

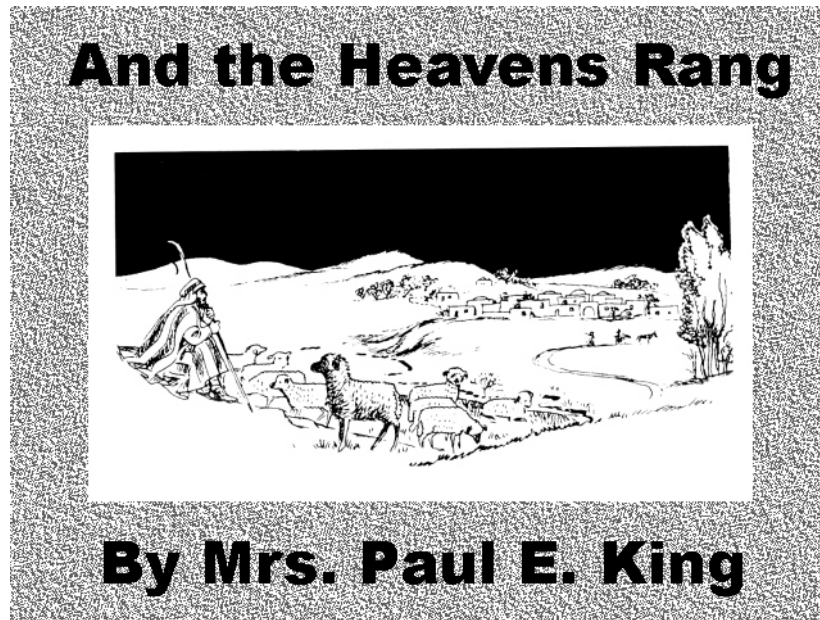
Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

The Sunday School Beacon
December 25, 1994



AND THE HEAVENS RANG
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"It's too bad you won't be going with your family, Simeon," Joash chided his cousin. "After all, you'd get to see everybody. Everybody!" he exclaimed with great excitement as he threw his arms outward and upward in a gesture of great expansiveness. "But I guess shepherds don't care a jot that they don't get to go to anything that's really important and . . . and exciting. What a

drab, dull life yours is!" he exclaimed with derision, plunging the sword of words ever deeper into Simeon's tender and sensitive heart.

Simeon swallowed hard. That nasty old lump was back in his throat again and in precisely the same spot as it had been earlier in the day when Joash showed him the new garments his mother had made him for the trip down to Bethlehem.

"Father gave me a coin," Joash bragged. "Spending money."

Simeon swallowed again.

"It's too bad you're a common shepherd, Simeon," the cousin declared.

"It's not of my choosing, Joash; you know this. But I am happy to make life easier for my mother," Simeon declared kindly. "Since Father's death, she has faced one adverse circumstance after another. The sheep flock -- a gift from my uncle and her brother Jacob -- has been a real blessing to her. I am the oldest son so, naturally, it has fallen my lot to care for and look after the flock. The God of our fathers has blest us indeed by bestowing upon us this poured-out blessing of such a fine flock of sheep. We now have wool to card and to make into warm garments as well as plenty to sell. We have cheeses and milk and. . . ."

"But you never have excitement," Joash declared, breaking in upon Simeon's unfinished sentence. "You know little or nothing about city life, Simeon. You're a dumb, dull, ignorant shepherd and I'm anything but proud to let anybody know that you and I are related. I'm studying under the greatest teacher in all of our country. He's brilliant. Brilliant, I tell you. And you . . . you have no teacher."

"Oh, but I do," Simeon cried softly. "I do. You are mistaken, Joash. I too am a student. I am learning."

"From what? Who would consider, even, to tutor a common shepherd boy?"

"I am learning, Joash," Simeon declared softly; patiently. "A shepherd need not be ignorant and unlearned. Jehovah God is my great Teacher. He is the Teacher of all teachers."

Joash laughed in pure mockery. "Jehovah God!" he exclaimed. "How brash of you, Simeon! Jehovah God rules in the heavens; He is neither seen, felt, nor heard. He cannot be your teacher. That is blasphemous."

"Wrong," Simeon declared quickly. "Jehovah God is my Teacher and daily, as I pray and seek His wisdom and His help, I am learning, Joash; learning things like I never knew it was possible for anyone to learn. What's more, through old Jude, I have been copying down portions of the writings of the Prophets."

"And what does an old shepherd know about the writings of the Prophets, may I ask? You know as well as I that the public has no access to these writings, much less a common old shepherd, Simeon."

"You're wrong again, Joash. Jude has a relative who is a scribe. He has recited many writings to Jude, who in turn has written them down and memorized them all by heart. He is reciting them all to me, chapter by chapter and verse by verse, and I am writing them all down on papyrus, a gift from this wonderful scribe to me -- the papyrus, I mean. Oh, Joash, I feel like I am rich; like I am unearthing hidden treasure with each new thing I hear and write and learn. We are a blest people. The Messiah, He could come in our day and. . . ."

"You're crazy, Simeon. Crazy! The Rabbis, we must listen to the Rabbis in the synagogue. They're scholarly men. Learned men."

"But blind regarding so many things, Joash."

"How dare you say that? You, an ignorant and poor shepherd boy!" And Joash stomped the ground with his foot, sending eddies of dust flurrying around his leather-sandaled feet. "I hate you, Simeon. Hate you!" With that, he spat upon the ground then turned and walked away with his nose up in the air.

Simeon watched the retreating figure until he was out of sight then he settled down upon a nearby rock and began quoting the scripture softly from Isaiah 53:

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

"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."

The young man felt tears slide from his eyes. Jude explained to him that this scripture all referred to their wonderful Messiah who would become the one and only sacrificial Lamb. Sometimes it was hard for him to comprehend and understand how this could be but deep within his heart, he believed. Believed it all -- from beginning to end. Jude had a way of unfolding the scriptural portions and making them as real as real could be. And he, young Simeon, listened with not only open ears but with an open heart as well, and thus he found it pure pleasure and joy to believe.

He raised his eyes heavenward now; his arms too, and whispered softly to the first cool wisps of the early twilight breezes, "Come, Messiah! Come! In this, my day, come. I welcome Thee!"

He stood now for a long while beside the rock, watching as the sheep bedded down one by one for the night, and by the time the last of the flock had settled down quietly, feeling confidently secure in his presence, the sun had dipped well below the highest rock formation and night wrapped them in its sable blanket, leaving only a faint hint in the west of the beauty of the day just spent.

Talking quietly to the flock, Simeon walked around the now bedded-down sheep, making sure that each was well; then he, too, settled down near

them. Immediately, his thoughts flitted back to Joash. His cousin could be so cruel, he soliloquized sadly. So very cruel. And so harsh and cutting. At times, his tongue seemed like a razor with a double edge.

Poor Joash; he had time nor thought for anyone but Joash. He was churlish and selfish and spoiled. Little wonder though: Adah, his mother, had a sharp tongue and believed little in restraining a child; and since Ephraim her husband spent most of his waking hours sitting with the men at the gates of the synagogue, the young man lacked much in proper training and upbringing. What he didn't lack in was wealth; both Ephraim and Adah came from wealthy families, hence Joash was receiving the best training and schooling possible. He had all that wealth could bring him. But he lacked greatly in the finer, gentler and more lovely things in life; things not imparted to one by wealth -- he was glaringly devoid of "fitly-spoken words" and of common but beautiful courtesies and gentle graces, which make even a commoner noble and great and much sought after.

He was in the midst of comparing his own gentle and loving mother with his Aunt Adah -- a thing he rarely ever allowed himself to do lest he become critical in his heart -- when he heard the soft, almost subtle, shuffle of Jude's feet nearing his resting place. Out of courtesy and respect for the aged man, Simeon got to his feet and bowed before the hoar head, saying quietly, "Greetings, my lord. How goes the night?"

"Greetings to you, my boy. All is well. Yes, all is well. I will sit a while with you. My flock is resting on yon hillock and I have much to share with you this night."

"You do?" Simeon's voice was eager, like a little boy's and not like the nineteen year-old that he was. "Is it about the Messiah? Do you still think He may come in our time?"

"Without a doubt! I believe it, young Simeon. And my heart rejoices that you, young as you are, do not doubt what the Prophets have foretold regarding His coming, but that you believe. Ah, this alone makes an old man's heart rejoice; to know that, even yet, there are still some with young blood running in their veins who listen to those whose heads wear the snows of many winters and believe. That's the secret, Simeon -- believing! It is one thing to hear but it is another to believe."

"But how can one not believe when he hears the words of the Prophets?"

"'Tis a mystery to me, son. Yes, a profound mystery. But there are more unbelievers than believers, I am sorry to say. Yes, many more of the former than of the latter. And many scoffers too."

"Oh, that He might come in my time!" Simeon cried with feeling. "But maybe He would reveal Himself only to those of nobility and . . . and wealth. Maybe, being a shepherd, He would. . . ."

"Joash was taunting you again, was he not?" Jude asked, breaking in quickly on Simeon's unfinished sentence. "I saw him. That young man will reap his just deserts, my boy; mark you well my words. Jehovah God is a God of compassion and mercy and truth and righteousness, but He is also a God of judgment. Joash is turning more and more into a self-righteous bigot. You must not pay attention to what he says. It pains me, inside, the way he treats you."

"That does not matter so much: it is his total and bitter unbelief that troubles me. He believes only what he wants to believe concerning the writings of the Prophets; all else is cast aside like refuse and is trampled under foot, figuratively speaking, and is made light of."

"But every word spoken by the Prophets is true, Simeon, whether Joash believes or not. The Messiah will come, as prophesied and promised, and I am expecting Him in my day. And now, perhaps I had better get back and check on my sheep. Keep the faith, my boy; keep the faith. Goodnight."

Long after Jude had gone, Simeon sat with his face turned upward, quoting the beautiful scriptural portions he had memorized. After a while, he grew sleepy and drowsy; what with the song of night birds being wafted to him from the cedar trees and the olive's lofty heights, as well as the steady and rhythmic breathing of the sheep under his care. So, wrapping his cloak more closely to his body and pillowing his head on a stone, he fell asleep. But not for long.

Hearing voices and with the awareness of light, he opened his eyes and stared into the heavens. But only for a moment. The brilliance and the splendor of the sky blinded him. Quickly and instinctively, he shielded his

face with his hands. And then he heard words which he would remember for so long as he lived:

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

"And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Simeon was on his feet, rejoicing. Shouting, he cried, "He has come! He has come! The promised Messiah is here! And I, a lowly shepherd shall see Him! I will now hasten away to 'see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.'

"Jude; I must tell Jude," he cried aloud, as he ran toward the hillock where his beloved friend kept his sheep. But before he spanned the short distance, he was met by not only Jude but a group of other shepherds, as well.

"Hurry! Hurry!" they cried. "The Babe! We must see this Heavenly Babe."

"A Savior,' the angel said," Jude remarked reverently. "A Savior, which is Christ the Lord.' My Savior! My Lord and my God."

"Amen and amen!" Simeon cried, hurrying across the dusty hills toward Bethlehem and the Babe. God had remembered him, a lowly shepherd. Yes, He had.

Wiping tears of joy from his eyes, he raced ahead. The heavens seemed to ring with the glad and glorious message.