

12.

Elisabeth Flees and Zacharias' Death

With the murder of Bethlehem's sons, Herod's henchmen are believed to have turned toward Hebron in their attempt to catch Joseph's fleeing family. This is where John, the infant of the elderly priest Zachariah, lived. (Zachariah' priestly group of Abia was at Jerusalem for a week where he carried out a special duty inside the sanctuary.)

By dawn, Elisabeth, being filled with the Holy Ghost was probably warned by Joseph and Mary, an angelic dream or by the LORD God, had fled with John the young prophet into the nearby Wilderness of Judea for protection. She too guarded a chosen child. Hidden in this harsh landscape, Elisabeth knew she would have to provide for herself and her child.



Though not mentioned in the gospels, twenty-seven miles northeast of Hebron near the western tip of the Dead Sea stood the community of Qumran some 12 miles southeast of Jerusalem, and home of the Essenes, a third Jewish group. (The two other groups were the Pharisees and Sadducees.) The Essenes had divorced themselves from the mainstream of Jewish religious and social life due to the corruption surrounding the Chief Priests and all Jewish religious groups. Temple funds were being stolen and converted to support an elaborate lifestyle for the High Priest, Chief Priest and temple officials. Yet these men carried nothing for the common people and even built a bridge leading from the Temple to the Upper City leading to their homes. This forced the people to walk under them and kept them separated. So the Essenes, led by their "Teacher of Righteousness," moved into the wilderness to await the coming of the Messiah.

The members of Qumran ate, prayed, studied and worked in the communal buildings, but probably slept in nearby caves, huts and tents. Celebrate, individuals worked as farmers, shepherds and craftsmen. They took frequent baths in baptismal pools for ritual purification, followed special rules of authority and conduct and adhered to communal ownership of property. Special attention was given to the copying and studying of the sacred scrolls. (The Essenes could be found reading the scrolls around the clock both day and night so the Christ or Messiah in Hebrew would find them ready.) Some of these documents, over the next 1,800 years, would be uncovered in the nearby caves and became known as the “Dead Sea Scrolls.”

The location where Elisabeth fled was never recorded in the gospel. But John and his mother would have set up home in one of the many caves in this harsh, lonely area of the wilderness separated from mainstream Jewish life.

Meanwhile, unable to catch Joseph’s secretly fleeing family, Herod’s henchmen returned to Jerusalem and the temple complex. They rushed across the Court of the Gentiles and forced their way into the Women’s Court, past a verbally hostile group of Jewish men and women. Then storming up the 15 steps to the Nicanor Gate, the henchmen entered the Courtyard of Israel where Jewish men stood in protest but kept silent. Stepping over the 18-inch retaining boundary, they entered the courtyard of the priest. Levite temple guards and priests momentarily halted the pursuit before the huge brass burning altar of sacrifice. The looks on the faces of the king’s men were deadly serious, and the henchmen were allowed to pass.

Climbing the temple steps, other priests immediately gathered before the henchmen but they too gave way. As Zacharias came out of the immense gilded temple doors and stood on the porch, he was instantly surrounded. When Zacharias refused to tell the soldiers anything about his son, they swiftly drew their swords and murdered the priest between the sacred porch and the bronze-burning Altar of Sacrifice.⁵³

Safely hidden the child John grew over the next 28 years in total anonymity. Therefore, John became strong in spirit, remaining in the desert region of the wilderness until the day of his showing to the nation of Israel and the world.

⁵³ Matthew 23:35.