

VOICES FROM HEAVEN AND HELL

by

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CHAPTER ONE

"There Was No Room For Us In The Inn"

by JOSEPH

"My name is Joseph. My father's name was Jacob and the name of my grandfather was Matthan. We were direct descendants of King David. This was a matter of pride both to my father and grandfather. They loved to tell me of the exploits of David and the prophecies of the future glory of our family. They read to me this prophecy of Jeremiah: **'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his day Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'** My parents insisted that I learn all the prophecies which concerned the family David and it seemed to me that there were hundreds of them.

"It was hard to see how the Messiah would ever be born from our branch of the family of David. We were very poor. At one time we lived in Bethlehem, the city of David. Father found it such a struggle to live that he moved to Nazareth in order to better his condition. This move did not help us and we still remained poor. I learned the trade of carpenter. I discovered that the work was scarce and the wages poor.

"However, I was not sorry that we had moved to Nazareth. I fell in love with a young woman whose name was Mary. I need not tell you that I thought she was the most beautiful girl that I had ever met. Her goodness matched her beauty. I was constantly amazed at her knowledge of the Law and the Prophets. It was her special delight to memorize the Psalms of David. When I discovered that she loved me I was the proudest man in Israel.

"We became espoused one to another. According to our Hebrew law this meant that any violation of our vows would bring about punishment. In the sight of the law we were husband and wife although our actual marriage was not to take place for about a year. Both of us eagerly looked forward to the time of our marriage.

"Then something happened which sent me into the deepest depths of despair. Mary was found

with child. I did not know what to think. I could not eat. I could not sleep. In spite of what I thought was her unfaithfulness I still loved her. Without her, life would not be worth living. And yet under the circumstances marriage was impossible. According to the law I could have made a public example out of her. But I did not want any harm to come to her. It was my purpose to divorce her privately. I did not want her to suffer through the cruel gossip of the neighbours.

"While I was thinking on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto me, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

"It was then that the realization came upon me that Mary had been chosen to bear the Messiah. I recalled the prophecy of Isaiah: **'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.'** It was the hope and dream of every virgin of Israel that she might be chosen of GOD to bear the Messiah. And now this honour had been conferred upon Mary!

"Immediately that morning I went over to Mary's home. I asked her to forgive me for the doubts which had entered into my mind. Her eyes filled with tears for my estrangement had hurt her deeply. She had hardly known how to tell me what had happened. She feared that I would not believe her. She told me the announcement of the angel to her. The angel had said: **'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end:'**

"This was very similar to the announcement which I had received. We could scarcely comprehend the meaning of these things. One thing we did know and that was that the prophecies of the Messiah were to be fulfilled through Mary. And according to the instruction of the angel I took Mary to be my wife that very day.

"Some months after this there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. You see, the Romans ruled over us and it seemed to be their chief delight to tax us. This brought several perplexing problems to me. I scarcely knew where I could obtain the money to pay the taxes. It also meant that I would have to travel to Bethlehem. All the lineage of David had to enroll there. What worried me most of all was what to do with Mary. It was about time for the child to be delivered. She insisted upon coming with me. But Bethlehem was a three days journey. She was not in a condition to travel and it was the coldest time of the year. However, Mary prevailed and we started for Bethlehem.

"On our journey Mary related her experience with Elizabeth at the time she stayed at her home. Elizabeth also was with child. Elizabeth told her that the babe leaped in her womb as they met. Filled with the Spirit Elizabeth uttered these words: **'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a**

performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.' Mary said that she was then led to magnify the Lord in that He had so blessed her in spite of her low estate. As she related this to me I could not help thinking of how I was blessed to have the care of her who was to bring forth the Messiah.

"However, I was not taking very good care of Mary at the moment. The journey was so long. Mary became more and more weary. The wind was so cold. On the third day I tried to cheer Mary by telling her of the warm welcome which we would receive in Bethlehem. Soon we would be in the Inn where a warm fire and a warm meal would revive us. This did give her encouragement and cheer. Then suddenly we beheld Bethlehem. It looked so peaceful and quiet.

"We hastened our steps and arrived in the court-yard of the Inn. The keeper of the Inn came out to us and before I could ask him for a room he said: "I am very sorry, sir, but there is no room in the Inn. If you had been a day earlier we might have provided for you. Every room is now taken.' This news stunned me and I said to him: "My wife is weary and sick. She is with child. We have traveled from Nazareth. Surely there is some room in which we could stay. It matters not how small.' But he answered: "Far be it for me to refuse room to a son of David. The trouble is that the Romans and the tax-collectors have taken every room.' He told me, too, that it was no use looking elsewhere in town for a room as a number of others had tried it without success. In puzzlement I asked him: "What are we to do? My wife is too sick to sleep in the cold night air.' To this the inn-keeper gave reply: 'I do not like to suggest it. But if you are agreeable to sleep in the stable we will turn out one of the beasts from its stall. We will put in some clean straw and make it as comfortable as possible.'

"Sick at heart I turned to Mary and said: "There is no room for us in the Inn or in the town. It breaks my heart to take you into a stable.' To this Mary replied: "Never mind, Joseph. GOD will take care of us. The stable will protect us from the wind. It will, at least, be warm. I am so cold and weary that any place will be welcome.'

"And during the night she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for us in the Inn. As we looked at the little babe our hearts thrilled and also a feeling of awe came over us. Here in a manger was He who would redeem Israel. We could hardly believe it.

"Not long after the birth of the child we heard the voices of men outside of the stable. We wondered who they were. At their knock I opened the door of the stable. They were shepherds. They asked me if it were true that a babe was born and was wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. In amazement I told them that was true and asked how they knew. One of the shepherds replied: **'We were watching our flock in a field near Bethlehem. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon us, and the glory of the Lord shone round about us, and we were sore afraid. The angel said to us: Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.** When the angels disappeared out of our sight we hastened here to see this thing which the Lord had made known unto us. May we see Him who is CHRIST the

Lord?'

"I led them to the manger where the babe was lying. The shepherds worshipped GOD and praised Him for the fulfillment of His promise to Israel. We did not lack visitors that day for the shepherds made known abroad the saying which was told them of the child. Later on I was fortunate to obtain a room in one of the homes in Bethlehem. After eight days the child was circumcised even according to our law. We followed the instructions of the angel and called his name JESUS. This name in our Hebrew tongue means *Jehovah is salvation*.

"Forty days after the blessed event Mary and I traveled with the child to the Temple at Jerusalem that Mary might be purified according to the law of Moses and that we might present the child to the Lord. It was the law that every firstborn male belonged to GOD. In our presentation we sacrificed to the Lord two young pigeons. We were too poor to offer a yearling lamb. Our GOD is gracious in allowing the poor to substitute young pigeons.

"At the Temple an old man by the name of Simeon took the infant JESUS into his arms. Then he said: **'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.'** And while Mary and I marveled at this saying Simeon turned to Mary and said: **'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'** This saying mystified us.

"We returned to Bethlehem where several other events awaited us. We had scarcely settled when strange and foreign men appeared. They were Magi from the East. They asked me if they might see the child that was born to be King of the Jews. I invited them into the house. When they saw the child they fell down and worshipped him. They opened their treasures and presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Afterwards they told us their experience. They had seen the star in the East. They told us how Herod at Jerusalem had informed them that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem and how they had seen the star again. Then they left us to stay at the Inn.

"That night the angel of the Lord appeared to me again. He said: **'Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him:'** We left Bethlehem immediately and journeyed into Egypt. GOD had made provision for us through the gold which the Magi presented. We were not happy in Egypt and rejoiced greatly when the angel appeared again to me in a dream. He said: **'Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young child's life.'**

"We entered into the land of Israel but when I heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the place of his father Herod, I was afraid to dwell in Bethlehem. So we traveled to Nazareth where I gained employment as a carpenter. And there we brought up the child JESUS.

"I never dreamed that life would be so full when I took Mary for wife. The Lord was gracious to his humble servant. Of all the events, what stands out the most, is the fact that there was no room

for us in the Inn. The Messiah was born in a stable. At the time that pained my heart. But would it not be terrible if there were no room in the hearts of men for the Saviour which is CHRIST the Lord? There would be no salvation from sin. May the words of the angel be fulfilled to the Israel of GOD:

'He shall save his people from their sins.' "

~ end of chapter 1 ~
