

Introduction

5 B.C.

The year was 5 B.C., and it was the month of June. It was a time in Earth history when wars were fought for territory, not for ideology. Empires rose and fell as new ones took their places. The Pax Romana was nearing an end, and Earth would never be the same. In Europe, one mighty empire now reigned supreme: The Imperium Romanum.

The Imperium had just undergone a massive upheaval, with the dictatorship of Caesar Julius and the power wars between Mark Antony and Octavian. Now that Octavian was in power, though, it was back to business. He renamed himself Caesar Augustus, named a calendar month after himself, and began to finalize the integration of the newly conquered Territory of Judea into the Imperium. The first action was to declare a census in the territory, which would tell Imperium bureaucrats and officials how many more millions of people were now subjects of Rome. However, thinking himself to be God, Augustus did not know that a real God had ordained many years ago that this census was supposed to take place.

Chapter I

The First Foretelling

The Priest Zechariah walked reverently up the quartz steps of the main altar, a torch in one hand and a stick of incense in the other. The prayers of thousands of Jews and converts to Judaism filled the Holy of Holies Temple of YHWH with a joyous echo. Their prayers could be heard all over the City of Jerusalem, the center of the Territory of Judea and the end of the Silk Road. A wide pantheon of people watched as the prayers went heavenward, among them pagan priests, Imperium soldiers and workers constructing the Tower of Siloam, which was set to be the tallest building in the whole of Asia.

However, as Zechariah reached the top of the stairs, he accidentally dropped the stick of incense. He reached down to retrieve the item, his long white hair drooping to the floor. When he stood up, though, he shrieked and fell face down to the floor, the incense and the torch both rolling down the stairs. The priest had popped a few joints, but it was demanded. Standing in front of the altar was an Angel!

The Angels hadn't been seen in four hundred years, and whenever one appeared, something extraordinary occurred, something worthy of its own book in the Torah. Zechariah didn't think he was a prophet. Sure, there were plenty to go around, but he wasn't one of them. His wife had the nature of a prophet, and she had even spoken directly with YHWH. However, he was not sure that this was real.

Not daring to look up, he asked, 'May I be of use to the Lord?'

'Do not be afraid, Zechariah,' the Angel told him. 'Stand up and talk! After all, I'm not the Father; I am merely a servant.'

Zechariah slowly stood up, partly out of reverence and partly because he was old and his joints weren't quite stable.

Seeing that the Priest was still quaking, the Angel repeated, 'Do not be afraid Zechariah.' He quickly added, 'Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to drink wine, nor any other fermented drink. He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, and he will bring the hearts of Israel back to YHWH. He will go forth before the Lord, as Elijah did during the reign of Ahab King of Israel.

'As said by the Prophet Malachi:

“See, I will send you the Prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful Day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

'He will turn the hearts of YHWH's people Israel back to the Lord,' the Angel finished.

Zechariah stared at the Angel, dumbfounded. This Angel must be a Demon, he decided. This was not an action characterized by YHWH; there must be something wrong.

‘Tell me,’ he told the Angel, ‘How can I be sure of this? I am a very old man, in case you haven’t noticed, and my wife isn’t exactly much younger.’

The Angel shimmered, and his light shone in a brilliance magnified ten times the brightness he had been when he first appeared.

‘I am Gabriel!’ the Angel cried. ‘I have stood in the presence of God, seen and participated in the glorified worship of the Most High! I have seen Michael fight wars for the souls men who didn’t even know that YHWH existed! I am the Holy Messenger, the handler of the Angel of the Lord, and God’s representative to all of his sentient creations!

‘Since you did not believe and in your heart considered me a Demon, I will give you a sign that these events shall come to pass: You shall not speak four nine months, until the day that your wife gives birth to your son John!’

In a great flash of light, Gabriel vanished.

+++

Annas the High Priest saw for a moment a flash of light emanate from the Temple. However, it was gone quickly. He had hoped it was just an eye problem, or even a large flare from the incense burning. However, an uproar from the praying crowd made him realize that there was more to it. Something was to be suspected after this flash of light since Zechariah had been in there a long time.

Taking the Priests Abijah and Caiaphas along with a score of the Temple Guard, he ran to the entrance of the Temple and through it open. The incense was burning on the alter, and Zechariah was sitting on the steps busily scrawling something on a piece of papyrus. He had written a message in Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin:

I cannot speak.

‘Who has done this to you?’ Annas demanded.

Gabriel, he wrote in Hebrew.

‘Impossible!’ Caiaphas cried. ‘Gabriel hasn’t been seen for a thousand years! He wouldn’t show up now.’

He did. He told me that my wife would have a son. When I didn’t believe, he struck me mute. And mute I will remain until my wife gives birth in nine months. May I leave soon? I must lie with her.

‘You will complete your service today,’ Annas told him. ‘Caiaphas will take over the rest of your duties. You are to tell no one of this.’

On the contrary. I shall tell everybody.

A group of Imperium Phalanx entered the room, a richly decorated centurion at their head. From outside Annas could hear the soldiers and Temple Guard send everyone away, and loud cries were going up from the masses gathered outside the Holy of Holies.

‘High Priest Annas, I demand an explanation for this!’ the Centurion, Marcus, shouted. ‘What just happened here? And do not try to lie to me, for I have reports from many people about whatever happened in your temple a moment ago.’

‘I honestly can’t say,’ Annas lied.

Zechariah slapped the steps loudly. He held his piece of papyrus up so that the Centurion could have an answer. The words were written boldly in Latin, but they befuddled the centurion.

An Angel of the Lord appeared to me, Centurion Marcus. I will not be able to speak for nine months. Then my wife will have a child.

The Centurion rolled his eyes.

‘Get this fool out of here!’ he ordered. ‘And find a real answer. Tetrarch Herod, Governor Festus and Praetor Pilate will both be wanting answers. And if you do not satisfy us, we may just have to find a new High Priest.’

Annas gulped. Each of those men were ruthless leaders, and they would kill him.

‘I will debate the matter with the Sanhedrin, Centurion Marcus,’ Annas assured him. ‘I will give you a proper answer the day after tomorrow.’

‘Good,’ Marcus said with a smirk. ‘If there is no answer, we will have to find some more “upright” Jews to be in charge of the Temple.’

+++