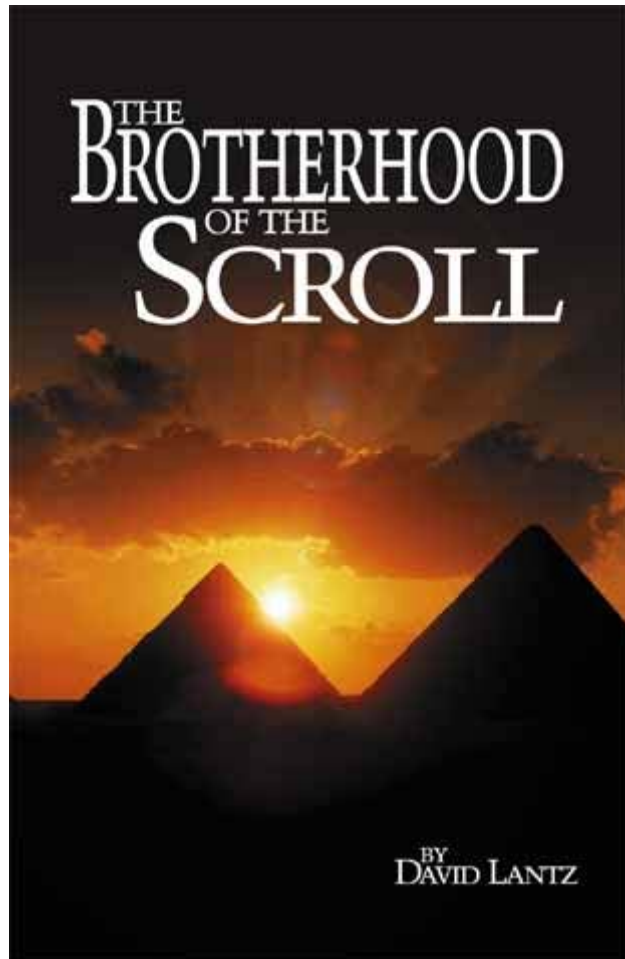


An Excerpt for



Excerpt Includes Prologue, List of Characters, and Chapters One and Two

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Prologue

Like a serpent's tongue, the fire flickered hungrily skyward, awaiting its next morsel. The screams of the last infant only an echo in the crowd's ears, they watched as the king stepped forth to receive the next baby. A young mother in a drugged stupor came forth and approached the king, her arms half cradling, half dangling, a crying baby boy.

"Oh great Dagon, Lord of the air, accept this sacrifice and bring rain to our land!" intoned Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah as he took the child from his mother's arms. Accepting the baby, the king carried it up the altar's steps to the waiting Pashur, the Chief Priest of the Temple of Solomon.

Pashur took the infant and turned to face the [Topheth](#). The flame, having retreated into the pit of the idol's belly, awaited its next victim. Its outstretched arms still glowed a dull red from the intense heat they had absorbed. Poised to place the baby boy in the Topheth's arms, Pashur froze as a booming voice called out to him from the fringes of the crowd.

"Stop, you adulterous murderer. Spare this innocent blood!" From beyond the arch of light cast by the idol's fire, an old, slightly stooped man stepped forth. He grasped a staff with a weathered hand, pointing an accusing finger at Pashur. His bearing demonstrated a physical power which, though faded from its youthful prime, spoke clearly of a man used to having his commands obeyed. Stepping closer so that Jehoiakim and Pashur could see who now addressed them, Uriah the prophet, son of Shemaiah, pointed his staff at the two leaders of Judah.

"By day, you worship the God of Abraham and Moses. By night, you gather at the Topheth to shed innocent blood in the worship of foreign gods." His lips curling into a sneer, Uriah's eyes swept the crowd, reminding them of their own guilt in this matter. "Listen to the word of the Lord, you rulers of Judah, you citizens of Jerusalem! The Lord God of Israel will bring a terrible evil upon this place, so terrible that the ears of those who hear it will shrivel up. You, oh Israel, have forsaken Me and turned this valley into a place of slaughter. The kings of Israel have filled this place with the blood of innocent children!"

Uriah approached the idol as he spoke, the king's guards standing transfixed, unable to lift a sword to stop him. Reaching the [Topheth](#), he turned to face the crowd as he pointed his staff at [Jehoiakim](#) and Pashur. "They have built high altars to Dagon, and there they burn their sons in sacrifice. The day is coming, declares the Lord, when this valley shall no longer be

called 'Topheth' or 'Ben-Hinnom Valley,' but 'The Valley of Slaughter.' I will let invading armies kill you here and leave your dead bodies for vultures and wild animals to feed upon. I will see to it that your enemies lay siege to the city until all food is gone, and those trapped inside begin to eat their own children and friends."

"Enough!" roared Jehoiakim. Seeing Pashur had not moved since Uriah had spoken, the king tore the child from his hands. "Silence that madman and take him away," Jehoiakim shouted to his guards. Turning to face the idol, a sickening grin darkened his face as he placed the screaming child onto the outstretched hands of the Topheth. In response, flames leapt up to devour their newest victim. Galvanized by Jehoiakim's actions, the soldiers swarmed over Uriah, beating him senseless as they carried him away.

"Remember Uriah, My servant, and walk in his sandals," said the voice of the Lord to a praying Jeremiah.

Pitchfork in hand, the man stood his ground as the Babylonian horseman rode him down. With a sweeping arc of his sword, the warrior decapitated the brave, hapless father. The invader's eyes shifted to the man's screaming wife, running from her house, child clutched to her bosom. Spurring his steed onward, the Babylonian raised his sword in anticipation of claiming his next victim. Throughout Jerusalem, his fellow warriors wreaked similar destruction.

In the distance, the Temple of Solomon burned as the Babylonian invaders completed their destruction of the City of David. The Captain of King Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard watched from his command post overlooking the city of Jerusalem. The treachery of Judah's king, [Zedekiah](#), had left him no choice but to order the destruction of the city. Now, as his lieutenants approached with their captive firmly in hand, a smile managed to brighten his grim-faced countenance. His men were bringing him the one man he had hoped to find.

"Leave us," Naaman commanded after his guards finished hauling the prophet Jeremiah before him, dashing him to the ground. "I wish to speak with this man alone." As the Babylonian guards withdrew, Naaman dismounted his horse to assist the prophet to his feet.

"The Lord your God has brought this destruction upon your people, just as He said He would. It is because of your people's sin that your temple now crumbles in flames. You know this, do you not?"

Jeremiah shivered, the chains binding his hands and feet making a clanking sound as he did so. The Babylonian's voice held a trace of sadness he had not expected. His mind, dulled by weeks of starvation and now the brutality of his captors, tried to force his lips to ask how this Babylonian knew about the God of Israel. Wracked with pain and exhaustion, he could but nod his head and grunt in acknowledgement of what the man had said.

[Naaman](#) withdrew a key from his belt and began to remove Jeremiah's chains. He continued, saying, "I am willing to make you an offer – you, and you alone of your people. I am freeing you. You may come with me to Babylon if you wish. If so, you will be fed and well cared for. If you do not wish to come with me, then you are free to come or go as you please. If you stay, go to Gedaliah. He has been appointed governor of Judah by my king, Nebuchadnezzar. It is up to you."

Naaman turned to his horse and reached into the pouch of his saddle. Withdrawing its contents, he turned back again to Jeremiah. "Here is food and gold. Take it and do as you will."

Jeremiah took the food and money. Then, the vision of the Captain of the Babylonian bodyguard dimmed from his sight.

"Remember, though Jerusalem be destroyed, yet a remnant will remain that will follow Me. Go and prepare, Jeremiah, for that time," said the voice of the Lord to a praying Jeremiah.

The old, hunched-back man arranged his thin white hair behind his ear to keep it out of his eyes as he unrolled the Scroll. Across the table from him sat the conqueror of Babylon, the ruler of the world.

"Oh great king," intoned Belteshazzar the Magi. "Behold the Scroll which from olden days foretold of your rise to power." With these words, a host of memories flooded Belteshazzar's mind. Chief among them was the vision of a day when a boy had carried this same scroll out of Jerusalem. In his mind's eye flashed the face of his mentor, dead these many years. Today began the consummation of a prophecy made years ago by that same man. In an instant flashed all the years, from then until now, as Belteshazzar considered the mission God had chosen him to execute. He leaned across the table to speak to his new liege-lord.

“Oh king, I have sworn loyalty to you, and you alone. Yet, there is a power in Heaven which even you must obey. Read now the words of the Scroll, and the commandment which the Lord of the Universe has spoken unto you.”

The king leaned forward to read the ancient scroll, written centuries before his birth. Upon seeing his own name recorded in the prophecy, his head jerked up, his eyes fixed questioningly on his chief Magi, Belteshazzar. “As it is written here, so shall it be. Go and fulfill the commandment of the Scroll,” said the king in a subdued whisper.

Rolling up the Scroll, Belteshazzar bowed his head and exited the room.

“This is the vision which I will bring about. Go now, and do as I have commanded you,” said the voice of the Lord to a praying Jeremiah.

With a start, Jeremiah’s eyes opened. His face determined, he knew he would not live to see the work of the Lord consummated. God had shown him how to begin. He would not walk this journey alone, but see God’s work completed by a holy Brotherhood of the Scroll.

Jeremiah rose. There was much he needed to do.

The Characters

Amhose: Vain and conceited, he disdains the Egyptian Pharaoh whose armies he commands.

Daniel: A disciple of Jeremiah, he must follow in his mentor's footsteps to lead his people in a foreign land.

Hamon: The Chief Priest of Babylon, he will stop at nothing to gain the throne.

Ithobal: King of Tyre who seeks to manipulate the fate of nations for his own gain.

Jeremiah: Born to be a messenger to his people, ever obedient to the Voice of the Lord.

Naaman: The Captain of the Babylonian Guard whose heart is conquered by the Queen of Ashkelon.

Nebuchadnezzar: A conquering king whose destiny has been foretold.

Timnah: Taken from her native Ashkelon, her thirst for revenge gives way to the power of love.

Troas: A Greek mercenary in the employ of Tyre who will use any means to complete his mission.

Part I

The Prophecy of the Scroll



In the third year of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, the Lord God raised up a Lion from the east, one Nebuchadnezzar. In that same year, King Nebuchadnezzar led Babylon at a place called Carchemish, and there defeated the Egyptians. Though he did so in the name of his god, Marduk, the king of the Babylonian gods, the God of the Hebrews had in fact ordained his steps. Nebuchadnezzar's comings and goings were prophesied by the Voice of the Lord, Jeremiah of Anathoth. Here begins the account of how the God of the Universe caused the Children of Israel to go in exile to the land of the Chaldeans.

The Chronicles of Belteshazzar

Chapter 1

A steady flow of pilgrims made its way toward the Gate of Benjamin, the northern gateway to the Temple of Solomon. Unnoticed among the throng of people, Baruch said to his companion, "It is not too late, we can still turn back."

"I told you before, the Lord has called me to speak out. Now is the time. This is the place. You don't have to come with me if you don't want to." Jeremiah's gaze did not lift from the dusty ground in front of him as they proceeded.

"I won't abandon you. I just don't want to see you end up like Uriah," Baruch replied.

A tear escaped Jeremiah's eye and trickled down his wrinkled sun-scorched face before being captured in the tangle of his beard. With his head bowed to hide his sadness, thoughts of his old friend, Uriah, flashed through Jeremiah's mind. From the

start of Jehoiakim's reign in Jerusalem, they had both spoken out against the atrocities committed by this king - a man long suspected of having conspired with the Egyptians to gain the throne of his late father, King Josiah. Since ascending to the throne three years ago, Jehoiakim had prostituted the faith, and sold Israel's soul in exchange for Egyptian riches. Uriah, older and more brash than Jeremiah, had gone into the Valley of Ben-Hinnom during the first year of Jehoiakim's reign to deliver a withering proclamation against the king as he sacrificed to Dagon. Uriah had spoken out for all to hear his words at the foot of the Topheth, their idol.

And for that, Uriah had paid with his life. Never had any prophet been killed by the political powers of Israel. But Uriah had. Indeed, Uriah had learned of Jehoiakim's plan to take his life and had fled to Egypt, but the king used his ties to Pharaoh to have Uriah taken prisoner and brought back to Jerusalem for execution. And Pashur, the First Keeper of the Door, had not said a word! So blinded by the profits from trade with the Egyptians were Jehoiakim and the Temple Priests that they would do everything to safeguard their position, including murder.

Now Jeremiah was about to follow in Uriah's footsteps. Would the Lord protect him as he went forward to proclaim the Word that the Voice of the Lord compelled him to utter? He said a silent prayer, ignoring the urge to turn and retrace his steps back across the viaduct over which he had just traversed. He looked at his friend and faithful servant, Baruch, who at forty-two, was two years his senior. Baruch had willingly followed him since their boyhood days growing up in Anathoth. It had been Baruch's plan that Jeremiah's young teenage disciples, [Daniel](#) and Ezekiel, accompany them on this day. "If you insist on going to the temple on this suicide mission, at least allow us to provide a plan of escape for you, God willing," he had said. As usual, Jeremiah left those concerns to Baruch. When the Lord prompted him to action, his only thoughts were the accomplishment of the task at hand.

They entered the [Court of the Gentiles](#), a large outer area surrounding the temple proper and its inner courts. Here, Hebrews and non-Hebrews alike gathered in a space comprising a little more than twenty acres. Various kiosks were set up for pilgrims to purchase animals at the last minute for sacrifice by the temple priests. Arriving just a little before noon, Jeremiah and his friends found the day's activity at its highest. The Hebrews were celebrating [Succoth](#), the Feast of Tabernacles. Many were coming to Jerusalem, and hence to the temple. It had been a good year, and the Hebrew pilgrims enjoyed the fruits of their harvest as they gave thanks to the Lord. Because Succoth

was in the second day of a weeklong celebration, many pilgrims and their families were already here. Small groups dotted the court, as rabbis and scribes taught from the Torah, the Book of the Law. For those not concerned with the fate of the nation of Judah, and the spiritual state of her people, it was a joyous time.

[Jeremiah](#) and Baruch came to the low stone wall that surrounded the inner courts of the temple. Called the Soreq, it stood five feet tall and surrounded the consecrated Temple area. Its purpose was to signify a barrier beyond which no Gentile might pass. As they entered the gate that would take them into the Court of the Women, Jeremiah glanced up at the inscription on the arch, which read:

“Any Gentile found within the enclosure of the Temple area will bear the responsibility of his own ensuing death.”

Jeremiah turned to Baruch. “For your own safety, leave me now.”

Baruch looked into his friend’s eyes, but knew that it was no use arguing. “I will not be far away,” he replied. Baruch looked around them. Only the temple guards were present in this area. Thus, anything that happened would be under the jurisdiction of the priests, not the king. He caught the eyes of Daniel and Ezekiel. On silent cue, the two teenagers split up and merged into the milling crowd. He turned back to Jeremiah. “God be with you,” he said.

“And with you,” replied Jeremiah as he watched his friend blend into the crowd. He looked up at the early autumn sun and felt its warmth on his cheek. Slowly but intently, he began to work his way to the center of the Court of the Women. At the western end of the court was a semi-circular staircase leading up to the Nicanor Gate, which led into the next court called the Court of the Israelites. Within that area, no woman was allowed. Jeremiah and Baruch had discussed this subject, and decided it was unwise to go beyond that point. At the top of the staircase, he saw Pashur, the First Keeper of the Door. He mentally spat on the ground, for to do so physically would be to profane the holy ground on which he walked.

The [Court of the Women](#) was crowded with people watching the priests carrying water from the pool of Siloam to the inner altar of the Priest’s Court for the water purification ceremony. The pool trapped water which flowed from the Spring of Gihon through the tunnel King Hezekiah had dug over a century ago to insure a supply of water to the people of Jerusalem in times of attack. Carrying palm branches, the people cried out continuously:

The Lord save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
From the House of the Lord, we bless you! The Lord is God, and He has
made His light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festival
procession up to the horns of the altar!

The noise around Jeremiah was deafening. It took time to push his way through the mass of people waving palm branches as the priests proceeded to the Nicanor Gate and into the inner recesses of the temple. At last he came to his destination: One of the three raised daises, about six feet in diameter, in the center of the court. Jeremiah faced the gate leading to the inner courts of the temple. Until now, he had walked with a stoop, but now he pulled back the hood of his cloak and stood to his full six-foot frame. He caught Pashur's eye and allowed a slight smile to flit briefly across his lips before lifting his face to heaven and stretching out his arms.

"For the last twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah, the son of Amon, King of Judah to this day, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken to you over and over, but you have not listened!" Jeremiah paused and watched as Pashur stopped what he was doing and called an aide to his side. The people nearest him also ceased their chanting and turned their attention to him. Even some of the rabbis in their small groups had stopped and looked up to hear what Jeremiah would say next.

"You haven't listened to the Lord, who has commanded you, saying 'Do not serve other gods, which are but the mere work of your hands. Therefore I am about to pour out my wrath upon you,' declares the Lord." Jeremiah paused again. Now people were coming to him to listen to his words. More than two hundred surrounded the dais on which he stood. He could see temple guards begin to move on the perimeter of the court. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Daniel milling about with a group of about twenty youths of his age. While the sight of his young friend registered with his subconscious, it did not distract him from what he had to say.

"...Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will exile the families of Judah. Even now, I am gathering all the armies of the north under Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, whom I have appointed my servant. I will bring them against this land and its people. I will bring them against all the nations surrounding you, to destroy them.'" The crowd was beginning to grow restless. This

was the point which Baruch had feared, had begged Jeremiah not to make. Not here. Not in public. Many believed that the Lord would never allow such a thing to befall His people and His temple.

They were wrong.

“This whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. With fire he shall consume this Temple, and all ...” A roar went up from the crowd. A hand grabbed him from behind, dragging him off the dais. Jeremiah struggled, but his assailants wrestled him backwards, wrenching his shoulder. Suddenly, the wind was knocked out of him as his back hit the ground below, his head slamming into the cobblestones. As he was dragged into the midst of the crowd, darkness surrounded him. Jeremiah struggled to retain consciousness, and failed.

* * *

“That man must die! We can’t allow him to say the things he is saying without suffering the wrath of Pharaoh Necho.” [Jehoiakim](#), King of Judah, glared at the priests and rabbis gathered about him. Fools! They had no understanding of the intricacies of international politics. Without Egypt to protect them from the creeping threat from Babylon, the lucrative trade through the pass of Megiddo - not to mention the trade with the merchants of Tyre and Sidon - would be imperiled.

It had been three and one half years since he’d taken the throne from his weak brother, Jehoahaz, with the help of his Egyptian sponsors. From that time forward, he had used his position to prepare his people for a new, cosmopolitan Judah. Their infatuation with an uncompromising religion had blinded them to the need to be pragmatic. Only by compromising with Judah’s more powerful neighbors could his country hope to regain the greatness of King David’s time. To build his vision of a New Jerusalem, he had killed a prophet who had stood in his way once before - Uriah. Jehoiakim had no problem doing so again.

“Pashur acted wisely in stopping Jeremiah and putting him in the stockade,” said Ahikam. Jehoiakim turned to eye the old man, who had been an advisor to his father Josiah. It had been Ahikam who had prevented him from having Jeremiah executed when he first took the throne three years ago. But that was then, and this was now, and Jehoiakim’s power was much greater. “The king should allow him to go his way as is the law for a man who has been flogged and publicly rebuked in the stockade,” continued

Ahikam. He met the king's stare and did not blink, while keeping his own countenance placid, revealing nothing of the emotional churning in his stomach.

"Jeremiah has already prophesied falsely concerning Babylon." All eyes turned to Shemaiah, who rose to speak out against Ahikam's counsel. The contempt which the two rival prophets held for each other was well known, as Shemaiah and Jeremiah had frequently locked horns, particularly over Judah's dealings with Egypt. Along with his younger associate, Hananiah, Shemaiah never missed an opportunity to disparage Jeremiah's words. "Though Babylon appears to be on the ascendancy, the Lord will clearly aid Egypt to prevail and elevate the House of David," he continued. "Thus, Jeremiah is a false prophet and must meet with the fate of a false prophet."

Jehoiakim smiled to himself. Without hesitation, he seized the opportunity afforded him by Shemaiah. "In the morning, we shall take him down from the stockade and imprison him. Then, when Necho defeats Babylon, we shall have him stoned to death just as the Law of Moses requires! Let us retire to our chambers and take this action at dawn." With that, the king rose and left the room, leaving the rest to realize that they had just been made party to a conspiracy to kill a prophet of God.

Ahikam left quickly, but discretely, and sought out his son, Gedaliah. As chief scribe, he was responsible for keeping the scrolls and overseeing their recopying. He was also the one who scheduled the reading of the sacred books in the Temple. His had been an honored position in the time of King Josiah, Jehoiakim's father. But in recent years, his influence had waned. He must now do what he could to save Jeremiah's life, which unfortunately, was very little.

Making his way from the King's palace to the Temple of Solomon, Ahikam found his son in the temple library. "I need you to act quickly," he told Gedaliah. "Seek out Baruch and tell him that Jeremiah is to be thrown into prison at dawn. He must be freed before first light if he is to live to an old age. I will seek out some of our friends among the Rechabites and see what aide they might give us." He looked at his son, a man of gentle spirit. One who never grew angry at those around him, he was a good man, but too trusting.

"Fear not, father. I will find Baruch. This isn't the first time that Jeremiah has gotten himself in trouble with the powers that be, and I'm sure it won't be the last."

[Hamath](#) was a provincial capitol of the Assyrian Empire - at least, what was left of it. Just over sixty years had passed since Assyria had launched an invasion of Egypt.

That invasion had resulted in the fall of Thebes and the subjugation of the Egyptians. But in the last thirty years, the Egyptians had driven the Assyrians back. Now, in an ironic twist of fate, the Egyptians were coming to the rescue of their former enemies. Babylon was on the march from the east. Ninevah, the capitol of Assyria, had fallen. So too had Haran, their northern provincial capitol. Weakened though Assyria was, Pharaoh Necho wanted to preserve her as a buffer zone between Egypt's vassal states and the advancing barbarians from Chaldea. If Assyria fell, Jerusalem was only slightly more than a fortnight's march away. Along with Judah, Tyre, Ashkelon and other kingdoms would come under the spreading evil. Then, nothing would stand in the way of an invasion southward toward the Third Kingdom. It was for this reason that Egypt had decided in the last several years to come to Assyria's aide.

[Amhose](#) could smell the salt scent of the breeze blowing off the Great Sea, less than-days march to the west away. As [Necho's](#) commanding general, he was pleased with the power he held in his hand. Arrayed behind him were 100,000 soldiers - mostly Egyptian, but numbering in their ranks were Greek mercenaries, Nubians and Libyans. Their mission was to march north to Carchemish, where a large Egyptian garrison had been harassed in recent months by the Babylonian scourge. Under his leadership, they had slowly wrested territory away from the Chaldeans (Osiris be praised!). In a display of typical overconfidence, their king Nabopolassar had returned to Babylon last year. Amhose had immediately overrun the garrison the Babylonians had left at Qurumati. All the Babylonian dogs had been put to the sword.

But now Nabopolassar's brash son, Nebuchadnezzar, was harassing the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish. Located on the Euphrates river, the garrison controlled a key choke point on one of the most important rivers in the world. Amhose's orders were to march his army north to Carchemish, relieve the garrison and wipe out the invaders. To move this army to its destination would take four more days. He had led his army out of Hamath two days before, and had encountered only scattered bands of Chaldeans since. Amhose had no doubt that they would quickly dispatch the raiders near Carchemish when he arrived. Once he had secured the garrison, he was to then march southeast along the Euphrates toward Babylon. Necho wanted him to strike the barbarians directly by laying siege to the enemy's capitol.

[Amhose](#) wiped away the sweat from his balding pate, cursing the onset of middle age which not only marred his youthful looks, but also was beginning to add inches to his waist. He had risen quickly through the ranks to become the general of

Pharaoh's armies. At the age of thirty-two, he was ruthless, afraid of nothing. Yet this last plan was insane. It was a mad plan dreamed up by a middle aged king who liked to play soldier. In truth, Necho had no idea what real soldiers did. But the invasion of Babylon was another issue - one with which he would deal when the time came. Amhose looked up at the sky. It would be dark in a few hours. He would give the order to halt once they had crested the next hill. Though expecting no trouble, he would make sure that every precaution to secure the camp was taken.

Amhose shifted his attention to several approaching riders. As they drew near, he could see they were an advance scouting party returning from their search for signs of the enemy. His personal guard had met them and were escorting them to his carriage. Amhose motioned the driver to stop, and bade his servants bring water to the scouts. They reined in their steeds and dismounted, immediately bending to one knee and saluting their general. "Rise and report," commanded Amhose.

"My lord, we came across 5,000 Babylonians a day and a half ride from here. They were camped at the foot of Mt. Tadmor, and were preparing to break camp when we came upon them."

"Were you seen?" Amhose asked the chief scout. While he was sure the man was a capable officer - Amhose could not recall his name - the general would be derelict in his duty if he did not ask this question.

"No, my Lord," the scout replied.

"You are certain?" Amhose saw the scout captain stiffen at the implied lack of faith in his abilities. A good sign - a display of hesitancy would have shown his next statement to be a lie.

"We were not seen, Lord Amhose," the scout said slowly and distinctly so there could be no misunderstanding of his answer - or his disgust that the question had been asked.

Amhose eyed the captain. His scouting party of twelve were strong, sure warriors. He was content that the information the man carried was accurate. He decided to ask the scout his assessment of the situation.

"What do you believe the enemy is up to?"

The scout paused to consider his words, then answered. "As you know, [Mt. Tadmor](#) is located near the Karasu river, a tributary to the Euphrates. There are several explanations for why they were there. The most likely explanation is that they were one

of the raiding parties which had been harassing [Carchemish](#) - if not the only raiding party.”

“What makes you think they had been involved in a raid on Carchemish?”

“They were tending to their wounded and appeared to have been there for at least a week. However, if we don’t act quickly, their trail will grow cold by the time we return to where they were camped.”

Amhose looked away at his army. Like ants moving over the face of the earth, so his soldiers were moving north toward Carchemish. He looked in the direction of the Third Corps, twenty thousand of his most capable troops. “I am ordering the Third Corps to march toward Mt. Tadmor and pursue the Babylonians. We will follow with the main army.” He turned to the scout. “You will report to General Ptah and guide him to where you spied the Chaldeans.”

“Yes, my lord,” replied the scout. He went, along with Amhose’s chief of staff to convey the order.

* * *

General Ptah had a reputation for being a glory hunter. A quarry was loose and he wanted the honor of the kill. In his late forties and the most capable military leader in Amhose’s command, Ptah would become his replacement should anything happen to the young commanding general. Ptah examined the site of the Babylonian encampment. He had led his men at a forced march to arrive here in less than a day since the order to proceed had been given. According to the report he’d received from his scouts, the Egyptians were now about six hours behind the retreating Babylonians. They have headed north, toward Carchemish, a little over a day’s march from here. Assuming their destination was the garrison, they would be there by mid afternoon tomorrow.

Ptah calculated quickly. It was now about four o’clock. His company would arrive by nightfall tomorrow. The garrison at Carchemish housed 10,000 warriors. Therefore, the Babylonians would be caught between two superior forces, with the main Egyptian army two days behind. No doubt, there were other Babylonian units in the area. However, they would be focused on the Egyptian garrison and be unprepared for the approaching reinforcements. Ptah’s main concern was to prevent the smaller, and therefore more mobile, Babylonian force from escaping his grasp.

Ptah pulled out his map of the region. Not far from the garrison stood a wooded glen, just the place where a force of 5,000 men would attempt to hide unseen from the

walls of Carchemish a quarter league away. Ptah's main force should attack this wooded area just before dawn. If the Babylonians were encamped in this area, he would catch them sleeping. To the east lay the Euphrates, and a flat plain. To the west, mountains. Therefore, to prevent the Babylonians from escaping, Ptah decided to send his chariots to the east and his archers to the west. As he examined the map, Ptah marked where these two battalions, because of their greater mobility, would take up positions and await the arrival of the main force in the center near the glen.

Ptah looked at the map one more time, thinking through his plan. The main force of nearly 10,000 warriors would approach the glen just before daybreak a day and a half hence. That would give his foot soldiers and light cavalry about seven hours rest before engaging the enemy - which would have nowhere to run, as their backs would be to the garrison at Carchemish. By the time Amhose and the main contingent arrived about a day later, all should be secure. And, should there be any other Babylonian contingents in the area, the full army would be there to make sure they did not live out the week.

Satisfied, Ptah stood up. "Prepare to move out," he barked to his lieutenants, who ran to him to receive his orders. The general informed them of his plans, and then ordered that riders be sent to inform Amhose of his plans.

Ptah waved a scout to his side. "Take your finest men and scout the enemy position ahead. We will rendezvous at the glen," he commanded, and watched as he turned to obey. Already, the camp was alive with activity, as the Third Corps prepared to move out. With a grin Ptah contemplated the thrill of the hunt which was about to begin.

* * *

"Send the signal. Four battalions, a total of 20,000 men are on the move toward Carchemish," a crusty old Babylonian warrior whispered to the men around him. Near by, two scouts held a large mirror, while a third scout lifted a shield to first cover and then uncover the mirror to flash a signal to the patrol waiting about four leagues to the north. One, two, three, four. The commander continued talking to the other three Babylonian scouts under his command. "They will be sending scouting parties ahead of the main force. And, you can be certain that this is but the advance vanguard of a still larger army - perhaps headed by Pharaoh Necho himself."

A thousand feet above the departing Egyptians, the four Babylonian scouts hid in a cleft in the rock. Protected from observation from below, theirs was the last piece in a plan to trap the Egyptians. When the expected signal confirming receipt of the message

was received, the old warrior knew his job was ended until the main force was spotted.
He watched the Egyptians below him march off to their doom.

Chapter 2

Even at three o'clock in the morning, the city of Jerusalem bustled with activity.

New

pilgrims were arriving daily. Worshippers came to pray, sacrifice and study at the feet of the scribes at all hours of the day and night. Huddled against the chill of the night, Daniel relived the previous day's events.

As they had planned, he and Ezekiel had gathered some of their friends into two groups. They had planned to create a disturbance on Baruch's signal, at which time Baruch would spirit Jeremiah away and hide him in a flax basket that would be loaded on a cart and driven out of the temple courtyard. But they had miscalculated. Pashur had not allowed Jeremiah to finish his pronouncements. This was unheard of! Before Daniel could react, the temple guards had come behind Jeremiah and pulled him off of the dais. They had concealed their movements by joining the crowd that had swelled to listen to the Prophet of the Lord. Had he only reacted faster, he ...

"Daniel, snap out of it, we must act quickly!" Baruch looked down at him and shook him roughly on the shoulder. "Gedaliah has come to warn us that at first light, they plan to take Jeremiah down from the stockade and throw him into the temple dungeon. If we don't act to rescue him now, we won't have another chance."

"While you were dozing, we managed to gather about two dozen of our comrades to help us create a diversion," said Ezekiel, smiling his know-it-all smile as he pulled Daniel to his feet. While they were friends, it was little things like this that Ezekiel used to "put him in his place" because he came from a wealthy family. Because the prophecies of Jeremiah were unpopular with King Jehoiakim and the priests, all who followed him were in some danger. Ezekiel had his ways of questioning whether or not Daniel could take the heat. In truth, he feared the wrath of his father far more than the punishment of the authorities. But like any other seventeen year old, Daniel could not understand why his father couldn't see how the king and his puppet priests were corrupting the people. He hadn't yet been confronted with the need to compromise principles for immediate personal gain.

Baruch interrupted the exchange between the two teenagers. "The guard will be changing in the next half hour. We have that long to get in position and be ready to free Jeremiah. Let's go!" With that, Baruch marched off with Ezekiel close behind, leaving Daniel scurrying to catch up.

Jeremiah was in the stockade at the Gate of Benjamin. Located on the north side of the temple, it was so named because the Tribe of Benjamin had settled to the north of Jerusalem. The most prominent of the gates, it was the main area through which pilgrims would pass into the Court of the Gentiles. Even at this hour, small groups were awake and celebrating Succoth. One group of thirty or so was having a particularly good time, as they ate, drank and watched several women dance.

The stockades were an extremely uncomfortable device, used not only to embarrass the occupant, but inflict pain as well. Bending a man at the waist, his ankles and wrists were enclosed by wooden shackles, thereby exposing his back. Jeremiah had been whipped forty times, less one, as prescribed by the Law of Moses. He remained unconscious in the grip of the stockade. It was Baruch's plan for Daniel and Ezekiel to create a diversion and draw the temple guards away long enough for him to free Jeremiah and secret him away in a cart filled with baskets of flax.

"Behold, the Lord will send terror on you and all your friends, and you will see them die by the swords of their enemies." On cue from Baruch, Daniel began shouting at Ezekiel to provoke a fight. As planned, the two groups of youths began to form a circle around the two friends as they prepared to stage a mock riot. "The Lord will hand over Judah to the king of Babylon, and he will take away these people as slaves to Babylon, where he will kill you and them." Daniel looked across the courtyard to see that the temple guards had taken notice of their performance. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the small group of pilgrims continuing their festivities, more engrossed with the gyrations of several young women than with the confrontation thirty yards away.

"Deceiver of the innocent," shouted Ezekiel. "The temple is the Lord's holy dwelling, and he shall allow no harm to come to it!" With that, Ezekiel and Daniel locked arms in play-wrestling fashion. At once, the youths on both sides joined in the fray, and as expected, the temple guards moved to intervene.

Baruch knew he had only a few moments. Along with three associates, he moved quickly to free Jeremiah and carry him to the waiting cart of flax baskets. As they did so, Jeremiah stirred and looked up groggily into Baruch's eyes. "Wha, what's happening?" he mumbled up at him.

“Quiet, old friend. You’re being rescued. Now, stay in this basket, and no matter what happens, don’t make a sound!” Baruch slammed the lid on the basket and gave the signal for the driver to head out the gates.

By this time, the guards had entered into the mock-fight and were pulling the youths apart. The captain looked up to see the cart moving away from the now empty stockade. Precious seconds ticked off while the reality of what had just happened sank into his brain. Finally, he barked a command for his men to pursue the cart. Four guards disengaged themselves from the melee and took off to cross the fifty yard divide between themselves and the cart, which was quickly picking up speed. The lead guard cursed as a wagon pulled by two horses broke from the reveler’s campsite and headed straight into the pursuing soldiers. Atop the wagon were a man and woman seemingly drunk, yet at the same time guiding the vehicle into the guards, knocking two of them to the ground. After coming to a stop, the woman began to dance suggestively in the bed of the wagon, to the catcalls of the man.

With the temple guards in momentary disarray, a small caravan entered through the Gate of Benjamin. Baruch, acting on impulse, slapped the lead horse of a team pulling a wagon filled with goods. The startled horse jumped forward and led its team toward the guards who had finally gotten around the partygoers’ cart. Three of the guards were able to dive out of the way of the errant wagon, but the fourth, already limping from the previous encounter, was unable to move quickly enough. With a scream he was crushed by the careening wagon as the horses pulling it collided with him, the left wheels rolling over his limp body as the horses veered right. The combination of the two actions caused the wagon to overturn and slide to a stop just a few feet from a stunned Daniel.

Now the entire courtyard was in turmoil. The group of pilgrims had halted their party and were stumbling over to see what was happening. The guards who had taken after the fleeing cart were now tending to their fallen comrade. Daniel, Ezekiel and their young friends ran from the scene, managing to draw a few guards after them. Baruch jumped onto the cart carrying Jeremiah as it exited the city into the open beyond the gate.

A league outside the city, they came to where the personal coach of [Gedaliah](#) stood waiting. “Praise the Lord, you are here! We almost didn’t get out,” Baruch said to Gedaliah as they switched the basket containing Jeremiah with one in Gedaliah’s

carriage. "Had it not been for a band of drunken partiers who disrupted the guards, we would have all been caught."

"They weren't drunk; those were [Rechabites](#). They do not drink. My father contacted them while we were making our plans to free Jeremiah. He gave them orders to assist in his rescue. If they fooled you into thinking they were drunk, then they indeed performed their task well." Gedaliah examined the basket containing Jeremiah one more time to make sure that it was secure. As he did so, his driver prepared the horse they had brought for Baruch, while the driver of the other cart began to pull away and head off away from the direction Gedaliah would take.

"Take care of Jeremiah," Baruch said, mounting his horse. "I will ride ahead and prepare for your coming. We will gather at the Inn of the Two Rams as we planned. God be with you."

"And with you," Gedaliah replied. Baruch took off, leaving his friend to follow.

The signal for which they had been waiting finally came. Mag, the commanding Babylonian scout clapped his hands and shouted to his companions, "Look, the Egyptians are on the move!" The rest looked up. In the distance, the advance patrol signaled from its hiding place on Mt. Tadmor the impending advance of the Egyptians. One, two, three, four. Each flash representing a cohort of 5,000 men at arms. A force of 20,000. He turned to the youngest of their band. "Ride and take word of the news to King Nebuchadnezzar and Lord Naaman while we signal receipt of the message," Mag said as he positioned his mirror. "The rest of us will split up and tell the other patrols to prepare for the advancing scouts. The trap has been sprung!" The small band of scouts gathered themselves to go their separate ways, setting in motion the plan which Nebuchadnezzar and Naaman had devised. Like all great plans, its beauty was its simplicity.

A cohort of 5,000 troops had camped out on the southern side of Mt. Tadmor to await its "discovery" by the Egyptian scouts known to be in the area. Once certain they had taken the bait and sent a corps to engage the Babylonians, the cohort moved north toward Carchemish. Babylonian forces had divided into three armies of forty thousand men each; one at the garrison at Carchemish which they had already over run. One to the east near the Euphrates, and the third to the west in the foothills of the [Amanos Mountains](#). A fourth force of 5,000 men - the "bait" - would be encamped near the glen within sight of the garrison. If, as was likely, the Egyptians split their forces in the hope

of making sure the Babylonians did not “escape,” their annihilation would be made all the more easy.

* * *

“I think it only fitting that we present the Egyptians with this gift, don’t you, [Naaman](#)?” asked Nebuchadnezzar with a sweeping wave of his arm indicating a mound in the center of the battlefield before them. “Ironic, isn’t it, that the very people they came to assist should be the inspiration for this gesture!”

Naaman regarded the prince, who was clearly pleased with himself. At twenty-two, Nebuchadnezzar had proven to be a superb military tactician. While his father, Nabopolassar, had been conservative in his tactics, the son was calculatingly aggressive. A week ago they had overrun the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish - something King Nabopolassar had never attempted. Then, Naaman had been dispatched to Mt. Tadmor with a force of 5,000 to serve as bait for the advancing Egyptians. As Nebuchadnezzar had anticipated, an advance force had been dispatched. Like fools, the Egyptian commander had divided his force of 20,000. The Babylonians had diverted a tributary of the Euphrates, built an earthen dam and then released the flood gates to mire the Egyptian chariots as they advanced over the flood plain near the river. Unable to move, they were easily destroyed by the Babylonian corps dispatched to meet them. The Egyptian archers sent to the western flank had been ambushed in the foothills of the Amanos Mountains. The main Egyptian force had emerged from the wooded glen a quarter league from the garrison. There, Naaman had stood ready with his command, the palace guard. Behind him rose up 40,000 soldiers under the command of Nebuchadnezzar. Other elements of the Babylonian army burned the glen behind the advancing Egyptians. It had been a slaughter. Within an hour, not one Egyptian remained alive.

“Your gift is as ingenious as it is magnanimous. You have taken the lives of an entire Corps of their army, but have graciously provided the Egyptian commander with their heads!” They both laughed at Naaman’s sarcasm. Their laughter faded as the first lines of the advancing Egyptians appeared two furlongs away.

“This is the moment we have waited for,” said Nebuchadnezzar with a gleam in his eyes. “Today begins the downfall of the Egyptian hegemony. A new world order is about to dawn and I, Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, will be the one who brings it about!”

“Our scouts report about 80,000 soldiers compared to our 120,000. They do not know our strength, and are likely unaware of the two corps we have waiting on the eastern and western flanks,” said Naaman. Between themselves and the advancing Egyptians stretched a relatively flat plain three times as long as it was wide. The Babylonians held the higher ground, which sloped gently down for about 400 yards before leveling out on the grassy field where the impending battle would be fought. A series of basalt pillars standing one hundred feet high served as the boundary on the western edge of the battle field. Hidden there was a full corps of Babylonian soldiers, including 3,000 chariots. A dried river bed lay at the eastern edge of the field. Hidden there was another corps of infantry. In the middle of the field stood the mound of which Nebuchadnezzar had been so proud.

A rider broke from the Egyptian ranks and approached the mound of heads. The Babylonians had chosen a depression in the field in which to place them. Like the Assyrians before them, Nebuchadnezzar’s army had left the heads of their fallen enemy in full view to serve as a warning to their countrymen. Moments after the rider rejoined the front of the Egyptian line, the Babylonians witnessed a ripple effect as the news passed down the ranks of the opposing force.

Nebuchadnezzar raised his arm, sword in hand. “For the glory of our God, Marduk, advance! Drummer, one quarter beat!” The drummer began a slow beat as the army advanced across the field. On the wings of the advancing army were two battalions of chariots. The center consisted of three battalions of foot soldiers. Behind them stood two battalions of archers. The Babylonians began to advance down the slope toward the Egyptians. With this geographic advantage, the archer’s arrows could provide a withering air attack before the chariots, followed by the infantry, advanced. “The Egyptians don’t appear to be advancing with the same assuredness we have seen them in previous campaigns,” Nebuchadnezzar observed to those around him. “Only the Greek mercenaries appear to be holding formation.”

Naaman looked at the Greek mercenary battalion. Little more than a bow shot away, the Greek banner came into clearer view. Professional soldiers all, breaking their unit would be the key to victory. Further back, the banner of Osiris - signaling the location of the Egyptian commander - could be seen. Their intelligence indicated that Lord Amhose led them. No doubt Amhose would be indignant over the fact that Pharaoh Necho remained safely away from the battle.

“We are now in range for the archers. Give the order to launch their volleys,” commanded Nebuchadnezzar.

The king’s Sergeant at Arms gave the order. “Loose arrows!” A corporal waived a flag with the emblem of arrows embroidered onto it. In a deft display of archery, the bow men drew arrows from their quivers, notched their bows and fired in unison while marching forward. Three volleys of arrows were on their way and buried in the chests of Egyptian warriors before they countered with their move. The middle parted and their chariots advanced. Like the Babylonians, each chariot carried a driver and an archer.

“Chariots, advance!” commanded Nebuchadnezzar. Again, the Sergeant at Arms gave the order, and the Babylonian chariots surged forward to meet the challenge in the middle of the field separating the two armies. “Order the reserves on the right and left flanks to advance,” Nebuchadnezzar called out to his aides. An archer, standing near by lit his arrow and pointed it skyward, and loosed the shaft. He immediately drew, notched and lit a second arrow, launching it skyward in the direction of the other flank. After a few moments delay, Babylonian cavalry advanced onto the field from both the eastern and western edges of the battle field. Behind them marched the accompanying infantry.

Nebuchadnezzar smiled as he watched the opposing armies merge in a deadly dance. “Naaman, it is time to join the battle in full,” he said. “Drummer, sound full advance. Head for the center of their line!” With that command, the main force of the Babylonian army advanced at a trot. It was the assignment of the Palace Guard to protect Nebuchadnezzar. Unlike his father, this was a difficult task, for the prince enjoyed the heat of battle.

Naaman scanned the Egyptian line as he jogged forward to battle. The Greeks were clearly trying to angle toward the Banner of [Marduk](#), signaling the location of Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonian ranks. With a clash, the lines of warriors were engaged. A spear lunged for his gut. He parried and then spun inward toward his opponent wheeling his sword in an arch which met with the head of the enemy. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw three guards defending Nebuchadnezzar against four Greeks. The Prince could not be kept from the fray, but weighed in with his double handed sword. Naaman slashed his way toward the prince’s side. At that moment, one of the Greeks smashed the Babylonian closest to Nebuchadnezzar and was upon the prince. Wielding his sword above his head, he brought it down with a speed which seemed impossible for a man of his girth. Nebuchadnezzar, able only to partially deflect

the blow, took the side of the sword against his head. As he crashed to the ground, Naaman bellowed for help and charged the Greek.

At six feet, he was not a small man, yet still gave up fifty pounds and several inches to his new adversary. Charging him from the side, Naaman smashed his shield into the Greek's sword arm. Quickly, Naaman swung at his opponent's legs only to have his blow blocked by his sword. Immediately, the Greek brought his sword up in a 360 degree arch over his head and down at Naaman's skull. To avoid the blow, he tucked his head and rolled somersault fashion forward under the brute's left arm.

Now behind the Greek, he sprang to his feet and ran his sword into the man's back up to the hilt. The warrior slumped to one knee. Naaman ripped his sword from the man's body as the warrior collapsed, face forward into the dirt. Chest heaving, Naaman looked around him. Nebuchadnezzar was conscious, kneeling to gather his strength. His men had pushed the Greek mercenaries back. Their Egyptian masters were in complete disarray and running away from the field of battle. Naaman, though dizzy, was on his feet and cheering his men to pursue them. There would be much celebrating this night!

* * *

"A toast to Naaman! He sprung to my rescue and slew the Greek. Another moment, and he would have had my head!" Nebuchadnezzar raised his cup of wine in one hand and a leg of mutton in the other. The officers all around cheered, as much in drunken reaction to their prince's toast as their praise of the Captain of the Guard. "Speech, speech, good brave Naaman!" they called.

Naaman stood to tell his tale of the battle. It would be the first of many this night, as each of the warriors would recount their bravery in battle until they had drunk themselves into a stupor. There was no fear of the Egyptians returning to take advantage of their revelry. With over a third of their army destroyed, they were now on the run. In the morning, plans to pursue them would begin. "Prince Nebuchadnezzar, my comrades, thank you ..."

Naaman's speech was cut short as a rider arrived, coming to a stop from a dead gallop thirty yards from their banquet table. After speaking briefly with the perimeter guards, he ran up to Nebuchadnezzar. "My Lord Prince! My most humble apologies," the young man exclaimed. All eyes turned to the courier and away from Naaman. "I have come from Babylon with dire news."

Nebuchadnezzar rose from his seat. "What is the message?" Nebuchadnezzar asked softly, not really wanting to hear the news.

"Your father, King Nabopolassar, has died of a heart attack," replied the messenger. "The Council Elders have requested that you return at once to Babylon."

Nebuchadnezzar sat down in his chair. All the joy and excitement of just a few moments ago was gone. Though a man, at that moment Nebuchadnezzar looked like a small child whose world had been totally and utterly shattered. "Leave me. I must retire to my tent." Nebuchadnezzar got up and slowly crossed the yard to his tent. All eyes watched, but none rose to accompany him. He made his way slowly to his tent.

Inside his chambers, Nebuchadnezzar stood in the middle of the room staring into the shadows in one corner of the tent. What was he to do? Always before, there had been his father to turn to. To ask questions. To seek advice. Not now. Not ever again. Nebuchadnezzar would now be king. Though he had always known this must happen, he had had no idea it would be so soon. They could not now pursue the Egyptians as he had planned. In the morning, he would order Naaman to go and speak to some of Egypt's vassal states. They would now pay tribute to Babylon. After all, that had been a plan of his father's. But what would he do when he had carried out all his father's wishes? "Marduk, what will I do!" he cried out in anguish.

Nebuchadnezzar collapsed on his bed, and wept.

It had been over four hours since Gedaliah had spirited Jeremiah away. The prophet slept fitfully in the seat next to him. Looking outside his side window, Gedaliah was pleased to see that they had come to the Inn of the Two Rams. As they drove up, Baruch stepped out of the shadows.

"I am glad that you were able to make it unharmed," Baruch smiled and said to the younger man. "Quickly, drive round to the back. I will let you in. Our room is on the roof above."

Gedaliah instructed his driver to do as Baruch had said. He looked around. The inn appeared to be mostly deserted, but the travelers who were here would be rising soon, as would the sun. Now at the back of the building, Baruch met him and together they helped Jeremiah into the inner courtyard. They climbed up a ladder to the roof. There, along the walkway circling the courtyard below, they made their way to a room on a corner of the building. After making sure they were safely inside, Baruch left to water

and feed the horses. As soon as he had seen to the comfort of Jeremiah, Gedaliah collapsed and fell into a deep sleep.

* * *

“Wake up. We need to talk.” Gedaliah, startled into consciousness, tried to remember where he was and what he was doing. As Daniel set a plate of food and water before him, his mind connected with the events that had brought him here.

“Gedaliah, you look like you’ve had it worse than I,” Jeremiah said with a grin. The new tunic he wore covered the raw strips of flesh that had been torn from his back. He had awakened an hour or so ago when Daniel and Ezekiel had arrived. The latter displayed some knowledge of the healing arts and had dressed his wounds. While he had suffered greatly in the last twenty-four hours, his head was clear. The pain helped to keep him awake, if not totally alert. “We are safe. Our young friends were not followed here,” he said, reading the question on Gedaliah’s face. “Daniel, why don’t you tell our sleepy friend what you were just telling me a little while ago,” Jeremiah said as he reached for a cup of water.

“After you took off to bring Jeremiah here, and Baruch left to secure the room, I crept back into my house. There I slept in my bedchamber until dawn. I didn’t want my parents to know where I had been - they disapprove of my following Jeremiah’s teachings.” Daniel paused and looked at his teacher. Jeremiah smiled and nodded for him to continue.

“After a while, soldiers came to the door. My father - a scribe, like your father, Gedaliah - was quite upset that they should knock on our door. He learned they were conducting a house to house search for Jeremiah. After they left, he was furious with me, saying I must not involve myself with Jeremiah.” [Daniel](#) looked down at the ground. Ashamed that he had disobeyed his father, he was nevertheless angry that his parents could not see that Jeremiah was a true prophet of God. He was about to continue when, thankfully, Ezekiel continued the story.

“Daniel and I met at about noon and left Jerusalem, joining in with a departing caravan. Gedaliah, Jehoiakim is desperate to seize Jeremiah. He suspects your father of helping him. When you return, you must be careful. His evil knows no bounds.”

“Then I must leave at once!” Gedaliah said. “That way, if I am questioned, I can truthfully say that I do not know your plans. And ...,” he looked intently at his friends “...if you depart soon from this inn, I can also truthfully say that I don’t know where you are.”

“God honors your honest and gentle spirit,” Jeremiah said. “When you are ready, return to Jerusalem. By the time you arrive there, we will be gone.”

Gedaliah finished his meal and collected his scant belongings. Then, he made his farewells and descended the ladder to begin his trip back to Jerusalem.

“We put him and his father at great risk,” Baruch said as he watched him leave.

“Yes, that is true,” replied Jeremiah. “But the Lord keeps in perfect peace all those who trust in Him. Gedaliah and his father [Ahikam](#) will be preserved from Jehoiakim!” Jeremiah looked at his three friends. How much easier their lives would be if they could relinquish the cares that God had thrust upon them! But they could not refuse Jehovah God. He looked into their eyes and knew they drew strength from him just as he drew courage from them. “I was not able to complete my warning in the temple yesterday. For seventy years, Judah will be in exile in Babylon. The temple will be destroyed, and the nation shall be a horror and a desolation.” A tear trickled down Jeremiah’s cheek. The vision of that fateful day burned in his mind - but so did the promise of hope.

“But after seventy years, God will punish the king of Babylon. He will destroy the land of the Chaldeans, and Babylon shall be blotted out from the face of the earth. There is still time, if Jerusalem will repent, to put off this calamity. But even if the Lord does bring it to pass, Judah will be rescued, and Babylon cast down into everlasting darkness. Baruch, do you have the scroll?”

Baruch got up and went into the other room. After a few moments, he returned with a scroll which he handed to Jeremiah.

“Baruch and I have been writing this scroll,” Jeremiah said to the others. “It is almost finished. When it is done, Baruch will deliver it to Jehoiakim. It is my prayer that when it is read in his presence, he will repent. It is my prayer that he will then turn from his evil ways, he and the temple priests, and save Jerusalem.”

“And if he does not?” asked Ezekial.

Jeremiah looked at him as though the possibility had not even entered his mind. Slowly, he answered. “If he does not, we must still be faithful. We must be committed, in a sacred Brotherhood of the Scroll, to bear witness to what the Lord will do. To give our people hope and point the way of redemption for the remnant that will remain.” Jeremiah, exhausted from the effort of stating his case, fainted. The others laid him on some skins and checked his dressings.

“You two must return to Jerusalem,” said Baruch to Daniel. “I will take Jeremiah from here so that we may finish the scroll. At that time, I will signal you so that you may know what he wants you to do.”

“We’ll help you prepare to leave. Only when we know you also are safely on your way will we head back,” Daniel said.

“Very well. But let’s hurry. We don’t want Gedaliah to be caught in a lie if he’s forced to tell anyone he doesn’t know where we are!”

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