

VOICES FROM HEAVEN AND HELL

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

"I held the Saviour In My Arms" by SIMEON

"My name is Simeon. For almost a century I have lived in the city of Jerusalem. During the years of my pilgrimage many sad days have been witnessed by my eyes. But now all is forgotten for I have seen the consolation of Israel. My eyes have seen the Messiah so long promised to Israel. But before telling you what my eyes have seen may I give you some of my history and that of Jerusalem.

"I am an Israelite. Of my birth I have full reason to be proud. I belong to a chosen race and a chosen nation. Of all the nations of the world Israel was chosen of GOD to be His peculiar people. It is an honour and privilege to belong to the Jewish race. I mention this because I must mention some things which are not complimentary to my race. It is with shame and bowed head that I must tell you of the degradation of my race and particularly of the citizens of the Holy City, Jerusalem. But do not forget that it is my race that brought forth Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is my race that brought forth Moses. It is my race that brought forth King David and King Solomon. It is my race that brought forth a royal line of prophets like Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others. They shone like the stars of the firmament. And it is Israel that brought forth the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Do not forget the light as I tell you of the darkness.

"Because of the unfaithfulness of my people to the living GOD, Israel has been subject to many Gentile powers. Three hundred years ago Alexander the Great conquered our country and we were subjects of the Grecian Empire. But soon thereafter we became subject to Egypt under the Ptolemies under whom we suffered greatly. One hundred and twenty-two years later we were released from Egypt by the Syrian Antiochus. He tried to impose his pagan idolatries upon my people. GOD sent us the Maccabees who led Israel in revolt against heathen tyranny some 166 years ago. But, alas, under our own rulers there occurred civil war after civil war. There was no rest nor peace in Israel. Some 63 years ago, and I remember it well, the Roman General Pompey attacked Jerusalem on the Sabbath day while many of us were at worship. Many of my countrymen and friends were slain at the altar of worship. From that time until now we have been subject to Rome.

"Some forty years ago the Idumean, Herod, was appointed King over Judea by the Romans. No words of mine can adequately describe the cruelty and bestiality of this monster Herod. He is not a Jew, nor a Greek, nor a Roman. He is an Idumean, a barbarian. By bribery and treachery he obtained his throne. His hands are dripping with the blood of his own wife and her mother. He had his own sons strangled to death. Many an Israelite he has put to death just upon a whim. It was his delight to see them burning alive.

"Why did GOD allow such a monster to occupy the throne of David? Alas, it was because of the sins of my people. My people are religious but their religion is a sham. For every Israelite without guile there are a hundred who are hypocrites. The priests are intent on the making of money and mark up even the temple sacrificial animals for gain. The Pharisees are so self-righteous. You see them on the street corners making long prayers. They go through the forms of religion but there is no mercy or love in their hearts. They broaden their phylacteries but the law is not in their hearts. They make prey of the poor and widows.

"The morality of my people in Jerusalem is such that one can only hang his head in shame as he speaks of it. Drunkenness is rife even on the holy days. Indecent dress degrades the daughters of Zion. Even high priestly youths are dressed indecently. Adultery is common amongst the high and low. It is a sad day indeed when Israelites ape the Gentile Greeks and Romans in morals and manners. This is Jerusalem of today.

"In the midst of all this darkness of immorality, hypocrisy, and political oppression there shone one star of hope in my heart and that was the coming of the promised Messiah. But what would my people do to the Messiah if He came? The thought often frightens me. As I stand here in the Temple I cannot help thinking what that priest would do who is intent on cheating his fellow countrymen in the price of the sacrificial lamb? What would that money changer do if confronted by the Messiah who is to cleanse the Temple? What would that proud Pharisee do who is so fond of show but who has no mercy in his heart? What would that Scribe do who is so proud of tradition but so ignorant of the true teachings of the prophets? What would that rich Sadducee do who is so fond of his denial of the resurrection?

What would that political Herodian do who is so fond of Roman rule? There goes an harlot; there a publican; and there a cursing Galilean. What would they do to the Messiah who would come in righteousness and purity? And if that were not enough to frighten me concerning the coming of the Messiah, what would that blood-thirsty Herod do and the brutal Romans?

"You see many years ago the Spirit of the Living GOD revealed to me through the Scriptures the nature and purpose of the coming of the Messiah. Many of my countrymen are expecting a political Messiah. They are expecting a Messiah who will deliver them from the bondage of the Romans and one who will politically exalt the Jewish nation above all nations of the world. Their hopes are carnal. But the Messiah of the prophets is not such a political Messiah who will establish an earthly kingdom like that of the Romans. Ah no!

"The living GOD of Israel knows that there is a greater bondage than that of the Romans. It is the bondage of the Evil One who caused Adam and Eve to fall. GOD revealed to Moses that the Messiah would bruise the head of this evil serpent. The Devil must be conquered before the Israelites can be delivered from one that is crueller than Pharaoh and crueller than Herod.

"It is my conviction through a study of the law and the prophets that the great task of the Messiah is to redeem Israel from sin. And how is He to redeem Israel from sin? He must take sin upon Himself even as the sacrificial lamb slain on the altar of burnt offering. Isaiah the prophet states that the suffering Servant of the Lord is to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter. And why? Isaiah states: **'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed:'**

"What will this present crowd do to such a suffering servant? They are expecting a great King to enter into Jerusalem like a Roman emperor. And yet Zechariah the prophet tells us: **"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.'** Not upon a white charger but lowly upon an ass. And He will rule righteously. The poor as well as the rich will obtain justice.

"The prophets also declare that the Messiah will bring blessings to the Gentiles. Isaiah reveals that He will be the light of the Gentiles. Through the Messiah the darkness of sin, superstition, and ignorance will disappear. How abhorrent that will be to the narrow scribes and Pharisees who feel that the Messiah's reign will benefit only our nation. So many of my people hate the Gentiles and call them dogs. One Rabbi went as far as to teach: 'The best among serpents, crush its head; the best among the Gentiles, kill.' We have been always taught to hate other nations. But the Messiah will bring salvation and blessing to all nations even as declared to Abraham our father.

"It is no wonder that the Messiah is to be the greatest glory of our nation Israel. But will my countrymen behold its glory? Or will the prophecy of Isaiah be true that He will be **'for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel?'** No doubt the Messiah will reveal the secret hypocrisy of the Pharisees; the superficial knowledge of the scribes; the greed of the priests; and the worldliness of the people. There will be no loveliness to the eyes of the people when the suffering servant of the Lord appears. But nevertheless He will redeem His people. He will be the glory of Israel. He will reign in righteousness. He will be the light of the Gentiles.

"It was while I was thinking in this manner that the Spirit of the Lord revealed that I would not die until I saw the Lord's anointed. I have waited long and not too patiently. And then this morning it happened. My eyes beheld the Messiah and my arms held the Saviour of the world. I beheld GOD in the flesh. I am now ready to depart in peace.

"As I stood in the court of the Temple in the midst of all the noise of the money changers and the haggling of those who sold the sacrificial animals I beheld two young Israelites. The young man, one could see at a glance, was honest and upright. He had in his hand two turtle doves. The purpose of this was, no doubt, the sacrifice for the purification of the young woman. It revealed to me that they were poor for, if one could afford it, both a yearling lamb and a turtle dove were offered as a burnt-offering and a sin offering. The young woman's face was aglow from an inward excitement. In her arms she held an infant child.

"The Spirit of the living GOD said within my heart: 'Behold the Saviour which is Messiah the Lord.' I stopped the young couple and took the infant in my arms. And as I realized that I held in

my arms GOD incarnate, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, a flood of joy possessed my soul. I cried out: **'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.'**

"As I returned this precious child into the arms of the young woman I noticed the look of wonderment and amazement on the faces of the young couple. No doubt they could hardly comprehend the blessing that was their lot in that they had been chosen to care for the Messiah. I lifted up my arms and blessed them. I said: **'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.'**

"The Spirit of the living GOD then moved me to speak to the young mother. 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. He will be a savour unto death to some and a savour unto life to others. To some He will be a rock of offense and to some a rock of salvation. Many in Israel will fall because they reject Him but the day will come when Israel after the flesh will cry out, Blessed are they who come in the name of the Lord. Israel shall yet be saved. But He will be for a sign which shall be spoken against. Many will mock His claim to be the Saviour and redeemer of souls. Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also. You will behold this Child suffering for His people. He will be persecuted and put to death and will be numbered with the transgressors. This is done so that the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed. Some will curse Him and the evil of their hearts will be revealed. Some will bless Him and acknowledge Him as Saviour and Lord. But be of good cheer the Lord will establish Him in righteousness and all generations shall call thee blessed.

"Then Joseph and Mary, for such were their names, left me to present the infant to the Lord as such is the custom and law in Israel. The firstborn belongs to the Lord. And again within my heart I blessed them and praised my GOD.

"Now I can depart in peace. Yes, a peace possesses me which passeth all understanding. I have seen my Saviour and Lord. It is He who shall redeem my soul and the souls of all who believe. I know that my Redeemer liveth and standeth upon the earth.

"As my voice reaches across the generations it is my prayer that you, too, will behold the CHRIST so that your soul will experience a peace such as the world giveth not. I pray that the CHRIST may be your salvation and your light. I pray that He may be a rock of salvation rather than a rock of offense. I pray that He may be a savour of life to you rather than a savour of death. I pray that on every remembrance of His birth that you may worship Him and repeat with sounding joy, **'glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'**

" **'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. Amen.'** "