The Protevangelion

CHAPTER ONE

In the history of the twelve tribes of Israel we read there was a certain person called Joachim, who being very rich, made double offerings to the Lord God, having made this resolution: "My substance shall be for the benefit of the whole people, and that I may find mercy from the Lord God for the forgiveness of my sins." 2 But at a certain great feast of the Lord, when the children of Israel offered their gifts, and Joachim also offered his, Reuben the high priest opposed him, saying, "It is not lawful for you to offer your gifts, seeing you have not begotten any issue in Israel." 3 At this Joachim, being concerned very much, went away to consult the registries of the twelve tribes, to see whether he was the only person who had begotten no issue. 4 But upon inquiry he found that all the righteous had raised up seed in Israel: 5 Then he called to mind the patriarch Abraham, how God in the end of his life had given him his son Isaac; and upon this he was exceedingly distressed, and would not be seen by his wife, 6 but retired into the wilderness, and fixed his tent there, and fasted forty days and forty nights, saying to himself, "I will not go down either to eat or drink, till the Lord my God shall look down upon me, but prayer shall be my meat and drink."

CHAPTER TWO

In the meantime his wife Anna was distressed and perplexed on a double account, and said, "I will mourn both for my widowhood and my barrenness." 2 Then drew near a great feast of the Lord, and Judith her maid said, "How long will you thus afflict your soul? The feast of the Lord is now come, when it is unlawful for anyone to mourn. 3 Take therefore this hood which was given by one who makes such things, for it is not fit that I, who am a servant, should wear it, but it well suits a person of your greater character." 4 But Anna replied, "Depart from me, I am not used to such things; besides, the Lord has greatly humbled me. 5 I fear some ill-designing person has given you this, and you have come to pollute me with my sin." 6 Then Judith her maid answered, "What evil shall I wish you when you will not hearken to me? 7 I cannot wish you a greater curse than you are under, in that God has shut up your womb, that you should not be a mother in Israel." 8 At this Anna was exceedingly troubled, and having on her wedding garment, went about the ninth hour to walk in her
And she saw a laurel tree, and sat under it, and prayed to the Lord, saying, "O God of my fathers, bless me and regard my prayer as you did bless the womb of Sarah, and gave her a son, Isaac."

CHAPTER THREE

And as she was looking towards heaven she perceived a sparrow's nest in the laurel, and mourning within herself, she said, "Woe is me! Who begot me? And what womb did bear me, that I should be thus accursed before the children of Israel, and that they should reproach and deride me in the temple of my God? Woe is me! To what can I be compared? I am not comparable to the very beasts of the earth, for even the beasts of the earth are fruitful before You, O Lord! Woe is me! To what can I be compared? I am not comparable to the brute animals, for even the brute animals are fruitful before You, O Lord! Woe is me! To what am I comparable? I cannot be compared to these waters, for even the waters are fruitful before You, O Lord! Woe is me! To what can I be compared? I am not comparable to the waves of the sea; for these, whether they are calm or in motion, with the fishes which are in them, praise You, O Lord! Woe is me! To what can I be compared? I am not comparable to the very earth, for the earth produces its fruits, and praises You, O Lord!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Then an angel of the Lord stood by her and said, "Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your prayer. You shall conceive and bring forth, and your progeny shall be spoken of in all the world." And Anna answered, "As the Lord my God lives, whatever I bring forth, whether it is male or female, I will devote it to the Lord my God, and it shall minister to Him in holy things, during its whole life." And behold, there appeared two angels, saying to her, "Behold, Joachim your husband is coming with his shepherds. For an angel of the Lord has also come down to him, and said, 'The Lord God has heard your prayer; make haste and go from here, for behold, Anna your wife shall conceive.'" (And Joachim went down and called his shepherds, saying, "Bring me hither ten she-lambs without spot or blemish, and they shall be for the Lord my God. And bring me twelve calves without blemish, and the twelve calves shall be for the priests and the elders. Bring me also a hundred goats, and the hundred goats shall be for the whole people.")) And Joachim went down with the shepherds, and Anna stood by the gate and saw Joachim coming with the shepherds. And she ran and, hanging about his neck, said, "Now I know that the Lord has greatly blessed me; for behold, I who was a widow am no longer a widow, and I who was barren shall conceive."
CHAPTER FIVE

And Joachim abode the first day in his house, but on the morrow he brought his offerings and said, 2 "If the Lord is propitious to me, let the plate which is on the priest's forehead make it manifest." 3 And he consulted the plate which the priest wore, and saw it, and behold, sin was not found in him. 4 And Joachim said, "Now I know that the Lord is propitious to me, and has taken away all my sins." 5 And he went down from the temple of the Lord justified, and he went to his own house. 6 And when nine months were fulfilled to Anna, she brought forth, and said to the midwife, "What have I brought forth?" 7 And she told her, "A girl." 8 Then Anna said, "The Lord has this day magnified my soul." And she lay in her bed. 9 And when the days of her purification were accomplished, she gave suck to the child, and called her name Mary.

CHAPTER SIX

And the child increased in strength every day, so that when she was nine months old, her mother put her upon the ground to try if she could stand, and when she had walked nine steps, she came again to her mother's lap. 2 then her mother caught her up, and said, "As the Lord my God lives, you shall not walk again on the earth till I bring you into the temple of the Lord." 3 Accordingly she made her chamber a holy place, and allowed nothing uncommon or unclean to come near her, but invited certain undefiled daughters of Israel, and they drew her aside. 4 But when the child was a year old, Joachim made a great feast, and invited the priests, scribes, elders, and all the people of Israel. 5 And Joachim then made an offering of the girl to the chief priests, and they blessed her, saying, "The God of our fathers bless this girl, and give her a name famous and lasting through all generations." And all the people replied, "So be it. Amen." 6 Then Joachim a second time offered her to the priests, and they blessed her, saying, "O Most High God, regard this girl and bless her with an everlasting blessing." 7 Upon this, her mother took her up and gave her the breast and sung the following song to the Lord: 8 I will sing a new song to the Lord, my God, for He has visited me, and taken away from me the reproach of my enemies, and has given me the fruit of His righteousness, that it may now be told the sons of Reuben, that Anna gives suck." 9 Then she put the child to rest in the room which she had consecrated, and she went out and served them. 10 And when the feast was ended, they went away rejoicing and praising the God of Israel.
But the child grew, and when she was two years old, Joachim said to Anna, "Let us lead her to the temple of the Lord, that we may perform our vow, which we have vowed to the Lord God, lest He should be angry with us, and our offering be unacceptable." 2 But Anna said, "Let us wait the third year, lest she should be at a loss to know her father." And Joachim said, "Let us then wait." 3 And when the child was three years old, Joachim said, "Let us invite the daughters of the Hebrews, who are undefiled, and let them take each a lamp, and let them be lighted, that the child may not turn back again, and her mind be set against the temple of the Lord." 4 And they did thus till they ascended into the temple of the Lord. And the high priest received her, and blessed her, and said, "Mary, the Lord God has magnified your name to all generations. And to the very end of time, the Lord by you will show his redemption to the children of Israel." 5 And he placed her on the third step of the altar, and the Lord gave to her grace, and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.

CHAPTER EIGHT

And her parents went away filled with wonder, and praising God, because the girl did not return back to them. 2 But Mary continued in the temple as a dove educated there, and received her food from the hand of an angel. 3 And when she was twelve years of age, the priests met in a council, and said, "Behold, Mary is twelve years of age. What shall we do with her, for fear lest the holy place of the Lord our God should be defiled?" 4 Then the priests replied to Zachary the high priest, "Stand at the altar of the Lord, and enter into the holy place, and make petitions concerning her, and whatever the Lord shall manifest to you, do that." 5 Then the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies and, taking away with him the breastplate of judgment, made prayers concerning her. 6 And behold, an angel of the Lord came to him and said, "Zachary, Zachary, go forth and call together all the widowers among the people, and let every one of them bring his rod, and he by whom the Lord shall show a sign shall be the husband of Mary." 7 And the criers went out throughout all Judaea, and the trumpet of the Lord sounded, and all the people ran and met together.

8 Joseph also, throwing away the hatchet, went out to meet them, and when they were met, they went to the high priest, taking every man his rod. 9 After the high priest had received their rods, he went into the temple to pray. 10 And when he had finished his prayer, he took the rods, and went forth and distributed them, and there was no miracle attending them. 11 The last rod was taken by Joseph, and behold, a dove proceeded out of the rod, and flew upon the head of Joseph. 12 And the high priest said, "Joseph, you are the person chosen to take the Virgin of the Lord, to keep her for him." 13 But Joseph
refused, saying, "I am an old man, and have children, but she is young, and I fear lest I should appear ridiculous in Israel." 14 then the high priest replied, "Joseph, fear the Lord your God, and remember how God dealt with Dathan, Korah, and Abiram, how the earth opened and swallowed them up, because of their contradiction. 15 Now therefore, Joseph, fear God, lest the like things should happen in your family." 16 Joseph then, being afraid, took her to his house, and Joseph said to Mary, "Behold, I have taken you from the temple of the Lord, and now I will leave you in my house. I must go to mind my trade of building. The Lord be with you."

CHAPTER NINE

And it came to pass, in a council of priests, that it was said, "Let us make a new veil for the temple." 2 And the high priest said, "Call together to me seven undefiled virgins of the tribe of David." 3 And the servants went and brought them into the temple of the Lord, and the high priest said to them, "Cast lots before me now, who of you shall spin the gold thread, who the blue, who the scarlet,, who the fine linen, and who the true purple." 4 then the high priest knew Mary, that she was of the tribe of David, and he called her, and the true purple fell to her lot to spin, and she went away to her own home. 5 But from that time Zachary the high priest became dumb, and Samuel was placed in his stead till Zachary spoke again. 6 But Mary took the true purple, and spun it.

7 And she took a pot, and went out to draw water, and heard a voice saying to her, "Hail, you who are full of grace, the Lord is with you. You are blessed among women." 8 And she looked around to the right and to the left to see from where the voice came, and then, trembling, went into her house, and laying down the water-pot she took the purple, and sat down in her seat to work it. 9 And behold, the angel of the Lord stood by her, and said, "Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor in the sight of God." 10 When she heard it, she reasoned within herself what that sort of greeting meant. 11 And the angel said to her, "The Lord is with you, and you shall conceive," 12 to which she replied, "What! Shall I conceive by the living God, and bring forth as all other women do?"

13 But the angel replied, "Not so, Mary, but the Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you, 14 therefore, that which shall be born of you shall be holy, and shall be called the Son of the Living God, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. 15 And behold, your cousin Elizabeth, she also has conceived a son in her old age, 16 and this is now the sixth month with her, who was called barren, for nothing is impossible with God." 17 And Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
And when she had wrought her purple, she carried it to the high priest, and the high priest blessed her, saying, "Mary, the Lord God has magnified your name, and you shall be blessed in all the ages of the world." Then Mary, filled with joy, went away to her cousin Elizabeth, and knocked at the door. When Elizabeth heard it, she ran and opened to her, and blessed her, and said, "How is this come to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For lo! as soon as the voice of your greeting reached my ears, that which is in me leaped, and blessed you."

But Mary, being ignorant of all those mysterious things which the archangel Gabriel had spoken to her, lifted up her eyes to heaven, and said, "Lord! What am I, that all the generations of the earth should call me blessed?"

But perceiving herself daily to grow big, and being afraid, she went home, and hid herself from the children of Israel. And she was sixteen years old when all these things happened.

CHAPTER TEN

And when her sixth month was come, Joseph returned from his building houses abroad, which was his trade, and entering into the house, found the Virgin grown big. Then, smiting upon his face, he said, "With what face can I look up to the Lord my God? Or what shall I say concerning this young woman? For I received her a Virgin from the temple of the Lord my God, and have not preserved her such! Who has thus deceived me? Who has committed this evil in my house and, seducing the Virgin from me, has defiled her? Is not the history of Adam exactly accomplished in me? For in the very instant of his glory, the serpent came and found Eve alone, and seduced her. Just after the same manner it has happened to me." Then Joseph, arising from the ground, called her and said, "O you who have been so much favored by God, why have you done this? Why have you thus debased your soul, who were educated in the Holy of Holies, and received your food from the hand of angels?"

But she, with a flood of tears, replied, "I am innocent, and have known no man." Then said Joseph, "How does it come to pass that you are with child?"

Mary answered, "As the Lord my God lives, I do not know by what means."

Then Joseph was exceedingly afraid, and went away from her, considering what he should do with her. And thus he reasoned with himself: "If I conceal her crime, I shall be found guilty by the law of the Lord; and if I reveal her to the children of Israel, I fear lest -- she being with child by an angel -- I shall be found to betray the life of an innocent person. What, therefore, shall I do? I will privately dismiss her." Then the night was come upon him, when behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and said, "Do not be
afraid to take that young woman, for That which is within her is of the Holy
Spirit, and she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for
He shall save His people from their sins. Then Joseph arose from his sleep,
and glorified the God of Israel, who had shown him such favor, and preserved
the Virgin.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Then came Annas the scribe, and said to Joseph, "Why have we not seen
you since your return?" And Joseph replied, "Because I was weary after my
journey, and rested the first day." But Annas, turning about, perceived the
Virgin big with child. And he went away to the priest and told him, "Joseph in
whom you placed so much confidence is guilty of a notorious crime, in that he
has defiled the Birgin whom he received out of the temple of the Lord, and has
privately married her, not revealing it to the children of Israel." Then said the
priest, "Has Joseph done this?" Annas replied, "If you send any of your
servants, you will find that she is with child." And the servants went, and
found it as he said. Upon this, both she and Joseph were brought to their trial,
and the priest said to her, "Mary, what have you done? Why have you debased
your soul, and forgotten your God, seeing you were brought up in the Holy of
Holies, and received your food from the hands of angels, and heard their songs?
Why have you done this?" To which, with a flood of tears, she answered,
"As the Lord my God lives, I am innocent in His sight, seeing I know no man."
Then the priest said to Joseph, "Why have you done this?" And Joseph
answered, "As the Lord my God lives, I have not been concerned with her."
But the priest said, "Do not lie, but declare the truth. You have privately
married her, and not revealed it to the children of Israel, and humbled yourself
under the Mighty Hand, that your seed might be blessed." And Joseph was
silent. Then said the priest, "You must restore to the temple of the Lord the
Virgin whom you took from there." But he wept bitterly. And the priest
added, "I will cause you both to drink the water of the Lord, which is for trial,
and so your iniquity shall be laid open before you." Then the priest took the
water, and made Joseph drink, and sent him to a mountainous place. And he
returned perfectly well, and all the people marveled that his guilt was not
revealed. So the priest said, "Since the Lord has not made your sins evident,
neither do I condemn you." So he sent them away. Then Joseph took
Mary, and went to his house, rejoicing and praising the God of Israel.

CHAPTER TWELVE

And it came to pass that there went forth a decree from the Emperor
Augustus, that all the Jews should be taxed, who were of Bethlehem in Judaea.
And Joseph said, "I will take care that my children are taxed, but what shall I do with this young woman? To have her taxed as my wife I am ashamed, and if I tax her as my daughter, all Israel knows she is not my daughter. When the time of the Lord's appointment shall come, let Him do as seems good to Him."

And he saddled the ass, and put her upon it, and Joseph and Simon followed after her, and came near Bethlehem, within three miles. Then Joseph, turning about, saw Mary sorrowful, and said within himself, "Perhaps she is in pain through That which is within her." But when he turned about again, he saw her laughing, and said to her, "Mary, how does it happen that I sometimes see sorrow and sometimes laughter and joy in your face?"

And Mary replied to him, "I see two people with my eyes, the one weeping and mourning, the other laughing and rejoicing." And he went again across the way, and Mary said to Joseph, "Take me down from the ass, for That which is in me presses to come forth." But Joseph replied, "Where shall I take you? For the place is desolate." Then Mary said again to Joseph, "Take me down, for That which is within me mightily presses me." And Joseph took her down.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

And leaving her and his sons in the cave, Joseph went forth to seek a Hebrew midwife in the village of Bethlehem. "But as I was going," said Joseph, I looked up into the air, and I saw the clouds astonished, and the fowls of the air stopping in the midst of their flight. And I looked down towards the earth, and saw a table spread, and working people sitting around it, but their hands were upon the table, and they did not move to eat. They who had meat in their mouths did not eat. They who lifted their hands up to their heads did not draw them back, and they who lifted them up to their mouths did not put anything in, but all their faces were fixed upwards. And I beheld the sheep dispersed, and yet the sheep stood still. And the shepherd lifted up his hand to smite them, and his hand continued up. And I looked to a river, and saw the kids with their mouths close to the water, and touching it, but they did not drink."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Then I beheld a woman coming down from the mountains, and she said, 'Where are you going, O man?' And I said to her, 'I go to inquire for a Hebrew midwife.' She replied to me, 'Where is the woman who is to be delivered?' And I answered, 'In the cave, and she is betrothed to me.' Then said the midwife, 'Is she not your wife?' Joseph answered, 'It is Mary, who was
educated in the Holy of Holies, in the house of the Lord, and she fell to my lot, and is not my wife, but has conceived by the Holy Spirit." 7 The midwife said, "Is this true?" 8 He answered, "Come and see." 9 And the midwife went along with him, and stood in the cave. 10 Then a bright cloud overshadowed the cave, and the midwife said, "This day my soul is magnified, for my eyes have seen surprising things, and salvation is brought forth to Israel." 11 But of a sudden the cloud became a great light in the cave, so that their eyes could not bear it. 12 But the light gradually decreased, until the infant appeared, and sucked the breast of his mother Mary. 13 Then the midwife cried out, and said, "How glorious a day is this, wherein my eyes have seen this extraordinary sight! 14 And the midwife went out from the cave, and Salome met her. 15 And the midwife said to her, "Salome, Salome, I will tell you a most surprising thing, which I saw. 16 A virgin has brought forth, which is a thing contrary to nature." 17 To which Salome replied, "As the Lord my God lives, unless I receive particular proof of this matter, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth."

18 Then Salome went in, and the midwife said, "Mary, show yourself, for a great controversy has arisen about you." 19 And Salome tested her with her finger. 20 But her hand was withered, and she groaned bitterly, 21 and said, "Woe to me, because of my iniquity! For I have tempted the living God, and my hand is ready to drop off." 22 Then Salome made her supplication to the Lord, and said, "O God of my fathers, remember me, for I am of the seed of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. 23 Make me not a reproach among the children of Israel, but restore me sound to my parents. 24 For You well know, O Lord, that I have performed many works of charity in Your name, and have received my reward from You." 25 Upon this an angel of the Lord stood by Salome and said, "The Lord God has heard your prayer; reach forth your hand to the Child, and carry Him, and by that means you shall be restored." 26 Salome, filled with exceeding joy, went to the child, and said, "I will touch Him." 27 And she purposed to worship Him, for she said, "This is a great King who is born in Israel." 28 And straightway Salome was cured. 29 Then the midwife went out of the cave, being approved by God. 30 And lo! a voice came to Salome, "Declare not the strange things which you have seen, till the Child shall come to Jerusalem." So Salome also departed, approved by God.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Then Joseph was preparing to go away, because there arose a great disorder in Bethlehem by the coming of some wise men from the east, 2 who said, "Where is the king of the Jews born? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him." 3 When Herod heard this, he was exceedingly
troubled, and sent messengers to the wise men, and to the priests, and inquired of his officials, 4 and said to them, "Where do you have it written concerning Christ the King, or where should He be born?" 5 Then they say to him, "In Bethlehem of Judaea, for so it is written: 'And you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of you shall come a Ruler who shall rule my people Israel.'" 6 And having sent away the chief priests, he inquired of the wise men, and said to them, "What sign was it you saw, concerning the King who is born?" 7 They answered him, "We saw an extraordinarily large star shining among the stars of heaven, and so outshining all the other stars that they became invisible, and we knew thereby that a great King was born in Israel, and therefore we have come to worship him." 8 Then Herod said to them, "Go and make diligent inquiry, and if you find the Child, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also." 9 So the wise men went forth, and behold, the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over the cave where the young Child was with Mary His mother. 10 Then they brought forth out of their treasures, and offered to Him gold and frankincense, and myrrh. 11 And being warned in a dream by an angel that they should not return to Herod through Judaea, they departed into their own country by another way.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Then Herod, perceiving that he was being mocked by the wise men, and being very angry, commanded certain men to go and to kill all the children who were in Bethlehem, from two years old and under. 2 But Mary, hearing that the children were to be killed, being under much fear, took the Child, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in an ox-manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 3 Elizabeth also, hearing that her son John was about to be searched for, took him and went up into the mountains, and looked around for a place to hide him; 4 and there was no place to be found. 5 Then she groaned within herself, and said, "O mountain of the Lord, receive the mother with the child." 6 For Elizabeth could not climb up. 7 And instantly the mountain was divided and received them. 8 And there appeared to them an angel of the Lord, to preserve them.

9 But Herod made search after John, and sent servants to Zachary, when he was at the altar, and said to him, "Where have you hidden your son?" 10 He replied to them, "I am a servant of God, and a servant at the altar; how should I know where my son is?" 11 So the servants went back, and told Herod everything, at which he was incensed, and said, "Is ot this son of his likely to be king in Israel?" 12 Therefore he sent his servants again to Zachary, saying, "Tell us the truth, where is your son? For you know that your life is in my hand."
So the servants went and told him all this. But Zachary replied to them, "I am a martyr for God, and if he shed my blood, the Lord will receive my soul. Besides, know that you shed innocent blood." However, Zachary was murdered at the entrance of the temple and altar, and about the partition. But the children of Israel knew not when he was killed.

Then at the hour of salutation the priests went into the temple, but Zachary did not, according to custom, meet them and bless them. But still they continued waiting for him to salute them. And when they found he did not come in a long time, one of them ventured into the holy place where the altar was, and he saw blood lying upon the ground, congealed. Then, behold, a voice from heaven said, "Zachary is murdered, and his blood shall not be wiped away, until the avenger of his blood comes." And when he heard this, he was afraid, and went forth and told the priests what he had seen and heard. And they all went in, and saw the fact. Then the roofs of the temple howled, and were rent from the top to the bottom, and they could not find the body, but only blood made hard like stone. And they went away, and told the people that Zachary was murdered, and all the tribes of Israel heard of it, and mourned for him, and lamented three days. Then the priests took counsel together concerning a person to succeed him. And Simeon and the other priests cast lots, and the lot fell upon Simeon. For he had been assured by the Holy Spirit, that he should not die, till he had seen Christ come in the flesh.

I, James, wrote this history in Jerusalem. And when the disturbance was, I retired into a desert place until the death of Herod. And the disturbances ceased at Jerusalem. That which remains is, that I glorify God that He has given me such wisdom to write to you who are spiritual, and who love God, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.