

TO WAR, WITH LOVE

Chapter 1 The way things could be

It was quiet - but then it had been quiet for over four hundred years.

There had been no words from The Creator. The prophets were silent as though all that had to be said was already entombed in the proclaimed words of the ancient bards.

There had been no new Isaiah or Daniel.

The time for words was in the past; now was the time for action - an action foretold in the words of old, yet shrouded in allegory and double meaning so that the intelligence of mere man would discern their significance in retrospect rather than as a crystal clear pointer to future events.

In aeons of time gone by the inevitability of the conflict had germinated with the creation of man. His name was Adam; the first animal to be given an eternal spirit; a creative creature with a will of its own. A strange creation - part mortal, with typical animal instincts and desires, part eternal, with a soul and spirit able to exist beyond the confines of time and space. There was one other distinctive characteristic of man - he had been given a creative capacity bettered only by that of The Creator himself.

Satan's role had been clear from the start; it was that of a servant whose job it was to ensure that the earth remained the paradise it was created to be; to eliminate virus and bacteria that might develop and prove harmful to man; to protect and shield men from natural disasters; to ensure an equable temperature and humidity, and an environment totally conducive to the development of the favoured species.

Satan hated the role. He was the superior creature! He existed wholly in a multi- dimensional state which provided him with far greater freedom than animal man's puny three dimensional existence. Satan was totally aware of his whole being; man was only *really* aware of his animal nature; his consciousness of the spiritual dimension was pathetically limited.

What man and Satan shared was a free will, to obey or disobey the directives of The Creator. Coupled with that freedom was authority which was without condition. Man had authority over the created world. He could use its resources to the full, but he also had to nurture and protect them. If man abused his authority; if he plundered the earth and raped his environment, he might well suffer with the rest of the created world but his authority would remain unchanged.

Satan had authority over the spiritual dimension and over the processes of natural creation. Supremely, Satan had responsibility for the soul and spirit of man. He was to nurture and guide each spirit so that it would mature and grow in wisdom and character, to become a perfect,

loving, unique spirit like The Creator himself. Man was to become a loving, creative god in his own right!

Then came rebellion! Man rebelled against his creator; rejecting a consciousness of right and wrong inspired by the Spirit of The Creator himself, and accepting in its place a conscience that could be moulded, manipulated and distorted by Satan. A conscience that in many ways could imitate the Spirit of The Creator, but which failed to inspire that sense of close proximity - the intimate dependant relationship - the child-like love that the Spirit of The Creator could inspire in the heart of man. All that the conscience inspired was a depressing and enslaving sense of guilt. Thus Adam placed himself and all his successive progeny under the authority of Satan. Satan rebelled against the same creator and trapped the spirit of man in perpetual slavery to himself. No man could escape the chains of bondage! An individual might lead a life of perfection, but still he would be under the authority given to Satan - what was known to man as 'the state of sin!'

There was only one chance for man to be free. The Creator had to establish *another* authority on earth; an alternative to that of Satan, but one that would not destroy Satan himself, nor remove his authority. The Creator would do nothing to undermine free will; free will was His most precious gift; free will was the only thing that gave an element of unpredictability and challenge to an otherwise ordered and predictable creation!

There was only one way to establish the alternative authority; The Creator himself had to enter the creation as a man having the pure creative spirit of God, and as a man, to pass through the gate of physical death which is the doorway to the eternal spiritual life. The prophets of old had foretold it - the 'Creator-Man' would be called the Messiah!

If The Creator-Man could achieve this without coming under Satan's authority, the way out of mankind's present slavery would be established. Satan would no longer have sole authority; there would be an alternative authoritative power on earth, that of The Creator, and man could use his free will to select between the two. Any person would be able to claim the protection of that new authoritative Spirit of God!

Satan could oppose it; Satan *would* oppose it. There were many avenues of attack. The Messiah would have to be born as a baby. To avoid automatically falling under Satan's authority, the conception would have to be initiated by The Creator himself, but if Satan could arrange to have the infant killed before it could mature, then the world would remain exclusively Satan's. As the child matured, it could be persuaded to accept Satan's authority - just as Adam had done. Failing this, then the child could be tempted to adopt Satan's attitude to authority and power - to use it for his own profit. If that were once done, then the new authority could not claim to be different to Satan's own. The new authority would be challenged and successfully defeated - it could not stand as an alternative to the authority of Satan!

The final let-out for Satan would be to force the Messiah to avoid human death - to make it so painful and torturous that the Spirit would simply escape the agonising body and leave the world to Satan alone.

That the battle must take place was clear, and its opening stages were imminent!

Satan felt the time to be near; he sensed the quiet - like the moment of pause before the flight of an arrow; the pregnant pause before the storm of battle; the battle he knew must come - and soon.

The prophecies were clear about the year, the country and the town in which it would start; but the form in which the attack would come, he could not tell.

Satan viewed with contempt the scenes of gluttonous orgy before him. It was a cool night on the hills around Jerusalem. Shepherds had lit fires, not just to keep the wild animals away, but also to afford themselves a little warmth. In the banqueting hall of king Herod there was little need for fires to keep the revellers warm. From around the walls the flickering flames of hundreds of torches cast their unsteady light upon host, guest and servant alike.

The flames reflected orange daggers of light from the silver goblets of the diners lounging at their food-laden tables. Many were lying on their couches in a drunken stupor, while others fondled the almost naked bodies of the servant girls whose task it was to pour the wine while they themselves were pawed.

Smoke from the torches curled blue and heavy around the beams of the lofty ceiling, making the air dense and stifling - seeming to deaden and muffle the sensuous music of the players in the music gallery.

How Satan hated these weak creatures of time and space. Creatures of such favour and potential, yet almost totally unaware of their spiritual dimension.

He watched Herod leering at the dancing girls gyrating in front of his table. Here was a man so intoxicated with his own puny power that he believed his ability to create and construct could give him immortality on earth.

Just so long as there was a major project requiring his driving vision and energy, just so long would the gods give him space and time to complete the work. This was the belief that Satan had placed in the mind of the king. He had placed it in the years of Herod's youth using mediums and soothsayers. He had fanned and developed the belief into a burning, feverish conviction that was now consuming the soul of the man, snaring and binding it to the treadmill of the lower dimensions.

The king was the man Satan had chosen to "set the stage" for the forthcoming battle.

It was abundantly clear that the physical battleground would be the country of Israel - the centre of the, so called, "people of God" - the Jews.

The first thing that Satan had to do was to dominate and control the religion of these people - he had to be in control of the temple; he needed to have the priests, the administrators and the temple guard firmly in his power.

He also needed to control the government and administration of the country, whether this was a Roman governor or a local dictator was of little consequence provided they were firmly in Satan's control.

As always, as a spirit being, he would exercise this control by selecting some man or woman who would willingly allow themselves to be influenced and used by him. The person so chosen was Herod!

Here was a man of wealth and influence - of Arabic stock from Idumea, to the south of Judea. A man of greed and ambition, ruthless and cruel and totally dedicated to self advancement.

Over the years Satan had worked to increase Herod's status from that of a second rate puppet king to one of such wealth and power that few more powerful men could be found in the Roman world.

Future generations would say that he had rebuilt the temple to win favour with the Jews - the reality was that in building the temple he had brought most of the Jewish faith under his own control.

He had replaced most of the priests with his own order of Sadducees - totally dedicated to their usurping monarch. It was true that Herod had married a Jewish Maccabean princess in order to legitimise his authority among the Jews. However, once he had established his rule, he had eliminated his wife and her brother and rendered the Maccabean line extinct.

Future generations would speak of him as a puppet king of the Roman authorities - the reality was that his power, money and influence had put Herod into a position of total authority in Judea, with the Roman authorities having little control; the Romans' did not even have a governor in Israel. A mere token force of Roman mercenaries was administered from Syria. Herod's own army, his personal bodyguard and the powerful temple guard were able to roam freely through Israel enforcing allegiance to the Herodian line and to the authority of the temple. Those who rebelled could be severely dealt with.

Thus the small community of Jewish zealots at Qumran by the Dead Sea had been attacked and scattered and their village burned and destroyed. Their crime had been to resist the authority of

Herod and his puppet priests in the temple, and remain faithful to Jehovah, the Lord of Israel.
(Chapter 10 of *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh)

Herod was, at least, creating structures that would give life to his name and memory for a few thousand years. Others in the court were striving for nothing more than pleasures of the moment, seeking the ultimate experience in the ecstasy of bodily pleasure, oblivious of their transient nature. Believing always that the experience could be bettered by the use of this special stimulation, that elusive drug, this rhythmic accompaniment, that touch of brutality - ignorant of the destructive nature of it all and of the chains of bondage that were being forged to Satan and his domain.

But along the passages of time, away from the noise of revelry, it was too quiet. It had the quality of imminent change - movements taking place in dimensions beyond those readily sensed.

Satan was not alone - Demons of a lower order could also sense the moment - like echoes and vibrations resonating to a distant source.

Satan knew the battle would come. The Creator had never been able to communicate His requirements and plans to the mass of humanity without Satan and his minions becoming aware of them.

The prophets gave their message as man to men but always they were heard and interpreted by friend and foe alike - and so it would always be - just so long as man remained chained to those dimensions of space and time that were the domain of his mortal body.

Satan felt himself fed and strengthened by the sensuous excitement from the orgy that he was observing. He wondered yet again at how few of the men and women around him had any sense of their own immortality - how many of them were clinging to a belief in a life after death as a desperate hope rather than a guiding belief.

How The Creator could have brought such pathetic creatures into being had always been a mystery. The root of man's being - his spirit - existed in the fifth dimension and beyond, yet he was only aware of that part of himself that was largely restricted to a physical confinement within the three dimensions of space and a slavish unidirectional bondage to the fourth dimension of time.

The Creator's desire to see these creatures develop and grow to become true spiritual beings - existing in His own higher dimensions, but having a form and nature resulting from their own response to His prompting, seemed the height of folly.

"Why not simply create something which was to His own liking and design?" mused the prince.
"Why leave creative processes to these pathetic creatures?"

Man should be ruled and controlled, he reasoned, not freed to develop towards the higher kingdom, to populate it with human characters, each one unique - a multitude of variety, colour and **power**.

At the thought of the ultimate potential of mankind, the prince shuddered. Such power within the higher dimensions would be disastrous for him - the so-called Prince of Darkness.

"They must remain enslaved!" he raged. "They must stay within my control!"

Satan had never experienced difficulty in controlling and ruling these lower creatures. Man could easily be enslaved by the desires of his own lower nature, that state that was to become known as "a state of sin". It was this state of sin that chained man and subjected him to the authority of Satan.

Anger seethed in the mind of the evil one. If men rose to higher dimensions, Satan reasoned, would not his own power over them evaporate? Might not he become the subject of **their** control and contempt? Such possibilities were a nightmare - yet he knew The Creator had plans. God's love of man and His desire for their freedom and future residence in His kingdom was foretold.

Satan had to resist!

He had thought through his strategy of resistance so often before - for thousands of years he had been living with this nightmare and in all that time his basic strategy had not changed.

First he had prevented man from realising his own true potential - kept him in the dark; convinced him of the finality of his own mortality - kept ideas of a higher order of life at the level of wishful thinking. He had convinced man that the pinnacle of pleasure and satisfaction lay in the exercising of bodily desires. He still found it incredible that man could be so blind to his own higher nature. How could he so readily sacrifice the eternal for that which was so short lived? Fighting for scraps from the bowl of the beggar at the door, when there was a banquet set for him within.

From the prophets of old, Satan had gleaned much about the coming Messiah.

Micah had said that he would be born in Bethlehem (*Micah 5:2*).

But all that could be gleaned about the mother of the Messiah was that she would be a virgin. (*Isaiah 7:14*) Satan thought wryly of the number of mothers of illegitimate children who had tried to claim that dubious honour!

Regarding the time - this had been given to a man named Daniel. (*Daniel 1:6*). The message had been given by the most formidable of The Creator's angels - the one named Gabriel.

How well Satan recalled his battle to keep this messenger at bay - indeed he had almost succeeded - would have done so but for the intervention of the warring angels of Michael.

As usual the message given to Daniel (*Daniel 9:21-23*) had been mysterious and open to numerous interpretations, but from it Satan could deduce that the time of battle was close!

If Satan could win this battle, then, not only would man be eternally subject to Satan, but there was the possibility that The Creator himself would fall into a position of subjection to the power of evil!

For a few moments of earthly time, Satan allowed himself to wallow in the imaginings of such supreme power - a universe under his control - worlds to dominate, suns to command - Satan as supreme God!

But first The Creator as man had to come into being - once identified, the attack could begin!

Chapter 2 The angels approach

The giant command ship nosed in closer, its neutron propulsion units resisting the combined gravitational pull of earth and moon which could now be felt with increasing strength. The final approach to the point of stationary orbit beyond that of the moon had to be made with extreme caution. The earth with its disproportionately large moon was regarded by travellers through space as a binary planet, revolving slowly like a giant bumbbell spinning about a common axis. The command ship would, for a time, be converting this binary planet into linear triad, by maintaining a static position on the blind side of the moon

By earthly standards the ship was huge - a giant pyramid structure with a base measuring over two thousand kilometres square and with a height of the same dimension.

(Revelation 21:16).

Little wonder that earlier visits to this domain of the rebel Satan had influenced the inhabitants of earth so dramatically. Their writers had described it as a giant mountain - the mountain of God. The shape had been copied in vast stone structures throughout the world - kings and princes had ordered their burial places to be within such structures, hoping by so doing to join the gods in their after-life. But it was ever a hope - a desperate attempt to get the formulae right - the correct shape, exact proportions, suitable materials, correct orientation, superb workmanship, brilliance of artwork and colour. Reflecting an awareness of man's immortality but failing to capture the absolute certainty of that eternal nature.

When visiting this region of the four dimensions for any length of time, there was considerable benefit in maintaining a strong local base that was subject to the physical limitations of that environment. By so doing, the problems of multi-dimensional travel were eliminated. A huge army of angelic beings could be held within the ship in close proximity to the domain of the rebel Satan, able to operate swiftly and with far less effort than would otherwise have been the case.

The giant structure could be more appropriately described as a city rather than a vessel or ship. Around its base were twelve access ports - three on each side. From these ports the smaller 'planetary approach vehicles' (PAVs), could be launched. These were still large by earthly standards and were capable of both space and atmospheric travel. Between the command vessel and the atmosphere of earth they used atomic powered rocket motion, but once within the atmosphere they switched to using more controllable helicopter rotors mounted on four pods that were lowered from the disc-shaped body of the vessel itself.

These vessels were capable of making an earth landing, using four retractable wheels, one of which could be let down from the base of each of the helicopter pods.

Even smaller 'four man' Personnel Transport Craft (PTCs), could be launched from the planetary approach space ships. These small, fast and highly manoeuvrable vehicles used a form

of gyroscopic propulsion and were equally at home in the atmosphere of earth or in the voids of space.

Again mankind had been inspired by earlier sightings of these vehicles - being described in detail by the prophet Ezekiel and alluded to by other writers. (*Ezekiel 1*) They had given rise to descriptions of cherubim with multiple wings and the faces of men, wild animals and birds, or when viewed from a distance, as chariots of fire.

For thousands of years the angels had regarded the approach to this solar region of the universe as difficult and revolting. To angelic immortals there could be no physical danger, but the forces of repulsion set up by their enemy, Satan, were so strong that few, if any, angels could come close to earth alone. They needed the protection of each other, of the command ship, or of their smaller PAVs to make such close proximity bearable.

The earth was virtually devoid of positive emanations - a negative dark world - a world with little hope, other than in small isolated pockets of spiritual resistance.

These pockets of resistance had been established by The Creator from the earliest times. They had been supported and encouraged over the years, but The Creator's insistence upon the sacred nature of the free will of His higher order creation had made it impossible to do anything other than prompt, encourage and support them.

From the command vessel, the smaller PAVs could be sent down to the earth's surface, either singly or in a group. When Gabriel had first tried the approach, it had been alone, but now they would be using five vehicles, descending in a pyramid formation. The warriors in the four lower craft would be clearing a path and creating a safe environment. Gabriel would be descending in a position slightly above them and central within the lower "square" formation.

First, however, the giant command vessel had to be brought into position. It had been decided that it should remain out of sight of those on earth, and the method of doing this had been provided by The Creator from the time of the world's creation. Earth's barren moon was disproportionately large for such a relatively small planet, but was perfect for hiding the hovering Command Vessel.

Total obscurity during the approach was impossible, and it was accepted that as they approached the earth/moon couple, the ship would be seen as a large and brilliant star which would eventually move behind the moon from where the final close approaches could be made. The vessel would remain on the far side of the moon for as long as necessary.

Gabriel was grateful for the company of Michael, the warrior, with his company of attendant angels. Earth was always a difficult place to visit - their approach was always detected and always fiercely resisted.

The archangel had felt the old familiar sense of weakness as the vessel had come into the solar environment. A sapping of the determination to move - a disgusting tendency to slide along the surface of a dimension rather than plunge through it. There was also the growing awareness of a concentration of creatures as immortal as himself, but of an alien nature. Creatures of free will like himself, but having exercised theirs in rebellion against The Creator.

He felt their repulsive forces below him now, squeezing him upwards and away from the area of their existence. Their presence awakened in him a feeling of nausea - a dizzy loss of direction - a weakening of the desire to descend further.

Despite this feeling of nausea, he recognised a vast difference between the present visit and his previous one. Then he had started out alone - Gabriel recalled the struggle he had had. He had been unprepared for the power of the enemy - Oh, he had been warned, but he had been quite ignorant of the power that the demons could acquire as they fed on the evil of mankind. He knew that the demons create feelings of hatred, fear, lust and greed among the creatures of earth, and then drew strength from that evil - cultivating and harvesting like any earthly farmer - but he had been shocked at the strength that they were able to draw.

Time and again he had brought his PAV close to the earth's surface and time and again he had been repulsed, until at last he had been forced to call upon the strength of the warrior angel Michael to assist him. With Michael's help he had been able to land on the earth and find Daniel, the man to whom he had been sent.

On this second visit he was better prepared; he could draw strength from the love and support of Michael, and he knew that Michael was equally drawing strength from himself and from the other warrior angels in their company.

On that first occasion his task had been simple - to carry a message to a man selected by The Creator to be a prophet - one who could guide and direct the activities of men and women - whose words would influence kings and rulers - whose writings would influence the thinking and actions of men for generations to come.

He allowed himself to reflect on the message of that first visit, aware that distraction was one of the main weapons of the enemy. Always they had to fight to maintain a clear sense of purpose and direction and to resist side issues and tendencies towards contra movement along a dimension, such as this desire that he now felt to move back along the dimension of time.

On this occasion, however, Gabriel felt that he could draw strength from the reliving of his previous experience.

He remembered he had battled for twenty one days to come into the presence of the man called Daniel (*Daniel 10:13*). He recalled the sudden acceleration of movement as he came into the presence of the man. Strange how these peculiar creatures - part spirit, part mortal - could have

a similar effect upon him as the presence of this present company of warring angels - it was a weaker force, but still there. A man seeking his Creator always repulses the power of the enemy, adding his strength to that of the angels and drawing them to himself like iron to a magnet.

His message had been a prophesy telling of the time remaining before The Creator would make His most dramatic move and enter the world as one of His own creations.

As always, the predictions were shrouded in prophetic language so that the meaning would be clearer to those seeking confirmation of the relevance and truth of subsequent events than to those seeking direction for personal benefit.

Daniel had been told to write down the prophetic utterances but to retain the prophetic language so that the book would remain 'sealed' to the time of the end.

The enemy would certainly have seen these and interpreted them for himself. Satan was certainly ready!

This second visit by Gabriel was very different from the first. There were still messages to be given, but this time there were also more positive actions to be taken; the stay would be longer and with more physical activity. It had been made clear that the fate of the world rested on the success of this mission.

This was to be the determining battle, but the form it would take was as yet far from clear. At no previous time had angelic forces been brought down in such numbers and for so long a stay.

The first vital mission to the surface was well under way. The five PAVs in their pyramid formation were already well within the atmosphere of earth, the rocket motors in the underbelly of each craft neutralising the powerful gravitation of the planet. They hovered for a while, maintaining station as each craft swung its four giant helicopter pods from their protected position above the vessel into their operational position - hanging down from the edge of the craft like four giant legs. Two supporting struts protruded like wings from the centre of each pod, rising to a pivotal position at the edge of disc shaped body of the PAV, mid way between each pod so that the 'wings' of each pod appeared to touch those of its two adjacent companions. On each pod, four massive helicopter blades now unfurled from their locked positions. Two descending from their vertical positions between the supporting 'wings' and two rising from their locking position at the foot of the pod. Slowly, and in perfect unison the giant blades began to rotate; there was a rhythmic swish of sound as they bit into the air and took the weight of the PAV as the rocket motors were switched off. Then the descent began again, the pulsating roar of the helicopter blades being the only sound as they sank towards their destination - the eastern end of the Mediterranean sea.

Once the lower four vehicles had landed, they would clear out all demonic forces within their square of operation, and set up a protective screen around them, hiding from the enemy all that took place within that square.

Gabriel's own PAV would then be able to descend unseen from its apex position and manoeuvre at will about the earth within the square; there was no way the enemy could find out what he was doing or exactly where he was going, nor could they establish who was visited.

The women would be safe, at least for a while.

Chapter 3 Zechariah's vision

Zechariah, the chief priest, was lonely. A deep seated loneliness that came from a feeling of separation from men and women and from God. His only friend in the world was his wife Elizabeth.

He had realised that the position of chief priest would be lonely, but then in the earlier days there had been the enthusiasm of his position as a servant of The Most High God. There had been the anticipation of a family - of children of their own and, at his time of life, of grandchildren. But God had not granted Elizabeth and himself this pleasure.

They had many acquaintances, but his exalted position put everyone else into a position of subservience. They felt themselves under scrutiny - their behaviour subject to question. No one could feel at ease in his presence, no one could approach him as a friend; he sometimes consoled himself with the thought that his must be the loneliness of God himself, but with advancing years he began to question his own relationship with The Creator.

Did he truly bring the petitions of men before God? Was God attentive to his words and actions? In the many years he had been in office he had seen nothing of the presence of God. The holy room into which he could go to come before God was always the same. The smell of incense heavy in the air and the long candles casting their dim flickering light upon the holy implements of gold.

Was God really there? Was He only to be found in the close confines of this dusty room?

Zechariah was only too aware that the temple had been built by one who had little or no reverence for the God of Israel.

Herod had built the temple to serve his own lust for power and authority. Though he, Zechariah, had never given allegiance to Herod, he knew very well that many of the priests and Sadducees were supportive of the king.

Was God to be found in the presence of so much self seeking, deceit and anarchy?

Was God not more likely to be found in the sunshine and light of His creation?

Year after year he slavishly followed the old rituals with a growing sense of their futility.

It was now the time of incense and while the people were praying in the outer courts, Zechariah entered the inner sanctuary. (*Luke 1:5-24*)

In front of him stood the familiar altar of incense, but as he entered the room there was a difference; a shifting of the light; a glow that seemed to hang in the air to the right of the altar.

Zechariah stared in astonishment as the glow intensified and began to shimmer and take on a physical form. Gradually the outline became clearer and could be identified as the figure of a man; a man with dark hair, wearing a bright shining gown of white, with a golden belt around the waist.

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Gabriel disliked this movement in the dimensions of space while remaining stationary in the time dimension - it did enable him to appear at will wherever he chose to be, without the inconvenience of being seen getting there, but it always left him with a slight feeling of dizziness and a momentary loss of orientation.

He had timed it exactly and as he materialised in the inner sanctuary Zechariah was standing before him with his mouth agape - eyes wide and staring.

The shocked priest was trying to speak or cry out but nothing came from his gaping mouth other than an incoherent gurgling sound.

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah," said Gabriel, "Your prayers have been heard."

To tell the terrified old priest not to be afraid was one thing - to actually allay those fears was another matter - he could see that the poor old man was shaking from head to foot. This was always a major problem when attempting to communicate with humans. The surprise and fear often rendered them incapable of reason or understanding; often they were quite unable to comprehend what was being said to them.

There seemed to be a crude general rule that the level of fear and disbelief increased in proportion to the age of the hearer. Children and young adults were always the most responsive.

The old priest was still shaking with fear, and for a time Gabriel thought that he might actually faint.

"Zechariah!" he repeated, "I have an important message for you from God - Do you understand me?"

Zechariah managed to nod his head in acknowledgement, but his dribbling mouth still refused to emit anything other than a pathetic whimpering.

"Your wife, Elizabeth, is to bear a son, and you must name him John. Many will rejoice and delight in him and he will be great in the sight of God." (*Luke 1:11-14*)

Gabriel questioned whether the old priest was able to hear and comprehend his words.

He wondered if perhaps it was more difficult for males to accept his appearance and his words than it was for females. Certainly he had not had such a problem with Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, herself.

He had met her only a few earthly hours earlier in her own home.

The task had been far from easy - it was necessary that the incarnation of the Messiah should be preceded by the birth of another child - a herald for the Messiah.

The reason had not been discussed in detail - Gabriel had been given his instructions and it was not for him to argue or debate the rights or wrongs of the action. But Gabriel could think of many reasons why John should be born.

It was obvious that the enemy would be watching their every move and anticipating the conception of the Messiah - how better to confuse Satan than to precede the messianic conception with a "false", pseudo-messianic conception and birth.

There was also the need for a "trial run" of the conception process to ensure that the true messianic conception should have maximum chance of success. Not that God was fallible, but Gabriel had to acknowledge that he himself was only angelic and not divine!

John would not be the Messiah, his conception would be made with the semen kept in frozen storage for generations - the sperm of Elijah the great prophet. The spirit of the man John, would not be the spirit of God, but the spirit of Elijah - Elijah reborn! A powerful spirit, able to willingly take an active part in these dramatic events, but a human spirit that was fettered - as were all human spirits - shackled within Satan's domain, awaiting the freedom that could only come from the Messiah for whom he was to be the herald.

Elizabeth had been startled at Gabriel's appearance in her home, but she seemed to assume that he was a messenger of God even before he could speak to her.

He had given her the same message that he was now endeavouring to give to her husband Zechariah - that she should have a son who was to be called John. That he was to have no wine or strong drink, and that he was to be inspired by the Holy Spirit of God from his earliest days.

It had been quite easy to put the willing and responsive Elizabeth into a hypnotic sleep and to inseminate her with the seed of Elijah - seed that had been stored for the purpose of creating a new human prophet - the greatest prophet ever - to clear the way and proclaim the Messiah.

(Matthew 11:11)

It was a good thing that Elizabeth had been so responsive and accepting of his message because her husband, Zechariah, was in such a state of shock that Gabriel doubted if he would have a coherent recollection of their meeting and of his message to him.

Again he said "Zechariah! There is no need to be afraid, your son will be a great prophet and be filled with the Spirit of God, and he will have the spirit and power of Elijah, so that he will turn the hearts of many of the people back to God."

Zechariah heard the words, though his mind was in a whirl. For how long had he been doubting that God was present in this room? How could God forgive such doubting in His high priest? What was to be his punishment? If this was his judgement, then what was to follow next? And what were these pronouncements? - It was surely part of the torment! Both he and Elizabeth were getting old and the possibility of a child was remote indeed. This was all part of a terrible nightmarish punishment!

Gabriel could read Zechariah's thoughts as clearly as though he had spoken.

"I am Gabriel," he said. "I stand in the presence of God and I have been sent to bring you this message, and to bring this thing into being. Your lack of belief and understanding has rendered you speechless, and so you are likely to remain until you see the proof of what I have told you."
(Luke 1:20)

With these words Gabriel left him and returned to the waiting PAV for the return journey to the Command ship.

Battle had commenced and Gabriel could imagine that the forces of Satan would be in disarray!

Chapter 4 The betrothal

In the little village of Nazareth, Joseph felt disturbed. He was no longer a young man - not that he felt old - he could still lift the heavy timbers and wield an adze with the best of his hired hands in the carpentry business. But he had to admit that the best and fittest years were now behind him.

The thought of a new young wife was not appealing!

Oh, he was sure there were many who would look with envy at his attractive fourteen year old bed companion, but he was equally aware that others would regard it as a huge joke.

Joseph had his reputation to consider and a demanding young wife could easily make him a laughing stock in the town.

But what could he do? Zechariah, the high priest, had forced this upon him.

Not that he wouldn't welcome the company - life had been lonely in the three years since his wife had died. He sighed wistfully and looked around the small room adjoining his workshop in which he had spent the night. The place was clean and tidy, but it needed a woman's touch. There should be flowers in a vase on the table or on the window sill - Martha always had flowers about the house, but since she died he had little heart for such niceties.

Perhaps a new wife might change all that and bring a little feminine comfort back into the home. He hoped so, because he could think of no way of avoiding the betrothal.

It was not that he could blame Zechariah - he was only doing what the Lord had commanded him to do - or so he had claimed, and who was Joseph to doubt the word of the high priest?

Strange things were happening - there had been stories of heavenly visitations, and it could not be denied that Zechariah had been struck dumb a few months ago, and now communicated only by written messages passed to one of the attendant priests.

Joseph also understood the predicament of the priests in the temple. Everyone knew of the existence of Mary, the beautiful temple attendant. On his periodic visits to the capital, Joseph had visited the temple and seen the young attendant grow from a child into a young woman of rare beauty - a beauty not just of looks, although she was a jewel among a nation of beautiful women, but she had a voice that could raise praises to God in strains of such purity that the angels themselves must envy her.

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