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C H A P T E R 1

I will destroy Paul! I have invited all of you to this room to tell you why Paul must be stopped.”

The voice was that of Blastinius Drachrachma, the most zealous Pharisee in Jerusalem.

“Last Sabbath I entered the holy temple, and there, standing before the altar, I made the most sacred of vows: Paul of Tarsus will be stopped. I will do all that is granted me by God to prevent this man from preaching the Messiah to those who are *not* Hebrews.”

Those listening nodded in approval.

“I will prevent Paul from corrupting the sacred teachings handed down to us by God through Moses.

“I have recently learned that Paul has left Antioch and is on yet another journey—a second journey into the Gentile world, destroying the sacred law. At present his destination is unknown. But I will follow him. I will soon leave Jerusalem and find this enemy of Moses . . . this friend of the unclean. . . .”

“And Peter?” asked one of the men sitting in the darkened room.

Blastinius’s black eyes narrowed.

“I have been told by many not to engage in conflict with

Peter, that he is too loved, too powerful, too highly regarded. Yet Peter confessed that he proclaimed the Messiah to Gentiles, nor did he require those heathens to be circumcised. No man, not even Peter, must be allowed to do such blasphemous things. This Paul has blinded Peter. Either Peter must be shown his error, or . . . he must be exposed as an enemy of the law.

“I have called you here to give voice to what all of you feel. That Peter, that Paul, that Rome are destroying the traditions of God.”

A long discussion followed. Common ground was at last found by both those in the room who professed to be believers and those who were unbelievers.

“We must stop the uncircumcised from following the Messiah.”

With that ground established, Blastinius dared make his surprise move.

“There is someone here whom we should now hear from, but before he speaks, all torches in the room must be extinguished.”

“The rumor is true then. He is here?” asked someone as the room fell into darkness.

“Yes, a *sicarius* is present.”

“What!” exclaimed another. “One of the Daggersmen, *here?*”

“There is no need to be afraid, I have invited him here,” reassured Blastinius.

At that moment, someone stepped into the room.

“I have been listening.” The voice unmistakably carried the accent of one who had grown up in the rural land of Judea. “You have asked a question I desire to answer.” The voice was cold, almost cruel.

“There are rumors that we who are called Daggersmen have

marked Peter for death. This is *not* true. Tell him so. We wish no misunderstanding. Peter is not on our list.”

There was a long silence.

“Each month we gather in secret—this is our way. We each call out the names of all who are undermining the traditions of Israel. Each time only a few names are selected for . . . for their just reward. We then pray for those who are about to die!”

A long pause ensued.

“Peter has never even been discussed. But tell him that his name may soon be discussed!

“As to Paul, we know little of this man. He does not reside in Judea. If he did . . .” There was another pause. “If Paul did live in Judea, his name would be *discussed*.”

“Until now we have never sent anyone outside of Israel to kill God’s enemies. But the thought has been . . . *discussed*.”

Another voice interrupted. “Then I suggest that you discuss Peter, and add Paul’s name to those whom . . . you will pray for!”

Nervous laughter followed.

“We,” the cold voice deliberately paused to emphasize the word *we*, “*We* advise you to heed Blastinius Drachrachma’s words: Pursue this man Paul wherever he travels. Stop his mischief—by any means.

“Now a final word. We, the sicarii, will see to it that Rome will be stopped. All Jews who derive their wealth from Rome will be eliminated. The traditions of our people will prevail. Israel will no longer suffer shame.”

A door opened, then slammed shut. Torches were relit, but the room was quickly empty.

A few days later there was another such gathering. It was decided there that Blastinius and a few men of his choosing should depart Jerusalem with the sole purpose of following Paul on his new journey.

But where was Paul? His first journey was into the Gentile land of Galatia. Rumor had it that Paul had begun his second journey by returning to Galatia. From there?

The answer to that question was to be discovered by Blastinius. At that very moment, Paul and Silas were in Galatia . . . and were making last-minute preparations to continue northward. Accompanying them would be Timothy, the young man from Lystra in Galatia.