

# Excerpts from

## *Life and Death on the Euphrates*

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*by Timothy Verity*

### Chapter 2—The Light and the Voice

The council of shepherds watched him disappear behind the rock. As soon as he was out of their sight a brilliant light transfixed Noah. He quickly walked toward it holding his dusty robe in front of his face, unsure of the light's source or its power.

Suddenly, a sharp crack ripped through the air. A storm erupted! Noah ducked hoping to escape its invisible force. The sky thundered! He was slammed to the ground onto his back!

The storm roared and rumbled over him driving hard toward the other shepherds. Fear gripped their hearts when they heard the explosive thunder. They lifted their robes over their heads hoping to escape that which they knew was impossible to evade. They moaned the names of gods and goddesses, dead relatives, anything that might help them fend off whatever danger the storm possessed.

The thunder and a thousand lightning strikes caused the men to press hands to ears and look at one another in abject fright. The storm nearly crushed them to the ground!

The whirling wind of the storm sucked dirt, leaves, and small sticks into the air. The men could not breathe.

But a moment later, the air was calm.

They rose to their feet and held their breath as they carefully turned to follow the storm with their eyes. They watched it grow as it moved away. It quickly expanded as it drove across the plain. The tall grass rippled under its power. It blew over the entire region before it slammed into the distant mountains.

Confused, the shepherds straightened their robes. They moved off a short distance from that place thinking that it was bedeviled.

Noah, with his face still in the dirt, opened his eyes. He was overwhelmed by the utter brilliance of a powerful light! He squinted, and pushed himself up. He heard the roar of the storm proceed behind him. But he did not look back. Somehow he knew that if he looked back it would be disrespectful to what was in front of him.

He was now surrounded by the light. It was warm, powerful and close.

He saw no source for the light. There was no flame, no faceted stone nor pool of placid water which might reflect the light of the sun. There was nothing but light!

He began to shake, though he was not cold. He perspired, though he was not hot.

Then as quietly as a mother speaks to her new born child, came a voice. It was smooth, resonant, powerful and absolutely confident. Slowly, he became calm. He stopped shaking and became very still, as still as a rock. He sensed words, but he did not know their meaning, at least not right away.

He shielded his eyes and looked from right to left hoping to see who was speaking. There was another crack, like the limb of a tree which suddenly gave way. He looked up and then down. There was nothing but the voice.

The voice was everywhere! It was insistent, demanding, yet soothing and reassuring.

Fear caught him again. He trembled violently. He fell to his knees! He covered his face! He could barely breathe. His heart raced as he tried to understand the spectacle that crowded his mind!

Then it was as if he was young again and a difficult problem was made clear! Suddenly he could understand the words spoken by the voice as it called to him.

The light, however, was not the source of the voice! The light was a beacon. The voice was coming from something else; from someone else! He dove onto the ground hoping to hide his face in the dirt. He pulled his robe up around his head. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He was filled with horror, with delight, and with longing. He moaned. He rubbed his face on the ground. Was this the last moment on earth for a man who had devoted himself to the Almighty? He cried in frightful agony.

He pounded his forehead onto the ground. Should he speak? His mind raced. How could he speak? The Almighty knows all things, sees all things! He hears all things! What should he do?

The other shepherds believed that the world was ruled by effects whose origins were the actions of people who either pleased or angered the gods. So they desperately hoped that the powerful storm and particularly, its cause, was unrelated to them; not having offended any gods, so far as any of them knew. They drew further away thinking that distance was a curative or at least would be preventive to whatever punishments the gods were presently visiting upon Noah.

As they nervously discussed the storm one of the shepherds, Samuel, heard an unusual sound, a large crack. He turned and looked toward the rock. He saw the light again; but now it was more brilliant! He looked up at the sky. It was thick with clouds! He looked again toward the rock. It seemed that maybe he had heard words; words that were carried on the wind. But there were no more words, if words they were. He returned his attention to the group. Some of the other men heard the sounds but no one spoke of them.

The departing storm rumbled off into the distance over the mountains. When the shepherds could hear it no more they all looked back to the rock behind which Noah had disappeared. They wondered what had become of him. But they did not go look for him.

Now they all saw it; the ascending, expanding, brilliant light! They pointed at it, astonished! They covered their eyes hoping to protect themselves from it, though it was far away from them.

They hoped that Noah was safe. They also knew that their friend, their benefactor, could not rescue them should they be in trouble. And they would not try to rescue him for he was facing a greater power than they could defeat; of this they were certain!

## Chapter 4—More About Noah

Noah was the oldest of his parent's children. The rest had all died when the earth was young.

Noah was a talented young man. He had an affinity for wood craft. He wielded both the small axe and the large axe with equal dexterity. He pleased his father when he made tent pegs, poles, cradles and bowls.

As Noah matured he received many gifts from his father who gave to him flocks and herds of sheep and goats, tents and servants and maid servants. His father was pleased to give him choice breeding stock as well.

Noah was a patient young man. That helped him to successfully raise sheep and goats. His patience also suited him well in the settling of disputes among the other men in his father's extensive family. Indeed, his social and arbitration skills became legendary.

Noah married a girl whose clan pastured its sheep on the eastern side of the Euphrates River. Her name was Ruhaa. She was one of his many cousins. She spoke his language, as in truth all people of the clans did in those days; the difference being found in their accents.

Ruhaa had known Noah since he was a boy. She was taken by his forthrightness, his skills with hand and speech. And he was quite handsome. She prevailed upon her father in no small way to press his advantage with Noah's father when the subject of marriage came up.

Ruhaa, unlike other young women of Noah's family, was spirited, opinionated, and unafraid to order the men around. Noah was intrigued and very much taken with her because of those traits. He also found her to be quite beautiful. Her raven black hair, slim face and twinkling black eyes set her apart from the other girls he knew. He had often seen her at the clan gatherings. He had even managed to steal away with her down to the river when their parents were engrossed in the parties and celebrations that punctuated their gatherings.

Ruhaa's figure was slight and fragile in appearance. This fact did not endear her to the other women. It was commonly repeated among the women of the clans that a woman needed to be robust in order to bear children and to please her husband.

Ruhaa proved them wrong. After they were married she eventually gave three sons to Noah and so she finally found acceptance from the other women. More importantly, she delighted Noah as no one else could! For that even Noah's father was most pleased.

Noah's father was a religious man of some stature among his people. He prayed daily in the direction of the northern reaches of the headwaters of the Euphrates.

"It was there that the Almighty had set the great garden. It was more beautiful than anything you could ever hope to see!" His father told him.

Noah asked his father if he had ever seen the garden of which he spoke.

"No, not once; no one ever has." His father gruffly answered him.

Inquiring how his father might know of such a garden he was told that the Almighty once spoke to the ancestors of their clan, face to face. "This same story," he told Noah, "had been handed down through their clan ever since."

Noah loved his father's stories of days gone by. He was especially intrigued by his stories of the Almighty. He hoped one day to see an apparition or some strange sight conjured by the Almighty. That was not an unusual desire among the people of the clans in those days.

In the early days of his life, the Almighty rarely visited and almost never spoke to anyone, save Noah's father.

As Noah aged he gave up hoping to actually see a sign of the Almighty. He had, however, from time to time, heard a voice that he believed was from the Almighty, though he could not prove it when he spoke of it to other people. But because of his absolute devotion to the messages he claimed to have received he was acknowledged as a religious man of serious conviction who never wavered from the words or commands that he heard.

And since success came his way, Noah became acknowledged as someone to be emulated, at least in his business enterprises. Business was considered to be the proof of all wisdom for the people of the clans, so long as it was successful business. So, the other clansmen accepted Noah's religious peculiarities. The words he claimed to have heard were words of encouragement and so were not deleterious to him or to the clan. The people of the clans could and did accept him in this way. They did not accept his religious thoughts or beliefs for themselves but they accepted such things in him.

## **Chapter 21—The Southern Exploration Teams**

Noah anticipated that the many explorers who were going south would have a difficult time. They would cross deserts, mountain ranges, and travel around lakes. They would encounter many tribes and clans unlike their own. It was possible that they might be opposed by armed bands. Consequently Noah directed that the southern teams should be fully armed with shields, short swords, spears and knives.

Noah sent a strong and wise leader with the main team. His name was Nimere. Nimere was tall and large. His thick arms were strong and easily drew the string of a long bow. He was quick thinking and given to extreme violence when such action was required. He was loyal and well grounded in the ways of the clans. Noah was confident that he would accomplish the task given to him. When the combined

team reached the southern sea Nimere separated his group from the others. The others were split into four groups of ten. Each was given an area to research. Nimere would command the largest group and head west.

He commanded over a hundred men. All of them were strong. Each was able to wield a staff, a spear and a sword. They were not fierce, however. Though strong and capable they were anxious young men. Most of them had never traveled out of the region of the Euphrates. Only a few had seen battle. Nimere was sure they would be tested. He hoped they would prove themselves equal to the dangers of the mission.

Noah encouraged them. He shared the story of the day the small bird caught his attention; about the words of the Almighty. Ruhaa, in her plucky way, reinforced Noah's speech. She told the men how proud she was of them. She extolled the virtues of their strength and dedication. She told them how important they were to her and to Noah.

Noah beamed when Ruhaa spoke to people in that way. Not many women spoke to men other than their own husbands, but Ruhaa was not ordinary. She was intelligent. She possessed keen intellect. And most of all, she had common sense. Noah hoped that she actually believed what she was telling the young men as she sent them off.

Privately Ruhaa questioned Noah about the necessity of the whole project. "You are the only one who heard the voice!" She complained, over and over. "How can we know it was not an animal complaining of the heat, or the wind passing through the branches of a tree that sang to your ears?"

But no matter her private doubts she busily and efficiently organized the teams for travel. Pack mules were draped with large, soft, leather bags heavy with supplies. Skids, made of cross hatched branches, were dragged behind the pack mules. They were piled high with cloth, spices, cooking jars, skins of wine, bread flour in heavy vases, and trading goods. Other skids held fine writing instruments, oiled skins, and various hand tools. Dried foods were carried on skids as well. There was dried fish for the early part of the trip, dried mutton, and small leather sacks which held figs, and dates. And always, there was salt.

## **Chapter 22—The Collection Teams**

After much trial and error and several failed expeditions Noah finally figured what it would take to prepare collection teams to successfully capture and return animals to the camp. Planning for the first teams had proven woefully inadequate. He also sent far too few teams out the first time.

The idea that only a few teams would be necessary to accomplish the task was based on biased conjecture about the world itself. The shepherds of the plain believed that the world was relatively small and only thinly populated with people and animals. The reality was that the shepherds knew little about the world outside the region of the two rivers. This ignorance would soon be replaced with a blizzard of information, knowledge, and surety that there was more in the world to learn about than one person could possibly acquire.

When asked one day what surety there was in the experience Noah answered; "I am sure that I will become all the more confused by the multitude of conflicting stories about tribes, clans and animals because there are so many of them!"

Forced to admit that the world was much bigger than the region of the two rivers, Noah commissioned many research teams and dozens of collection teams! He sent them in all the directions of the sun. They would travel as far as they could possibly go. The first successful research teams had gone out and come back overwhelmed and burgeoned with stories of the strange sights they had seen and the equally strange animals and people they had encountered.

To make sure their success, based on the knowledge of the research teams, Noah thoroughly trained, supplied and enlarged the collection teams. They were to do whatever was necessary to collect the animals. Their supplies included pack mules, skids, ropes, nets, food, cloth, medicines and water skins.

Some of the most valuable cargo each team carried was a large container of sleeping potion. The practice of sedating the animals made their capture and traveling easier.

Noah did not send gold or silver with the collection teams. He did not want the teams to fall prey to bandits or brigands. After all, the teams would be facing unknown assailants who, when seeing even a little gold, might kill Noah's men to get their gold! Noah also took wise counsel that some of the team members might possibly be tempted to bring back an animal or two that already been captured, feigning forgetfulness.

Noah's solution for such problems was easy. He insisted that the team leaders use persuasiveness and barter when they discovered strange animals that, so far as they knew, had not yet been lodged in the camp enclosures.

The good part was that if they succeeded Noah rewarded the team members very well. And if by chance the teams discovered that some of the animals were owned by tribes or clans, making it easier to acquire them, then the teams were authorized to use any form of persuasiveness at their disposal in order to accomplish their goal. They could not lie or cheat or steal, however.

Nor did Noah want team members to be seduced by gold or silver; which once it left Noah's control might serve its own directive to such a non principled people as he was forced to hire for his projects. So he forbade them to carry gold or silver for any purpose.

They would be rewarded only after their missions were successfully accomplished. And since Noah had copies of what the research teams had discovered, the collection teams must return with at least those animals so described. If not, then they would not be rewarded. It was a simple process that Noah enforced during the entire decades long search for animals.

Noah offered extra rewards to the teams returning with animals which were not described on their lists. He and Ruhaa debated this policy. They realized that greedy men of one team might lay in wait and steal animals from unsuspecting hard working teams. But, Noah told Ruhaa that men would do what

men would do. He hoped they obeyed some of the rules of civilized people but he could not guarantee such good behavior.

Noah even added a special bonus. The stranger and more unique the animals the more he rewarded the captors. The same principle was applied to the food gathering teams.

Farmers accompanied the tree collection teams. Their job was to gather and preserve small plants, young trees, herbs and other foods that they discovered the animals ate.

## **Chapter 38—Trees, Food**

Noah's tree growers were in need of numerous and various types of trees. Noah sent continual expeditions to the places where these special trees grew naturally.

The teams devised ways to bring back small, young trees whose chance at survival proved better than larger older ones.

It required a considerable amount of time to learn what foods the animals would eat, but many of them were leaf and grass eaters. Some of the teams lived for several months with the people who knew the trees and the animals who ate their leaves.

All this experimentation and trial was, of course, deleterious to the animals already housed in the enclosures. They sickened slowly and died regardless of the care or hope of their tenders. The arrival of the new trees would be their salvation. For some it was too much too late. For others, the trees were their salvation.

It was as late as the fifth year that the larger and more numerous collection teams began to trickle back to camp with small, healthy trees. It would be many more years before they could produce the prodigious amounts of leaves necessary for the animals in the enclosures to survive in the camp and later, on the Ark.

One group brought people back who knew something about the trees. Noah thought that was especially clever. It was easier to care for people than to keep sending groups back and forth to the faraway places. This indeed proved to be a blessing.