

SHADOW<sup>OF THE</sup> MOUNTAIN  
BOOK 1

# SHADOW<sup>OF THE</sup> MOUNTAIN

— E X O D U S —

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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*For Cassandra, L.O.T.T.M.*

*And for all the older men who  
still threaten the Enemy*



## Note to the Reader

It will quickly become apparent that I have taken a considerable amount of license with the life story of Caleb in the Scriptures. He is only briefly mentioned, and therefore much imagination is required to fill in the blanks where the Bible is silent.

Units of measurement and distance are modernized. Words like *canvas* for tent material and *minutes* for time measurement are used for description, instead of ancient terms that would be too cumbersome for a reader to have to keep track of. Anachronisms are a necessary component of historical fiction; otherwise books like this one would be dry history textbooks.

My goal is to create a plausible scenario for what happened in between the events the Bible explicitly narrates. The books of Exodus through Joshua say very little about Caleb until much later in his life, so I have taken the liberty of creating a backstory for him that will provide the reader with a front-row seat to the events of the Exodus, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the conquest.

Readers of my work will know that I do not hold back on graphic depictions of the realities of ancient warfare and ancient cultures and customs. The intent is not to offend but to portray the realities of a brutal culture like the Egypt of the pharaohs.

This is a work of fiction. Please treat it as such.

# Glossary of Terms

## **Military Terms (modernized):**

*Team:* 3 men.

*Squad:* 6–10 men.

*Platoon:* 30–50 men.

*Company:* 200–300 men.

*Battalion:* 900–1,200 men.

*Division:* 8,000–10,000 men.

*Squadron:* 10–50 chariots.

## **Egyptian Gods, Concepts, and Misc. Terms:**

*Ammit:* Known as the “Devourer,” the personification of divine retribution and justice. The evil have their souls eaten by this hybrid demon of a lion, a hippo, and a crocodile.

*Anubis:* The god of death and dying, a major figure of the underworld.

*Ba*: The birdlike form that a person's soul takes.

*Hapi*: A form of the river goddess, usually associated with a hippo.

*Horus*: The falcon-headed god of warriors, occasionally desert wind and storms, symbolizing power and authority.

*Isis*: The goddess of fertility and magic.

*Khamsin*: A massive dust storm that rolls across deserts and can last for days.

*Nekhbet*: Vulture god, a scavenger and poorly esteemed.

*Osiris*: Lord of the underworld.

*Ra (Amon Re)*: The sun god, also known as the Chief of the Gods. His name changed variously through the ages when the Egyptian religion shifted, based on which line of pharaohs ruled.

*Seth*: The god of war, but negatively associated as such. Barbarism, chaos, and destruction. Frequently viewed as the chief antagonist of the other gods and of mankind.

*Sobek*: Crocodile god.

*The Duat*: The River of Night, where the sun god Ra takes his nightly journey, and where the dead journey.

*Wadi*: A creek or small streambed.



# PART I



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The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.

Exodus 15:3

# Morning

The mornings were the hardest.

Every bone ached, every old scar throbbed. His wrist no longer bent back fully, and on nights when he slept on his side without realizing it, he was unable to move that side without pain for most of the day.

Caleb greeted this morning like any other, with a casual assessment of these pains. Nothing seemed to be abnormal. Some pains were injuries needing to be tended; others were just the advance of age.

When it was cold, as now, he took longer getting dressed. The approach of spring led the young troops to switch to summer tunics, but he would be wearing the thick wool winter cloak all summer long. Even the desert heat was no longer enough to thaw his bones.

But I can still move, he thought as he rubbed his feet. He squeezed his leg with his sword hand, the fingers pressing hard into flesh. He still had his battle grip. When that softened he

would be done, but it was still nearly as strong as when he was in the fiery power of youth.

Now he rolled onto his knees and paused, giving the joints time to loosen before he stood. He would be fine once he was up and his blood flowed through his veins. It was just the wake-up, he told himself.

Just the wake-up.

He exhaled slowly, then held his breath for the effort to stand. With a grunt he forced his back to straighten and pushed off the ground. The muscles relaxed and he was up. As he stretched, he remembered the first time he had been roused by a training master many years before. Shouting, kicking, he had three counts before he was supposed to be fully dressed with weapon in hand. Now it felt like it was three counts just to open his eyes.

“Enough,” he said aloud to himself in the dark.

The wind battered the tent, and he heard the thumping sound of heavy raindrops. He scowled. It would be another day of delays. Delays meant lost advantage. Delays favored the enemy.

He tried to be hopeful that it was only a passing storm and would give way to bright sunlight, but as soon as he looked out of his tent and blinked at the sky, he saw nothing but heavy darkness overhead and, as though mocking him, the rain clouds opened up and poured down onto the camp. Puddles formed in the mud nearby. Men who had ventured out into the open scurried to find shelter.

A figure appeared in front of him.

“Permission to enter, lord.”

“No,” Caleb said.

Silence outside. Caleb smiled to himself. Decided to have mercy.

“Speak quickly,” he said.

“We need your instructions, lord.”

“Send the others in so we can study the assault. They can spend the day teaching it to the men again and again until it is too firm in their minds to forget. Perhaps the weather will lift tomorrow.”

The commander disappeared. Caleb made out other men running from tree to tree and overhang to overhang. The men would be grumbling about the weather, about the lack of information, about how each other smelled. They would complain about everything, including him. Whoever was commanding was complained about. He used to complain, too, when he was a simple foot soldier.

Oh, how he missed it.

He withdrew into his tent. He struck flint and lit a torch, then slid it into the mount on the center pole. He watched the smoke billow heavily at first as the fresh oil caught before wafting out of the slits in the goatskin overhead.

A scratching sound at the tent flap.

“Come in.”

A stream of men entered the tent. They shook their cloaks off and shivered, stamping their feet and continuing conversations begun outside. Caleb waited for them to settle, and they all took their seats on rugs.

“Men,” he said, trying not to sound tired, “we do not have reinforcements yet. Joshua cannot spare them. But the weather has provided us an opportunity to wait another day or so before attacking. Perhaps they will arrive by then.”

He reached out with a short pointing stick, ornately carved by his own hand to resemble a spear, and drew the outline of a city in the dirt. The commanders huddled close to see it.

“Did everyone get a glimpse of the city before night fell?”

Nods and affirmations all around.

“You saw the main gate?”

“Yes, lord,” one of the younger ones said. “And the stones we can climb near it.”

Caleb nodded. “Your mission?”

“To get over the wall and open the gate using three men.”

“These men have been selected?”

“Yes, lord. My best.”

Caleb was satisfied. He nodded to the young leader. “Well done, Othniel. Make sure your men rehearse it.”

“Yes, lord.”

Caleb searched the faces until he spotted a middle-aged man with missing teeth and a nose heavily distorted from multiple breaks.

“Adino, show me what you will be doing.”

Adino took the pointing stick from him and traced a route beginning from the outside of the city. “My lead force will follow me through the water drainage to the city’s sewer ditch. We will climb through the well shafts until we reach the streets, then attack west along the wall until we have cleared that quarter of soldiers. We meet up with you at the gate if something goes wrong.”

“Second mission?”

“Support the capture of the house of Anak in the north of the city if it has not been taken yet.”

“Why?”

“The giants control the city. Anakites have been a nemesis to peace for generations.”

Caleb reached over for the pointing stick and handed it to the other commanders one by one. They walked him through the plan he himself had created.

It was complicated, more complicated than he was comfortable with. He believed the simpler a plan, the better.

But this city, and these people, had proven to be worthy foes. The Hebrews would have to attack in unexpected ways. Even so, he had simplified it as much as possible. One primary and one secondary mission per unit and therefore per soldier. A soldier could forget a lot of things and be forgiven so long as he knew his mission.

Caleb knew his men were green. They had been tested a bit in battles on the plains and in skirmishes in the foothills, but now they were in the mountains and staring at a fortified city filled with giants. He had no way of knowing how they would respond. They had been trained in how to fight this specific enemy, yet that meant nothing before the first combat. Would they learn? Would they adapt? Would they maintain their ferocity in the face of plans falling apart and suffering losses?

When the last man had finished, Caleb sat staring at the map quietly. The others remained silent, knowing better than to speak when their general was not ready to listen. The wind picked up outside the tent. The rain grew heavier.

“Adino, you are certain they do not know that we know about the waste ditch access into the city?”

“I killed the man we bribed myself. They do not know it. They will never believe that we would be willing to crawl through excrement to kill them. I cannot believe it myself, to be sure.”

The others laughed. Caleb nodded. Every approach and main street had been sketched by their spies. But a map was never the battlefield. What buildings were left out? What archery positions? Would the citizens all fight themselves or leave that to the soldiers and surrender easily? Was there enough food

inside to provide for his troops once they had it? Was every enemy escape route covered?

He rubbed his forehead. Impossible to know. Trust those in your command to do their duty.

“Go back to your men and let them rotate through the tents to get warm and dry throughout the day. Make sure the perimeter watch stays alert. I will be checking myself to ensure it. If the chiefs of the Anakites hear we are already encamped this close, and they believe our perimeter is weak, then nothing would stop them from sending a surprise attack to frighten us off, even in the storm.”

He reclined on his rug, and this was the signal for them to leave. They all stood and began talking again. Caleb stretched his back out flat on the ground, listening to them. He was about to close his eyes when he saw that Othniel had remained behind. The young leader, twenty years old, was staring hard at the map and scratching his short beard in thought.

“It is possible to be too prepared,” Caleb said.

“How do you know the difference between being too prepared and not prepared enough?”

Caleb thought about it a moment. “Not prepared is when you stay up all night terrified that you have no idea what you are doing. Too prepared is staying up all night terrified that you have no idea what you are doing.”

Othniel smiled. “You tell that to all the young ones like me, don’t you?”

“You are prepared.”

“I hope so. Do you believe the men are?”

“As prepared as we can make them. They should have enough motivation with their women and children nearby.”

“Was that your plan all along?”



“Where else would we put them?” Caleb asked. “This is our inheritance. We have nowhere else to go. We live where we conquer.”

Othniel gazed at the map a moment longer, then said, “When did you see your first major battle?”

Caleb laid his head back and looked at the ceiling of the tent. The torch was dimming.

“Could you replace that?” he asked, gesturing to the torch. Othniel picked up a candle lantern and hung it on the pole, using the dying torch to light it. It was a duller light than the torch, but it would last longer.

“Egypt. Many years ago,” Caleb finally answered.

“Why haven’t you told your story to the men? They would benefit from hearing it.”

“What story?”

“The time you were in Egypt. We know the account of Moses and Joshua. Our fathers composed songs and inscribed records. But we have never heard from you on it.”

“Why does it matter?”

“It is our history. It would be good for the men.”

“What do they say about me?”

“That you were formed out of the mud by Yahweh and have no mother.”

“Good,” Caleb said. “That’s what they need to know.”

“Uncle, we have time. There is nothing to do. This storm is not going to calm down before nightfall. Tell me of the old days.”

“The weather could clear.”

“You know it will not.”

The rain fell harder even as he listened to it. Blowing in from the Great Sea, these storms stayed trapped in the highlands and

did not move on until the western deserts sent their own dry winds to push it back. He knew he may have to resign himself to the truth that it was one of those storms that lasts for days, possibly weeks, but he bitterly hated the idea and therefore preferred to deny it.

“I do not like reliving the old days,” Caleb said dismissively.

“Many young men would learn from it. We would be able to grow in wisdom, unlike our fathers’ generation.”

Caleb sighed. Othniel knew right where to press him.

“They can read the scrolls of the scribes,” Caleb said.

“Those have few details.”

“They have all they need to know. They were written by the hand of Moses himself, many of them.”

“True. But there is always more to learn. When you go to your grave, you do not want us to squander what we may have learned from you, do you?”

“You are using my own words against me.”

“Whatever it takes, Uncle.”

Caleb was quiet. No part of him wished to say anything about Egypt. But his nephew was right. If there was a chance that even a single young man could learn from his experience and choose the path of Yahweh over idolatry . . .

“You will check on your men later,” he said, resigned.

“I will,” Othniel said. Impatient, he added, “They said you were in the armies of Pharaoh. That you were a great hero for him.”

“I learned the warrior arts from the Egyptians, as did Moses,” Caleb conceded.

Othniel leaned forward. “Please. Tell me of it.”

“Where do you want me to begin?” Caleb asked, settling into the cushions that were his only yield to comfort in his old age.

“How you got to Egypt. How you met Joshua. Yahweh parting the seas. Everything.” He sat forward, as though unable to believe he had actually convinced the old man to talk.

Caleb saw himself in Othniel’s expression. Long ago, when there were not cities filled with giants to attack, or aching bones that hurt even worse during storms.

“I will tell you, on the promise that you will ensure the other young men will read of what the Lord God did.”

“I will tell them. I promise.” Othniel pulled out a set of charcoal writing sticks and some sheets of parchment.

Caleb eyed him. “You came prepared.”

“I expected to win you over eventually. Perhaps a bribe if it came to it.”

Caleb smiled. He let his eyes relax behind their closed lids and grew very still. Took several deep breaths. The rain continued to pelt the tent, and he concentrated on the sound. The memories were deep and hidden. They would emerge only if Yahweh allowed them to, and only to accomplish his purposes.

Darkness. Rain. The musty, damp smell of the wet tent.

His senses grew sharp.

From deep within him, an image emerged. An image long lost, but one that grew bolder and clearer until he saw golden sand and piercing blue skies, and mountains made by man.