



### **Around Pentecost – Part 1**

I began to hear about the prophet Jesus almost as soon as we crossed the borders into the land of the Israelites. I had tagged onto quite a large caravan of merchants wanting to trade around Jerusalem and the fertile parts of the Jordan Valley. Wherever we stopped I would go into the nearest village and exchange the grain I carried, for local crafts to delight the market goes in Alexandria, my home city. In every village I heard stories of miracles and healings. In the towns I heard of Jesus' debates in the synagogues with the religious teachers. Jesus was thought to be a very learned man and clever at debating, things which these Israelites value greatly. In a Caravansary one night, I met a Roman centurion who talked about Jesus. He had apparently healed his servant and without coming anywhere near him. I did not know what to make of these stories. 'It was beginning to be said,' he told me confidentially 'that Jesus was the Messiah, that the Israelites had been promised by God, the man who would save them.' The Roman authorities were getting a bit twitchy, but they had told the native leadership to control their people, or else!

The nearer we got to Jerusalem the more the contents of the sacks on my donkeys changed from the grain, to pottery, fine copper work and softest leather. The nearer we got, the wilder the stories seemed to become. Then I began to hear stories of a great procession that had happened spontaneously in the city. Jesus had come riding on a colt, and the people had come out in their hundreds, thrown palm branches and even the coats from their backs down on the ground in front of him. The Temple Guard had come out to control the crowds, who were ecstatic that Jesus had come at last to begin his campaign against the Romans. The Romans had looked on but hadn't got involved. Yet.

A few days later, and a little nearer, I was sitting next to a well in a village bartering for some very fine rush mats that the women of that village make. A man came rushing up the road in a great deal of agitation. The men of the village, who were working in the houses around, tensed and a couple went inside and came back with knives which they discretely hid among the things they were working on. When the man reached the well, he was so out of breath that he had to be sat down, and given a mug of water to get his breath back before he could tell us his news.

There was stunned silence as he told us that the Jewish authorities had arrested Jesus in the middle of the night, while he was praying in a garden with his close friends. Nobody knew where he had been taken. It was a very sombre group of people who met together in the synagogue that night to discuss what the news about Jesus might mean. The next day I left early, promising to send word if I heard what had happened to him.

Late in the day, as we were hoping to reach a village just a day's journey from Jerusalem, we were met by a group of women hurrying towards us. As they approached, one of them hailed me, and said that we had better turn around. The prophet, Jesus of Nazareth had that very day been dragged through the streets of Jerusalem and taken to Golgotha, the place of the skull, nailed to a cross, and hung there until he died. His body had been taken by a member of the Sanhedrin, and he was buried, dead and gone. Everyone expected the authorities to start rounding up his followers after the Sabbath was over, and making very sure that Jesus was completely erased from the lives of the people of Israel. We took their advice, and turned around and headed for the nearest walled caravansary. Rebellions are no good for trade!