

**The Scribe Who Must be Right**  
by  
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In the dim light emanating from his small oil lamp Moshe poured over the ancient scroll unfurled before him. He rocked his head side-to-side in an attempt to chase away the stiffness in his neck. He paused to rub his eyes, the sting beneath his clenched eyelids reminding him of his wife Sosh's warning that if he didn't take a break now and then he'd end up blind. "And," he could hear her shrill voice in his head, "if you are blind, how will you continue crafting the leather goods that pay the bills?" Like most scribes Moshe wasn't able to fully support himself and his family from the income he gained from teaching. The leather shop was the real bread winner, to be sure, but it had never been his true passion. The ancient scrolls had always sat upon the throne of his heart and played in the fields of his mind.

Heeding the inaudible voice of his beloved, Moshe rocked back in his seat for a moment. Allowing the breezes of a mental pause to blow through his mind, soon he was back in Asibla, a small village that lay along the northeasterly road between Damascus and Palmyra. As residents of the diaspora they lived as part of a minority Jewish population. For some the immersion in a Gentile culture lured away from strict faithfulness to God and His Law, but not for Moshe's family.

His father, as a good Jewish man, instructed his sons at home. He worked tirelessly with them to memorize portions of the Torah. He assiduously drilled them in the language of God—the written Hebrew language. After all, had it not been the very finger of God that had written the ten words on the stone tablets on Mount Sinai? Moshe could still hear his father's deep, resonate voice as he led them in reciting portions of Holy Scripture. He and his brothers had learned well, but Moshe clearly stood out from among them. They wanted to honor God. Moshe wanted to master God's words, to internalize the word and will of the Lord until there was no guessing as to what would please Him. Had his father foreseen this drive in Moshe? Or had he planted and nurtured it within him? After all, he had named him Moshe, after the great Law-giver, Moses. Or, well, technically, the great *Law-receiver*.

As he grew Moshe went to the synagogue for further, more technical instruction. Here too Moshe's star shone brighter than the rest—not so much in skill, though he had that too, but in passion and drive. The others certainly did not depreciate God's Law, but Moshe revered it beyond all comparison. He soon outpaced the other students. It wasn't long before the local scribes were murmuring amongst themselves about Moshe's facility with the language, the capacity of his memory, the insightfulness of his interpretations, and sagacity of the applications he drew from the text of Scripture.

But a big fish in a small pond never really knows what it might be like to swim in the ocean. Sure, Moshe could win every debate in the synagogue in Asibla, but what if he was in Jerusalem? Would he prove right there?

Several months passed and then one evening as the family broke bread together Moshe's father lifted his voice in a tone that always meant he was about to say something to which he had

devoted much thought. This meant, of course, that the matter was already settled, and though his father never seemed to be laying down the law, one knew that once he had spoken there would be no further discussion. Turning and fixing his eyes upon Moshe, his father announced that he had arranged for Moshe to study in Jerusalem, in a prominent synagogue under the direction of some of the best scribes the Hebrew nation had to offer.

Silence enveloped the room. His mother wept. They were tears of joy over a son who had proven so zealous after the Torah of the Lord, but they were mingled with sadness as well for the separation this would bring. Her Moshe would be alone in that great city of God! One of Moshe's brothers rested a hand on his shoulder in a gesture that communicated both congratulations and honor. Two others bobbed their heads up and down in a silent acknowledgement of what had already been clear to them all—Moshe was the pride of the family and this opportunity was his due.

Moshe himself was awash in a myriad of emotions. Joy! *Me, in Jerusalem! Studying with the scribes in the capital city!* Fear! *Will I be seen to be a fool? Can I prove that I can handle the Torah rightly?* Sadness. *How will I ever survive without my family?*

Soon Moshe found himself wandering the streets he'd seen only once before, during a pilgrimage with his father. He was no longer the prize pupil, but at least he was there. No one else from his village or the entire region where he grew up had ever gotten this far!

But gnawing, fear-filled questions kept chewing away at the fringes of his conscious thoughts: *Can I do this? Do I know enough? Will I be proven wrong?*

As the months unfolded Moshe battled his fears with the weapon of increased effort. He studied harder than ever. He determined that no student would out work him. And it showed. His instructors silently took notice. They didn't say it, but he—and he thought his fellow-students—could feel it. Moshe was moving up.

Yet, inwardly, in a silent place that others cannot see, something had subtly, but quite seriously changed within Moshe. He didn't see it yet himself. He was too absorbed in his work. But almost imperceptibly Moshe's passion for the Law had become, in a subtle, but dangerous shift of emphasis, a zeal to be right. Not just to be *upright*. Not just to be *righteous*. But to be right. He was driven to have the answer, always. Without fail his must be the correct answer. He simply had to be the one in the right, whatever else was said or argued. He longed for the right answer; to possess the right answer; to intone it, for it to be heard on his lips.

The answer to what? To anything! To everything! The necessity to be ready with the authoritative answer to whatever may come up became the unspoken, unexamined reason for Moshe's existence.

Inside such zeal, however, there is a seductive allurements, one that woos from the path of righteousness and leads to simply rightness. And being right is not always the same as being righteous. Being right may not always be expressed in an upright way. The passion to possess and provide the right answer easily morphs into the zeal to be treated as right. That is to say,

respected; feared, even.

In the name of all that is right something decidedly unrighteous had been planted in Moshe's soul. An unseen hand was tilling and tending and watering and nurturing it. Moshe was changing.

Then came the day when finally Moshe was given his robes. *The robes!* The long, flowing robes otherwise restricted to nobility were attainable by those of non-noble blood in only one way—through scholarship, through study, through being right, in the right, quick with the correct answer. Moshe had dreamt of this day for years, but enjoying those robes took only a moment. It was a pleasure that one never really spoke of, but secretly cherished as a private indulgence. He gloried in the way his robes rippled in the breeze as he made his way through the streets. The colors, the pattern, the material—they all set him off as a ready scribe. The deference in doorways would have been a little intoxicating if it wasn't his just due, his right ... for being right. Regularly, consistently, reliably, unfailingly, always right—this was his ticket to respect. The sound of the fabric's snap a strong wind served as a herald announcing his coming to those that owed him their respect. These robes were his security clearance and free ticket to a front row seat, and certainly to reserved seating in the synagogue. Being right was his invitation to be the designated pray-er at civic and religious events. And how he relished the opportunity to hear his voice ring out in the synagogue while all others quietly listened!

But none of these honors compared in Moshe's eyes to the achievement he gloried in when others addressed him with the honorific, respect-filled title: "Rabbi"!

More and more, in situation after situation, Moshe's became the voice of authority. The days of responding to questions from his teachers were falling behind him and increasingly the peoples were seeking out him for answers to their questions about God, His Law, and His will. More and more Moshe's became the voice of authority. Progressively, though imperceptibly, though Moshe's voice spoke of God's Law it was *his* word that became "law." It wasn't just what God had said, but what Moshe said about what God said. After all, hadn't the rabbis written, "It is more punishable to act against the words of the Scribes than those of Scripture"? (Sanh. Xi.3)

Moshe wasn't above his teachers—and they periodically let him know it—but he was rising. And this they all knew.

Then one quiet afternoon as Moshe was absorbed in his work, pouring his attention over a scroll of Micah the prophet, a runner burst into the synagogue, shattering the stillness. Heads popped up from the manuscripts they were studying and wide-eyes now studied the intruder. Through gasps for air the Gentile messenger revealed that Herod urgently requested that a panel of the best scribes be immediately gathered to his presence. The emissary had arrived in off-hours and they weren't able to assemble the A-team. Lemeck was missing and no one seemed to know just where he was at the moment. Moshe stood quietly off to the side wondering what was unfolding before him. With a quick nod and a call of command his superiors told him to join the party. They despised Herod, but they dared not delay him. So out the door they went, rushing through the streets toward the Fortress of Antonia, which served as headquarters for Herod as he governed the province for the Romans.

It was an odd scene really—this Roman herald racing over the cobblestone streets of Jerusalem followed by a gaggle of bookish scribes! Scribes don't run! They *glide!*

As they huffed through the streets on their way to the Fortress, their minds reeled with questions. *Herod? Why would he wish to see us? What could this mean?*

Mingled with the curiosity was a nearly lethal dose of fear.

Herod had been, decades before, named “king of the Jews” by Octavius Caesar. But he was no Jew, not a pure Jew at least. It was common knowledge that he was a half-breed Idumean. Yes, he had built the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem and there were those who said this was proof of his legitimacy and his passion after God. One of the rabbis had even said, “He who has not seen the Temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building.” But others saw in this little more than political pandering, for had he not also installed a Roman eagle over the gate to the Temple of God? Was it not at his command that other temples were built to pagan gods? Had he not over the years taken ten wives? And, beyond all this, there was blood on the man's hands, much blood! And not just that which comes in times of war, but the blood of innocents—including that of one of his wives and several of his sons.

As they rounded a corner in the narrow street the rising towers of Antonia came into view. Racing up the steps, they took note of the Centurions lining the way and the gleam of their well-polished weapons. As they disappeared into an interior hallway, the Roman slowed his pace and exhorted the scribes to catch their breath and ready themselves before entering Herod's presence. They all took a moment to draw a deep breath, straighten their robes, and compose their thoughts. Then, next they knew, they were standing before the man who staunchly declared himself “the king of the Jews.” The sparkle and sheen of the chamber and the size and demeanor of the guards added to the awe that swept over the scribes.

Moshe's role here was to be a body, to take a spot, to be a number whose presence made their collective whole appear more official. Hadn't the head of the synagogue whispered in his ear as they raced through the streets, “Just keep your mouth shut; let us senior scribes do the talking!” That's all Moshe had to do. Just stand there and try not to shake. And above all, *don't speak.*

When finally Moshe laid eyes upon Herod he found him not what he had expected. Near seventy years of age and in ever increasingly ill health, he wore a worn and anxious countenance. Something sinister seemed to be brewing behind his bulging eyes.

The awkward silence was broken as the official standing just to Herod's right raised his voice to thank them for coming on such short notice. Moshe thought to himself that Herod looked anything but grateful, but he dismissed that line of thought and focused his attention on what the official said next. “Your king would like to know from you, you who have spent your lives scouring the word of God, where the Christ is to be born?”

The question hung in the air. A couple of the scribes' Adams apples bobbed up and down in their throats as they swallowed in nervousness. The chief cast his eyes to the floor. *Why, they each*

wondered, *would Herod be asking us this?*

The silence lasted only a moment, but it seemed much longer than that to Moshe. These were men who had given their all to know the word of God so thoroughly that they could answer without hesitation any question put to them. The silence that followed felt to Moshe like a humiliating sign of incompetence.

Herod, whose eyes had been resting in a distracted gaze upon a non-descript point on the floor, slowly raised them to lock on these Jewish men of the Book. The temperature in the room seemed to spike and the pressure to answer rose dramatically.

It was clear now that the rumors in the streets of Jerusalem had been true. Several days before strangely dressed travelers from the east, Magi they called themselves—wise men in their own right—had wandered into the city. They had come, they said, under the guidance of a star. As the story went, they had made their way to Herod’s court and asked, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” They had come, they said, to worship him.

Little wonder Herod wasn’t in a festive mood. He reckoned that the Jews already had a king.

The awkwardness of their silence was more than Moshe could take. *Why don’t you say something?* They appeared to be stalling; trying to figure out just what Herod’s angle was; just what would be the safe answer to provide him.

Moshe, on his part, mistook their silence for ignorance. *Maybe it’s the pressure*, he thought. *They’ve all frozen under the stress!”*

But not Moshe; he had the answer immediately. He knew it. He had been, providentially, hovering over the scroll of Micah at the very moment Herod’s runner had come crashing into the synagogue.

Moshe’s mind reeled in confusion, not over the answer. That he knew. And he knew that he was right. *But*, he desperately wondered, *Should I ... say something?* He recalled the unambiguous nature of the command the senior had issued him. *But*, Moshe thought, *our silence is humiliating. We look stupid! Incompetent! How can this glorify the Law of the Lord?*

And then, suddenly, Moshe heard his own voice. He did not recall making a decision to speak. But he heard himself blurting out in response, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

And just like that the hall fell silent again and the awkwardness returned—though it felt different this time. Moshe could feel the angry stares of the other scribes boring holes in the side of his head. But worst of all was the sinister expression that washed over Herod’s face. When Moshe had come to the words “from you shall come a ruler” the king had risen slowly to a standing position.

The man at Herod's right hand hastily dismissed the party of scribes, perfunctorily thanking them for their time.

Next thing they knew they were alone in the street again, just outside Antonia.

The verbal assault of the other scribes began immediately. The most senior among them drew himself up till his nose nearly touched Moshe's. In bitter tones and with spittle flying and left hanging from his beard, "Didn't I tell you to keep your mouth shut?"

The others joined in:

"Don't you realize what you've done?"

"Did you see the look in his eyes?"

"Haven't you heard what he's done to his own family?"

"What do you think the parents and people of Bethlehem would say to you right now?"

"Didn't you even think about the consequences of the answer?"

Moshe felt his face flush.

Moshe hadn't thought of *that*. All he could think of was being correct, of having the right answer. Of course he was correct, right, that is. I mean, *the* answer, it was ... *correct*.

Something one of the scribes said echoed in his mind for some time: "Truth can be used as a weapon as well as a balm." Sadly, Herod had established a pretty clear record of what he was willing to do with the truth.

The next twenty-four hours were torturously long for all of them, but especially for Moshe.

With the next dawn came the news from people rushing back from Bethlehem. Under the cover of night Herod's troops had descended upon the unsuspecting village. Every baby boy under two was dead. Barely a home in Bethlehem was left that was not touched by the grizzly aftermath of Herod's jealousy.

As Moshe sat silently in the synagogue filled with those gathered to mourn the loss, the words of Jeremiah the prophet ran through his mind, "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Sure, he had the reference right, but he had been so very wrong.

Heartbroken and guilt-ridden, Moshe longed for the simpler, quieter days in Asibla. Growing up there he'd longed for the streets of Jerusalem. But now, with the blood of who knows how many babies was on his hands, he could only wish for home.

In the aftermath of it all Moshe had nearly quit. But instead he filled the hours, and weeks, and months, and years to come in what had always been his comfort—pouring over the sacred texts of the Law, and the prophets, and the writings. But now as he did so a dark, unrelenting shade

had settled over the eyes of his heart.

He had been right. But, he knew also he had been wrong.

He lingered more and more over those words of Jeremiah the prophet. As the years passed he calculated the ages of the boys from Bethlehem and imagined what they might have done that day, had they still been with us.

And he held to a wisp of gossip that had filtered back into town in the weeks after the infanticide. It was said that a child and his family had slipped out of Bethlehem just moments before Herod's men had arrived. It was almost, they said, as if they had known what was coming and had been rushed out of town and down the road to Egypt by an unseen hand.

Moshe took some solace in the thought: *One child; at least there was one.* Yet still he tortured himself: *If only the others ...*

In his despair a Scripture descended to his conscious thoughts like down wafting on a gentle breeze: "Out of Egypt I called my son." *Hmm, Moshe would recall thinking, wonder why that came to mind? What's that got to do with anything?*

Year melded into year and Moshe's career recovered from the great blunder in Antonia. The senior scribe had passed a few years later. The others seemed not to hold it against him. After all, it is the impulse of a scribe to be right.

Then one day a decade or so later, as Moshe wandered into the Temple courts, he observed a crowd of scribes huddled around something. As he approached he couldn't see just what was happening so he found something to stand on and peered over the huddled mass. To his amazement they had circled 'round a boy who appeared to be no more than twelve years of age. The boy was fielding their questions! It was the role of the scribe to take the questions of the common man and to provide the correct answers. It was they who did the educating. Little wonder a crowd had gathered! As Moshe listened in he realized why the scribes were thunderstruck at this child. His answers were like none he had ever heard. Well, that's not quite right. The answers were *right* and that was something Moshe and the other scribes were accustomed to. But it was the manner in which they were right—that was different, and magnetic, almost beautiful.

When the boy's mother retrieved him it was over the complaints of the scribes. As the crowd broke up, Moshe grabbed a fellow scribe whom he recognized. "Who was that boy?" he asked. "I don't know. He said his name was Jesus." "Where is he from?" Moshe demanded. "Don't know that either. Could be almost anywhere, I suppose. You know the crowds we've had here for the Passover."

Moshe wandered away, deep in thought. The words of the eighth psalm ran through his mind: "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise." He wondered to himself, *I've spent a lifetime learning the Scriptures. How can a lad so young know them so well?*

As the years continued to unravel Moshe added the thought of this boy to those of the many boys of Bethlehem that filled his mind as he lay upon his mat each night before sleep overtook him.

*What would those boys have been and what would they have done?*

*What has become of the boy who escaped?*

*What of this prodigy in the Temple?*

Almost every night Moshe then dreamed. Sometimes there were great debates in which he always proved right in the end. Sometimes he endured nightmares of blood on his hands that no soap could wash away. Sometimes he saw himself standing before the bar of God and, despite having all the right answers, he knew he needed more than right answers; he needed to *be* right in the Lord's sight. But he wasn't.

Years came and went. Decades swept by and soon a lifetime stood behind Moshe. Now aged, he had risen to prominence in Jerusalem. Asibli and childhood was a faint memory. His family was gone. He was no longer the small town diaspora Jew, tainted by the Hellenization of the culture. No, he had achieved his dream. Though, Moshe often reflected, the dream had not delivered just what he'd imagined it would.

Yes, he knew the answers. And, yes, people respected him. The robes were still a nice perk. The front row seats, the special greetings were a pleasure well-hidden beneath expressions of spiritual seriousness. But for all the rightness of his religion he was a man haunted by memories of a day in Herod's court and the night that followed in Bethlehem.

He had mostly learned to distract himself. Lately there had been the diversion of trying to figure out the latest sensation to capture the imagination of the people. A new Rabbi, from—*Can you imagine!*—Galilee, had burst onto the scene. He was, by most estimation, something of a radical. He wasn't connected with any single synagogue. He hadn't signed on with the Pharisaic party, but he wasn't a Sadducee either. He was, Moshe had concluded, a third-party rabbi—just the kind that made everybody nervous.

Periodically the rabbi would appear in Jerusalem. Crowds would always gather. Moshe had several times stood on the fringe and listened to him teach. Clearly he'd not been schooled in proper pedagogy. He didn't quote; he didn't footnote the rabbis. He just spoke, as if from somewhere deep down inside himself. His words seemed to authentic themselves. It reminded him of someone, but he couldn't quite place it the memory.

A few times Moshe had wanted to argue a point with the rabbi, but he held his peace. He'd long ago learned that wisdom is often found not in being the first to speak, but the last.

There came a day, however, when he noticed the rabbi in the temple courts. Several in the crowd were pressing a point with him. Moshe wandered over and heard the incompetence of those debating the rabbi. He thought this might be his chance so Moshe raised his voice over the din and directed a question toward the rabbi, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

Immediately the young man answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our



God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

*Ah, yes*, Moshe thought, *Good answer*. Before he could form his next question, he heard the young teacher continued, “The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

“Um, yes!” Moshe found himself saying. “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

*There*, thought Moshe, *I've established the playing field. He's obviously a sharp cookie, and I've given him a passing grade. He'll surely be grateful for my authentication of his ministry.*

As Moshe turned to go the rabbi called out after him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

Moshe froze, mid-stride. Someone in the crowd gasped. Moshe was both embarrassed and a bit outraged. *Had this young man the audacity to render a verdict upon him, the respected scribe and rabbi? Did he think he was in a position to determine whether Moshe was right?*

Fleeing the awkwardness the crowd filtered away and Moshe decided to join them. From that point on no one dared to ask the young rabbi any more questions.

Some time passed before Moshe bothered himself to listen to any more of this man's teaching. But it didn't mean he'd not been on his mind. *The audacity! The arrogance!*

But then one day he caught the sound of the rabbi's voice lifted above the noise of the Temple courts. Moshe drew n ear, being sure to stay at the fringe of the crowd. As the rabbi made his point, Moshe lifted up his voice, knowing it would be heard but, hidden in the crowds, it couldn't be pinned on him.

“Teacher, you have spoken well.”

*Ha!*, Moshe thought, *That'll teach him! Now who's passing out the grades to whom?*

But the young rabbi addressed the crowd yet again: “How can they say that the Christ is David's son?”

There was an awkward silence. Then the rabbi continued, “For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”’” The teacher paused for dramatic effect and then drove home his point, “David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?”

Again silence enveloped the crowd. The scribes present pondered their sandal laces, unable to

think of anything to say in reply.

Moshe himself was dumbstruck. *What! Wait, I ... no ... um ... what? What did he say? Why have I never seen that before?* And with that he too was lost in silent search of an answer.

The rabbi then turned to his own disciples and, in a voice loud enough for all the crowd to clearly make out, he warned, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

*Oh that’s it!*, thought Moshe. *Enough! Someone has to put an end to this nonsense.* And off he stormed to figure out just how that might be accomplished.

Moshe fumed for weeks. And the more he thought the angrier he became. There were official motions introduced at scribal meetings to the effect that they take collective action against this rabbi. A lynching-fever grew as the celebration of Passover drew near.

There was something in Moshe that resonated with the sentiments and intentions of his fellow-scribes. But in the last few weeks his dreams had also become more unsettling. They were still about dead baby boys and occasionally there was one about the boy in the Temple. But increasingly there was a nightmare of standing before God, hearing the statutes of the Law read against him. And every time Moshe was left speechless. He had no answer. He knew what the right answer was, but he couldn’t *spea*k it. It was as if an elephant was sitting on his chest. He just couldn’t form the words. And there was the clear awareness that though he had the right answer, to have spoken it would have been to condemn himself, because the right answer found no answer in a rightness within.

Each time he awakened in a cold sweat, gasping for air.

He had spent a lifetime pursuing being correct, but increasingly Moshe was troubled with the thought that perhaps he not spent enough time seeking to *be* right with God.

And his thoughts—what had been going on with them? The young rabbi had rightly said that the scribes “sit on the seat of Moses.” They are, after all, the official interpreters of what God meant when He gave Moses the Law. But this rabbi, though a teacher, was more. He spoke with authority, as would a prophet. He spoke not just as a prophet, but as one would expect *the* prophet to speak.

*Surely not! No, this just couldn’t be right!*

Yet hadn’t Moses himself said, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”

Moshe didn’t like where his thoughts kept leading him. In fact he’d spent a great deal of energy resisting them—but the thought kept returning to him: *If the prophet like unto Moses did come,*

*would he speak any differently than this man?*

Increasingly tortured as the days drew near for the Passover celebration, Moshe pulled back from the front lines of ministry. His brother-scribes were out in full regalia. But Moshe just couldn't do it. Something within him held him back. Was it holy wrath or a guilty conscience? It had gotten so entwined over the years he wasn't sure which was what. He didn't trust himself anymore. And a scribe that couldn't trust himself to be right wasn't much help to anyone, now was he?

Moshe spent the run-up to Passover in fasting and prayer—calling upon God for a light that would end his misery and for a peace that would quell his decades-old guilt.

He wasn't there Thursday evening when they officially voted to hunt down the rabbi and bring him in. He wasn't present for the events of the night. But every detail was reported to him.

Days before Moshe had unfurled the scroll from Isaiah and spread out on the table. Hour after hour he had poured over it. *What did the prophet mean? Of whom did He speak?*

Every line seemed filled with an ocean of meaning, but obscured by a dense fog that lay over Moshe's heart. Of all he read one line drew him back again and again: "... when his soul makes an offering for guilt ... the righteous one, my servant, [will] make many to be accounted righteous ..."?

*How could that be? Didn't David himself say, "no one living is righteous before you"?*

Moshe had given his years and vitality to being right, to being the one who is right. But he wasn't. This much he knew. Awareness had begun to dawn upon his soul as the sun breaks over the Mount of Olives: *Possessing the right answer is not the same as being right with God.*

In desperation, as if fleeing from an unseen accuser Moshe ripped himself away from the scroll and rushed out the door and down the street. *I need air! I've got to clear my head! Maybe I am losing my mind!*

As he hastened down a side street in search of solitude he stumbled upon the exact opposite. At the first intersection he met a crowd so large it was unusual even for festival time. He was about to turn and return the way he came when he saw him—the teacher, the rabbi. He was bloodied, beaten, stumbling under the weight of a heavy cross.

A word from the scroll back at the synagogue ran through his mind: "his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind."

Then he heard some mocker in the crowd call out the teacher's name—Jesus.

*Jesus! No, couldn't be. I mean, it's a common enough name, but ...* Suddenly he realized just who this rabbi had been making him think of. A boy in the Temple, so long ago; the boy with the right answers. *Could it be?*

Then, from nowhere Moshe had ever remembered his mind going and by a power he did not recognize but seemed helpless to resist, he recalled something he'd heard this Jesus say to a crowd in the temple: "Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Moshe was startled back to awareness by the shouts of derision rising from the crowd. Again Isaiah came to him, "He was despised and rejected by me; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hid their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Moshe was both horrified and, what could he call it ... it was like light breaking through. It started coming clear to him—this day, so dark, was casting a light upon his heart such as he'd never known.

The words of Isaiah's scroll almost involuntarily tumbled through his mind as he joined the throng following behind Jesus.

Motionless at the fringe of the crowd, Moshe heard the thud of the cross hit the ground and the groan that arose as Jesus was thrust upon it. He heard the sickening thud of the hammer against the spikes as Jesus was fixed to the beam. Again the inescapable voice in his head, "he was pierced for your transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace ..."

When the cross was dropped in the hole prepared for it the voice in his heart rose up again: "... with his wounds we are healed."

Moshe stood back a bit from the cross. Some of his fellow scribes approached the cross and hurled venomous accusations toward him who hung there dying: "He saved others; he cannot save himself!"

Moshe could not join them. His thoughts swirled in a tornadic vortex that pulled down from heaven the words of God that he had treasured for a lifetime. *The prophets! The psalmists! The words of Moses!* They were to him at one and the same time the voice of condemnation and a light shining in a dark place, beckoning him to come find peace.

And then an audible voice broke into his conscious thoughts. It was the voice of the rabbi. From the cross he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

No sooner did the teacher's voice trail off than within his heart Moshe heard the words of Isaiah, "... he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people."

Jesus again spoke a bit later, this time to one of those crucified with him: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Echo of Isaiah came again to Moshe: "... there was no deceit in his mouth."

Sometime later Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In the silence that enveloped the crowd Moshe heard Isaiah’s words again: “... the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Eventually Jesus gathered up all his strength and cried out: “It is finished!” By now Moshe was anticipating the light of Isaiah’s words to respond, and without fail they did just that: “his soul makes an offering for guilt.”

Finally, Jesus prayed, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Then Moshe heard his own voice. Just as in the Fortress of Antonia he didn’t remember making a decision to speak. He simply heard himself praying. “Yes, Father,” Moshe whispered, “Me too. Into your hands I commit *my* spirit, my whole life.”

And with that Jesus was dead.

Not everyone noticed immediately. There was too much mocking and reviling. Those on either side of Jesus were still crying out. But Moshe noticed. And one final time the words of Isaiah the prophet came to him. And when they did, somehow Moshe knew they were the right answer: “the righteous one, my servant, [will] make many to be accounted righteous.”

Moshe couldn’t remember a midday so dark, yet a light went on inside him.

*Jesus*—he was “*the* righteous one.” He was the *only* righteous one. In these moments the Lord had laid Moshe’s iniquities upon this innocent one and judged there. The Father had taken Jesus’ life instead of Moshe’s. In some colossal reversal of standard accounting practices, in Jesus’ own righteousness Moshe had been “accounted righteous” by God.

Though he’d spent a lifetime seeking to be right, now for the first time he knew what it felt like to be made right, to be declared right with God, to be at peace with God.

Years later another Pharisee by the name of Saul would recall another of Isaiah’s words: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

He would go on to write, “Where is the scribe? ... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ... we preach Christ crucified ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

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