BOOK ONE
OF THE ANTEDILUVIAN LEGACY

LEVIATHAN

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For Dad
First and foremost, I thank the Creator God for the words He has given to us, and for the Word through which He fulfilled his promise to the serpent in the third chapter of Genesis. Thanks to my sweet wife Meredith for her perpetual support of a husband who must seem to have no end of time-consuming projects he takes on. An enormous thank you to my dad, Rick Huffman, who has read this at least twenty times; without his support, this book wouldn’t exist to be read. Also, thanks to my brother John, who nurtured this idea with me until it was ready to become a story, then graciously let me run with it in my own direction. Thanks as well to Katherine and Dustin George, Kathy Decker, Tim Chaffey, Ben Wiggins, Brian Niro, Billy Herrington, and Rachael Wilson for their valuable time and invaluable feedback. The graphic elements of the book were, for me, some of the most fulfilling aspects of this project to work on; thanks to Igor Desic for his colors, Justin Tumey for the map, Ashley Legler for the genealogies, and especially Lucas Graciano for the fantastic cover art (and thanks to Sarah Carlson for taking the author photo, which requires far more skill than one might appreciate in this cameraphone age). Thanks to Wayne House and Tim Demy for taking such personal interests in helping this book achieve its full potential. Finally, thanks to everyone who reads this; no matter who or where you are, you and I share a common ancestor, which makes us family. This story is about that ancestor. I hope you like it.
Elohim – the Lord God Creator, Who made the world

Bene Elohim – meaning “the sons of God,” a general term for angelic beings, as opposed to humanity

Nephilim (singular Naphil) – the name given to the offspring of bene Elohim and human women, and their progeny; the males are notable for their giant stature

EDEN

Noah – a farmer from the land of Eden; descendant of Adam, the first man, through his son Seth in a line of firstborn sons; subject of a prophecy made by his father Lamech

Lamech – father of Noah; son of Methuselah

Methuselah – father of Lamech; grandfather of Noah; son of Enoch the Scribe, a prophet of Elohim who was translated to heaven at the age of 365

Jonan – brother of Noah, second son of Lamech

Hadishad – brother of Noah, third son of Lamech

Emzara – betrothed to Noah; daughter of Rakeel

Merim – cousin to Noah; firstborn son of Rakeel

Rakeel – second son of Methuselah; father of Merim and Emzara

Elebru – wealthy owner of the lands bordering those of Methuselah

Dashael – an animal wrangler employed by Elebru

Denter – chief of the men-at-arms employed by Elebru

Suat – the seneschal of Elebru, in charge of household affairs

Enosh – grandson of Adam; son of Seth; Greatfather of Eden, a title given to the eldest living firstborn son of Seth’s line
Kenan – son of Enosh; unlike most of his family line, left Eden to wander the earth before returning centuries later

ENOCHE
Tubal-Cain – skilled smith in the line of Cain
Naamah – sister of Tubal-Cain, wife of the ben Elohim Samyaza
Lilith – descendant of Cain; wife of the ben Elohim Azazyel
Agrat – descendant of Cain; wife of the ben Elohim Barkayal
Eisheth – descendant of Cain; wife of the ben Elohim Tamiel
Jet – descendant of Cain, wife of Gloryon the Naphil
Malidoch – lieutenant-captain of the guards of Enoch; brother of Lilith
Onim – leader of the Scribes and follower of the teachings of Enoch of Eden
Gregan – member of the Scribes
Thims – member of the Scribes
Raposh – wealthy member of the council of Enoch

GRIGORI
Samyaza – chief of the Grigori, a group of two hundred watcher angels who left their stations to take human wives for themselves; husband of Naamah
Azazyel – Grigori captain; husband of Lilith; teacher of smithing, warfare, and cosmetology
Barkayal – Grigori captain; husband of Agrat; teacher of astronomy
Tamiel – Grigori captain; husband of Eisheth; teacher of astronomy
Asaradel – Grigori captain; teacher of the movements of the moon

NEPHILIM
Gloryon – captain of the guard of Enoch; son of Azazyel and Lilith; husband of Jet; father of Gilyon
Gilyon – son of Gloryon; grandson of Azazyel and Lilith
Dyeus – son of Samyaza and Naamah; father of many children by different mistresses; a leading citizen of the city of Enoch
Pethun – son of Samyaza and Naamah; unmarried and childless
Dedroth – son of Samyaza and Naamah; a well-traveled naturalist
Mareth – a son of Dyeus; skilled in fighting
Hamerch – a son of Dyeus and friend of Gilyon
Deneresh – a son of Dyeus and friend of Gilyon
Hoduín – son of Barkayal and Agrat; magician and sorcerer
Tiras – son of Hoduín
Tevesh – son of Hoduín
Gofannon – a smith under Tubal-Cain
Voland – a smith under Tubal-Cain

*Bene Sheol* – meaning “sons of the grave,” a secretive group of assassins trained by the Grigori Azazyel

*Scribes* – an organization of descendants of Cain who worship Elohim and oppose the presence of the *bene Elohim* on earth
PROLOGUE

Nine hundred and thirty years
after the creation of the world

Lamech raced down the gritty road, his scarf pulled over his face to keep out the dust. His crested dragon’s clawed feet tore up the ground in long, pounding strides. Millennia from now, the beast would be called a hadrosaurid; the rider called him Gryp, and he was the fastest in the herd.

Terraced groves of lemons and olive stumbled down the rocky hillside on either side of the small road, just wide enough for two carts to pass one another. The trees gave way to vineyards that covered the slopes, where wooden trellises supported broad-leafed green vines heavy with grapes. A dignified future awaited those grapes, destined to be pressed into the best wine in the region. Indeed, the wine’s superiority was no longer considered to be a matter of taste, but a matter of fact, by the many who had enjoyed it. The master of viticulture responsible, after all, had been practicing his craft for more than two hundred years.

A cloud of dust trailed behind Lamech as he coaxed as much speed out of Gryp as he was able. The day’s mists had long left the tops of the hills, parching the roads and leaving their last wisps curling about the vineyard valleys. Lamech scanned for signs of the winemaker. An oxcart on the road, half-full of baskets of harvested clusters of grapes, marked the slope where he might find the man. He reined his animal to a halt near the cart, jumped down, and followed one of the small paths that led down the hill through the vineyards.

“Methuselah!” he cried, “Methuselah! Where are you?”
“Lamech? Over here, son.”

The rider followed the voice down a row of trellises and found its owner, carefully harvesting enormous dark clusters of the famous grapes. Another man was engaged in the same task beside him; both looked up from their work.

“Father, you need to come with me now,” Lamech said, breathing hard, his anguish traced in tears down travel-dirty eyes. A man for whom everyday experiences produced great highs and crushing lows, he often needed his hands to help express passions too expansive for voice alone, and he waved them now as if to gather the older man to himself. “He’s dying—Seth doesn’t think he has much time left.”

Methuselah’s stone brow trembled slightly. He dropped a last cluster into the basket. “Then come I shall. Elebru, I’m sorry to leave you with work unfinished,” he said to his companion.

“Then leave not!” said Elebru indignantly. “He has brought this curse upon himself, and all of us in time—you know this. Because of him, we toil out here now!”

“I am sorry, my friend,” said Methuselah over his shoulder, following Lamech, who was already hurrying back down the path. “And I assure you, he is sorry too—more than he could ever say.”

“Bah!” muttered Elebru, turning back to his work.

Rolling fields of grain replaced terraced hills as the dragon carried his passengers to their destination. As they ascended a rise in the road, an old village—the oldest in all of God’s earth—spread out before their eyes. Ancient cottages and farmsteads in the center of the village had transitioned gradually to more modern buildings as the growing population had expanded; and as the older buildings became unfit for use, they had been torn down and replaced by builders using the newest methods at the time. As such, what was literally the architectural history of the land of Eden could be seen in the structures of the village, radiating outward like the growth rings of a fallen tree.

In the very center of the town, one ancient cottage remained. Several acres of undeveloped land lay around it and were home to a menagerie of creatures, each with scars from nature’s red claw, that the cottage’s
resident had rescued over his many centuries. To this place rode Lamech and Methuselah.

Lamech tied Gryp to the trunk of the tall pine that served as a gate-post while his father waited. The two men hurried down paths that led through hedged lawns and over rocky ponds, past a tortoise with a partly-crushed shell and a slope-backed kerit that had been lamed by a wolfpack. The animals were loud today, as if they knew what was transpiring at the house ahead. A man stood at the door to meet them.

“Methuselah! At last. Thank you for coming so quickly, son.”
“Lamech is a strong rider,” said Methuselah. “Hello, Father.”
“Enoch, who has come?” called a woman’s voice from inside.
“Methuselah and Lamech, Grandmother,” answered Methuselah’s father Enoch. “All are here now.”

Lamech bounded through the garden and the three men entered the home together. The room was one long, low-ceilinged hall, framed by timber beams above and walled by clay bricks. Two hearths divided the hall into three sections, with passages to private quarters on either side. The room was full of solemn people, engaged in whispered conversation. Methuselah recognized many; every one of his seven sires was present in the room, save Adam. He greeted them in turn: Seth and Enosh, Adam’s son and grandson, both still living in the village; the son of Enosh, Kenan, a wanderer seldom seen in Eden anymore, dressed in rich robes from foreign lands; Mahalalel and Jared, father-and-son potters who lived with their families several hours away; and finally Enoch, Methuselah’s father and the best man he knew. Myriad great-uncles, uncles, and cousins from Eden’s small farming villages were clustered in tight groups; many other men were present as well, strangers in strange attire, at least to Methuselah.

“Who are those men? From where do they come?” he asked Enoch.
“Emissaries and elders, and it seems they have come from everywhere. When he first fell ill, Adam requested them to be here, and messengers were sent to retrieve them. Some travelled for weeks.” Enoch smiled sadly. “They have as much a claim on Adam’s kinship as you and I. It is right for them to be here, I think. People will want to know of his passing.”

Methuselah dropped his head. “Will it be soon, then?”
“I fear so. He has grown weaker.”
An older woman bustled out of the doorway that led to Adam’s quarters. Seth hurried over to her and exchanged several brief, hushed words, then approached Methuselah. “My son, Azura says he is ready for you,” he said. “We have all said our goodbyes already.” Methuselah gave the old man a quick embrace, then went to Azura. The woman was the second daughter of Adam and Eve, as well as the wife of Seth, and engaged herself now in the role of loving nursemaid to her ill father. She retrieved a water-filled sheep-goat’s bladder from a pot that was warming on the dog-irons in the hearth. She wrapped it in several folds of cloth to fashion a compress, then motioned for Methuselah to follow her.

Adam rested in bed, woolen blankets pulled to his chest, gaunt from illness. The orange glow from a sconced oil lamp threw bluish shadows around the room and accentuated his ancient features. He coughed wetly as Methuselah entered. Azura applied the compress to her father’s forehead, then drew a thick curtain over the doorway and left the two men in privacy. Rheumy eyes fell on Methuselah, and a weak smile lit up Adam’s face.

“Methuselah.”

Methuselah kneeled at the bedside and clasped Adam’s wrinkled hand. “I am here, Greatfather Adam.”

“And I as well,” the old man said, “but not for long, I think.” He coughed again. “I need to say two things to you. First: I ask your forgiveness. No, do not argue. I know you are gracious towards me, and will tell me that all have sinned. But I was first, and I am sorry.”

“Of course I forgive you,” Methuselah said.

“Thank you. Second: always obey Elohim, our Lord God Creator—always! I know that you do now, but you have many years ahead of you before you share my fate. Many of my sons have strayed from the old ways.” Adam stopped and stared at the lamp’s flickering flame. “Old ways. They do not seem so to me, but old they are, and still true.”

“I will, Greatfather.”

“I believe you will, too,” Adam said, looking back at Methuselah. “The line of Seth is blessed; how much is the grace of God, and how much is your fathers’ obedience to His instructions, I cannot say, but you have been touched.” His brow creased slightly. “Remind me of your prophecy. My mind grows dim.”
“"When he dies, it shall be sent," Methuselah quoted quietly. The old man sighed and closed his eyes. "'When he dies. Even prophecy cannot escape the Curse.'

"More than two hundred years have I carried that prophecy, and I still do not see its meaning," Methuselah said.

"Redemption? Judgment? It is hard to know." Adam gripped his hand tighter. "Trust the Lord." A paroxysm of coughing suddenly wracked the ancient man's body, alarming Methuselah almost enough to call for Azura. Adam waved his hand against it.

"Ah...I thought I had understood the full magnitude of the consequences of that original sin...my sin...when my son Abel died. Then, when Eve passed, I realized that I had not, and would not until death came for me. And now my own time comes, and I must face the enemy I have brought upon the world." Adam's voice faltered and his vision fell unfocused, filmy eyes drifting like mists over unfathomed waters. With an effort, he raised his head. "My last advice I give to you, Methuselah. Resist the Serpent, the tempter and corrupter. Walk in righteousness always. Obey Elohim, and teach your children and grandchildren to do the same."

He laid his ancient head back on the pillow. "The light fades," he rasped. "Would you please call my sons and daughters?" Methuselah nodded, then kissed the old man lightly on the forehead. "I will do all you ask," he promised Adam, then left slowly, pondering many things.

Adam's funeral was an event not rivaled in the history of the world, not even by Eve's. Tens of thousands passed through Eden, wishing to pay last respects to a man known to all, but whom most of them had never met. Even some of Cain's descendants attended, traveling from their homes in Nod, east of Eden. They carried news that on the day of Adam's passing, Cain was killed by stones fallen from the crumbling wall of his own house. "A fitting end," some said, but to Methuselah, it underscored Adam's last words to him.

"He gave me that advice as well," said Lamech, as he walked with his father down the main village street. "Do we not do those things already?"

"Aye, son, we do, for the greater part. Our family has been blessed with good training, and we are surrounded by those who believe as we do.
Never forget, though, that any man can fall. Adam knew that better than anyone else could.”

Lamech nodded slowly, then kicked a fallen coconut husk down the road with a long scream. He sank to the ground as his lungs emptied at last.

“Our faith can be lost in one generation, after all,” said Methuselah, sitting by his son. “One can never have too many reminders to be vigilant”

“True.” Lamech ran his palms over his face and looked full into the elder man’s eyes. “But I promise you this, Father: it will not be lost with me, and if ever the Creator gives me a son, we will teach him to hold strong his faith, too,” he said hoarsely. “Even if the whole world should turn against him.”

Sunrise was the best time for bathing, Naamah always thought. She and the other girls would wake early, as their mothers and the older women began the day’s food preparation. The working men—five generations of them—were already in the shops and markets, dragging the boys with them. That meant no fear of being spied upon by hormonal cousins. She was in no rush to bear children; after all, they were only young once. Centuries of motherhood could wait its time, thank you, and besides, none of the young men particularly interested her.

Agrat called to her to hurry. Typical Naamah—always thinking, always dreaming and dawdling. The other girls were in the water already. The morning mists were rising from the ground, another guard against peeping boys. She entered the warm, clear springs, wading through the trumpet-shaped lily blossoms up to her chest. Smooth shelves of stone clung to the banks; Agrat and her sister Eisheth were sitting on their favorite one, splashing their feet and gossiping. Lilith was busy brushing her long, dark hair with the comb the craftsman’s son had given her. Of course, the one boy in whom Naamah might possibly have considered taking interest would fall for Lilith. Well, he could have her—soon enough he would discover that the sweetness of her tongue was far exceeded by its sharpness.

Naamah dipped her head under the surface. She stayed submerged for just a second, enjoying the feeling of floating. Keeping her eyes closed,
she tilted her head up and rose, her hair streaming wet and straight behind her. She opened her eyes and quickly started, her mouth parting slightly in confusion and surprise. A man’s silhouette came towards her through the mists. She kicked backwards to the other girls, each turning to look at what had caused such a reaction. Lilith let out a stifled mix of gasp and scream.

The quickly advancing silhouette had been joined by three more. Naamah wasn’t afraid, not really, not after her initial shock. The descendants of Cain had always benefited from his being marked for safety ages ago; the same fear of sevenfold vengeance against anyone who killed Cain had extended to his children, then grandchildren, and now generally lay as a covering from harm over all of the city of Enoch. Apprehension turned to curiosity as the figures came closer. Naamah heard Lilith gasp again, this time in awe, as the men parted the mists and came into view.

They were tall, well over six feet. Their lean and hard muscles seemed more like a master sculptor’s example of the ideal human form rather than those built from years of work and toil. The tallest man, the one Naamah had first noticed through the mists, gazed directly at her. She met his eyes. Their crystal, unearthly beauty caused butterflies to flutter in her chest, but the intensity, almost intimacy, in the way he looked at her made them race down to her legs. Had she been standing on dry land, her trembling knees might have failed her.

Naamah’s world contracted to the magnificent being stepping into the water towards her. She was entirely oblivious to her three friends, each equally enthralled by another of the men. He drew closer, almost near enough to touch.

He spoke. “I have been watching you.”

Had a boy from the city said that to her, he would have been slapped and his father would have been told. Coming from this, a more beautiful specimen of a man than Naamah had supposed existed, it was beyond flat-tery. She could form no words; she could only stare. She waited for him to speak again.

His voice rang like music and laughter. “From all the daughters of men, I have chosen you. I wish to make you mine. I wish to marry you. I will honor your father and mother with our children, and to your brothers I will teach the secrets of the heavens. Only say you will be mine.”
Naamah realized that he was waiting for her to speak. Of the countless words that had come unbidden to her mind in these last few impossible moments, she found the simplest and forced them out. “Who are you?”

The man smiled. “I am an *irin* of the *bene Elohim*, a son of God,” he said. “I sang for joy as this world was created. My name is Samyaza.”

“I am Grigori.”
CHAPTER 1

TWO HUNDRED AND SIX YEARS LATER

The warm spring washed away the scent of the hunter, his sound masked by its rush. He wove silently through tendrils of leaves and vines hanging low over the calf-high water’s edge, navigating submerged roots and rocks by feel with bare feet. Water brought life with it, now and in ancient times: the four great rivers; the mists that rose from the ground; the land of the earth itself, raised out of endless water on creation’s third day. This stream widened into a pool, where the drake he hunted, just visible through the vines, drank haltingly, warily, but, thanks to the secrecy afforded by the water, remained ignorant to the man’s presence.

Water brought life, but for some creatures, water brought death.

A woolen hood shadowed the man’s tanned features. He wore a dun vest and buckskin pants pulled up past his knees, a sheathed iron hunting knife strapped to his braided belt. A long leather bracer wrapped his left arm to his elbow, and an arrow-filled quiver carved from yew wood was at his back. He went barefoot, as was his habit when hunting. His name was Noah.

On most days he was a farmer and a husbandman; occasionally, as today, he was a protector of his family’s herds from the many predators that found their ways across wild wooded hills to the grazing valleys. The hunting party had left yesterday, when the half-eaten carcass of an ewe was discovered at the edge of the forest. They had expertly followed the reptilian tracks, never giving up any sign of their presence to the beast, and were now closing in on their quarry.

Noah tensed the string of his flatbow, broad-headed arrow already nocked. He crept forward. The drake, a reptilian creature roughly the size
of a grown man, strutted stealthily on two hind legs among the mossy rocks and short, scrubby bushes by the pool. Its mottled green skin would have made it almost invisible in the forest, but in the open it wasn't difficult to follow. A head that tapered slightly from skull to snout ended in a mouthful of sharp teeth, and Noah recognized the single oversized claw on either foot as the instrument that had rent the ewe so ruthlessly. In many ways, it was a testament to its Designer; Noah wondered if it was much changed from its ancestors that walked with Adam before the Fall, when every animal ate only plants, so the Generations told.

The drake paused, bobbing its head. Noah quietly ducked his own head to avoid being noticed. He wondered if the creature had seen or smelled one of the other hunters, although he doubted it. The others, experts in these woods, would remain undetected if they wanted. Regardless, the momentary stillness of the beast presented an opportunity that he was ready to take. He quickly drew his arrow back, rising in an instant from his crouch in the stream.

The arrow flew wide as a snarling white blur flashed from the rocks, shattering the hunter's concentration. A rolling mass of fur and claws entangled the reptilian, its shrieking cry short-lived as snapping teeth ripped stringy chunks of meat from its neck. The new attacker stood over its kill and took another vicious bite from the drake's carcass. The feline beast, longer than a man was tall, rippled with muscle. Brown stripes decorated its legs, fading to bronze at its flanks and disappearing into a solid white coat. A short mane bristled from the huge cat's neck. Lips curled in a predator's sneer, and nostrils sniffed the air.

“You are a bit smarter, aren't you?” Noah whispered to himself. The big cat may have taken care of the hunters' quarry, but their job was not done. Noah immediately recognized the threat that this beast represented to the herds, and he knew the others in his party were thinking the same thing. Two days' work had been lost chasing the dead drake. How long to hunt this hungry monster after it slaughtered more livestock, as it undoubtedly would? Not willing to wait to find out, Noah drew another arrow and fired.

His arrow hit the white cat high on its shoulder; another arrow, fired from the undergrowth on the opposite side of the pool, caromed at a shallow angle off of the big beast's neck, leaving a red stretch of wound. Roaring
in pain and appearing more angry than hurt, the cat bounded away from
the water, towards the treeline from where the second arrow was fired and
disappeared into a wall of fronds and foliage.

Noah splashed out of the water and sprinted to the trees. “Blood and
death,” he swore as human shouts and sharp bestial roars reached his ears.
He crashed through the underbrush, following the cat’s path.

A quick survey of the scene showed the big white cat on its hind legs,
two hunting spears stuck fast in its chest and holding its clawing, writhing
body up like tentpoles. One spear was held by Noah’s father Lamech, the
other by his younger brother Jonan, both doing their best to hold the beast
at bay. His grandfather Methuselah was backed up to the broad, knobby
trunk of a large conifer tree to avoid the long swiping reach of the cat’s claws.
Two ends of a broken bow he clutched, one in either hand. He blocked a
paw with a piece of the ruined wood, then struck the animal hard in the
mouth with the other, but the blow did nothing but increase the animal’s
ferocious ire.

A running leap carried Noah full onto the cat’s back. He grasped a
handful of mane with one hand and drew his knife with the other. With all
his strength, he plunged the iron blade into the muscled white neck. Warm
blood spurted around the wound; the animal thrashed violently, but Noah
held on.

Slowly, steadily, the beast grew weaker, until Lamech and Jonan jerked
their spears from its breast and it slumped lifelessly to the forest floor.

Noah rolled off of the dead cat, exhausted, and laid on his back on the
leafy ground. Jonan stood over him, hands on knees. “I had him, you know,”
he said, turning up a corner of his mouth in a half-grin.

“Of course you did,” answered Noah. “Sorry for butting in.” Jonan
offered a hand and pulled Noah to his feet.

Lamech handed the ruined halves of Methuselah’s weapon to him.
“My best bow,” the elder man sighed. “Now what shall I do?”

“Cheer up, Father,” said Lamech, “After all, for a moment there, I was
afraid that we were about to find out what that prophecy of yours meant.”
Noah and Jonan looked at each other with a smirk.

“Hmph! It would take more than a mangy beast like that to introduce
me to my Maker.” Methuselah examined the dead cat. “A fine hide, though,”
he said; then, rising and looking at his son and grandsons, added with a wink, “that is, if you three had not poked holes in it. Now! Let us skin it, then to home! I’m hungry.”

Noah laughed. The more heated the battle, it seemed, the more humorous everything after. Although the hunt had lasted more than a day, a straight path back to the farmlands should take but a few hours. They ought to return home before nightfall, Noah guessed, and a good thing, too. Harvest began tomorrow, and the entire household was having a feast, a last celebration before a season of hard labor. And with Methuselah and Lamech in such fine spirits, Noah anticipated a night to remember.

They arrived at the sprawling farmhouse as dusk was falling. Methuselah’s home, whose first stone had been laid by his own father Enoch, fell in staggered levels from a rise in a hill. Verandas walked down the slope around the huge bole of an ancient cypress tree, several cellar-cave entrances below embraced and bordered by its roots. Below this were outbuildings, silos, and animal pens; fields of crops, planted in the lowlands to take the most advantage of watering mists, lay beyond these. This was Noah’s home, and he was thankful to return to it.

Methuselah’s and Lamech’s wives, Edna and Betenos, met their husbands with warm embraces, naturally relieved at their safe return. Jonan entertained his younger brothers and cousins with a ballad detailing the hunters’ adventures that, despite repeated good-natured punches to the ribs from his elder brother, he had insisted on composing on the long hike back from the forest. He, of course, had expanded his role in the hunt to epic proportions, and his exaggerated descriptions of their grandfather’s plight brought forth many worried noises from their grandmother Edna, much to Methuselah’s chagrin.

“Hello, Noah.”

A young woman approached Noah, walking with a light bounce to her step. Her bright eyes and pretty smile complemented the lovely figure of a woman exiting gracefully from the last stages of girlhood. She was, Noah thought, the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.
“Zara!” he exclaimed, embracing her waist and spinning her once around. He held her tightly to his chest and inhaled deeply. “Mm, you smell wonderful!”

She pushed away playfully. “And you have smelled better,” she said, “not that I mind. Come see what we’ve prepared!” Zara took Noah’s hand.

“Should we tell them now?” asked Zara in a whisper, as she led Noah to the dining hall.


Zara kissed him on the cheek. “And I love you, Noah,” she said. “Now see what we have done while you were away!”

The long, wide dark wooden table stretched almost the entire length of the spacious main hall at the center of the farmhouse. The foods prepared for the feast completely covered the table, and a feast it was.

Towers of fresh fruits cut carefully into different designs rose at either end of the table. Broad platters of sliced apples and apricots shared space with bowls of mixed berries. Entire wheels of cheeses, made from sheep-goat’s and cow’s milks and crusted with herbs or crushed garlic, were placed at intervals, with plates of sliced cheese and grapes atop them. Dishes of nuts and dried fruits wrapped in grape leaves, savory cruciferates, fried plantains, and yam cakes rested in arm’s reach of each place at the table. Breads of all kinds, some filled with dates, some with mixtures of pine nuts and spices, some plain, and all freshly baked, were abundant. Saucers of honeys smelling of orange and lemon accompanied grain puddings, and decanters of wine were placed regularly about the table, as were pitchers of cider and steaming pots of white and black teas.

Noah’s eyes widened and he took a step forward. Zara stopped him with a tug of his vest. “Oh, no,” she gently scolded. “Go wash up and change your clothes. Worry not, we shall not start without you.” She pointed him in the direction of his quarters. “I will save you a seat. Now, hurry!”

Noah sent a silent prayer of thanks to Elohim as he jogged to his quarters. Life did not get better than this.
The feast filled the hall with the laughter and conversation of family and friends who truly enjoyed each other’s company. Food and drink disappeared and were quickly replaced, most often by the young men who took the opportunity to first taste some new morsel on the way back from the kitchens. The fine women who had cooked and prepared the feast received much praise from the men, with one or two jesting comments of “you ought to do this more often.” Eventually, appetites began to fill; the adults picked over the last few bites of their favorite dishes, and the children roasted sweet chestnuts and cocoa beans in the wide, crackling stone fireplace at the end of the room. As the empty trays were cleared and the oil lamps around the room were refilled, Methuselah rose. Silence fell as he began to speak. “As this season’s harvest draws near, we thank Elohim for the bounty with which He has blessed us.” A few murmured thanks to God were given in reply. “This year, as every year before, we honor Him with sacrifices, as well as our continued obedience.”

He continued. “Let us speak now of wine. Who remembers the vintage from seventy years past?”

“Best you’ve ever made, and that’s saying something!” called Noah’s cousin Merim. The men in Methuselah’s line typically knew their wine vintages as they knew their own families.

“I acquiesce to your excellent taste! There is one barrel still in the cellars,” he said, pausing to scattered applause, “and the wine therein will be poured out as a drink offering in three days. For some of you, it will be a sacrifice indeed,” he added to a few chuckles, and more than a few wistful looks from the younger generations. “As well it should—remember, we are simply stewards of what our good God has given to us for our short lifetimes. It is only right for Him to receive the first and best fruits of our labor.” Heads nodded in agreement.

“Noah!” Methuselah addressed his grandson, “This farm has many herds, and you know them all. Which animal would you say is the best of them?”

Noah thought for only a moment before answering, “I should say that I have seen none finer than that young white bull from Ghestel’s northern herd.”
“Again, I agree. Ghestel,” Methuselah directed to a quiet herdsman sitting with the younger men, “you have worked diligently for me for five years now and have multiplied our herds. Although you came to this place not of our family, I do regard you as such now, and I am proud to call you friend.” Jonan clapped Ghestel on the back, and many of the other men made sounds of affirmation. Ghestel seemed a bit stunned. “I want to honor you and your labor. The best of our herds will be given as a burnt offering, and the culmination of our sacrifices will be your bull. I thank you for your work and stewardship, and I thank all of the esteemed cooks responsible for this excellent meal.” Methuselah bowed to his wife. “Now everyone, finish up—preparations begin early tomorrow, and I wish you all well-fed before!”

“Pardon me, Grandfather,” said Noah. He stood up, gesturing to Zara to do the same. “We have an announcement to make. All of you here know of my esteem for Emzara. By God’s great grace, she feels the same for me. Her father,” he said, inclining his head to his uncle Rakeel, Lamech’s younger brother, “has given his blessing, and she has consented to be my wife. We are betrothed to be married!”

Cheers erupted from the younger crowd, and many of the older women looked at each other knowingly, as if they had expected the announcement. A wide smile spread on Methuselah’s face. Lamech and Rakeel clasped hands. Rakeel approached the couple, embraced them both, and said to Noah, “What can I say? Welcome to the family!”—drawing general laughter from the table. Noah and Zara spent the next few minutes accepting congratulations from those gathered at the feast, receiving the many exclamations of such a perfect couple and I’m so happy for you both with genuine joy and thanks.

After the line of well-wishers for Noah and Zara had ended, Methuselah spoke once more. “Everyone who did not have a hand in the making of this meal, will have a hand in its cleaning up! That means you, Jonan—and yes, you may leave the wine on the table.” A bustle of activity later, the table was cleared and dishes rinsed in the kitchen’s large basins. The older generations and children retired to bed, but the younger adults remained in the hall, drinking wine and talking.

“Where will you live?” asked Merim.
“My father has given us a plot near the east vineyards,” Noah said. “I have been storing wood and stone in the old barn for a year.” He grinned at Zara. “Designing our home for longer. Now we have but to build it.”

Merim tilted his cup to them. “Strong motivation to finish harvest quickly, I suppose.”

The conversation naturally turned to the upcoming harvest. Noah’s youngest brother, Hadishad, began arguing with Merim about the merits of hornfaces over aurochs as plow animals, with promises to compare the upcoming crop yields as proof. Several of the women, concern on their faces, were listening to Jonan’s greatly-overstated descriptions of the difficulties and dangers he might face in the vast wheat fields at the foot of the vineyard hills.

Arm around his newly-betrothed, Noah’s thoughts were on Zara and the life they would soon begin together. He absently listened to the various discussions around the table, not paying much attention to any of them, enjoying his own quiet reverie.

“This must be what life in the Garden was like,” said Hadishad, tossing a last grape into his mouth and leaning back into Jonan as if his elder brother were a comfortable chair. Jonan shoved him away, laughing. “Does that make tomorrow the fall of Adam?” he asked. “Toil, plants of the field, sweat of our faces...we’ll be well aware of the ground’s curse for certain.”

“You’re quite right, dear brother,” said Hadishad, adopting a false look of concern. “Noah! When are you going to fulfill that prophecy of yours, anyway? This harvest is going to wreak havoc on my lyre practice.” Several cousins snorted.

“All in God’s perfect timing,” answered Noah. “Besides, little brother, you have far too many calluses from plucking strings, and not nearly enough from wielding a scythe.”

A distant female cousin from the village who was spending some months at the farm leaned across the table and asked, “I know of Methuselah’s, but what prophecy is this?”

Jonan stared at her, his expression feigning shock, and drew in a deep breath. “You mean you haven’t heard?” He climbed on the bench, cleared his throat, and recited portentously: “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed!”
Joining in, Hadishad took out his lyre and began playing a tune. Jonan and Merim linked arms and started dancing around the table, singing the words of the prophecy to the melody. Ignoring their antics, but now engaged in the camaraderie around him, Noah noticed one other who seemed lost in thought. Ghestel sat quietly by himself, nursing his wine and staring blankly. “Ghestel,” he hailed the farmhand, “I would thank you as well for your work. Methuselah thinks quite highly of you, you know. For him to choose a bull of your breeding for the sacrifice is a great honor.”

“Indeed,” said Ghestel. “Please excuse me. I think I shall go to bed.”

“Sleep well, then,” Noah said. The farmhand rose from the bench and left without another word, taking his cup of wine with him.

The sacrifice was more difficult for some than others, thought Noah. The farmhand was right about one thing, though—it had been a long night, and it was time to go to bed.

“I ought to retire too,” he told the group around the table.

“So soon?” Jonan asked, taking a brief rest from the dancing that had started. “You are getting old. In all honesty, though, congratulations to you both. And I do not mock the prophecy our father gave you. I only hope to be there when it is finally fulfilled. Until then, though,” he said, rising again with a sigh, “our toil continues. Goodnight! And Zara, enjoy these last nights of sleeping alone—he snores!”

Noah stood and pulled Zara to her feet. “Goodnight, my love,” he said, embracing her. She kissed him wordlessly. “Rest well, Noah,” she said, smiling. “I will stay a while longer. There is much to tell the other girls!” Noah glanced at the table, where sisters and cousins were waiting for Zara eagerly.

True, long hours of hard work would begin soon. Still, Noah thought, he had more blessings than he could count. God was truly gracious, and he had been right; this had been the best night of his life.

As he fell to sleep, the evening’s many pleasant conversations drifted through Noah’s head. Of all the happy words he had heard, though, the last ones in his thoughts before he succumbed to slumber were his brother Jonan’s.

“Tomorrow...the fall...”