

1 GOD'S APPOINTED TIME

A ringtone caused me to stumble.

“Move,” an annoyed traveler mumbled.

Anxious pilgrims traipsed past me. Did no one else hear it?

The ringing continued—musical notes that blared from a rocky outcropping near the desert road. I got out of the way of others and rushed over to inspect the overhang, but the ringtone stopped too soon. Sliding my hand along the uneven shelf, I searched for the iPhone. Nothing.

I kicked the sand. Satellites didn't exist in the first century and neither did cell phones. Perspiration beaded on my forehead. How dare nonexistent technology taunt me. When I glanced down, I saw a red cellphone protruding from the dirt. It was mine, the one some thief stole from me—two thousand years in the future.

The phone rang again. ID—unidentified.

I snatched it out of the sand. “Hello.”

Silence.

“Hello,” I repeated.

“Where are you going, Daniel?”

Chills tiptoed up my spine. I slouched against the rocks. “Why do you torture me?”

The ventriloquist spoke in a smooth voice. “I want to help you.”

The demon who had duped me into accepting a counterfeit gift when I lost God's gift wouldn't fool me again. I shouted into the phone. “No, you don't.”

A woman nearby flinched.

I needed to lower my voice.

“Why are you going to Jerusalem, Daniel?”

I rubbed my eyes and wiped the sweat from my face. Crouched on the ground with my knees knocking, I spoke softly, “Why do you keep harassing me?”

“Don't go to Jerusalem.”

My voice quivered. “Leave me alone.”

Annoying static blared.

“Don't go to Jerusalem, Daniel.”

The raspy voice made me panic. Maybe I should listen to her.

My voice cracked. “Why?”

Another passerby gawked. Only crazy people spoke to themselves in the first century.

Click.

The phone dissolved in my hand. I splayed out my fingers and stared. How could my hand be gray? In fact, tones of gray saturated the sky and everything else. I squinted.

Had the chariot accident damaged my vision? No, this must be the ventriloquist's wicked magic. She wanted me to believe I was going crazy as my family was apt to tell me. I balled my hand in a fist. “No!”

A couple of people ogled me.

An old man approached. “Are you all right?”

I nodded, appreciating his concern. I waved at the onlookers. “I'm fine.”

I turned and muttered a few choice words. How many times in the seventh dimension had things not been as they appeared?

A few minutes later, hoof beats filled the dry desert air. Roman soldiers, outfitted in heavy accoutrements, led a long procession. Chariots adorned in the best Roman decor followed the horses.

Why did I have to run into Roman soldiers so soon? I hadn't even made it to Jerusalem. I was a wanted man. Travelers cleared to the sides of the road to let the peacekeepers pass.

I rubbed my eyes. The demon's wiles—I would not listen. God must be showing me something I didn't yet understand.

Because of the traffic, the Roman caravan slowed to a crawl. Fancy chariots brought up the rear. I peered inside the first compartment. Pontius Pilate sat beside an attractive woman. I laughed. The hanky dropper at the chariot races hated the Jews. How much trouble would we cause the Roman governor this spring festival?

Pesach was the only Jewish tradition my family kept in 2015. God had delivered the Jews from Egyptian slavery over a thousand years before the first century when he drowned the cruel taskmasters in the Red Sea.

The Romans took a while to pass. Precious minutes ticked by. The Shabbat meant nothing to them, but before the first two stars appeared, I needed to be on the Mount of Olives or outside the city gates.

My stomach churned. What would I give for a few figs and berries to satisfy my hunger.

I didn't relax until the Romans disappeared. I turned towards Jerusalem. I must make it to Jerusalem in time. I must. The Romans would think I had stolen the racing horses when I ran away. I hadn't, but runaway slaves didn't live long in the first century. God was my only hope. I slung my bag over my shoulder, rubbed my eyes, and walked faster.

"Please, God, heal my vision," I prayed.

