

Chapter I *A Journey of 2000 Years*



Jordan River, wikipedia.org

Sometimes, Time Itself seems to be the bearer of good news, and this is one of those good days. From this day forward, only you and I need listen to our tale. We have started a friendship that will never be denied, and I know you will listen to me, as I pass through the memories that have startled me until this very hour. Yes, startled! It's like standing and gazing into a mirror - you know where you are, but what you see is just as real. And this mirror is so clear that it seems the events are actually more real than my self. How, I ask, is this possible? So yes, it startles me even now

In the conclusion of my days, a bright light entered the world - a light that is still shining with intensity - perhaps too much intensity for this world of human frailty. The light came without a trumpet. But a herald was the start, and the finish must now be spoken from a personal point of view. For many have given their versions, and now I add mine to the record.

On a very fine day, with no heat other than the warmth of the sun, with no blowing wind, with no challenge from the mobs, I chose to visit the one who gave *absolution* to the common man. People had begun calling him "John the Baptist", and word had spread far and wide.

Donned in disguise (for I was a wealthy man), we began our walk to the river, right along with the pilgrims and the curious. I was not alone; my wife was still at my side, and following behind us were part of the brood that I fathered. Others were away in distant lands, offering the goods we had found to a growing world. My daughters were married: some to Gentile, and some to Jew. And all were interested in this man, the Prophet of the Messiah.

The distant river seemed further away this time; my legs were tired even before we left! But I told myself this was not to be missed, and that brought me the energy to carry me the distance.

In the middle of the day, we stopped to rest. Finding a place where we could be alone was a rare opportunity. So many were traveling toward the same destination, the river Jordan. The roads were indeed as crowded as if the highest of holy days was upon us! I turned my eyes toward a grove of trees that had not yet been occupied, only to spot a solitary man approaching the very same grove. But a single man could be persuaded to give us room, in the only shady place in sight! I was by now old enough to use my age as a plea for kindness!

I tipped my frame as deeply as I could (without too much pain in my old back), and asked for the space to settle my family down for our afternoon meal. And he, a gracious man, left his peaceful place. He settled at the very edge of the shade, without the soft sand to sit upon.

Although the rock did not seem to bother him, my daughters still filled a leather flask with water and a plate with food and took it to him, requesting his company, if he was in the mood for conversation. After we had all finished our meal and the day had started to cool a bit, he ventured the few steps over to our cook fire, and made his greeting.

He was a man of gentle beauty, fresh as though the heat did not bother him at all. I asked him where he came from, but in general terms, giving him the freedom to decline this question, as many do. Yet he seemed not to think it odd, and said he was from the region known as Galilee. He was on a pilgrimage - as we all seemed to be. But he had been stopping along the way, to gather a group of young men to follow him, asking them to meet him at the river, where the Prophet now spoke of the Messiah.

Some thought John was the Messiah. And perhaps he was, for who knows how God chooses his prophets, and how he will choose his Messiah?

He was now alone on the road, finding this time good after much debate and conversation: about the religion of the day; about the rule of Rome; about the conditions we all find appalling - ruthless men and faithless women, starving children, disease everywhere, and nothing to hold onto in a world seemingly gone mad.

Had God abandoned us?

Of course not! Only our faith was suffering - for our lagging behind in our steps toward his Grace.

These were words that I had not heard spoken. Of course it was a world gone mad! And, yes, it was a time for us all to find our way back into God's hands. But how we could find our way was always elusive. Yet this man seemed to have an answer. We spoke for some time, and though we had intended to continue our journey, we decided to settle in for the night.

He went back to his own robes, and in the morning he was gone. But his words floated in and out of my thoughts throughout the next day, as we traveled the rest of the way to the river

I was startled - yes, startled - to find this very man kneeling in the water right before me, to ask the Baptist for his blessing.

It was like a scene from an ancient text, like a dream coming back to reclaim me. It was the conclusion of the days I remember as *before*. From this day forward, it would always be *after*.

I lived from that day on forever changed. It was a glimpse into the future that could only exist for the start I had witnessed. What went *before* in this man's life? It was also concluded. As my role changed, so did his. As I challenged myself to pay attention to every detail, he challenged himself to be that which all men awaited. The Messiah was born on that day, right before my eyes. Yes - startled eyes.

Naturally, the one who stood in the water to give the blessing was equally commanding. With his glorious eyes and his spare, strong stance, there could be no doubt of his authority to grant this blessing. And his eyes revealed no surprise! Indeed, his look of recognition was quite well-defined.

I chose my position then. I would witness the lives of these two men, entwined in a fate that could only move forward. Destiny is no stranger to me! I learned that day that destiny could trample the soul, take hold of the body, and breathe itself into this world as God's breath upon the landscape. I was told to witness, as surely as I was told that I would live to know the outcome. And I would do as I had promised.

And I will now do what I have promised. I will take you there, and lead you on a road of ancient peril, and ancient promise - both still filling the world you inhabit today.

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