

Light and Life EXPRESS

ONLINE EXPLORATION OF THE SPIRITUAL UNIVERSE

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Chapter 1 - The First Advent

Jerusalem was a conquered city. There were few to pity the captured vanquished. The city was old even by standards of the time. It had seen armies come and go, the great and the small, leaving behind ashes, crumbled walls and the dead. Yet in an almost hurried fashion, the Israelites, who were a stiff-necked people, rebuilt anew on top of the old. No one ever knew how many cities were buried in the countless layers of strata, for their scribes and their scrolls were also contained therein.

Rome had been a cruel taskmaster. Its edicts governed daily life and all commerce, ever demanding impeccable obedience. As was the custom, procurators were assigned. Pontius Pilate had been placed over Judea, Samaria, and Idomaria. Herod Antipas, the second son of Herod the Great, was the Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. It was his father who, by Roman decree, had received the title King of the Jews. In desperation, Herod Antipas, ordered that the sons of Bethlehem two years and younger, be put to death to insure that he might retain his throne. Having been a believer of Jewish prophecy, he sought to kill a child who was destined to be King of the Jews. It was also he who had rebuilt the Jewish temple in an attempt to increase his popularity.

Distant sounds of the shofar summoning ancient tribes of their ancestors to assemble were still discernible to seasoned ears. The sound of the shofar served as a sad reminder of the loss of King David and Solomon, Rehoboam and Jehosophat and their days of glory. Thus, it became the custom for people to rend their garments each day upon awakening to display their anguish. Prayer and devotion became their habit while they longed for prophecy as if it were their final hope.

They cried for a Deliverer, the Anointed One of Jehovah, God of their ancestors, to redeem them from the hands of their oppressors, and never again to be left alone outside His grace or to bend beneath the yoke of their enemies. Never again to find a barrenness at the holy mountain or to hunger from a beggar man's portion of bread.

There was a scarcity among their herds of cattle and within their tribes as well. Disunited and in disarray, each man became his brother's enemy as they struggled to survive. Their



faces were hollowed, their bodies made of straw, offering assurance to even the meekest of travelers that they had come upon easy prey.

Daily life had become ritualized. Their variety being patterned by season and Roman edict weighed heavily on their outlook. It was good for the old to watch children in endless play even if it was a reminder of the passing of their own blissful ignorance. Teaching their young was mostly comprised of lessons about whom to approach and whom to fear. Teaching of the promises made to their patriarchs was always considered foremost in learning, and even more so in times of strife.

It took a war to defeat their sons and an invasion to depress their spirits, yet the Jews were accustomed to wars and foreign invaders. For whatever recompense, they relished the knowledge that foreign armies, their edicts and intimidations, were as transient as seasons, but regrettably, almost as dependable.

Palestine had always done its share of world trade. Its harbors of Joppa and Ashdod teemed with flurried hysteria as trades from Greece, Rome and Egypt attempted to out-perform each other in the face of waiting merchants. During the heavy trading season, harbors became overcrowded with assorted, multi-shaped ships, all of them balancing toothpick masts seemingly without effort. Their canvases hung lifeless, as if having been exhausted by overly playful winds. Once unloaded, cargo would be routed to favored Jerusalem, Arimathea and Jericho, serving wealthy families of importance and those who were placed in stations of authority, and to any fledgling marketplace that showed promise.

There was a cool oasis just outside of Jerusalem's walls. Shaded by olive and palm trees, it drew travelers on the way to temple worship to drink of its coldness and to rest in its shade. Colorful tents spotted its landscape, their silken tapestries romanticized the wind by caressing a baby breeze. Melodious prayers were already audible from the more devout. Wind carried the sound in all directions, making it appear that the desert itself was chanting.

Come evening, rain was falling in the city, distant thunder clapped and growled like an approaching hungry beast emerging from a century of sleep. One could forgive stars for not guiding the way and forgive those who take them to shelter at first sight of rain, yet one could never forgive the stain of darkness that comes to lose a nation, or even a single soul in the great expanse of night.

The First Advent
by Lloyd Stancliff

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