking with those whom he saw as his people, and was heralded by multitudes who were inflicted with the despair and suffering, from years under the brutal regime of Roman occupation. His arrival amongst them gave them hope at a time that all seemed quite hopeless.

“Do not despair. Have faith in God, as did your ancestors,” he announced to a large gathering seated upon grassy hillside. “You will be delivered out of the hands of oppression.”

A murmur of excitement swept through the congregation, for they mistook this to mean a possible up-rise. Perhaps he would lead them to freedom, they thought. Oh, to throw off this yoke of Roman despotism and to be a truly Jewish nation once again, as Moses intended.

Yeshu’a saw around him great changes in the dress and general lives of his people, particularly in the city of Jerusalem. The wealthy had adopted Greek dress and a Roman way of life. There was a time when they ruled their own country, and had their own laws, but now the position was reversed, with the general population being no better than
slaves, eking out a meager living at manual labour. A once proud people now brought down to working for the conquerors of their nation.

“We might just as well be back in Egypt. We are again no better than slaves!” was the much-grumbled remark.

“We were delivered then, perhaps we will be again,” came the hopeful response.

Their hatred for the Romans had no bounds. While they still awaited their Redeemer, -their Messiah! - Yeshu’a’s words uplifted them to the point that they felt their hour of deliverance was near.

These Roman pagan’s had caused much atrocious suffering to the Jewish people, and they were in despair. This caused them to ask him where they could worship their Lord, God. Since their Roman enemy had demolished their temples and robbed them of their sacred vessels. He replied, “God cares not for temples erected by human hands, but human hearts are the true temples of God. Enter into your temple, into your heart; illuminate it with good thoughts, with patience and the unshakable faith which you owe to your Father.”

Uprisings against the Roman tyrants had long been sporadic incidents, flaring up from time-to-time throughout the length and breath of the land. Wherever Yeshu’a went he was followed by multitudes seeking guidance, and blessings, more of a temporal nature, rather than of a spiritual one. The common people saw in him their longed-for Messiah;
he who would deliver them from misery, misrule and oppression. They
approached Yeshu’a informing him of the atrocities against them and
imploring heavenly intervention.

The high priests, however, were jealous of his popularity and the
orthodox Pharisees demanded strict adherence to the Commandments
according to the ‘Torah’. While the aristocratic Sadducees also opposed
him seeing in his teachings their ruin, suggesting that he was possessed of
the devil. The priests held rigidly to the rituals and regulations, laid down
by the Prophets of old in the scriptural texts, as being valid for all time,
and consequently held the teachings of Yeshu’a as being wholly wrong.

Being moved by personal hatred towards him, they encouraged the
people to disrupt his meetings and make accusations of blasphemy
against him.

The scenes of despair before Yeshu’a, struck deep at his heart. He
decided to visit the Essene monastery and report to them of his travels,
and what he had learned. He was received with great honour by the
Brotherhood, and the teachers praised his wisdom. He still required to
gain further heights and have further tests to be passed before he
completed his initiation some of which required to spend long days in
isolation, in the nearby caves.

When having passed all the tests placed before him, and having
conquered the lower self, the “Terapeut”, or Elder, placed a diadem upon
his brow and he was declared to be the Christ! All were pleased.

Yeshu’a left the Essene assembly and went down to his home in Jerusalem to be greeted with tears of joy from his mother and family. His brothers wanted to know all about his travels, the dangers and the strange places he had visited. While his sisters wished to know only of the teachings he had learned.

His mother, Murree, sat in silence gazing and listening to her son, with his brothers and sisters gathered around him. A boy had left home, she thought to herself, now a man has returned, -and one whom she barely recognised.

“What of John?” Yeshu’a asked, with a smile.

Yeshu’a’ cousin, John, the son of Elizabeth and the priest Zechariah, an old man when their first-born John, was conceived. It was Zechariah who married Murree to Joseph. John was later educated in the priestly duties by his parents and entered the Order of Essenes at Jutha, near Masada. He grew strong in spirit and in stature, later to assume his mission preaching of ‘The Coming’, and baptising for the remission of sin, as taught by his Order. He also spent much time at “The Sea of Solitude”, a volcanic landscape in the valley of Jordan, which both the Essenes and John himself regarded as holy ground.

Yeshu’a was to eventually to meet with his cousin, and Essene brother, in the Essene monastery at Qumran on the banks of the Dead
Sea, where John baptised him. It was not John’s wish that he should
baptise Yeshu’a, but Yeshu’a requested that he should do so, because he
saw it as a preparation for the events ahead.

Baptism had been performed by the Order since the early days at
Lake Moeris, in the Fayum district of Egypt.
Chapter Fourteen.

The Roman guards saluted Pontius Pilate, the Governor of Lower Galilee, as he slowly strolled, head bowed deep in thought, along the broad, tiled corridors of the Governor’s palace, in the castle of Antonia. He was troubled by instructions he had received from Rome demanding he took stronger measures against agitators and dissidents. Pilate was now to meet with his newly appointed Commander, formally Captain Corsini, who had come highly recommended by Lorenzo, now retired these five months, to his comfortable house in Alexandria.

Commander Corsini stood up when Pilate entered the palatial Governor’s Hall, a bright airy rectangular room with highly polished ornate white and brown marble floors and pillars, and being open on one side to a panoramic view of the city and countryside beyond.

“Perhaps you would join me on the terrace, Commander,” Pilate suggested to Corsini. “Would you care for wine?”

“Thank you, Governor! I understand you wished to brief me on new anti-terrorist procedures,” Corsini replied, with some degree of trepidation. Being a military man he wasn’t used to being directly responsible to a professional politician like Pilate.
Pilate, who originally came from the Spanish town of Tarragona, which is just south of the city of Barcelona, and he was considered by the military commanders in the past, as a difficult person to deal with. He had an impulsive manner and tended to make tempestuous decisions for expediency sake, and be irascible with those under his immediate authority.

As they sat, sipping wine, overlooking the city of Jerusalem below them in the early morning sunlight, Pilate outlined his plans for arresting any person suspected of being a dissident. He was particularly concerned about his image back in Rome where he hoped for a position in the Senate upon his return. Indeed, he longed for this transfer,-and soon! - besides being Procurator of Judea for another lengthy period. He frequently complained to his wife, saying, “It’s a miserable posting which I must have amended, as soon as possible, or I shall go mad and die here."

Commander Corsini was instructed to arrest one rebel in particular, who went by the name of Barabbas and who had a large following amongst the young Jewish zealots.

“He is a slippery individual and would be difficult to capture,” Pilate advised Corsini. “But I won’t tell you how to do your job. Just bring him back for trial…and we’ll deal with him! We have enough on this rebel to have him crucified ten times over!” The Roman answer to all dissidents,
was flogging and crucifixion. Few Jews were found innocent of any criminal act, -no matter how trivial.

Corsini understood, from this last remark, that the rebel’s trial would be speedy and merciless. He knew Pilate to be a ruthless tyrant, who had ruled Judea for many years, executing anyone deemed to be a rebel, but was obliged to stay on friendly terms with Jewish authority, -the high priest Caiaphas in particular.

“I also wish you to look into the teachings of others, such as one referred to as the Baptist, and a newcomer called Yeshu’a,” Pilate suggested. “I am being plagued regularly by that priest Caiaphas, to take action against these two. Caiaphas thinks I have nothing else to do but rise to his continuous requests. I know he has his own network of spies, and thugs who call themselves soldiers.”

Pilate strode to the balustrade to gaze down upon the city below. There was a momentary silence as he pondered the political implications of his rule back in Rome.

“I’d like to squash all those miserable Jews,” he hissed through trembling lips. “And particularly that infernal high priest!” he shouted, as he hurtled his wine goblet into the palm-fringed gardens below.

Corsini rose quickly deeming it to be an appropriate time to leave, - and as hastily as possible.

“I will carry out your orders immediately, Governor,” Corsini said, as
he retreated from the room, with the sound of his sandaled feet reverberating through the hallowed halls of the palace.

As he returned to his military post, he thought of the many differing worshipping groups in this state of Palestine; each claiming to worship the same God.

“How can this be,” he thought. “How can a god be worshipped from so many diverse philosophical positions? What kind of god is this?”

He knew of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Publicans, and those called the Essenes. The Pharisees were deemed the sect of harsh fundamentalism, hypocritical and egotistical. Indeed, he recalled it was they who welcomed Pompey’s Roman army when they first invaded their country, storming Jerusalem and breaking into the Temple: they were being welcomed as deliverers by the Pharisees.

The Sadducees were aristocratic as well as being philosophers, while denying the immortality of the soul, and an after-life. Equally, they were more worldly, which was something they had in common with the Pharisees. Indeed, their King, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, was a member of their sect and acknowledged their doctrines.

The Publicans were, to some, considered the ‘proper Jews’, in their religious beliefs, while being held in contempt by others.

But the Essenes, -those belonging to the Essene Brotherhood, were different. Corsini felt he could easily relate to them and their monastic
life, and communal living. But he could not understand their teachings on non-marrying and not keeping servants. Equally, he found the trusting of their fate in the hands of their god, and surrendering to its will, was more than his military mind could comprehend. But now he had more pressing responsibilities, of pursuing investigations into those that Pilate referred to, -John the Baptist and the one called Yeshu’a.

After much planning Corsini decided his best strategy was to investigate the situation for himself, before authorising the spy network to infiltrate the followers.

Disguising himself in merchant’s garb, and removing any semblance of military attire, he travelled into the countryside in hope of coming upon the multitude followers of Yeshu’a. His first efforts in making contact resulted in failure. It was the same the following day, but while on his return through the market place, he heard whispers of a meeting place the following day, at a field in a small sheltered valley just off the road to Jericho.

So as not to raise suspicions, he chose not to ride there, but walk inconspicuously, to the gathering. Dressed simply he arrived at a grassy swath beside a clear flowing stream, where a small gathering gradually grew into a multitude. Families, old people, indeed people from all walks of life sat as in a miniature coliseum, awaiting their Master’s arrival. The sun was high and hot. Birds flitted between the eucalyptus trees that
bordered the rim of the little valley. Some people brought food for their families, and drank the pure waters from the stream; it was a day-out to be enjoyed as well as to listen to moral teachings.

Corsini sat with his back against a tree, looking down upon the gathering from the rim of the hill. He was glad of the shade from the sun, but also he wished to keep a distance from the body of the crowd so as to observe well all that may happen. Children played, running to and fro between the family groups, and rolling, as children do, upon the sunburnt grass.

A fog drifted slowly through the little valley, turning to a red hue with the light of the sun. A sudden hush from the congregation startled him. It seemed to signal an air of expectancy. Looking around he saw a tall young man, dressed in the white robe of the Essenes, approaching through the fog, accompanied by a group of male disciples and a small band of female followers. He brushed past Corsini with a silence that was almost ethereal.

“This is hardly the Baptist,” Corsini thought. “Must be the other fellow,” as he squinted up at the slim figure of Yeshu’a who was silhouetted against the sun.

Commander Corsini quietly observed that Yeshu’a had an air of peace about him, as he delivered a discourse on love and forgiveness, in a quiet steady voice. He wondered how anybody could find fault with what
he spoke, or with the manner he delivered it. His audience sat transfixed, in silence. Even the children ceased playing and sat quietly alongside their parents as the fog began to clear.

Yeshu’a spoke for almost an hour on the subject of ‘love thine enemy’. Corsini thought, “I see no fault here,” -seeing the parables as simple diagrams for correct living. No more nor less than those he lived by himself, and expected his own children to live by.

Yeshu’a moved forward towards a family group seated in the front row, the mother of whom had a small child on her lap, with twisted limbs. Corsini saw the tall figure of Yeshu’a lay his hand on the child’s head, with the other hand raised skywards, but was unable to hear distinctly the words that were uttered. Immediately the child jumped from the mother’s lap standing erect upon the now-straightened limbs. The crowd gasped and broke into spontaneous applause. Corsini jumped to his feet, to observe more clearly the drama before him. Looking around him he saw the broad smiles on the faces of the congregation. “What had happened?” he wondered. Had he blinked and missed something? One minute the child had twisted limbs, while in the next moment they were straight as she stood erect and walked a few steps.

What man could do such things? Indeed, what god can do such things? Does that god work through this man, and only this man? So many questions, yet no answers. “How am I to report this to Herod I
would be laughed out of court. Best to say nothing!” he concluded.

The Commander sat again, and slowly wondered if this young rabbi
would heal his servant who had contracted leprosy, and would otherwise
have no future but one in a stone quarry where the local lepers lived. This
hopeful thought had only just come to him, when Yeshu’a turned and
walked slowly back up the slope to where Corsini sat. Standing an arm’s
length from Corsini, Yeshu’a stared into his eyes, as if daring him to ask
his question. Corsini felt uneasy as he looked into the intense light blue
eyes, so full of love.

“Would you heal my servant, rabbi?” Corsini found himself asking,
and quickly looked away as if ashamed of what he had asked.

“Return to your home. Your servant is well.”

Puzzled by the response, Corsini looked up seeking clarification, only
to find Yeshu’a proceeding with his companions to the nearby cluster of
trees where they sat in their shade and discussed amongst themselves the
miracle that they had just witnessed. Yeshu’a told them that they too
would perform equally marvellous miracles, in the days to come.

The following morning found Corsini seated sipping the red wine
placed before him, as Pilate stood and perused the report that lay on the
marble table, while holding a goblet of red wine in his left hand. The
report stated that Yeshu’a was in his late twenties, fair hair, and beard
that gave him a genteel appearance. It further noted that, unlike most
Jews, he was of a fair complexion, quite different from those with black beards who were gathered listening to him.

The day was hot, but the wine was remarkably cool. Corsini pondered on this and assumed Pilate stored his wine in deep underground cellars, similar to his storehouse back in Italy. Ducts leading from underground streams were often used to keep the temperature constant.

“Where’s the evidence of conspiracy? I needed evidence, Commander!” Pilate roared, slamming his hand down on the report in front of him. “That priest, Caiaphas, will not be satisfied with this. There is nothing here by which he may be arrested and tried.”

“With respect, Governor, I am a soldier not a spy! I reported as to what I saw and what had occurred. I can do no more than that,” Corsini said with obvious annoyance at being treated like a servant.

“If Caiaphas wants more than the truth,” he continued, angrily, “then he had better use his own men.”

“Commander!” shouted Pilate, as he strolled up and down with annoyance. “I have sufficient to contend with the likes of Caiaphas and his cronies, I don’t need this from my Commander!”

Cooling his temper, Pilate realised he had no reason to criticise Corsini for the report he gave. It was the heat, combined with his irritation with Caiaphas, which made him loose his temper.

Pilate sighed, “Here! Have some more wine Corsini! It’s the only
good thing in this damn land.”

The Roman Authority had a long-standing treaty agreement with the Jewish leaders; to carry out the trials and executions of Jewish criminals on behalf of the Jews, as the latter were not allowed, by their own laws, to perform any act of killing except in the form of sacrificial animal offerings to their God. The Jewish Authority consisted of Jewish leaders, mainly rabbis and wealthy merchants, being representative of the ‘establishment’ but not of the population as a whole.

Let it be known that neither Yeshu’a nor John had any fear of their own people, being Jews themselves. Since it was mostly those who were “down the social scale” who were their devoted followers, while others chose not to heed such teachings.

John did baptise in the wilderness and preached to the poor of spirit, as well as to those who had little in the way of worldly goods. He was an enlightened person who was brought up by the Essene Brotherhood. He was fearless. He would publicly rebuke and criticise the Sadducees and the Pharisees, who came for baptism to him at Salem, on the banks of the Jordan. He prepared for his mission from the early age of sixteen year, and had joined another holy man in the wilderness, called Banus, also a member of the Holy Order of Esseens.

But his words were equally heard by young Zealots; desirous of political change. Because of this he was subjected to constant scrutiny by
both Jewish and Roman authorities. Indeed, at times there were as many spies in his congregation as there were sincere followers! Now it was no longer safe for him to preach of justice in a land ruled by Roman terror.

Yeshu’a and his disciples journeyed into the city of Jerusalem, to visit the great Temple and other holy shrines. It was here that he hoped to preach to the ever-increasing number of people, but events soon changed all that. The sounds coming from the Temple were more of a marketplace than that of a temple of worship. He was shocked to discover commercial transactions were taking place on the steps, as well as within the Temple sanctum itself. The holy places were being used as bazaars, where the Grace of God could be bargained for and commercialised, while birds and small animals were on sale for sacrificial offerings, and where foreign coins were being exchanged for the local currency.

Yeshu’a condemned those priests who encouraged and tolerated these rude practices, and in doing so brought down upon his head the anger of the overseers of the Temple and shrines.

Enraged at the sacrilege taking place before his eyes, Yeshu’a swept up the steps and angrily overturned the changing tables which were piled high with pillars of coins of varying value, scattering all before him as his companions joyfully released the birds and animals from their cages. The Temple was now in turmoil; chaos ensued. Flaying fists with angry shouts and scuffles broke out within the Temple confines and spreading
to the steps outside, as frightened pigeons flapped their wings as if applauding the gesture of freedom now being offered to them. The act of turning over of the ‘changing tables’ was to signal the change within the state of Judea: from that moment onwards nothing in this land would ever be the same again!

It was not long before this demonstration of ‘righteous anger’ came to the attention of Caiaphas, who now felt even more threatened by the teaching of a ‘new’ law, humility, -propounded by these young men. He and others of senior priestly positions began their sinister plot against Yeshu’a, and to have him arrested, and if possible, put on trial before his influence took hold of his growing number of followers. There had even been rumours of healings, and a reported resurrection from the dead! All this was much too dangerous to be ignored, Caiaphas felt.

Joseph of Arimathaea became aware, from his connections in the Sanhedrin, of the dastardly plots instigated against both Yeshu’a and John, and sent words of warning to them both. Nicodemus was equally fearful of what might happen to Yeshu’a, for Nicodemus too was an Essene and a secret disciple of Yeshu’a.

Early developments in the plot by Pilate had been preceded, for John was soon to be arrested in the countryside surrounding the stronghold Macherous, on the command of King Herod Antipas, and later beheaded for a matter totally unrelated to Pilate’s plans. This dastardly incident
struck deep at the hearts of Yeshu’a and all the Brotherhood, for they
knew that it was the commencement of an epoch of cosmic dimensions.

Chapter Sixteen.

Barabbas, the young rebel leader, lead one further futile attack on
Roman authority, by assaulting a company of Roman soldiers on a lonely
hill road, north of Jerusalem. One could hardly call it a battle, more a
skirmish, where many of his poorly armed young men, perished at the
hands of battle-hardened experienced soldiers. In close combat the slings
and spears stood no chance against the gladius, the short stabbing sword
responsible for conquering most of the known world.

The battle was swift, and the blood flowed freely, being quickly
absorbed into the dry sandy soil. Over twenty rebel bodies lay at the feet
of their superior foe, but the officer in charge identified Barabbas and
spared him the fate of his companions. Speedily bound, he was led back
to Jerusalem under the cover of darkness. Night, and a Roman cloak
covering his head, prevented him from being recognised by possible
sympathisers.

Barabbas was very popular amongst the young zelots of Judea. His
leadership was drawn from the strength of young politically minded men,
to whom he offered the hope of a nation once again ruled by their own
people.

Beneath the castle of Antonio, was a labyrinth of passages with numerous cells barred by heavy iron gates. Continuous merciless cries echoed down the passageways, for it was here that torture, of varying intensity, was practised on hapless prisoners by sadistic Roman soldiers, expert in the ways of extracting information.

Anybody unfortunate enough to have been brought to this subterranean dungeon could be assured of never seeing the light of day again, except to be taken to the site of execution by crucifixion; Calvary. Such would be the fate of Barabbas who was thrown into a dank cell and left without food for several days, thus weakening him in preparation for torture. This torture was not for the purpose of obtaining a confession, for they had all they needed to have him put to death. They were vengefully repaying him for the deaths of their fellow comrades, -after all, the Romans reasoned, he had Roman blood on his hands and that alone was deserving of the fate that awaited him.

While Barabbas sat pondering his fate, Yeshu’a was seated with his disciples and followers, both young and old, on a hillside many miles outside Jerusalem. He spoke of loving one’s neighbour as well as all animal life, for he was blessed with the ability to commune with animals, birds and fish; indeed, he would even converse with the spirits of the water and those of the air. While those surrounding him sat and ate fish
and drank wine, he chose only to eat figs, bread, olives and herbs, and drinking only water which he had blessed.

On many occasions priests and elderly men would come to listen full of admiration of his discourses, and they once asked Yeshu’a if it was true that he wanted to rouse the people against the Roman authorities, as reported to the Governor, Pilate. Yeshu’a replied that he had only warned those unfortunate people, as he had done in the temple, of the dangers ahead and the yawning abyss beneath their feet. “It would be of no use to rebel against authority, for one power always succeeds another power”, Yeshu’a stated. “And it shall be thus until the extinction of human existence.” They asked him who he was, as they had not heard of him nor where he had come from. “I am an Israelite,” he replied, “I was grieved to see that my people had forgotten the true God and while still a child I left my father’s house to go among other nations. I have now returned to the land of my ancestors, which teaches us patience in this world that we may obtain perfect and sublime happiness on High.”

On another occasion Yeshu’a spoke sweetly to the children, -telling them stories of past events, as a beautifully coloured rainbow appeared directly above the little group. Such a phenomenon had previously occurred when he spoke to children and animals in the desert, and these had been witnessed many times by others and were referred to as the desert rainbows!
Another miracle! -thought those close-by, since there was not a cloud to be seen in the clear blue sky!

Many of these children had been adopted by the Essene Order and cared for as orphans, as were off-springs of casual relationships between Roman soldiers and young local girls. But many of these girls were cast out of their homes by their parents, only to be taken in by the Order, and when a baby was born it was adopted by the Brotherhood.

(A case in point was Mary of Magdala who fell in love with a Roman officer, but was left devastated and destitute when he later returned to his wife and family in Rome. Her parents, who were prominent in the society of the time, felt scandalised by the incident and, disowning her, forced her from her home. She was beautiful and well educated, as well as being a trained singer and musician. Fortunately, these talents enabled her to earn a living in taverns and such, but she never prostituted herself, as some commentators would later suggest. She assisted in the care of the orphaned children.)

Wherever Yeshu’a went with his disciples the crowds grew even larger; the Jewish people were always seeking the nectarine words of love and peace that flowed from his lips. He answered many questions put to him by the people. At one occasion a elderly woman was roughly pushed aside by a man who placed himself before her. He was a spy in disguise, in the pay of the high priests, there to note the words of Yeshu’a that they
might be used against him. Yeshu’a rounded on the man for his lack of consideration towards womankind. “Whosoever does not respect his mother, the most sacred being next to God, is unworthy of the name of son. Respect woman, for she is the mother of the universe and all truth of divine creation dwells within her. Love your wives and respect them, for tomorrow they shall be mothers and later grandmothers of a whole nation. Protect your wife, that she may protect you and all the family; all that you shall do for your mother, your wife, for a widow, or another woman in distress, you shall have done for God!” The spy shifted uncomfortably, and slinked back into the crowd.

On this historic occasion, Yeshu’a was seated with his group shaded from the heat of the noon day sun, when Joseph of Arimathea joined them to warn of the dangers ahead, and to advise them as to whatever course of action that might be necessary. Joseph was tall, muscular and very intelligent, and highly regarded by all as an excellent speaker and orator in the Sanhedrin. The disciples were unaware of his important status within the Sanhedrin, -the body that governed the religious life of the Jewish people, -a body which was tolerated, but not respected by the Romans!

Yeshu’a paid little heed to his uncle’s warnings, choosing instead to remain silent, for he knew the destiny that lay ahead, -the dangers and pain which he was ordained to undertake as a Messiah. He had viewed,
for some time in the depths of his meditation, the path of suffering that he willingly and gladly accepted on behalf of mankind. He was to be assisted in this mission by the apostle Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, and a man of culture and intelligence, with a deep interest in music. Yeshu’a entrusted him with the plan for his crucifixion and resurrection thereafter, for events would show the faith Yeshu’a had in Judas, as the other eleven were to deny Yeshu’a before his hour was near. Even his favourite apostle, Peter, the one he called his Rock, could not be wholly trusted to carry out the ordained plan. So one should not see Judas’ part in the ‘play’, as an act of mistrust and betrayal, -but an act of deliverance and the fulfillment of a “Glorious Design”.

It would be later, as they supped together for the last time that Yeshu’a would announce to his disciples, “One of you is to deliver me!” *(not as future commentators would put it, “One of you shall betray me!”)*

Those disciples present did not know of the ‘play’ that was to unfold in the days ahead, which is why they all denied knowing their Master for fear of losing their own lives.

At the appointed hour, during the course of the supper, Judas left quietly to perform the role assigned to him. Yeshu’a raised bread and a goblet of wine stating that, “this is my body, and this is my blood”, teaching his disciples that consideration be given to all mankind and that
they too should be revered as he had been. It was not a case of
‘transubstantiation’, but of instructing his followers that all peoples, all
religions and all cultures, should be treated with the same equal respect as
they had for him.

As the hour drew near for Judas’ momentous role, the disciples
decided to accompany Yeshu’a to his home, stopping to rest awhile in a
garden before proceeding further. It was here that Caiaphas’ guards came
upon them and after an initial struggle with Peter and another apostle,
they apprehended Yeshu’a.

The climax of the mission for which he had long prepared himself,
was about to begin. He had been preparing for this moment for many
years, -indeed for many lifetimes! The happenings over the next few days
were to shape events in the world for centuries to come, -for he had come
to redeem the world! Mankind, in future times, would speak of the pain
and suffering he was about to endured, and that he died for our sins,
while, if the truth be known, he died because of them!
Chapter Seventeen.

Commander Corsini remained unaware of the arrest of Yeshu’a by Caiaphas’ men, ‘till mid-morning. He was angered that Roman authority was flagrantly ignored, once again, by the Jewish high priests. Since it was customary, under the mutually agreed treaty, for any arrests and final judgement, to be sanctioned by the local Roman authority, - he wasted no time in summoning Caiaphas to him.

“What is the meaning of this? Commanding me to appear before you! You have no authority over me! ”, demanded an outraged Caiaphas. The man standing before Corsini, was of medium height with dark complexion, dressed in the regalia of a rabbinical high priest. Corsini was meeting him for the first time and wondered how such a pompous individual could have reach and sustain such an exalted position within the Jewish community.

Ignoring the protestations, Corsini reminded Caiaphas of the political and social implications of arresting an apparently innocent man. Secretly he could not help but recall to mind the ‘distant healing’ Yeshu’a had given to his man-servant.

“Where is the prisoner, now?” asked Corsini.

“The trouble-maker called Yeshu’a is with my father-in-law, Annas”.
“You are known to have said that it was expedient that one man should die for the Jewish people,” Corsini remarked. “Does this include an innocent man?”

“I see no innocent man. It is reported to me that he who is called Yeshu’a has attempted to assert himself to be our King, and so should be punished for treason. We recognise no one other authority than Caesar’s.”

While Caiaphas chose his words well, however, Corsini was not deceived by his patronising ways, he ordered Caiaphas to present the prisoner immediately to Pilate for questioning.

It was late afternoon by the time Yeshu’a stood before the Roman Governor. Pilate turned to Caiaphas’ men and asked what accusations had been made against Yeshu’a. Their reply was vague suggesting that they would not have disturbed the Governor should the evildoer had not been guilty in their eyes. Pilate instructed them, saying, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own laws,” throwing the responsibility back to them.

Caiaphas’ men smiled inwardly, knowing the Treaty forbade them from putting any man to death and this was to be the responsibility of the Romans. After prolonged questioning, Pilate could find no cause for condemning Yeshu’a and reported as much to Caiaphas’ men.

“I find no crime in him. But you have a custom that I should release one prisoner to you for the Passover festival. Who do you choose?” Pilate
directed his question to the crowd that had gathered in the courtyard below. Unknown to him most were the followers of the rebel Barabbas, and paid agitators, they cried aloud, “Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!” This request shocked the group of moderate Jews gathered with the disciples, but the die had been cast and Yeshu’a’s fate was sealed with Barabbas’ released. Pilate was enraged when he realised he had been skilfully out-smarted by a bunch of common criminals, in this game of political intrigue.

Word of Yeshu’a’s trial for treason, spread speedily throughout the Jewish community and amongst his followers and friends. Joseph of Arimathaea consulted with Nicodemus, and other members of the Sanhedrin, to see if something could be done to reduce the charge.

“Treason means certain death,” Joseph remarked afterwards to a small group of Essene Brothers, gathered to discuss the impending event. “We must negotiate with Pilate to reduce the charge to a misdemeanour. Another thing…he likes money!”

“It is time we stood up against these barbarians,” voiced one Brother, angrily. “We cannot allow one of our own to be lost to those idol worshippers.”

“We are peace-loving, Brother. We cannot condone violence for whatever reason,” remarked another.
“I will speak to Pilate, myself,” Joseph interjected. “I will plead for compassion, and if that doesn’t work, I shall bribe him, much as it goes against my principles; but I fear Caiaphas may have got in before us!”

A number of rabbis and elders went to Pilate entreatimg him to release Yeshu’a, that he may attend a great festival that was near at hand. They were refused. So they then asked that he be brought before the Council of Elders, so that his guilty or innocent could be judge by them. Pilate agreed.

In the meantime, Yeshu’a was taken to the subterranean dungeon, now vacated by the rebel Barabbas, and was to remain there for eight days in isolation without food, and the minimum of water; the Roman way of weakening their captives in preparation for torture.

The room was dark, being windowless, with a stout wooden door barring any light of the torches in the corridor from entering. He was now to spend his long days and nights on yet another trial. It was as if the devil entered the cell to confront him, to taunt him, and to suggest how foolish he was to presume to be superior to others. It was a crushing experience, but one for which he had long prepared himself.

The following day the principle rabbis, elders and judges were assembled and Yeshu’a was temporarily released, to be questioned by them. He was seated between two thieves before Pilate, for they too were to be judged. Pilate asked Yeshu’a, “Is it not true that you have incited
the populace against the authorities so that you could proclaim yourself King?”

“They have told you an untruth when you were informed that I was inciting the people to revolution,” Yeshu’a answered. “I preached only of the Kingdom of Heaven and it was to Him, the Lord our God, that I told the people to worship. For the sons of Israel have lost their original innocence and unless they return to worship the true God, they will be sacrificed and their temple will fall in ruins.” He continued, “Live in conformity with your situation and refrain from disturbing public order,” and he reminded them that disorder reigns in their hearts and spirits.

At that moment witnesses were brought before the court to give their evidence, one of whom stated, “You have said to the people that in comparison, with the power of the King who would soon liberate the Israelites from the yoke of the heathen, the worldly authorities amounted to nothing!”

Yeshu’a raised his head and faced the witness, “Blessings on you, for you have spoken the truth! The King of Heaven is greater and more powerful than the laws of man and His Kingdom surpasses the kingdoms of this earth. The time is not too distant when Israel, being obedient to God’s will, shall throw off its yoke of sin; for it has been written that a forerunner would appear to announce the deliverance of the people and that he would re-unite them in one family.”
Whereupon Pilate jumped up, stabbing the air with his forefinger, crying, “Have you heard this? He acknowledges the crime of which he is accused. Judge him then according to your laws and pass upon him condemnation to death!”

“We cannot condemn him,” replied the elders, saying he spoke only of the Kingdom of Heaven, and never proclaimed himself King.

Pilate was outraged and thereupon shouted that Yeshu’a be condemned to death and that the two robbers should be declared guiltless! The judges consulted amongst themselves and later announced to Pilate, “We cannot consent to take this great sin upon ourselves, to condemn an innocent man and liberate those wicked thieves!” their spokesman declared. “It would be against our laws. Governor, you only must decide, for we are innocent of the blood of this righteous man,” -whereupon the rabbis and elders walked out, washing their hands in the sacred vessel as they did so.

Pilate saw their refusal as a personal slight, and angrily ordered Yeshu’a’ crucifixion, for he was aware of Yeshu’a’ royal ancestry and origin, and saw it as a threat.

Yeshu’a was returned to his confinement where, for eight days, his long solitary hours were spent in prayer and communion with the Father, for he had long been able to confer with Him and was now being presented with the ultimate test; total surrender to His Will!
Yeshu’a was unafraid, for it is the loveless that are enveloped in fear. His love for all mankind had instilled in him courage, and banished fear, for if one follows the Master, one never comes face-to-face with the ‘devil’, for he is protected and sustained. Yeshu’a’ life’s mission held forth the highest ideals of life for all mankind.

Keys rattled and the sound of metal bolts being slid across, with the opening of the door. A small goat’s skin bag of water was tossed inside and the door slammed shut once more. In the darkness Yeshu’a crawled along the wall to where the water-bag had been. No food of any kind was given to him for those eight days, making him physically weaker. He blessed the water before he sipped it and splashed some on his face.

He knew the hour of his deliverance was getting near, when once more the door crashed open and two soldiers reached down and dragged him out into the corridor, up steps and into the sun-drenched courtyard. The light burst upon him, momentarily blinding him, that he dared not open his eyes. He felt the heat of the sun upon his face, its welcomed warmth after the dungeon dankness. His wrists were roughly bound to a stone pillar and the garment on his back was torn apart. He didn’t feel the first lash ‘til a moment later when he cried out in pain through clinched teeth. Another stroke, and still another, until he ceased to count and his legs buckled beneath him unable to support his weakened body. He kept
thinking that he must not condemn or find fault with his persecutors, for they also had within them the same Divinity as he.

The prolonged flaying resulted in barely an inch of his body having not been ripped and bleeding, for this loss of blood was to weaken him further.

Many of his devoted followers and family members, pleaded with the authority to set Yeshu’a free, but without result. Indeed, his brother Joses procured a meeting with Corsini in the vain hope he too might intervene.

“Commander, I have something of yours which I wish to return to you for my brother’s release. I found it many years ago upon the sands of the Sinai,” Joses reminded him, as he produced from under his cloak Corsini’s precious dagger, lost when his troops camped by the fresh water Oasis of el-Lejah. Corsini could not believe his eyes as he slowly extended his hand to receive again the precious gift from his family.

“Where did you come upon this?” Corsini demanded. “Or was it you who had stolen it?”

“Indeed not! I found it half buried in the sands where you had camped that night when my brother restored the hand of your soldier.”

Corsini slowly sank back in his chair recalling the incident many years previous, and the occasion of its loss. Holding his jewel-encrusted dagger once again, the thoughts of his beloved wife and family came flooding back to him and tears came to his eyes.
“You found it you say?” he said, quietly. “I suppose you wish for a reward? What shall it be?”

“My brother’s life! You know him as Yeshu’a.”

Corsini looked up quickly as he placed the dagger before him on the table, insisting that there was little he could do in this matter, since Pilate himself had settled the case. Anything else…gold or silver, he suggested.

“I too am aware of your brother’s innocence. I know him to be a good and pious man, but I am not empowered to save him.”

“I do not understand. If as you say you know him to be innocent, why then should he be crucified? For what is he being sacrificed?”

Angry words came flowing out at the injustice of the verdict. Corsini explained that there were powerful people who had a vested interest in seeing Yeshu’a punished for his part in the ‘raid’ on the Temple.

“They have close connections with the Roman authority, and have privileges extended to them for financial return,” Corsini explained.

“There are many of your people who do not wish to see a national uprising for fear it would interfere with this perfect arrangement.”

“But my brother has nothing to do with such plots!” Joses argued.

“He speaks of the Heavenly Kingdom, he speaks of love, truth, and peace, not rebellion!”

“I too am angry that the rebel, Barabbas, should go free. It was my duty to seize him and have him tried for his murderous actions towards
my men. Seeing him walk free is not to my liking. But never fear, we will capture him again and next time there will be no exchange,” Corsini said.

“Now, leave me.”

Enraged, Joses turned and stamped out into the sunlight, his simple request for Yeshu’a’s release left unrewarded.

Chapter Eighteen

The 1st Centurion, Quilius Correlius, lead the procession route out of Jerusalem by way of the Gate of Struenus, wending its way down through the valley to the hill of Calvary, commonly known as Golgotha; the barren skull-shaped hill used by the Romans for execution. Yeshu’a and
the two thieves passed along a line of weeping women, amongst them was his mother with his sisters and brothers, and a small group of close disciples and followers. All were in great distress upon seeing the wounds Yeshu’a had undergone from the scourging, and seeing him bleeding profusely. His weakened state made it impossible to drag the heavy cross. He fell to the ground on several occasions when a kindly figure stepped from the crowd to assist him in carrying the heavy cross. Yeshu’a’ bloodied face looked up into the face of his old Bedouin friend, Yusuf. A whisper of a smile came over Yeshu’a’ lips upon seeing his old friend again. Yusuf was appalled at what he saw, choking back tears as he witnessed Yeshu’a condition, and took the weight of the cross upon himself for the final stage to the hilltop.

Because of the hard rock surface, it was impossible to dig a sufficiently deep hole for the crosses to be placed into, so the Romans had constructed a large trellis-like structure atop of the hill, upon which crosses would hang on stout iron nails through a hole on the top of the crosses.

Many crosses would hang upon this structure. Some corpses were left there in a state of foul decay, before they were eventually thrown to wild animals. The more ‘fortunate’ corpses would be bartered back by relatives from Pilate, for removal and burial. Pilate made a nice private income from this grizzly business.
About this time crowds came out from the city, some drawn by curiosity. Amongst them were priests, and some of the stallholders who had been the source of Yeshu’a wrath at the Temple. All gloated and jeered with satisfaction over the vengeance they had secured, and they encouraged others to do likewise.

The sound of horsemen approaching parted the crowd as Caiaphas and his armed escort rode up to mock and deride the crucified innocent Yeshu’a, while in turn the Roman soldiers sneered at the high priest and his bodyguards, as they placed a plaque above Yeshu’a’s head, inscribed, “King of the Jews”. This infuriated Caiaphas but he chose to keep silent lest he angered Pilate. While it was Pilate who imposed the death penalty, the verdict was recommended by Joseph den Caiaphas, the chief priest.

(It is interesting to note, that both men were removed from their posts by the Romans, about three years later.)

It was at this time, and unseen by those present, that the black sleek form of the raven that had followed Yeshu’a all those long years through Bharath and back, flapped and steadied itself upon a pole nearby. The heat of the day increased, but by mid-afternoon the sky darkened and the earth trembled as a violent earthquake rumbled beneath the feet of the crowd of mockers, scattering them as they rushed to the shelter of the city. Murree and her family, ignoring the violent movement of the ground, sheltered instead beneath the cross.
At that moment Yeshu’a heard the comforting voice of his Father, say; “All life is one, My dear son! Be alike to everyone!” And just before his head sank down upon his breast, he cried aloud, “Eli, Eli, Lama azavthini?” (My God. My God. Why did You leave me?)

A thick, reddish fog began to slowly creep over the landscape. Standing quietly some distance from the scene stood the Roman Commander, Corsini. It dawned upon him that Yeshu’a was beloved of the gods as he fixed his gaze upon the pathetic figure of Yeshu’a impaled upon the Roman wooden cross. At this point the black form of the raven flapped its wings and at the wink of an eye changed into a pure white dove, and rose from its resting place and flew high into the gathering clouds.

The earthquake’s violence split open many sepulchres, exposing the remains therein, but the crowd, in their haste, assumed that the dead had risen in angry opposition to the cruel injustice meted out to an innocent man, and they ran through the streets of Jerusalem proclaiming this fearful fact.

Small groups huddled together for comfort and courage, as a strong wind blew all before it, swirling the red dust through the narrow streets, overturning merchant’s stalls, as it careered on its way to Pilate’s palace, on a trail of vengeance, -ripping through the heavy wine-coloured drapes
that hung on either side of the balcony, and spreading a thick layer of red
dust on the white marble floors.

Pilate moved his two visitors away from the balcony and into a side
room that sheltered them against the violent wind.

“Have some wine,” suggested Pilate, to Joseph and Nicodemus, as he
pulled his cloak around his shoulders against the cold wind. “It will help
to clear the dust from your throats.”

Joseph and Nicodemus came to secure the release of Yeshu’a’ body
from the site of crucifixion, that they would lay it rest in Joseph’s tomb.
As already stated, it was common practice by relatives, to barter with
Pilate for the return of the bodies, but in this instance Pilate hesitated
making such a heinous request of the two most prominent members of the
Sanhedrin.

“I need to be sure, you understand, that the criminal is in fact dead,
before he is removed,” Pilate said, instructing his secretary to send his
Centurion, Longinus by name, to proceed immediately to Golgotha, to
ascertain that Yeshu’a was indeed dead.

Joseph and Nicodemus hurried to the site on foot while the soldier
galloped swiftly ahead. On their arrival they gasped upon seeing the
wretched body of Yeshu’a hanging limply upon the cross, while the
centurion stood nearby with the bloodied spear that pierced their Master’s
side, just above the hip.
“We have Pilate’s permission to remove the body,” Joseph announced to the centurion, who in turn curtly replied that he had no such orders, and his duty was to first report to Pilate. An argument ensued, whereupon Corsini strode forward and commanded the centurion to do as they requested, that He would take full responsibility.

Many hands laboured to remove the heavy cross from the stout nail from which it hung, gently laying it at the feet of a heartbroken Muree.

Chapter Nineteen.

The tearful followers of Yeshu’a laid his bloodied body on a marble plinth inside the cave tomb, hewed from solid rock, which was to be the resting place for Joseph of Arimathaea. A posteru, or private entrance, lead into the gardens at the rear.
The tomb was cold and filled with the mournful laments of the women gathered at the entrance. Joseph and Nicodemus went in and stood over the lifeless remains of Yeshu’a. When Nicodemus examined the body he saw the blood and water flowing from the spear wound, and his eyes became animated with hope he declared that Yeshu’a was not yet dead, and speaking in a low and urgent voice, “As sure as is my knowledge of life and nature, so sure is it possible to save him.” They could barely conceal their great joy, for they knew he still lived. What they did not know was that Yeshu’a had induced a deep trance while upon the cross, thus avoiding the great pain of crucifixion. Instead, he was in bliss. He went out of body to comfort the two thieves alongside him, and was able to observe the events surrounding him.

A messenger was sent urgently to the nearest Essene retreat, to fetch the herbs and ointments, that they might reanimate the body, and restore it back to health. On the pretence of anointing the body, the tomb was vacated by all except Joseph and Nicodemus, while the latter spread strong spices and healing salves that had great healing powers, on to long pieces of byssus, which accompanied the ointments and herbs. The principle ointment consisted of twelve ingredients, which were as follows;

1. White wax; 2. Gum gugal, also known as balsamo dendron mukul;
3. Plumbi oxidum; 4. Myrrh, also known as balsamo dendron myrrh;
5. *Galbanum*; 6. *Aristoelchia longa*; 7. Sub-acetate of copper; 8. Gum *ammanicicum*; 9. Resin of *pinus longifolia*; 10. *Olibanum*; 11. Aloes; 12. Olive oil. (These twelve ingredients were first recorded in the Greek *Pharmacopoeia*, having been passed down by word of mouth over the years.)

Before they bound Yeshua’s’ face, Nicodemus blew into his mouth in a effort to expand the lungs with air, and warmed the temples. Balsam balm was spread on the wounds of the nail-pierced hands and feet, but it was thought best not to close-up the wound in his side, believing that the flow of blood and water therefrom was helpful to respiration and beneficial in the renewing of his life. They then smoked the sepulchre with aloe and other herbs, went outside and rolled a large stone into position in front so as the vapours would better fill the grotto.

After thirty hours had passed, since the “death” of Yeshua’a, during which time another great storm and earthquake occurred. Caiaphas had placed his own guards at the tomb’s entrance to ensure nobody removed the body, but the guards sought shelter nearby ‘till the storm abated. All this while the tomb was kept under watch by one of the Order’s brothers, who reported to their house that the guards were no longer there. Twenty-four brethren arrived at the grotto along with Joseph and Nicodemus, to find the lips of their dear brother moving and the chest rising and falling, as fresh air revived the functions of the body.
Since Yeshu’a was not yet strong enough to walk, he was lifted and conducted secretly to the retreat house of the Order in the garden, which was close-by to Calvary.

Caiaphas, who had instructed his spies to proceed to Golgotha and ensure the tomb was still sealed, was informed that the tomb was now empty!

The guards were closely questioned by an angry, and shocked, Caiaphas, for upon learning that they had deserted their post to seek shelter from the storm. He bribed them not to mention this to anyone but to inform the people that Yeshu’a’ followers had stolen the body so that credence would be given to the prophesised resurrection.

After many hours Yeshu’a felt strong enough to raise himself onto one elbow and partake of a light refreshment. Joseph spoke to those present Brothers, “This is not a place in which to remain longer, for soon the enemies may soon discover our secret and come to arrest us all.”

Fearful of Caiaphas’ vengeful nature, they took Yeshu’a to another retreat house where he continued to rest. Nicodemus once again tied up his Master’s painful wounds and gave him a medical draught, insisted that he lay still awhile. All now knew that their lives would in danger, and that it would be best to leave Jerusalem as soon as possible and travel in different directions.
While Yeshu’a fell into a profound sleep, Nicodemus, Joseph and the Elders convened a meeting to discuss the best procedure of caring for the Master’s safety. Brothers returning from the city brought back rumours of the resurrection that was foretold, and of other miracles. While they questioned that Yeshu’a would be strong enough to travel so soon, however, they were as one in protecting him against being recaptured. It was agreed to obtain the assistance of Yusuf, -Yeshu’a’ dear friend, -in this subterfuge, to convey Yeshu’a by camel train north to Galilee, from whence he would journey to retreat houses to the east, while Joseph, himself, would take a number of the followers with him by boat to safety in the west. It was not now a matter of escaping the clutches of Caiaphas and Pilate, but to spread the Word.

Two days of preparation ensued during which time Yeshu’a and the Elders spoke together of their proposed plans for his safety.

Feeling stronger physically, Yeshu’a announced, “I now feel it behooves me to remain no longer in concealment, for I have to be amongst my people and to embrace my mother once again. I do not fear death, and my enemies must acknowledge that our Father in Heaven has saved me.”

Joseph sighed, and replied that the Brotherhood “-is father and mother” to Yeshu’a and was duty-bound to protect him as its beloved Son.
Others counselled Yeshu’a that it was not safe for him to remain in the country, for “…they will begin to search for you. Do not now go amongst the people to teach, for the seeds of truth that you have sown have now taken root in the hearts of the people, for all time! When it is once again safe to go amongst the people, we will then send for you.” Yeshu’a lowered his head to ponder their wisdom.

“The Lord of us all is more powerful within me than the fear of death”, he replied. “I shall, however, obey your directive and will see my disciples in Galilee.” Yusuf, he said, would guide him by way of Bethania and the Ephraimitical mountains, where Samaria borders on upper Galilee to the north.

Word of Yeshu’a’ intentions were sent on ahead to advise the brethren, so that protection would be afforded to him along the traitorous route. He was dressed suitably so that none would recognise him on his journey. His mother, Murree, and Mary Magdalene, accompanied him on the arduous journey East which would take them back to the land where he had previously sought the Lost Tribes of Israel, -the Bani Israel, or the Chosen Ones, -in ‘the promised land’ of Kashmir.

Their departure was a tearful one as Joseph of Arimathaea and others embraced family members for the last time. Theirs was now a mission to spread the Word of their Lord; East to Bharath, -the resting place of Solomon and Moses, -and West to the shores of the Atlantic.
Yeshu’a’ last act before their long journey, was to bless the marriage union of his sister, Fatima, to his good and faithful Bedouin friend, Yusuf. This wedding was held in the small town of Cana, in Galilee, and joyfully demonstrated the happy union between the Jewish and Arab communities, that existed at that time. At one stage of the celebrations, Murree asked Yeshu’a to procure more wine as there was little left for the guests; whereupon Yeshu’a requested the empty wine jars to be filled with water and thereupon miraculously produced 180 gallons of the finest wine, to the amazement and delight of all those present.

Four days later Yeshu’a embraced his sister, Fatima, and her new life’s partner, Yusuf, blessing them both, and departing with his mother, Mary Magdalene, and with the disciple Thomas they turned their tearful faces eastward to begin their fateful journey.

Travelling mostly with a merchant camel-train, along the Silk Road, that ‘well-trodden route’ from the Mediterranean to the Far East, it would take the group up to sixteen years to finally reach their final destination in north-west Bharath. Their goal was the beautiful mountainous region of Kashmir, passing through the lands now called Afghanistan, Persia, and Pakistan. It was on the final stage of the trek that Murree was taken ill from sheer exhaustion, and die shortly afterwards. Her body was later placed in a tomb, according to Jewish rites, in the little town that was
later called after her, -Murree. The tomb may still be seen near Pindi Point, and often referred to as the shrine of Mai-Mari-de-asthan.

During these years when Yeshu’a was asked who he was, he would reply Yusasaphat (Yuz Asaf) for he was known as a nabi (a prophet), and it was this name that he was now to travel under. His journey was to take him to those parts of Bharath now called Bangladesh, and further east to the land of Malaysia, --carrying The Word of God to distant lands.

Yeshu’a lived into his eighties, having worked diligently for the people; healing, teaching and uplifting the downcast. He had succeeded in linking-up with those referred to as the Lost Tribes of Israel, reminding them of their fine heritage and their duty to their fellow man and to God. Yeshu’a passed from this life, but not before instructing Thomas where to place his tomb, and in accordance to Hebrew rites.

To this day the tomb in Rosabał, Srinagar, is called the Tomb of Isa or the Tomb of Nabi.