

SHARON LINDSAY

Unto Us

THE
SON
OF
GOD

Series: Book 1



TATE PUBLISHING
AND ENTERPRISES, LLC

To the Spirit-led leadership
and members of B'rit Hadasha
Messianic Jewish Synagogue
They welcomed my husband
and me at a very low point
in our lives and ministered
God's healing to us.

Contents

Introduction.....	9
Prologue I Creation.....	11
Prologue II The Fall.....	21
Chapter 1 An Unbelievable Story.....	41
Chapter 2 The Road to Carem.....	57
Chapter 3 In the Home of Zechariah and Elizabeth	71
Chapter 4 Joseph Comes to Carem.....	75
Chapter 5 From Nazareth to Bethlehem	109
Chapter 6 A Baby in a Manger.....	143
Chapter 7 A Child of the Covenant	163
Chapter 8 Royal Visitors in Jerusalem	197
Chapter 9 Gifts for a Child	221
Chapter 10 The Slaughter.....	249
Chapter 11 Desert Journey	263
Chapter 12 Entering Egypt.....	291
Chapter 13 Life in Egypt	309
Chapter 14 Protected in Egypt.....	331
Chapter 15 Return to Nazareth	359
Index of Characters.....	387
Biblical References.....	395

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to breathe life into the plastic characters of the nativity so that the reader can identify with the flesh-and-blood people who lived and were associated with the birth of Jesus. Their experiences with each other and with the beings who dwell in the spiritual realm are not unlike the experiences of people today.

A great deal of research has gone into this book, but it does not contain the definitive answers to controversial questions. It does attempt to follow the biblical narrative and the chronology of historical events; the rest is theory or imagination. All direct quotes from scripture are italicized and referenced at the end of the book. An index of characters will help you recognize biblical, historical, and fictional characters. *Unto Us* is the first book in the *Son of God Series*, five novels which cover the life of Jesus.

So let the story begin.

In the beginning was the Word [Yeshua the Creator] and the Word was with God [the Eternal Father and his Holy Spirit], and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)

Prologue I

CREATION

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

—Genesis 1:27–28

In the beginning

Like a fiery wind, the Spirit of God moved back and forth over a patch of bare soil, waiting for the moment.

“Let us make man in our image!” the voice of the Eternal Father boomed from his Holy Sanctuary. From the sapphire throne on the backs of cherubim, his all-powerful voice instantly cut a path through the vast void of space. It reached the ears of Yeshua the Creator, who was kneeling in the dirt he had created three days earlier.

Responding to the voice of that part of the Godhead which maintained order in the universe, Yeshua thrust his hands deep into the black soil, pulling from it elements with which to form cells, the building blocks of flesh. Skillfully, he packed various types of cells together. Bone tissue—one by one, he formed and laid out over two hundred bones to shape the skeletal system.

“Father?” the Creator’s voice traveled through space unimpeded by time or distance. “Man is smaller than the angels.”

“Only for a time is he less than the angels. He will grow into companionship with us,” the Eternal Ruler replied. “All he needs is the potential to grow more and more into our likeness.”

Nodding his head in agreement, Yeshua continued to work. He knew his Father omnisciently watched from the throne room, pouring himself into this unprecedented event. Never before had such thought, such personal tenderness gone into an act of creation.

Heart tissue—the Creator packed it together into an irregular ball about the size of a fist, then he created chambers and attached a system of veins and arteries through which life would surge.

“Make it big enough to hold more than blood,” the Spirit urged. “Man’s heart must hold love, compassion, patience—all the emotions we share. He must feel deeply about righteousness and justice. And he must need companionship”—the Spirit sighed such a long deep sigh that the trees bent as his breath went forth with the words that completed his thought—“like we need companionship.”

The Godhead, a single omnipotent being who had divided himself into three separate beings with specific roles, now focused on the creation of a being more like himself than anything previously created—not equal, not an exact replica, but very similar in many significant ways.

Nerve tissue—painstakingly, the Creator threaded the sensory paths, linking each one to the center of intelligence that was protected by the skull. “The capacity of man’s brain, like ours, is infinite,” Yeshua commented to his coregents as he placed centers of language, speech, and creativity in the brain. “For now, I am giving him the basic information for life. As he experiences life and as we share with him, he will grow to be more and more like us.”

Reproductive tissue—from the throne room, the Eternal Ruler shouted with excitement! “We are going to be a father many times over! This man is only the beginning. He will reproduce and fill

the universe with beings that are our children, each one like us in many ways and still unique created beings. I can hardly wait!”

At last the Creator straightened up. “The form of man is finished!”

At that moment, all eyes focused on that one spot in the Garden of Eden. Like a beautiful clay statue, the first man lay lifeless on the ground.

Throughout the universe, not a note was sung, not a word was uttered as slowly the Creator bent over. Pressing his lips to the mouth he had formed, he blew into the man his own life.

Immediately, the man warmed and then took his first shuddering breath. His lungs filled with air. His cells began functioning according to the design of their Creator. He opened his eyes.

“Adam,” the Creator said his name as he reached out with both hands to help the first man to his feet and bring him into a welcoming embrace.

Instantly, the Spirit wrapped himself around the man, enshrouding him in a mantle of light, his only clothing.

“It is good!” Father God shouted from heaven.

Lucifer, the prince of the cherubim, sang a perfect pitch, and suddenly all seven angelic choirs burst into song. Their anthem could be heard in every corner of the kingdom that was ruled by the Eternal Father, Yeshua the Creator, and the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the entire choral anthem, Yeshua held his newest creation close to his chest. As newly awakened flesh pressed against the spiritual being of his Creator, they bonded. “I love you,” the Creator whispered, tears of joy running down his glowing face. “The experience of having you alive in my arms is more joy than I have ever experienced before! We will spend time together.” As the last musical note sounded, Yeshua released Adam and took him by the hand. “This world is for you! Let me show you!”

Dazzled, overwhelmed, Adam began to look around. His nervous system began feeding and storing information. Suddenly, he was animated, running from forest to meadow, from seashore to mountain. Hand in hand with his Creator, he explored the garden. Then at the command of Yeshua, the animals presented themselves, coming forward in pairs, and Adam named each kind.

When the last pair of animals had passed, Adam continued to look around.

“What are you looking for?” Yeshua the Creator gently asked.

“My partner,” Adam responded. “Every kind of animal that has passed by me has come with a mate, another like itself. I am looking for another like myself.”

“We made you to need companionship,” the Spirit commented.

“We did,” Yeshua concurred, “and now that you have felt that need, I will fill it.” As he spoke, Yeshua led his creation to a mossy bed near a flowing stream. “Lie down,” he directed.

Adam stretched out on the ground, and Yeshua the Creator knelt beside him. With one hand, he reached out to touch. It was a tender touch, repeatedly brushing the golden curls back from Adam’s forehead until sleepiness made his eyelids close and his breathing became slow and shallow.

Then while Father God watched, the Spirit tenderly glowed, causing warm breezes to engulf the first man. With one finger, the Creator opened up Adam’s side. Skillfully, without spilling any of the blood that carried life throughout Adam’s body, he removed one of Adam’s ribs, sealing the incision immediately.

While Adam slept, Yeshua worked with the genetic material he had placed within each cell in the rib. From it, he generated new cells which he formed into another being, a being like Adam in most ways but significantly different—a compliment, a companion, a being capable of bearing the offspring that would populate the earth and spill over into the other solar systems and galaxies that had been spoken into existence on the fourth day.

“She is beautiful,” the Holy Spirit whispered. “Her heart is tender and capable of holding tremendous love.”

Once more, the Creator pressed his lips against the cold clay lips of his creation, breathing steadily into her mouth. Color bloomed in her cheeks, and as she turned her head, rays of sunlight caught the movement of her long dark tresses.

“Eve,” Yeshua spoke the name of the first woman. She took a breath and slowly opened her eyes.

“It is good!” Father God announced, and once more, the angelic choruses burst into song while Yeshua pulled the first woman to her feet and into his arms, welcoming her, pouring himself into her. The Holy Spirit also caressed her, dressing her in a garment of light.

As the angelic chorus ended, the Creator took Eve by the hand and showed her Adam as he slept. “You were made to be a companion and a coregent with this man.”

“Adam!” the Spirit called the man out of his sleep.

Adam opened his eyes, reaching up and accepting the hand of his Creator.

“This is your partner, your mate for life,” Father God announced from the throne room as the Creator placed Eve’s hand in the hand of Adam.

As flesh touched flesh, an electric thrill surged through both the man and the woman. Joyfully, the Spirit swirled around them, knitting them together heart and soul.

“Together, you are to rule over the Earth, the plants, and the animals. Make all flourish, and then bear children so this planet will be filled,” God commanded.

In response, both Adam and Eve bowed to the ground, accepting the mandate of the Eternal Triune.

With an outstretched hand, Yeshua the Creator brought them back to their feet. “Come, I will show you more of the garden.” Grabbing each by a hand, Yeshua began to run, taking them

from quiet ponds to cascading waterfalls, from golden fields to majestic forests.

Time passed. Earth rotated away from the sun, and darkness filled the sky. Throughout the night, Adam and Eve sat with their Creator, naming the stars and wondering at the brightness of the moon. At dawn on the seventh day, Yeshua led them to an orchard where they enjoyed the sweet produce of the trees. Then he took them to a field where they plucked the ripe grain, chewing handfuls as they walked along.

They drank water from a stream and then sat on its mossy bank with feet submerged. “This day, the seventh day of every week, will be our day,” the Creator said. “I will come to you in the evening as the sixth day ends. For the entire seventh day, we will celebrate the creation of this world. *For in six days I made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but I rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Eternal Father, the Holy Spirit and I have blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*¹ It will be our eternal celebration.”

Then the Creator led Adam and Eve to a grassy hill. At the top, he paused, pointing to the sunset. “Our day is ending. I have so much more to tell you, and you need time to make your own discoveries. For now, I will leave you to explore, to taste, to experience. All has been created for your pleasure. There is only one restriction, the Tree Of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is planted in the center of the garden. Do not eat from it. The fruit of that tree causes sorrow, separation, and death.”

Before parting, the Creator pulled each one close. Then as the sky began to lose its light, his bodily image became a fiery spirit enveloped in clouds, and he ascended into the twilight.



High atop the golden walls of the celestial city, Lucifer, prince of the cherubim, looked down on the Creator's most recent achievement. "The Creator actually gave dominion of the planet and all the creation associated with it to those inferior beings," he muttered. "They are so immature in the ways of the kingdom! Why couldn't the Creator have given that world to me? I am qualified for greater responsibilities than supporting the sapphire throne and directing the choirs."

One of the angelic watchers soared to the top of the wall, stopping in front of Lucifer to make a quick sweeping bow.

Lucifer nodded, enjoying the recognition of his superior rank within the angelic hosts.

"Gabriel sent me to take this position on the wall where I can watch over Adam and Eve. If they appear to have any need, I am to report it immediately," the watcher relayed his assignment.

Concealing the resentment he felt, Lucifer stepped aside, allowing the angelic watcher to take his place. After a brief hesitation, he flew off to take his position, walking among the fiery stones while supporting the sapphire throne of the Eternal God, Three-in-One.



"He is coming!" Adam pointed toward a tiny glowing point of light in the early evening sky. He took his wife's hand, and together, they watched as the golden ember in the heavens became a giant ball of fire streaking toward Earth. As it appeared to increase in size, clouds formed at the base of the fireball, cushioning and slowing its descent through the atmosphere.

Hand in hand, the first man and woman ran through the grassy meadow to the top of a flower-strewn hill, to the place where the Creator usually met them. Breathless with anticipation, they raised their hands in welcome. A deliciously warm breeze enveloped their bodies. Like the kiss of God, it sent warm shivers through their souls.

“The Holy Spirit is with him,” Eve said, acknowledging the presence of that part of the Godhead that moved like the wind, burned like fire, and flowed like oil throughout the kingdom of the Eternal.

As the fiery cloud touched the ground, it suddenly transformed into a towering man clothed in shimmering white light. A smile covered his glowing face, and he stretched his arms out in a welcoming gesture. “Adam my son and Eve, my daughter, I am so eager to hear what you have been doing with the Earth and the creatures I have placed under your authority.” Before the Creator could say more, he engulfed both of his unique creations in his arms and pulled them firmly against his chest. “I can feel your excitement! I know you have so much to tell.” Releasing them, the Creator stepped back. Then with an arm around each, he led them to a bench-shaped boulder, where they sat together while the Spirit swirled around them.

For a few moments, everyone was silent, just enjoying the physical closeness and the beauty that surrounded them.

“You know, the angels do not understand what it is to enjoy the results of a creative effort. They are incapable of experiencing the satisfaction and pleasure that we are feeling at this moment,” Yeshua commented quietly, as if he were speaking to himself. Then he turned to Adam. “You’ve named the creatures and assigned each to a region suitable to its physical and temperamental needs. Now in what other ways are you ordering and expanding upon my creation?” Yeshua asked.

“I am learning to communicate with the dolphins, and they are helping me explore the underwater regions. Coral fascinates me. It provides a habitat for so many sea creatures. I was wondering if it could be made to grow above the waterline, providing a habitat for flying creatures?”

In response to Adam’s question, the Creator waved his hand, and a giant illustration filled the sky. “You have to make a basic change at the intracellular level.” Yeshua pointed to a tiny point

on the spiraling chain of genetic material located in the core of the cell. “A change here will allow the tiny creatures that build the coral to adapt to a dry environment.”

Adam studied the illustration intently, his face breaking into a big grin as he began to understand how to apply the information the Creator was sharing with him.

“Do you know how happy you make me?” the Creator asked. “For so long, I have desired to have someone with which to share the secrets of creation, someone who would be able to come up with original ideas and implement them! I am looking forward to seeing coral rise out of the sea! And what about you, Eve?” He turned to the beautiful woman he had made to be a companion to Adam and mother of the human race.

“I have been cross-pollinating fruit trees with fruit-bearing vines.”

“And I have had to taste the results,” Adam quipped. “Today she was perfecting sour.” Adam’s mouth puckered as he spoke.

“Sometimes a pure sour taste is exactly what is needed when you are working with food combinations,” Eve good-naturedly defended her project. Laughter rolled off the hilltop as Adam, Eve, and Yeshua appreciated the humor of the moment.

When their laughter died away, Yeshua asked, “Have you found a place to make your own special dwelling, a place to begin your family?”

Adam answered, “We found a place near the river. Together, we planted grapevines, which we are going to train to arch, forming a roof.”

“I’ve put lily of the valley near the base of the grapevines and transplanted moss and ferns,” Eve added. “It will be a cool, comfortable place, our own dwelling that we do not share with the animals.”

“We will always share our dwelling with you,” Adam hastily added, including both his Creator and the Spirit in his invitation.

“I hope that is always true,” the Creator replied with an unusual note of wistfulness in his voice.

Prologue II

THE FALL

You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

—Ezekiel 28:14–15

Like fiery oil, the Holy Spirit made a glowing circuit of the room before flowing into the shape of a flaming hand and filling his place on the throne. “Eternal Ruler,” the Spirit addressed his coregent, “Lucifer is spreading sedition again.”

Before the Spirit could communicate his thoughts on the activities of the highest-ranking and most beautiful cherub ever created, a seraph named Ophaniel soared into the throne room. He made a sweeping bow before the trifold rulers of the universe. As this beautiful angel prostrated himself before his God, one pair of his shimmering wings covered his face, and another pair of wings covered his feet while a third set of wings slowly beat the air and whispered, “Holy, holy, holy! Wonderful Creator, Eternal Ruler, and Bountiful Spirit!” For a long time, the high-ranking seraph remained in that position.

Ever watchful, Michael, one of the archangels on the Mount of God, stepped to the side of the kneeling seraph to gently urge him to take his post above the throne. But at that moment, the

Eternal Ruler held up a restraining hand, and Michael, with a respectful bow, returned to his place beside the throne.

“Your heart is heavy,” the Eternal Father observed.

“Speak,” Yeshua the Creator urged. “Unburden yourself before you take your place above the throne.”

Without commenting, the Spirit flowed from his place on the throne and engulfed the now-trembling angel. His sweet aroma, mercy mingled with compassion, filled the holy chamber.

Ophaniel breathed deeply, allowing the fragrance of genuine comfort to fill his nostrils. It broke through his respectful reserve and allowed him to confess, “My heart is breaking over the accusations of Lucifer, your wisest and strongest cherub. With his body, he supports your throne, but with his words, he tears it down!”

“We have heard him, and we have seen the dark places in his heart,” the Father responded.

“Then please, speak out! Refute Lucifer’s claim that he and not man should have been given dominion over your newest creation, Earth! Silence him now before it is too late! Many of the hosts of heaven are convinced that you have treated the royal bearer of your throne with undeserved disdain. Some ministering spirits have stopped praising your name and have become obsessed with judging and condemning your actions. Your kingdom is being divided. The spiritual beings that you have created to minister in the heavenly courts and sing praises before your throne are now taking sides. You must take action!”

“Do not be troubled,” the Creator responded. “We have a plan. As Lucifer continues to build a wall that separates himself from us, our plan will unfold.”

“Forgive me,” Ophaniel cried. “I have listened to his divisive words.”

“There is nothing to forgive,” Father God responded. “You have chosen us, and that choice brings some rejoicing to this dismal situation.”

“It is all about the choice,” Yeshua the Creator asserted. “We are the rulers of created beings who choose to submit to our authority.” He gestured toward the Archangel Michael and to the guardian cherubim on whose backs the throne floated. “They, along with many others, have turned their backs on Lucifer and have pledged their allegiance to us.” Yeshua pointed above the throne toward Gabriel, who had joined the seraphim to fill the throne room with praises. “Each time one of the heavenly hosts comes freely into this room to declare allegiance, there is rejoicing.”

“I do pledge my allegiance and submit to the authority of the Eternal God, Yeshua the Creator, and the Holy Spirit,” Ophaniel declared.

In response, Yeshua extended his hand toward Ophaniel. “Accept this white stone. It bears the mark that identifies those who are with us.”

Ophaniel extended his hand and received a pure white stone, on which two intersecting lines were engraved: one long and one short. He placed the stone in his breastplate among the other gems that had been given to him at his creation and on the occasion when he received the honor of singing praises above the throne.

“Some of the heavenly beings are still deciding. For now, we will wait until all of our created beings have affirmed their loyalty. Allegiance cannot be forced,” Father God added.

Satisfied and comforted, Ophaniel rose from his kneeling position and flew to his station opposite Gabriel above the crystal-blue throne. Their shimmering wings arched like the dazzling emerald bow above them, and together, they sang their love and loyalty to the Trinity.

Simultaneously, Father God and Yeshua looked at the Holy Spirit, waiting for him to complete the thoughts he had begun to share.

“Lucifer is on the walls attempting to convince the watchers and the heralds. Many other heavenly beings are also with him.” The Spirit had stated what the other members of the Godhead knew. Sadly, the three rulers turned their attention to the gathering near the jasper watchtower on top of the golden walls of the celestial city.



Lifting his chin a little higher, Lucifer, the prince of cherubs, observed his glorious reflection in the polished jasper of the corner tower. “I am an astoundingly beautiful creature!” He then spoke to a cluster of angels and heavenly beings who had been drawn almost irresistibly to the top of the towering walls of the heavenly city, “You came to see the Creator’s wisest and most wonderful creation.” Lucifer’s melodious voice pulled his audience closer while his eyes remained fixed on his own reflected beauty.

He stared at himself. Like all cherubim, he had four faces: a man, a lion, an eagle, and an ox. Each was magnificently regal, and each glowed like polished gold. Deliberately, he pulled his gaze away from his own dazzling reflection and turned his manly face toward his audience.

The promenade on top of the golden walls continued to fill with every rank and kind of heavenly being. Lucifer waited. The air became heavy with anticipation. Finally, with a voice as clear and resounding as a perfect musical note, he trumpeted, “When you see my wings, woven with strands of silver and gold and set with diamonds, are you not awed? And when you see my breastplate filled with precious stones, are you not amazed at the honors I am worthy of! Each of these stones represents a position in the kingdom.” Then he paused, slowly turning so the gems the Creator had placed in his breastplate could catch the rays of light that emanated from the throne room of the Eternal Trinity.

“When you observe the Creator’s newest addition to his kingdom—man, ruler of Earth...” The royal cherub’s intonation

signaled his disdain. His pause allowed anticipation to build. Then dramatically, he arched his wings and shook his head so his golden tresses caught the breeze and floated like a shimmering halo. Suddenly, he turned his eagle face on his audience. For a spellbinding moment, he swept the crowd of heavenly beings with his piercing sapphire gaze. Only when he was satisfied that he had the attention of every celestial being within the range of his voice did he revert to his manly face and finish his sentence, "...and you see the plainness of flesh with a mere covering of light that is Adam and his partner, Eve, are you not aghast that they were given dominion over the planet? Did you see what the man was made from? Dirt! Not precious stones filled with light and set in gold! Man cannot transform himself into energy and move faster than light. He cannot even change his form, yet God expects us to minister to him! There is nothing about man that commands my respect. Adam and his partner, Eve, are inferior creatures who should be ministering to us!"

In response, a cacophony of voices filled the air as some voiced their agreement and others their amazement.

"You heard me!" Lucifer repeated. "Adam and his partner, Eve, are inferior creatures who should be worshipping and ministering to us! A mistake! Yeshua the Creator surely made a mistake in setting the hierarchy of his new domain!"

"Mistake!" A subordinate cherub vehemently protested as he turned a brilliantly glaring ox-like face toward his superior. "The Creator does not make mistakes! Adam and his partner, Eve, are made in the image of God, with unlimited potential and the ability to procreate! They are destined to rule with the Godhead. That is truly awesome! You should not speak against your Creator and his plans without cause."

"I have cause!" Lucifer shouted back as he turned his lion-like face toward the protesting cherub. Shaking his beautiful hair like a magnificent golden mane, he roared, "Injustice!"

Lucifer smiled to himself in satisfaction as his audience gasped. “How could the Trinity be accused of injustice?” they asked.

Returning to his most serene face, man, he responded to his listeners, “Since the moment of my creation, I have demonstrated the ability to rule. I have become more than a mere cherub, supporter of the throne.” He pointed to his breastplate, to a shimmering piece of topaz cut so it appeared to have an eye within its center. “I organize the watchers and send them to their posts.” Next, his finger touched the pulsating ruby set near the center of his breastplate. The living stone sang a perfect scale. “I compose the music and conduct all seven choirs of morning stars.” As he enumerated the positions he flawlessly maintained, he pointed to the corresponding stones in his breastplate. “Jasper—I direct the heralds to announce every movement of each member of the Godhead. Because I understand the needs of the Godhead, I make sure there are always two guardian cherubim and numerous seraphim in the throne room.” He pointed to the royal sapphire, then to the onyx stone, black as the uncreated voids at the edges of the kingdom. “I also oversee the keepers of the records of heaven.” With a sneer, he added, “Adam, lord of the Earth, has named the animals and is now attempting to communicate with them!”

Within the heavenly audience, there were a number of responsive chuckles, but many of the heavenly host remained uncomfortably silent.

Encouraged by the positive responses, Lucifer continued, “Justice demands that I take dominion of Earth, that Adam and his offspring submit to my authority and honor me.”

From the center of the audience, a beautiful winged creature rose in a shimmering mist that condensed into a brilliant fireball. Like a comet, he soared into direct confrontation with the Prince of Cherubim. “Do not give the false impression that you have been treated unfairly! Yeshua the Creator made me to spread his beautiful qualities throughout the kingdom. He is the source of all that I am, and my loyalty is with him!” Turning on his

glowing tail, the outspoken creature soared off the city walls into the celestial clouds. Other shimmering creatures rose from the crowd, condensing into brilliant balls of fire as they flew away toward the Sea of Glass in front of the Sanctuary of the Most Holy. Many cherubs, seraphs, watchers, and heralds also followed, leaving Lucifer with those heavenly beings whose thoughts and allegiance he had captured.

“Can’t you show the Trinity that they made a mistake?” a prince from the heralds voiced his suggestion.

“The Godhead is fair. If you show them the error of their ways, they will have to correct their mistake,” another seraph offered support for the herald’s suggestion.

“I have considered a demonstration.” Lucifer nodded thoughtfully before he continued. “I want to show the Creator that Adam and Eve are of inferior intellect. They should be ministering to the heavenly host. The host of heaven should not be ministering to them.

“Yeshua has spoken with the man and woman frequently, and still they are simple beings incapable of ruling Earth. I have observed them closely and know for a fact that they spend much of their time trying to communicate with the animals. They are very slow to accomplish the things we are all able to do. The Godhead will thank me for making their ineptitude clear.”

“Do you really think the Creator will give you dominion over the Earth just because they have not mastered communicating with the animals?” a doubting herald asked.

“I am counting on the objectivity that the Trinity has always boasted,” Lucifer answered in a challenging tone.



“Nearly one-third of our ministering spirits agree with Lucifer,” the Eternal Father said, stating what the Triune Rulers omnipotently knew.

“When we created beings with the ability to reason and make choices, we always knew rebellion was a possibility,” the Creator asserted with resignation.

“But we did not know it would hurt so much.” Father God wiped a crystal tear from his face, and a little of his physical brilliance seemed to fade with the emotional pain of accusation and rejection. “My heart aches for Lucifer, our wonderful creation.”

“I will go to the Garden of Eden and warn Adam and Eve once more,” the Creator stated. “They must understand their vulnerability.”

“And they should be advised to stay away from the place where they are most vulnerable,” the Spirit added.

“The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” Father God breathed the name of the element of choice that, after much conferring, had been placed in the garden.

“At Earth’s twilight, I will meet them,” the Creator said.

“You may be too late.” As the Spirit spoke, each member of the Trinity was simultaneously aware of Lucifer’s presence on Earth.



“Winged serpent?” On Earth, the Prince of Cherubs approached the most intelligent and dazzling creature that Yeshua had placed in the garden.

Gracefully, the iridescently scaled reptile raised its magnificently sculptured head. With quizzical onyx eyes, it looked directly into the face of the most beautiful and intelligent angel ever created.

“I speak your language, and I have authority over the animal kingdoms,” Lucifer announced.

The beautiful winged serpent stared uncertainly, then he spread his wings and started to soar away into the treetops.

Quickly, Lucifer interposed his dazzling body into the creature’s flight path. Flaunting his position, he said, “I’m sure you recognize that I am a very high-ranking emissary from the

Most Holy Sanctuary of the Trinity. Adam is not the only being who has dominion over you!”

Immediately, the serpent responded as he would to his Creator. Submissively, he folded his wings and lowered his gold-and-silver patterned head.

Lucifer read the creature’s body language and nodded to himself in satisfaction. The serpent was going to cooperate. Making his voice as nonthreatening as possible, he continued, “Yeshua has asked that you allow me to inhabit your body so I may speak to Adam and Eve through you.”

The serpent’s high-pitched song of consent softly floated on the air as Lucifer transformed himself into a stream of high-energy living matter that flowed into the body of the winged reptile. As soon as he had possession of the beautiful creature, he soared to the top of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to wait for his opportunity.

It was not long before Eve wandered by. The early afternoon sun caught her long black tresses, reflecting the colors of the rainbow. Enviously, Lucifer fixed the hypnotic eyes of the serpent on his prey. Hidden in the silver foliage of the forbidden tree, he watched every movement the woman made.

As she walked from tree to tree, gathering fruit, the translucent light that clothed her body revealed the silhouette of her exquisite feminine form. Lucifer had to admit that there was primitive beauty in this newest creation, so much beauty that he could not tear his eyes from the graceful movements of the creature called woman. She was alone, and her arms were loaded down with the fruit from several species of trees. Through the serpent, Lucifer called to her, “Eve, daughter of Father God!”

Immediately, the beautiful female paused and looked around, astonished that someone other than Adam or Yeshua had called her name.

“Over here,” Lucifer called. “Come over to the tree so I can talk with you.”

Wide-eyed and curious, the woman created from Adam's rib turned to see a winged serpent speaking to her from within the branches of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

"I have been trying to learn how to communicate with you. How did you learn my language?" Eve asked.

"I ate the fruit of this tree," Lucifer responded through the serpent.

"I have never touched that fruit," Eve thoughtfully replied. Then as an afterthought, she added, "The Creator told us never to eat from that tree."

"Hasn't God said, 'Every tree that bears fruit is good for food'?" the serpent countered.

"God has given us every tree for food but this one," she answered as she moved a little closer. "You are a winged serpent! I did not know the Creator had made any other creatures with language like ours."

Lucifer chuckled to himself. He could see the way her eyes widened with curiosity and the way her body leaned toward his own. "You are intrigued by my ability to speak." He spread his shimmering wings and soared to a lower branch, stretching his long body so Eve could get a better look.

"Yes." Eve started to take another step but hesitated. "I really should not touch the fruit from this tree, for the Creator has said if we eat the fruit of this tree, we will die."

"Die! Surely not!" The serpent took a bite from a nearby piece of fruit. "Look at me! I am not dead. Come close and touch my living scales," he invited.

"Oh, I couldn't," Eve protested, "but a talking serpent, it is so fascinating." She took a few steps closer to the tree.

"I obtained the ability to speak after only two bites of this fruit. After a few more bites, I gained unbelievable wisdom. I now know things that are only known by the Creator, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. They fear you will also gain their knowledge."

“That is not true!” Eve objected. “I think I had better go find Adam.” She started to turn away.

“Adam? What do you need him for? Is your mind so befuddled that you cannot think for yourself?” the serpent taunted.

“I can think!” Eve protested with an emphatic toss of her head. “I am a very intelligent being.”

“Then show your husband just how intelligent you are. Take two pieces of this fruit: one for yourself and one for him. Eat, and you will both have the wisdom of the Three-Gods-in-One.” Lucifer slithered along the branch until he reached several pieces of ripe fruit. With his nose, he nudged them until they fell to the ground. “Just pick them up,” the Tempter suggested. “Take a bite and see. You will have as much wisdom as you have beauty. You are very beautiful, you know.”

Basking in the glow of the serpent’s flattering words, Eve stood in stunned contemplation, and Lucifer remembered the first time he had felt the overwhelming emotions of pride and covetousness. It was a moment to savor. He could see that she was deeply moved by those sensations. “There is so much to experience on this Earth. Don’t let the Creator hold you back.”

Immediately, Lucifer could see that his words had moved the woman to action. Eagerly, she picked up one of the two pieces of fruit he had dropped to the ground. She took a bite, savoring the sweetness, then exuberantly, she reached up to gather more. She could not get enough. He chuckled to himself as he watched her discard her previously gathered fruit, fill her arms to overflowing, and then run to find Adam.

Then still in the body of the winged-serpent, he followed, soaring from treetop to treetop, all the while keeping a discreet distance.



“Adam! Adam!”

From beneath the sea where he was diving with the dolphins, studying their precision swimming and communication skills, Adam heard the sound of his wife's voice. Slowly exhaling, he swam to the surface and looked around. He could see Eve on the beach, her arms overflowing with fruit. With strong easy strokes, he swam toward shore to see what was causing his partner such excitement.

How wonderful the Creator was to have made such a perfect partner for me, Adam mused as he swam toward the beach. He remembered that short period of loneliness when it had seemed that every creature had a mate except him, and then he relived his joy and excitement when the Creator had introduced him to Eve.

Nearing the shore, Adam was almost close enough for his feet to touch the sandy bottom. Eve came wading toward him. Her arms were still full of fruit. As Adam's feet touched the smooth sand of the seabed, he got a closer look at the fruit Eve was carrying. It was...no, it could not be! But it was—the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil!

“What have you done?” Adam cried as he ran toward his wife, splashing through the knee-deep water. “You know what the Creator said, *‘You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’*”¹

Eve met him. Blithely shrugging her shoulders, she ignored his words and held out a piece of golden fruit. “I have brought you wisdom. Here, taste and see! You will feel wonderful and know so much! I met a winged-serpent who could talk—”

“Eve!” Adam interrupted her excited babbling. “This is the forbidden fruit! Now you will die! What can I do?”

“If you eat the fruit, you will be as wise as the Creator, then you will know what to do,” Eve asserted.

“I am not even certain that I know what death is.” Adam was pacing back and forth in the calf-deep water. “But it must mean that you will be separated from me!” He threw his hands up in despair. “I cannot bear it!”

“Adam,” Eve coaxed, “just from eating this fruit, the winged serpent has gained the ability to speak. He knows everything the Creator knows. He knows what death is and how to avoid it. The serpent is not dead, and look, nothing has happened to me!”

“I must know what to say to the Creator. I must know how to stop him from taking you away from me!” Adam stopped pacing and looked his wife directly in the eye. “Are you sure you feel exactly the same as before you ate the fruit?”

“Everything is the same,” Eve assured her husband, “except I am sure that I am now much wiser than ever before.”

Deliberately, Adam reached out and took a piece of fruit from her hand. He ate it, tossing the core into the water where they both stood.

From the top of a nearby tree, Lucifer, still possessing the body of the serpent, observed his complete triumph. Man had chosen to reject the authority of the Godhead. He could no longer occupy an elevated position in the heavenly kingdom. The ministering spirits of heaven could not possibly be expected to minister to him. Man must now minister to angels. Lucifer pushed his reasoning to what he considered the ultimate conclusion: man must minister to his new Lord, Lucifer. The Prince of Cherubs would become Lord of Earth. All that remained was to wait for the Creator to arrive and make the inevitable declaration.

Adam noticed that a sober demeanor had suddenly come over his wife. She dropped the rest of the fruit. It splashed, floated momentarily, and then sank beneath the gentle wavelets. With downcast eyes and a heavy heart, Adam took his wife’s hand, and together, they walked out of the water toward the grass beyond the crystal sand of the beach.

When they reached the shade of a large oak, Adam paused. “Eve, I ate the fruit, and I still do not know what we are going to do or say when the Creator returns.” At that moment, he lifted his eyes from the ground and looked at his wife. “Eve!” he gasped. “You are naked!” The light that had always provided an ethereal

translucent covering was gone, and for the first time, bare flesh presented itself.

Eve began to sob. Tears ran down her cheeks.

Adam had never seen such a thing, and he reached out with one finger to touch the drops of water that were streaming from his wife's eyes.

Between sobs, Eve choked out, "Oh, Adam, your beautiful light is also gone."

Adam looked down and felt repulsed by his nakedness. He could not look at it. Forcefully, he grabbed Eve's hand and pulled her into a waist-high cluster of ferns. For the moment, they were partially covered, but it was not enough. Desperately, he looked around until his eyes fell on the broad leaves of a nearby fig tree. From those, he fashioned a garment that covered his wife from her neck to her thighs and one for himself that covered his flesh from his shoulders to the tops of his knees. Then they huddled together, for the first time experiencing shame and fear.

As Earth's twilight filled the sky with dazzling colors, Lucifer sensed the royal holiness of Yeshua and knew the Creator was approaching the garden. The Prince of Cherubs felt a tingle of anticipation run along his serpentine spine. Ever since the creation of man, he had been waiting to show the Creator his error. The obvious wisdom that he, the most honored member of the heavenly host, had shown in pointing out this mistake would have to be rewarded. This time, the reward would be greater than another stone in his breastplate. It would be a crown on his head. In his mind, he imagined approaching his Creator as an equal and reasonably stating the undeniable facts, "Man has rejected the authority of the Godhead and has submitted to my angelic authority. Earth is now rightfully my kingdom."

The first man heard the familiar footsteps of Yeshua as he walked through the garden. Unfamiliar waves of apprehension ran along Adam's spine and sent him, along with his wife, scurrying deeper into the foliage.

“Adam? Eve? Where are you?” The Creator’s voice followed them. His footsteps stopped very close to the spot where they crouched.

Sensing their Creator’s presence and realizing there was no place to hide, Adam answered a little evasively, *“I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”*²

“Who told you that you were naked?” the Creator asked. *“Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”*³

Squirming under his first experience with guilt, Adam replied, *“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.”*⁴

“Eve,” the Creator addressed the woman, and she cowered, covering her face in shame. “What have you done?”

The need to escape blame was so overwhelming that Eve answered, “The serpent spoke to me, so I ate.”

“Serpent?” The Creator’s voice echoed through the garden.

Hoping that the serpent would carry the blame, Adam and Eve looked up and around to see if the serpent would appear.

In the body of the winged-serpent, Lucifer spread his glittering wings and soared to the top of a nearby tree.

The Prince of Cherubs knew the Creator had recognized his presence. He could feel Yeshua’s righteous gaze penetrating the glossy scales and searching his mind, his heart. Resentfully, Lucifer tried to cloak his thoughts, but it was impossible, so he threw out a challenge, “I have earned the right to be Lord of the Earth!”

The Creator answered Lucifer’s challenge. “Serpent, you are cursed above every creature on Earth.” Yeshua’s voice seemed to split atoms as he continued, “From this day on, all serpents will crawl in the dust.”

Adam and Eve were shocked to see the winged serpent suddenly fall from the top of a nearby tree. Its long thick body hit the ground with a resounding thud. Its beautiful wings had completely broken off from its scaly body. Awkwardly, the

serpent writhed, trying to find a way to move through the dust. The glorious flying creature had become a pitiful snake.

With all his might, Lucifer tried to extricate himself from the body of the earthbound serpent, but he was trapped. The heat of the Creator's gaze sealed him in the body of the squirming snake. Dust clogged his nostrils and made him choke.

*"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers,"*⁵ the Creator announced.

"No! No!" Lucifer tried to voice his objection, but the serpent was no longer able to make a sound. Silently, the Prince of Cherubs railed, "They are my subjects. They have to love and adore me! They have to worship me, like the other ministering spirits, and I have always worshipped you!"

*"He will crush your head!"*⁶

Who? An offspring? Eve's offspring? Lucifer struggled to comprehend.

Deliberately, the Creator's heel came down on the head of the wriggling serpent, applying steady pressure.

Suddenly, it became perfectly clear to Lucifer. Yeshua the Creator was going to somehow do the crushing! Painfully pinned under the weight of the Creator's heel, Lucifer could only grind his jaws in impotent rage.

In horrified amazement, Adam and Eve watched. It was the first act of violence they had ever witnessed. Without mercy, their kind Creator kept bearing down on the serpent's head until its beautiful onyx eyes protruded unnaturally and its forked tongue lay limp in the dust. Suddenly, Yeshua lifted his foot, and instantly, the serpent struck at it, almost touching, but just missing, the Creator's heel.

"You will strike at my heel," Yeshua admitted. "Your fangs will draw blood."

"Read my thoughts," Lucifer retorted. "I'll do more than strike at your heel! One-third of the hosts of heaven have already abandoned you. I am their commander! Together, we will seek out

this offspring of Eve, thwart his appearance, and strike a deadly blow. I have the allegiance of your son Adam and your daughter Eve. All the generations within their reproductive organs belong to me. Earth is mine!”

Refusing further communication with the angel who was now his enemy, Yeshua turned his attention to the created beings that he loved, the ones made in his own image for his personal companionship. “Eve.” The Creator’s voice revealed the heaviness of his heart. “I will greatly increase your pain in bearing children. For your protection, you will desire your husband and submit to him in all things.”

In reverent submission, Eve dropped to her knees, bowing her face to the ground.

“Adam, because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from, I curse the ground! Through backbreaking toil, you will grow the food that you need, wrestling it from thorny ground.”

In the dust at the feet of the Creator, the serpent continued to writhe as Lucifer struggled to extricate himself from the body of the cursed reptile. Exhausted, the Prince of Cherubs paused and looked up at Yeshua. The Creator was completely absorbed in man, his inferior creation! At that moment, anger and resentment exploded in Lucifer’s mind. It rushed through every fiber of his spiritual being, fusing itself to the living energy that was his life.

Burning with rage, the Prince of Cherubs refocused his energy and pushed to escape the fleshly confines of the serpent, only to find that he was bound by its rigid ribs and constricting muscles. How could the Creator do this to him! He was a royal angel of light, a bearer of the throne. His power had never been so restrained!

Unfettered rage quickly turned to anxiety when he realized that the serpent was dying. This confrontation with flesh and death was a shocking experience. Gradually, the movements of the snake slowed. Its body temperature dropped. The scales and

flesh of the serpent now weighed heavily on Lucifer, making him fear that he would never again soar through the heavens. On the verge of panic, loath to accept the embarrassment of calling on his Creator, Lucifer consolidated all his energy and finally burst through the imprisoning corpse.

Seething under the stinging humiliation of the curse and the confinement, the Prince of Cherubs returned to the celestial city with plans to consolidate his forces and confront the Trinity.



Weeping and bent under the weight of their newly gained knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve left the garden. It would no longer be their home. A few paces past Eden's gate, Adam turned his head and looked back over his shoulder. A sword-wielding cherub stationed at the entrance effectively killed all hope of ever returning to the only life he had known.

As if reading her husband's thoughts, Eve offered, "We have the promise that through a son, we will be restored."



"Lucifer is waiting for an audience." The Archangel Michael bowed before the Triune Rulers. "A third of the heavenly host has gathered with him."

"They will never enter this throne room!" The Eternal Father raised his right arm in a gesture of defiance.

Forming a flaming beam of light into a sword, Yeshua the Creator placed it in the hand of Michael. "Gather those who are with us and give them swords."

Without hesitating, the Creator descended from his throne. The train of his regal robe shimmered and floated around him. On his head, a jeweled crown radiated like the suns of the solar systems he had created.

Like a wall of fire, the Holy Spirit followed.

In the Most Holy Sanctuary of the Trinity, praises ceased, and awesome silence filled the throne room.

Sword in hand, Michael soared past his Creator to gather the loyal hosts of heaven.

As Yeshua the Creator moved past the altar, he could see Lucifer and his followers gathered on the Sea of Glass. "What brings you to the Mountain of the Lord and the Court of the Almighty?" Yeshua asked in a voice that shook the foundations of heavenly Zion. Behind him, the flames of the Holy Spirit flared and roared.

"I have come to receive the deed to Earth and official lordship over mankind," Lucifer responded with unwarranted confidence.

"I am the Creator, and Earth is mine!" Yeshua announced. "You are no longer Lucifer, prince of the cherubs. You have become Satan, a thief and my adversary!"

"I am your coregent!" the deposed Prince of Cherubs protested. He gestured to those who stood behind him. "I am recognized by one-third of the heavenly hosts, and mankind has chosen to obey me."

From the clouds that enveloped the Most Holy Sanctuary, the voice of God thundered, "You will never enter my throne room again!"

The sapphire in Satan's breastplate, symbol of his position as guardian of the throne room, suddenly fell from its gold mounting. In a moment of shocked dismay, the former Prince of Cherubs stared at the blue gemstone. It was disintegrating at his feet. "I am your equal! Angels and creatures do my bidding," Satan shouted.

Yeshua thundered in response, "You deceived my creation. They were not given an honest choice!"

"Nevertheless, they belong to me!" Lucifer retorted.

In the cloud-filled expanse above the confrontation on the Sea of Glass, Michael and his warrior angels gathered. High-intensity

beams of light from their burning swords flashed through the glowing canopy of clouds.

“They will be mine again!” Yeshua shouted. “They will be given an honest choice, and all who choose my kingdom will be restored to me. As for you”—anticipatory silence reigned as all of heaven held their breath—“I strip you of every position in my kingdom!”

The rest of the stones in Lucifer’s breastplate began to fall from their mountings, leaving only the gold frame.

“Leave! Leave my kingdom! Take your followers with you!”

“You have no right!” Satan protested.

“I am your Creator, and I have every right,” Yeshua answered.

At that moment, the Holy Spirit exploded into a shower of flaming arrows. Satan and his forces fell back.

“Go to Earth, Satan, my enemy. Pretend to be prince of that world until I come and take it from you!” Yeshua announced as Michael and his host of warrior angels swooped down from the clouds.

Confusion and panic broke out in the ranks of the fallen host. Overwhelmed and outnumbered, the ministering spirits who had given their allegiance to the ex-Prince of Cherubs fled poured over the golden walls of the celestial city in a cascade of chaos.

With as much dignity as he could muster, Satan followed. Soaring to the top of the city walls, he turned his lion face toward Yeshua the Creator and roared in defiance.

“You will be defeated,” Yeshua announced as his face took on the appearance of a lamb.

Like lightning, Satan, the deposed prince of cherubs, fell from the heavenly city to Earth.

Chapter 1

AN UNBELIEVABLE STORY

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

—Matthew 1:18

“**T**his is the time, and this is the place.” The fallen angel Raziel urged the dark spirits who accompanied him to slip under the roof of a humble home in the Galilean town of Nazareth. “Watch their body language.” Through the cracks in the wooden gate to the courtyard, Raziel could see Heli the scribe of Nazareth and his wife talking to their daughter, Mary. “Listen to their words and try to weasel your way into their thoughts, but be careful! You will have to work from a safe distance.” He pointed to the glow from the Holy Spirit, which surrounded the young girl seated in the center of the courtyard.

The spirits of Doubt, Fear, Condemnation, and Judgment trembled and held back.

“Go in,” Raziel urged, pushing them through the spaces between the stone wall and the mud-and-thatch roof. “Do what our master has taught you to do,” he admonished before soaring off to report to his immediate superior, Satan, the prince of evil.

“Now, Mary,” Heli raised his hand in a gesture meant to silence his daughter. “I know you love Joseph and he is eager to take you

into his home and make you his wife. You two have waited a little longer than usual, but that is only because Joseph is such a fine craftsman and won't settle for anything less than the best. The bridal chamber and cooking area that he is attaching to his shop are almost complete. No girl living anywhere in the region of Galilee will have two rooms with finer craftsmanship, even if the rest of her home is a carpenter's shop." Heli paused, stroking his beard, taking a few pacing steps on the hard-packed dirt floor of the courtyard as he contemplated the situation.

"Sometimes the waiting is just too difficult," Mary's mother suggested as she comfortingly put her arm around her fourteen-year-old daughter. She spoke to her husband as much as to her daughter. "There are feelings and physical drives between men and women that are difficult to say no to." Looking directly at her daughter, she sternly admonished, "Mary, you don't have to make up a story about an angel and the Spirit of God coming upon you. Your father and I understand those desires." The very married Jewish couple exchanged affectionate knowing glances. "I have to admit, I am surprised at Joseph. I thought he was a man more bound to the law than the desires of his flesh," Mary's mother added, as if trying to shift some of the responsibility from their daughter to their future son-in-law.

"Now, Mother." Heli stopped his pacing directly in front of his wife and daughter. "Don't pass judgment on Joseph. He is a man of the Torah, just like my ancestor, King David. And you know the stories about him!" Heli's eyebrows lifted, and his eyes became big with suggestion.

"Heli, this is not a light matter!" Mary's mother scolded.

"Yes, I know." Heli composed himself and turned a solemn face on his daughter, who sat on a small stool, head respectfully bowed and eyes on the well-trampled dirt of the small courtyard, as was the custom for children who were being reprimanded. Heli wiped the sweat from his forehead, walked over to the water jar, and dipped himself a cup of water. "It is too hot a day for

such a story! Mary, the mother of the Son of God? You mean the Messiah?” Mary’s father shook his head in disbelief. “It is unnecessary to go to such extremes. Joseph is an honorable man. He will do the right thing. He will take you into his home right away. I will speak to him.”

“But, Father, you don’t understand. I have not been with Joseph.” Mary looked up. Her eyes, a serious dark brown, met the horrified eyes of her parents. All levity left the room.

“Oh, Mary! Then how?” Her mother’s hand slipped from Mary’s shoulder and went to her mouth in a gesture of unspeakable horror. “What have you done?”

“Nothing! I have done nothing!” Mary protested. She stood and looked her parents squarely in the eyes. “I know what you are thinking, but I have not been with any of the men of our village.”

“Then how can you be sure you are with child?” Mary’s mother asked.

“Mybody is going through all the changes Cousin Hannah told me about, and you have seen what is happening to my breakfast every morning. Even you began to suspect and ask questions. That’s why we are having this conversation,” Mary replied.

“It wasn’t a Roman soldier, was it?” Heli spit the question through clenched teeth.

“Oh no!” Mary responded with equal horror.

But her mother started weeping as if she had not heard her daughter’s reply. “Remember your cousin Deborah? Poor child. She had no choice, and no one dared come to her assistance. Oh, Mary, you can tell us.”

Heli looked tenderly at his beautiful daughter while placing a comforting hand on his wife’s shoulder. “Mary, you do not need to fear being stoned. If this child that you carry was forced upon you by our oppressors, you can expect mercy. We cannot take the bodies down from the crosses that stand by our highways, but we can spare the women they molest.”

Mary looked up and raised her arms in exasperation. Then she began repeating her story, measuring each word. "Father, I tell you, the angel of the Lord appeared to me in this courtyard. Mother, you know I have never told an untruth. I am speaking the truth to you now. He stood in that corner next to the water jars." She pointed, hoping her parents could visualize the scene. "He was dressed all in white, and his skin glowed like the coals of a fire. His head was higher than the roof on the surrounding rooms. When I saw him, I was frightened and speechless, but he spoke to me. He said, '*Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*'"¹ He frightened me so much that I was about to flee, but he spoke again, and the tone of his voice was so gentle that I wanted to run to him instead of away. He said, '*Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God.*'"²

"Child," Mary's mother interrupted, "you should have run away. You should have run into the street and screamed for assistance."

"Who is this man you are talking about?" Heli raged as he paced around the tiny open courtyard, peering into each adjacent room as if he were looking for the stranger his daughter was describing. "How dare he enter my house and molest my daughter! Didn't you cry out? Didn't anyone hear?" He stopped pacing in front of the partially opened drape separating his daughters' sleeping area from the courtyard. "Where was your sister, Salome, when this was taking place?" With one hand, he swept the drape open and glared down at the young girl who sat on the floor listening.

"She was working in the garden," Mary answered.

"Salome can go to the garden now," her mother sternly insisted as she quickly strode over to place a basket in the hands of her youngest child. "This is not a conversation you are involved in," she rebuked. "Go to the garden and pick all the cucumbers that are ripe. If any of the neighbors come by, do not speak to anyone regarding this matter!"

Obediently, Salome stood, accepting the basket and walking toward the gate, but not without catching Mary's eye and silently mouthing, "I believe you!"

Once more, Heli turned to his daughter. The sadness, the pain in his eyes, Mary could hardly stand it. "I taught you the Torah, the sacred laws that we live by." He began to quote, "*If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death—the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you.*"³

"Heli," Mary's mother spoke up, "the Romans do not allow us to carry out death penalties."

"The Romans are not everywhere," Heli argued. "They are seldom in small towns like Nazareth. In Jerusalem, they regulate the religious courts, but in small towns, tradition often prevails."

"We must protect our daughter," Mary's mother insisted. "We love her, and she has always been our most obedient child. But, Mary"—she turned to her daughter—"you must tell us the truth!"

"He never touched me," Mary insisted. "He just said, '*You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.*'"⁴ The angel told me this child would be great and he would be called the Son of the Most High."

The Holy Spirit drew near. "Speak, Mary. Say the exact words of the heavenly messenger." The beautiful anointing that accompanies the presence of the Spirit of God fell upon the girl.

Mary stood and quoted from the heavenly being that had visited her, "*The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.*"⁵

Entwined in the thatch and clinging to the rafters, the demonic observers trembled. "She is speaking of the promised Messiah, the very prophecy that our lord, Satan, has sworn will never be fulfilled.

For a few moments, both of her parents were struck by the power of their daughter's words. They stared at her, not knowing how to respond. Finally, her mother broke the silence with a practical statement. "Mary, you cannot have a child without knowing a man." She looked at her daughter skeptically. "I thought you knew how God ordained that men and women come together to have children."

"I know," Mary rushed to defend herself. "I asked the angel how this could possibly be since I am a virgin. I am still a virgin to this day! I have never known a man!" Her voice pleaded with her parents to understand and believe. "As the angel continued to speak, my whole body began to tingle and shake." Again under the power of the Spirit, she repeated the exact words, "*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*"⁶

Mary continued, "I replied, *I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.*"⁷ At that moment, I lost all strength. No one touched me, but the presence of the Holy God was so overwhelming that I could not stand. It was like the Shekinah that once filled Solomon's Temple. It filled me at that moment."

"We must do something!" Spirits of Doubt dropped from the ceiling, landing like unnoticed insects on the shoulders of both parents.

Mary looked at her parents who stared back at her, speechless. Doubt and horror seemed to be written on their faces. "You do believe me, don't you? Father, say you believe me. Mother?"

"Well, Mary"—her father continued to shake his head while he groped for words—"this is quite a story! In this story, there are elements of many prophecies. I taught you those prophecies, but I did not intend for you to use them to get yourself out of an unlawful situation." There was a painful pause while doubt and belief struggled. "I just don't know what to say." Worriedly, almost under his breath, he finally said, "What will I tell Joseph?"

“The angel gave me a sign,” Mary added, hoping to bring her parents confidence in her truthfulness.

“A sign?” Both parents leaned forward, their bodies and minds begging for reassurance.

“The last thing he said was, *‘Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.’*”⁸

“Elizabeth? She is my mother’s sister!” Mary’s mother gasped. “She could not possibly carry a child at her age!”

“I have been inquiring in the town, trying to find someone who is going to Carem in the Judean hills just west of Jerusalem. Father, I need to go and see Elizabeth for myself,” Mary pleaded. “I have found no one going all the way to Carem, but Hur the silversmith and his wife are going to Jerusalem in a few weeks. He needs to sell the jewelry he has been making. I could travel that far with them.”

“Carem is only a little further,” Heli commented. “You could walk from Jerusalem to Carem in just one more day.”

“I don’t see that we have any choice but to let her go and see if this miracle has taken place,” Mary’s mother offered.

“I will speak to Hur, but I don’t want you to tell him or anyone the story of the angel. It’s just too hard to believe,” Heli stated. The slow side-to-side movement of his head indicated his own struggle to accept his daughter’s story. “If what you say is true...” His voice trailed off in contemplation.

“I want to see with my own eyes,” Mary softly stated. “I must know without a doubt.”

“Yes, my daughter. You must travel to visit Elizabeth and Zechariah the priest,” her mother quickly replied.

Heli agreed. “Stay only a few weeks and bring a letter back from Zechariah confirming the word of the Lord to you. When you return with the letter, I will speak to Joseph.”

A shofar sounded in the village of Nazareth. Heli turned toward Jerusalem and pulled his prayer shawl over his head, but

not before Mary got a good look at the pain and anxiety in his eyes. As he began to chant the ancient prayers of her people, his body swayed back and forth in the traditional davening prayer of the pious. She watched him and felt a pang of regret.

For a moment, the spirits of Doubt united in the air, swarming in consultation before separating and coming down to crawl under the head coverings of each person in the house. Like annoying flies, they swarmed around the ears, whispering worry and attempting to nibble away at faith and experience.

“Your father is a devout man. Look how you have hurt him. You should have resisted the stranger.” A spirit of Doubt clung to Mary’s ear and whispered, “If you had not come into agreement with the messenger, then you would have never have had this conversation with your parents. There would be no problem to bring to Joseph. Your life would not be in danger.”

In her mind, Mary protested, It was an angel. I submitted to the will of God for my life.

“Are you sure you were visited by an angel and not a clever stranger who had his way with you?” Doubt persisted.

“What I felt, what I experienced, it was supernatural and pure.” Mary relived her encounter with the angel.

The words of the angel seemed to ring in her head as the Spirit whispered, “*Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.*”⁹

The voice of Doubt intruded, sweeping aside the whisperings of the Spirit, “Maybe you submitted to Satan, the Prince of Darkness. Maybe you had relations with him? Were you aware of everything that happened after you collapsed? After all, your knowledge of the ways of men and angels is very limited. Even your knowledge of procreation is very limited. You could have been deceived like Eve in the garden. You could have had relations with that being without understanding what you were doing.”

No! Mary protested mentally. And once again, the words of the angel filled her mind, “*So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*”¹⁰

The spirits of Condemnation and Fear chimed in, trying once more to shake God’s chosen vessel, “Look at your mother. See how she pauses to worriedly wring her hands between each lamp she trims. She is the daughter of a Levite, married to a scribe from the tribe of Judah. She knows the law regarding these matters. She knows how the people of a small town can become uncontrollable, rock-throwing zealots. She is fearful. And there is reason to fear. You could be pulled from the safety of your parents’ home and taken to the cliff just outside of town. Unless Joseph, a man known for his truthfulness, claims the child, you will be stoned and your body tossed over the precipice. Joseph will never tell a lie. He is a man of the law. *‘You shall not give false testimony.’*”¹¹

Mary shivered involuntarily. Once, she had seen the people of the town in a rage, chasing a loose woman to the cliff just outside the village and there stoning her to death. Now she saw the scene again, only this time she was the woman. No one would listen to her story or her protests that she was innocent. In her mind, the townspeople were screaming curses at her family and pelting her with rocks. Imagination played like reality. She kept backing away from the angry mob, closer and closer to the cliff until she stepped over the edge, falling, falling. Horror caught in her throat, and she nearly gagged on it.

“I know it was the angel of the Lord. I was not deceived. I was not physically touched.” Under her breath, she kept repeating, “*Don’t be afraid... You are highly favored of God.*”¹²

But who would believe it? If she told them how the Spirit of God filled her, how her soul seemed to burst with intimate knowledge of the love of God for his people, no one would understand. To some, it might even sound like the physical union of man and wife. Even though she had no words to describe

such an overwhelming spiritual experience, it was burned in her memory forever. She raised that memory like a protective shield.

The voices wouldn't quit. "Mary, Mary, you need this problem to go away. You are breaking the hearts of your parents, and Joseph will despise you. You don't have to have this child. Remember? One time at the well, you heard about an Egyptian woman who lives on the outskirts of town. She knows how to make unwanted pregnancies go away."

Mary covered her ears with her hands and cried out, "In the name of God Almighty, be silent! I will not listen!"

At her outburst, both parents turned, unable to disguise their looks of alarm. "Are you possessed?" her father asked.

"No, Father. Only the Spirit of God fills me," Mary calmly replied as she picked up a water jar and walked out the door toward the village well. The cooler evening air seemed to have cleared all the voices from her head. How was it, she wondered, that one minute she could be in complete mental turmoil and the next in such tranquility?

The Spirit of God Most Holy rose and went with her, only to be confronted by the ugly demonic spirits who had been forced into submission by her words. "You shouldn't have stopped us!" a spirit of Doubt shouted his accusation from a safe distance.

In response, the Holy Spirit seemed to expand and glow like fire. "Mary commanded you to be silent in the name of the Lord Almighty. She is a favored daughter of God. When she speaks his name, you are to submit."

The one outspoken spirit drew back into the dark clustering of his evil cohorts. Together, they stood their ground, feebly resisting the Holy Spirit.

Glowing with righteousness, the Spirit stared them down and spoke a slight variation of the words he had given to David five hundred years before, "*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from*

*those whose walk is blameless.*¹³ Blessed is his daughter Mary, who trusts in him.”

With a scream of rage, all the evil spirits retreated to the outskirts of Nazareth. Then, undetected by humans, the Holy Spirit spread himself over the entire village while specifically taking residence in the home of Mary. He spent the night ministering to the fears of her godly parents.

It was an unusually peaceful evening in all the homes of that little village on that summer night.



“Shalom and good morning to the house of Heli!” It was Joseph’s voice. Mary would know it anywhere.

“Father and mother of my betrothed, are you home?” His deep voice penetrated the wooden gate and rang through the courtyard into every part of the house.

Mary looked up from the figs she was peeling and cleaning. She loved the sound of Joseph’s voice. She loved this swarthy man who worked with his hands and rippling muscles.

Working beside her, Salome took the figs from Mary’s hands and nudged her. “Hurry, go to the gate! Tell him you will be leaving in a few days, going to visit Elizabeth.”

Mary shook her head negatively at her sister and called, “Joseph, my parents are not here!”

Normally, she would have run out to greet him, to feast her eyes on his suntanned face and dark curly beard, but since the visit from the angel, she had avoided encounters with her betrothed. Not to explain all that had happened to her seemed so uncomfortably dishonest; she just couldn’t face him. It would be easier to leave it to her parents to explain her journey to see Elizabeth.

“Mary!” Joy seemed to fill Joseph’s voice when he said her name. “Come to the gate and get the fish I brought your mother.” He rushed to add, “Let me tell you about the bridal chamber and

the cooking area. I just need to finish the lattice and the trim on the windows.”

“Go!” Salome pushed her toward the courtyard.

Feeling trapped, Mary wiped her hands and walked quickly through the courtyard. “Oh, Joseph, you don’t have to bring us things,” she spoke as she passed through the tiny courtyard toward the wooden gate that opened onto the street. “We have plenty.”

She lifted the latch and swung the sturdy gate open. Immediately, her eyes feasted on Joseph’s well-muscled body. He took a step forward and filled the entrance to her parents’ home, and Mary’s heart danced like the maidens at their betrothal feast. It had been at least four weeks since she had spoken to him, such a long time, and so much had happened.

Silently, Salome came up behind Mary, giving Joseph a little wave so he knew they were not alone and it was proper to speak with his betrothed.

“I know I don’t have to bring things to your family, but I am going to be a good son-in-law to your parents and a great husband to you.” He grinned at his bride-to-be. If he could take her into his home at this very moment, he would, but he restrained himself with the knowledge that in just a few weeks, he would get his friends together and they would come to her father’s house shouting and singing. He would carry her, light as a feather, to his own home and into the wedding chamber he had been laboring on for more than a year. Even though his mind was full of desire, he properly remained on the threshold of her home and spoke of safe, mundane things like fish. “Zebedee was peddling his dried sardines from Galilee. I brought your mother a basketful for her wonderful fish stew.” Joseph lifted the lid of his basket to show a pile of dried miniature fish.

The odor of dried sardines filled the entrance, and without warning, Mary found herself gagging. There was nothing she could do but clamp her hand over her mouth, push past Joseph,

and run for the garden, where she heaved up and splattered her morning meal beside the ripening melons.

“Mary?”

She sensed Joseph’s strong body behind her.

“Are you ill?”

His carpenter’s hands grasped her shoulders and steadied her until her stomach stopped heaving. Turning her to face him, he asked, “What is wrong? Do you need a physician? Your mother?” His face was filled with worry. “Where is your mother? I’ll go get her!”

“I’m all right, Joseph.” She didn’t want to tell him now. She needed the letter from Zechariah.

Joseph’s eyes were staring into hers, demanding an honest answer. Over his shoulder, she could see Salome running to the neighbor’s, where she knew her father was discussing the Torah.

“It was just the warmth of the day and the smell of the fish,” Mary replied while wiping her mouth with a rag she had pulled from the folds of the belt that encircled her waist. “It turned my stomach,” she added with unconvincing honesty.

“I don’t understand. It never bothered you before.” Joseph was not satisfied with her answer.

What could she say? The man she had pledged to marry was waiting for a better explanation for her strange behavior. “My father is going to talk to you.” Mary was trying to choose her words carefully.

“Your father? What does he have to say to me?” Joseph dropped his hands from her shoulders and took a step backward. Confusion and worry played across his face.

“Joseph, my son.” Heli and Salome had come up behind them.

Immediately, Joseph turned and asked, “What is wrong with Mary?” He glanced at his betrothed, who was bent over as if she were going to vomit again.

Heli took in the scene with a sigh of resignation and said, "Mary believes she is with child." He took an unsteady breath before adding, "I was going to tell you soon."

"With child?" Joseph repeated the words in agony. "Mary, how could you?"

Heli placed a hand on Joseph's shoulder. "We must sit down and talk." He gestured toward the wooden bench at the back of the house. "There are special circumstances. My daughter has told us a most unusual story."

Joseph took another step backward, and Heli's hand fell from his shoulder.

"Joseph, listen!" Mary pleaded. Salome ran to her sister's side.

"No! I will not sit down and talk!" Joseph continued to back away. "Mary," he groaned. "You know the child is not mine." He turned to Heli. "There is nothing you can tell me. She has broken her vows, and now I cannot take her to be my wife under any circumstances!"

"Mary." He turned once again to the girl he loved. She was kneeling in the dirt of the garden. In a hoarse half-whisper, he spoke, "I cared deeply for you. I thought you cared for me. We had plans. We had a legal contract." Joseph's face contorted as he struggled to control his grief and rage.

"Joseph, I have not been with any man. I have not broken our contract," Mary said, pleading with him to believe her. "This child that I carry is from God. I was visited by an angel."

"She is telling the truth!" Salome loyally inserted.

"Don't, don't say such things." Joseph held up his hands as if to shield himself from such evil words.

"You know the prophecies of a Messiah, a son of David," Heli interjected.

Joseph turned to Heli, gesturing angrily. "I have heard enough. Send her away. I will divorce her quietly." He shook his head in sad disbelief. "This one untruth I will tell. I will say that she no

longer pleases me, and based on that alone, I will go before the elders and dissolve our betrothal.”

“But, my son,” Heli tried, “you could just take her into your home. She does please you, and you do care for her. It may even turn out that she is mistaken and she is not with child.”

Joseph ignored Heli’s pleas and continued asserting the unwavering righteousness that Mary had so admired in him. “There is only one reason that a young woman would suspect that she is with child, and that is, she knows she has been with a man!” Joseph composed himself and looked squarely into Heli’s eyes. “I will not demand to know the name of the father or bring her before the local council, but I do not want to see her face or hear her name again.”

“No!” Mary dropped her head to the soft ground, sobbing. Her hair fell from its loosely tied knot and spilled around her face like a black mourning veil hastily thrown over her head. Salome threw her arms around her weeping sister.

Righteously, Joseph turned and strode away. After a few steps, he looked back, throwing a solemn warning over his shoulder, “Get her out of town, Heli, before her condition becomes obvious and the matter is taken out of my hands.”