

Secrets

The moment had finally come. These two long years had been torturous for David, and now he was finally going to confess.

He and his betrothed were alone in her father's expansive garden, situated on the outskirts of Jerusalem. David gazed into her eyes, her face framed by long, raven-black hair and a wall of pink flowers behind her providing a perfect backdrop.

Why hadn't he told her before? Why hadn't he told his family? Why hadn't he told anyone?

He felt like a prisoner.

Now it was time to set himself free.

"I have something I must share with you, Chana." David could feel his heart beating.

His wife-to-be smiled. "What is it, my love?"

This was it. The exact point in time he would share with his beloved his deepest, most well-kept secret. He would finally be free.

And then his common-sense sounded like a trumpet in his thoughts.

"I..." David began, trying to articulate words. He couldn't stumble now! He had purposed in his heart to tell her and he would live with the consequences, no matter what they were. Nothing could stop him.

"I..." But could he tell her, the daughter of one of the most prominent members of the Jewish nobility... that David was a Christian?

Chana gazed into his eyes, her innocence ripping into David's resolve like a sword through parchment.

No. He couldn't. She would leave him. He would be thrown in jail in jail, or worse. David's father... their relationship was strained already. The revelation of David's conversion would rip them apart.

David knew Christians were to have no fear. They were called to give up everything for the Gospel.

And yet David couldn't tell Chana. She was too precious to him.

David's gaze intensified as his common-sense rejoiced and his conscience rebuked him. "I... love you. I love you with all my heart."

Chana leaned over and hugged him. "I know."

If David hadn't been so conflicted, his heart would have burst with joy.

Yet he still lived a lie. He had failed once again. He was still a prisoner.

His beloved still loved a fake.

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David sat in the cool, dark Sanhedrin building later that day. A privilege he had only recently gained, he was without a doubt the youngest man in the room. Twenty years was a babe compared to the decades these men had seen.

The speaker was talking about various heretics of the faith, the most notable of which was Paul. David winced every time the speaker uttered his uncle's name. Paul had preached the sermon which eventually led to David's conversion. David knew he owed the man everything. And yet, if David ever associated himself with his uncle's faith, he'd lose everything.

Suddenly, the door swung open and three men walked in. David immediately recognized their leader – Chana's father, Denias.

“Men of the Sanhedrin!” he said, his dark beard swaying from side to side. “I stand before you with a solution to one of our most troublesome problems. For far too long, that snake known as Paul has been polluting our religion and defiling our nation with his false teaching. His ludicrous babble must end before he deceives any more of God's holy people.”

The men all nodded, their attention undivided. David felt sick.

“Today, I come before you to tell you that I and my followers, who number almost forty men, have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything... until we have killed Paul.”

Silence immediately followed his declaration but soon turned into low murmuring. David was stunned. He had known that Chana's father was a zealot, but this was taking it too far.

Denias swept the men seated in a circle around him, his gaze piercing with intensity. His eyes focused on the man seated next to David.

David wanted to shrink into the hard seat, but his father didn't flinch. Tall, handsome and tanned from long days spent working the family farm, they shared nearly identical features. At this moment, though, their expressions differed.

Now all eyes of the Sanhedrin were fastened on them.

David's father stood. “I know what you all are thinking - a blood relative of Paul's cannot be trusted. However, as most of you know, when Paul was driven to madness and began preaching this false religion, I took it upon myself to disown him so he would not dishonor my wife's or my own family's name. And today, my son and I stand by that commitment.”

David's father looked at him.

A tense second passed and David slowly, painfully nodded.

“And we are prepared to stand by whatever plan Denias proposes in order to finish the purification of my family's name and to protect our sacred religion,” his father finished.

Denias slowly stroked his beard, allowed the tension to build for another moment, and then spoke directly to the chief of the court. “Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the

commander to bring Paul before you on the pretext of procuring more accurate information on the case.”

He paused for just a moment and then uttered his last sentence through gritted teeth. “We’re ready to kill him when he gets here.”

All eyes turned to the chief of the court. The elderly man clasped his hands together and spoke in a low voice. “Denias, your plan is one that this Sanhedrin and the chief priests have been considering for quite some time. If these men agree...”

Nearly the entire Sanhedrin voiced their approval.

“Then it is settled. We will carry your plan into action as soon as possible. What we have discussed must remain confidential. May the Lord show his favor and bless our holy endeavor to deal with this heretic and his deceitful teaching.”

Denias’ followers hurried behind him as he turned and walked out.

The Sanhedrin building was as silent as a tomb. Finally, a few of the members stood to leave and the assembly was adjourned.

David looked up at his father, hoping to see any sign of remorse.

There was none.

David slowly rose, his heart feeling ripped in two. Paul had helped him find salvation. If it hadn’t been for him, David would never have found Jesus.

Paul hadn’t been afraid to share his faith. Paul hadn’t been afraid to be labeled a Christian.

And now he was about to be murdered.

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“Chana, I just don’t know what to do. They’re going to kill my uncle.”

Only a few hours had passed since the meeting and it was nearly dusk. David held Chana’s hand and gazed at the surrounding flowers illuminated by the setting sun. They were so beautiful. And yet they faded in comparison to his wife-to-be.

Chana’s soft voice enhanced the picturesque scene, but her words did not ease the ache in David’s soul. “My father has spoken of this often. He’s right, you know. Paul is a heretic of the worst kind and has led many gullible Jews astray. His false religion must be stamped out if we are to remain pure before Yahweh as a nation.”

David looked at her, tears filling his eyes. He was a Christian. She was not. That was clear now.

She had to know.

And David had to save Paul, even if everyone knew about it.

“Chana, remember earlier today when I said I had something to tell you?”

She nodded.

“Well... I do love you. With all my heart. But... but more importantly, I must tell you...”

David’s intuition screamed at him, begging him to stop. But he kept going. “I have kept this secret for too long. It’s time you knew the truth.”

Chana looked at him with wide eyes. David avoided her gaze.

“I am a Christian.”

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She’d promised not to tell, but David knew the love they once shared was not to be found again. She could never love a man who had betrayed her trust in such a way.

And now, as David ran down the darkening streets of Jerusalem, a battle raged within him.

He wanted to go back. Tell her that he’d revoke his faith, begin anew. They could still marry and love each other forever.

And yet David knew that Jesus had not died for David to deny His name and keep David’s faith under wraps.

Paul had helped save David’s life. Now David would return the favor.

He turned a corner. There in front of him was the massive Roman fort that held Paul prisoner. The sun slowly lowered in the sky as David ascended the numerous steps.

He was committing religious and familial suicide. He knew that. At the very least his father would disown him, just like he had disowned Paul. At worst... David didn’t want to think about what the Sanhedrin would do if they ever caught him.

Eternal life was worth it. Perhaps someday his family’s hearts would soften. Perhaps Chana’s heart would soften. Maybe David could share with them the wonderful news his uncle had shared with him.

But today was not that day. Today was the day to proclaim David’s faith and tell a secret that entailed life and death.

At last David reached the top as the sun’s last rays disappeared over the horizon. He pounded on the door. Each knock echoed his heart’s overwhelming conflict.

The door opened.

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The Roman commander concluded his interview and asked if there was anything else David could recall. David mentally went through the details of the Denias' plot. Everything had been told.

The commander rose from his seat and put his hand on David's shoulder. "Young man, you have done your uncle a great service. I will not allow the Sanhedrin to murder a Roman citizen. I know that both Paul and the empire are indebted to your bravery."

As David walked away, the commander called out to him. "Don't tell a soul you've reported this to me."

David nodded and then smiled grimly.

The Sanhedrin had sources. Soon everyone would know he had saved Paul's life. Everyone would know that David was a Christian. It was inevitable.

And yet, David felt a strange, new kind of joy. He had proven his faith to be genuine.

He kept no secrets anymore.

He was finally free.

Acts 23:12-22