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THE LONG-AWAITED SAVIOR
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The moon hung like a crescent gem in the velvet-blue sky. Stars blinked and winked and danced as Isaac leaned on his staff, staring into the heavens, his mind deep in pondering over the strange things his young nephew had told him about when he made his usual delivery of cheeses, figs, nuts and bread earlier in the day.

Elihu always was different, Isaac mused silently, recalling the day and the time when Lois and he had taken the three orphaned nephews into their home as their own.

Daniel, the oldest of the three, and also the huskiest and the tallest, had been trained well by his father, Isaac's oldest brother, in carpentry. Now married and raising a family of his own in a nearby village, Isaac knew his nephew was well on his way to success and wealth.

"If only Daniel were more interested in the worship services in the synagogue!" he exclaimed aloud to no one but himself.

It disturbed him that this prosperous young man could be so disinterested in the tenets of the Torah and that his attendance at the synagogue was only when it was a matter of convenience for him; in reality, a matter when it suited him, which was seldom.

Isaac sighed and sat down on the ground, resting his shepherd's staff across his knees. He sometimes had the uncomfortable feeling that Daniel looked down on him with shame and scorn because he was a lowly shepherd and had not "bettered" himself by learning a specialized trade, like his own father, Isaac's brother.

The Almighty One will have to bring him down, Isaac mused, as he thought of Daniel's proud and haughty spirit. Lois and he had brought the three up the same way they had brought up their own offspring. They were treated like family members and were never deprived of love. Every Sabbath, they went faithfully to the synagogue and worshipped Jehovah God. Yes, he had done all he could to instill worship in the young man's heart.

Adam, four years younger than Daniel, was a quiet boy with great dark eyes and a pleasant smile. Adam laughed a lot. He loved music and was now, at the age of twenty-three, an accomplished musician as well as the maker of many musical instruments. He and Rebekah, his bride, had their store on one of the little streets in the village in which he had been raised. Adam was deeply religious and visited often in the place he called home, making the hearts of Isaac and Lois happy. He was an appreciative and grateful young man. Often, after his and Rebekah's departure, Lois or he would find a loving note with a sum of money attached. "For giving us a home with lots of love, thank you. I love you," the neatly-written words declared.

Tears swam in Isaac's eyes. How kind and generous Adam was. And so appreciative. What a contrast between the boys! he thought. Then there was Elihu, who was but an infant when his parents died.

At thought of the youngest of the nephews, an overwhelming love rose in Isaac's heart for the boy. Not yet twelve, he possessed a nature of such religious curiosity as to sometimes cause the uncle's heart to fear and tremble. And the questions the lad could ask! He was a student like no one Isaac had ever known: a student of religious things, going often to visit the white-haired, bearded scribe Amos and asking profound and poignant questions of him.

"I never heard the likes of the questions that boy asks," Amos had confided to Isaac on more than one occasion. "He keeps me busy searching and reading the scrolls that Eli and I have written as God's revealed truth was told to us. I tell you, Isaac, I'm sure the Almighty has a special calling for the lad. He thinks deep thoughts about God."

Isaac drew his robe about him more closely now; the night air was getting chilly. He bowed his head and prayed in soft tones to the Almighty. Surely, God would send the Messiah: their Messiah. When? he wondered, as he continued his nightly prayer and praying.

The man loved the solitude of the night and of the dark-robed hillsides. Communing with God was as normal for him as was breathing. As soon as the sheep had quieted down for the night and after checking on the flock, he always settled down nearby and began to talk to God, asking for protection for Lois and their entire family, although Elihu was the only one at home anymore; all the others were married and had established homes of their own.

With his own sons and grown-up nephews now gone and no longer into shepherding, Isaac had hired on three of his friends to help keep his sheep. The men took turns at shepherding; one week a month each looked after and cared for the flock, which was only of moderate size.

Three weeks they remained home with their wife and family, taking care of whatever work needed done and the trade in which each had become involved and in which he was proficient. It was an ideal set-up for all, since

his friends had at one time themselves been shepherds and missed the sheep and the silence and solitude of the night vigils.

As he prayed for Elihu, Isaac's thoughts wandered to something the lad had said to him before leaving to go home late in the day.

"Uncle Isaac," he'd said, "I wish I could stay here with you. All night. I feel something's going to happen. Something great and wonderful."

"Remember how your brother chides you for your dreams, Elihu?" Isaac had teased.

Looking his uncle full in the face, the boy replied seriously and quickly, "Daniel's an unbeliever, Uncle.

He's a scoffer. I pity him. Adam believes, like we do. Uncle Isaac, I feel that the Messiah could come even now. Now! Something within me tells me this. I have been praying earnestly for His coming. And I have been praying for Jehovah God to have mercy upon my brother, too. How can anyone scoff and not be a believer in the things that are written on the scrolls?

"Amos told me again, only three days ago, that the Messiah will come. It's predicted, Uncle. Prophesied, really. He said the first promise of His coming was given after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. I know it by heart. Here it is: 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' God cursed the serpent for beguiling Eve; then He made the promise of the Messiah."

"Yes, I know. What a sad thing, that Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God's order and His commands!" Isaac remembered having answered.

Seriously, Elihu replied, "But the bright side is that our God promised a Messiah, and I believe He will come soon."

"For many years our people have been looking for Him and still He has not come, Elihu. We must not grow weary with waiting."

"But He will come, dear Uncle. He will! I believe what is written in the scrolls. Every word of it."

"I do too, my dear boy, only, when He will appear we do not know. Only, like I said, we dare not grow weary with waiting."

"True. True. But I believe He is about to arrive. Now, dear Uncle. In my day. And . . . and, please forgive me if I sound a bit presumptuous and overconfident for one so young as I -- a mere lad -- but I believe He is about to arrive! I am filled with eager anticipation and . . . and Uncle, I am looking for Him."

Isaac felt tears sting his eyes, recalling Elihu's words only hours ago. How earnest and zealous the boy was, he thought, as he gazed long into the starry sky above him, praying for Jehovah God to give Elihu the patience and the faith needed for the waiting. Hadn't he been one who had waited, yea, longed, since he was a young man, for Messiah to come? And now he was along in years and hoar hairs adorned both his head and his beard, and still he was waiting. That He would come, Isaac had no doubt. But lately he had begun to wonder if it might not take place in the generation after him, since he was now getting to be an old man and He had not yet made His long-awaited, long-looked-for appearance.

He leaned his head against a rock behind him and heaved a heavy sigh, closing his eyes and relaxing completely as he listened to the soothing breathing of the sleeping sheep. A night bird trilled a soft, lifting song from a nearby bush and from a short distance away, another answered. Ah, the night! the man thought. The beautiful, beautiful night! How near God seemed! How very near.

He must have slept, for with a start, he sat up and looked around him. The sound was like that of a stone being kicked. Then he saw a figure approaching.

"Sorry if I startled you, Uncle," came Elihu's softly-spoken words. "In my excitement to join you, I tripped on a stone. So clumsy of me. Forgive me for awaking you, please. I meant to sit down by you quietly and, perhaps even, to sleep beside you. Instead, I tripped on that stone and nearly fell."

"What brings you here, my boy?" Isaac asked anxiously. "Your aunt will be worried sick when she cannot find you in the morning."

"No, no, dear Uncle. I do not disobey orders. I could not sleep. I got Auntie's permission to join you for the night. She even gave me her blessing, saying that she thought it would be 'spiritually profitable' for me to spend the night on the hills with you. She, like I, feels that our Messiah could come anytime now. She is praying that I may be an eye witness to this great and wonderful event. Oh, I rejoice that I am able to be here with you. I love you, Uncle Isaac. Love you like a father. You are all the father I know and Aunt Lois is the only mother I know. Jehovah God will bless you for taking Daniel and Adam and me into your home."

"Already, the Almighty has blessed us for having had you," Isaac replied, beckoning the lad to sit beside him. "We love you like a son. We love Daniel and Adam as sons also. You honor me by coming, Elihu. It makes my night special."

"It will be more special when Messiah comes," Elihu replied confidently and positively. "Oh, that it were this night, Uncle! I would shout for joy."

For a long while the two sat in silence, each praying and meditating and searching the indigo blue sky for shooting stars or just watching them twinkle, blink and wink. The crescent moon had sailed along silently, still looking like a gem of rare and exquisite beauty. Isaac's head nodded in half-sleep.

Elihu gently wrapped an arm around his beloved uncle's back and eased his body to the cool earth, saying, "Get some sleep, please. I will look after the sheep. I am not sleepy. The strength of youth runs through my body. Years of labor and toil for us have helped to tire and weary you. Soon I will be able to care for the flock, as Jehovah helps me."

'You are kind and good, Elihu, and I am sleepy. Thank you,' and in a little while, the soft sound of rhythmic breathing let Elihu know that his uncle was sleeping soundly.

For a long while the lad's gaze centered fixedly on the scintillating stars in the velvet blue-black sky above him. His thoughts, however, were higher than the stars: they were on God and His promise of a messiah. "O that He

would come in my day!" he exclaimed in a whispered plea as he bowed his head on his upraised knees and closed his eyes.

It was the brilliance of light that made him look upward. Then, in an instant, he was on his feet, beholding a light like he had never seen before. Its brilliance was so white and shining as to make him feel blinded. He dropped to the ground in profound awe and wonder and amazement.

The heavens above exploded in light and the glory of the Lord shone round about him.

Isaac opened his eyes and got to his feet. With fear and awe he stood with bowed head, and trembled as he leaned heavily upon his shepherd's staff, his beard becoming wet with tears.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them . . . and the angel said unto them, 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."

"He's come! He's here!" Elihu cried joyously to his uncle. "Come, let us go even now and worship Him."

"Yes! Yes," came the uncle's ecstatic answer as, leaping and shouting, the two departed for Bethlehem.

THE END