

NIGHTINGALE MOUNTAIN TRILOGY
BOOK 1

THE VIGIL

The Apostle Paul and His Family
A Novel

D. D. SHIELL

Welcome to Nightingale Mountain Trilogy

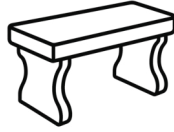
Thank you for downloading this free preview of *The Vigil*, Book One of *The Nightingale Mountain Trilogy*.

In these opening chapters, you'll step into the world of Rachel, Mary, and Saul (the Apostle Paul)—ordinary lives caught up in extraordinary times. Their stories unfold on Nightingale Mountain near ancient Ephesus, weaving history and faith into a narrative of love, loss, and hope.

Our goal in sharing this preview is simple: we want you to taste the story and feel the journey. If it speaks to you, we invite you to continue reading the full novel.

—Diane & Dell Shiell

Co-authors of *The Nightingale Mountain Trilogy*



Chapter 1

Rachel

Rachel's story begins on Nightingale Mountain near Ephesus, Asia Minor (near modern-day Selçuk, Turkey). The year is 44 CE (Common Era, equivalent to AD—"Anno Domini," Latin for 'in the year of our Lord').

Rachel laughed.

The sound rang clear and bright, carried by the gentle mountain breeze. A large tree root, smooth and hard as rock, jutted out from the earth, causing Rachel to stumble. Rachel, now steadying herself, held more firmly to the woman walking beside her.

"I'm sorry, Anna," she said, amused and apologetic.

Anna felt the tug on her arm but did not know its cause. She did not care. Rachel's laughter made her heart swell—a rare, cherished sound, unexpected and joyful, from someone who often kept her emotions guarded.

"I tripped on a tree root," Rachel explained, her laugh turning self-deprecating. "I don't know why. This path is so familiar to me. I know every rock and root. I have walked it so many times these past five years."

Anna smiled. She turned her unseeing eyes toward Rachel. Though she could not see her companion's expression, she could hear the smile in Rachel's voice.

"Perhaps your thoughts are elsewhere," she said, her voice teasing and knowing.

Rachel's cheeks flushed as she smiled. Her thoughts wandered to the young man who captured her heart. Fifteen-year-old Rachel walked with buoyant energy, her dark chestnut hair, long and wavy, glinting with coppery tones in the sun that filtered through the sycamore canopy. Rachel's dark eyes shone with a rare sparkle today. She was in love, and it showed in the way she carried herself, a confidence tinged with the giddiness of youthful infatuation.

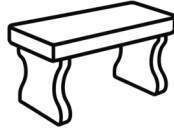
She was on her way to visit someone who was more than a friend—someone who felt like both a mother and grandmother to her. The thrill of the day left her inattentive to the ground beneath her feet.

Anna moved beside her with poise. Tall and slender, she carried herself with effortless grace. Her silver-gray hair was coiled neatly at the nape of her neck, highlighting the strong angles of her face.

The two women continued along the path. A nearby stream flowed over smooth stones, while the air carried the scents of thyme, lavender, and damp earth. Light and shadow shifted across the ground.

As they rounded a curve, the house came into view—modest but welcoming, its stone walls softened by blooming, pale pink oleander. A woman sat on the bench outside, her hands folded in her lap, face lifted toward the sun. Lost in thought, she did not notice their approach.

Rachel's heart lifted at the sight of her. With excitement in her voice, she called out, "Mary!"



Chapter 2

Rachel

Rachel's story continues on Nightingale Mountain, in 44 CE.

Mary lifted her head at the sound of her name. A sycamore tree shaded the bench where she sat. Her eyes betrayed a trace of fatigue as she waved to her approaching visitors.

Rachel resisted the urge to run to Mary, though every fiber of her being longed to close the distance in an instant. Instead, she quickened her pace. She held Anna's arm firmly but gently, her grip a steady reassurance as they navigated the uneven path. The responsibility of guiding Anna safely was a duty Rachel took to heart, even in moments of her excitement.

"Oh, Mary," Rachel thought, her chest tightening with an almost overwhelming joy. "I've missed you." She felt the corners of her lips lift into an unbidden smile, the sight of Mary bringing a familiar sense of comfort and belonging.

Even after five years on Nightingale Mountain, moments like this still felt new to Rachel. Her early years had been lonely; her thoughts and dreams kept to herself, unnoticed and unheard.

Now, surrounded by the warmth of those who cared for her, Rachel carried not only the knowledge that she deserved love but also the quiet assurance that she was loved. Each day, she found strength in the kindness and acceptance she discovered here.

When Rachel and Anna reached Mary, they each embraced her. Mary's frail arms wrapped around them with a warmth that belied her tired appearance.

Even seated, Mary carried herself with dignity. Silver now streaked her thick, dark hair, worn simply and partially covered, as was customary. Sun and years etched fine lines into her skin, each marking memories of life's joys mingled with its sorrows. Her gray-blue eyes conveyed both wisdom and kindness. Time had changed her, but traces remained of the young woman who once received an angel's message and lived to witness her son's ministry, death, and resurrection.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, Rachel noticed Anna's restlessness—the way she leaned forward and tilted her head toward the house, her eagerness to be with her sister, Miriam, unmistakable.

Rachel guided Anna to the door of Mary's stone house.

As the door opened, Anna stepped inside, moving with confidence. Her fingers skimmed the doorway, tracing its familiar shape. She knew this house so well that her blindness hardly mattered at all.

Rachel called out, "Miriam, we're here."

Miriam answered, "I'm glad you came. She's been asking for you."

The house was not large. The main room stretched lengthwise, with a hearth and kitchen at one end. On either side of the kitchen was a sleeping chamber. A narrow courtyard ran along the side of the house.

Rachel paused, watching the sisters head to the kitchen. "I'll leave you two to catch up. I'm going outside to talk with Mary." She stepped into the sunlight, shutting the door behind her.

† † †

Mary sat on the bench outside her home. She waited for Rachel to return. The stone bench rested on sturdy hewn stones. Years of use had smoothed its surface, with patches of lichen creeping along the edges.

Rachel stepped outside with a bounce in her step, excitement evident in the way she moved. She sat beside Mary, her energy unmistakable, eager to begin their conversation.

Talking with Mary always brought a change in Rachel. She laughed easily, words tumbling out as she happily shared every detail of her life. Mary listened with quiet attention, her smile warm, asking a question now and then to encourage Rachel to continue. Anyone watching could see Mary's joy as she listened to the thoughts and stories shared by this young woman, only fifteen, whose presence brightened her world.

Rachel could share anything with Mary—her thoughts, fears, even her most whimsical hopes—without fear of judgment. Mary's steady love anchored her and formed the foundation of her transformation since she arrived at Nightingale Mountain. That love filled every word Mary spoke, every patient smile, every moment of understanding. After being apart for two weeks, Rachel longed to share everything with her.

"Mary, I have something to tell you! I'm in love." Warmth spread across Rachel's face as she blurted out the words, her eyes sparkling with excitement and bashfulness. She stole a glance at Mary for her reaction.

Mary's eyebrows rose slightly, her smile warm with delighted curiosity. Pride stirred in her—Rachel's openness and confidence filled her with joy.

"I'm so happy for you," Mary said, her voice gentle. "Tell me everything. Who is he?"

Rachel, swept up in excitement, did not notice the pallor in Mary's cheeks or how her lively eyes had dimmed. The weariness on Mary's face escaped her as she poured out her thoughts, blind to the signs of fatigue.

The two women sat together on the stone bench. Their conversation unfolded, undisturbed by the world beyond.

For Mary, this day felt so different from the dark day when her son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, hung on a cross, condemned to die. The crowd's jeers and the searing heat remained vivid in her mind, but nothing compared to the agony of watching him suffer. John had stood beside her, silent, his face pale with grief. Before his final breath, Jesus had turned to them both and said, "Behold your son; behold your mother."

After religious leaders in Jerusalem stoned Stephen—the first martyr of The Way, the name by which the earliest followers of Jesus were known—persecution spread, forcing many to flee.

To keep Mary safe, John decided to take her to Ephesus, far from Jerusalem.

Nine years ago, after arriving in Ephesus, John asked Jacob, Miriam's husband, to build a home for Mary on Nightingale Mountain. Jacob chose the site, ensuring it offered peace and seclusion. John intended it as Mary's refuge, where she could live in safety. Though grateful, she often felt the quiet ache of memories—her son never far from her thoughts.

Jacob and Miriam, two of Mary's closest friends and neighbors, had lived on Nightingale Mountain for thirty years. Their home, located a 45-minute walk from Ephesus, stood among olive trees, with a pen for goats and a thriving garden.

Jacob, a skilled builder, constructed many homes in their small mountain community. He sometimes took jobs in Ephesus but avoided work that kept him away too long—he refused to leave Miriam for more than a short time.

Their bond with Mary went beyond neighbors—they had become family.

When John asked Jacob to build a home for Mary, Jacob immediately thought of this site, drawn to the nearby spring that provided fresh water. If he had found it earlier, he might have built a home for himself and Miriam here, but by then, they had already settled half a mile away. He gladly offered it to Mary, knowing it would give her the peace she needed.



In the kitchen, warmth radiated from the hearth as Miriam and Anna worked side by side. Their quiet conversation was punctuated by moments of laughter. Through the open window, Rachel's voice drifted in.

Miriam smiled, glancing toward Anna as she said, "She sounds so happy today."

Miriam's strong and capable hands bore the marks of a life spent tending her garden and delivering countless children as a midwife. Auburn hair, now streaked with silver, framed a face lined by both joy and hardship. Her deep-set hazel eyes suggested resolve, softened by a warmth that drew others near.

Six years ago, Anna left Tarsus to live with her sister, Miriam, and brother-in-law, Jacob. Two years earlier, she lost her husband, and her life slowly unraveled. Soon after his passing, her vision began to fail—a gradual loss that deepened her grief. A physician confirmed her worst fear: her eyesight would continue to decline until she lost her sight entirely. Each day, she surrendered a little more independence, forced to adjust to a world growing darker.

Anna's two married sons lived in Tarsus, and her friends assumed one of them would take her in. But when she spoke to them, their wives made it clear they did not want the burden of caring for a blind mother-in-law along with their children.

Hurt but not surprised, Anna accepted their decision. The rejection stung more than she expected, but she had prepared herself for it. With a heavy heart, she reached out to her sister, hopeful and uncertain, asking if Miriam and Jacob would provide her with a home. Their reply came without delay, bringing relief—and news of a traveling companion. A kind merchant agreed to escort her from Tarsus to Ephesus. The journey ahead felt daunting, but it also held the promise of a new beginning.

Miriam and Jacob did not hesitate to welcome Anna. They understood that her arrival would change their routines—peaceful evenings by the hearth and quiet mornings in the garden would now include the responsibilities of caregiving. But Anna's needs came first. She needed a safe home where she could adjust to her blindness and a life in new surroundings. Miriam, with her nurturing nature and years as a midwife, embraced the role, while Jacob's steady presence provided stability. Together, they resolved to help Anna not only adjust, but thrive.

Living on Nightingale Mountain made the journey to the synagogue in Ephesus increasingly difficult for Miriam and Jacob as they grew older. The steep trails and distance kept their visits

infrequent, but whenever they went, the trip offered an exceptional opportunity to reconnect with old friends.

Five years ago, during one of these rare visits to Ephesus, Miriam spoke with a longtime friend, sharing the news of Anna's arrival. As they talked, a well-dressed woman stepped closer, interrupting their conversation.

"I'm afraid I overheard your conversation," she said. "I hope you don't mind, but I may have a solution. My niece, an orphan, needs a place to stay. She's ten years old, and I'm certain she could help you and your blind sister, if you're willing to offer her a home and meals."

Soon, they made the necessary arrangements, and Rachel moved to Nightingale Mountain. From the start, her eagerness to help endeared her to Miriam and Jacob. She soon became a vital part of their household—an invaluable helper who brought energy and order to their days.

For Anna, Rachel's presence changed everything. The two found an easy closeness, Rachel's warm and patient nature making her an ideal companion. At first, little was known about Rachel's past—only that she proved herself reliable and eager to help. Still, her genuine kindness and tireless efforts left no doubt in Miriam and Jacob's minds: Rachel belonged to their family, and they loved her.

Over time, Miriam, Jacob, and Anna learned more about Rachel's early life, their affection for her growing with each new detail. Each revelation revealed her quiet strength and resilience, leaving them in awe of her spirit.

As Rachel spoke with Mary outside, her voice drifting through the air, Miriam's eyes filled with tears. She placed her hand gently over Anna's—a silent gesture of comfort. Anna responded without a word, her hand resting on Miriam's in quiet affirmation. In that shared moment, both women knew: the time had come for a difficult conversation with Rachel—one that would finally uncover the hidden truth of her early life.

Anna spent her entire married life in Tarsus before moving to live with Miriam and Jacob. As she learned more about Rachel's past, she realized she knew Rachel's family. That connection gave Anna unique insight into the roots of the sadness that seemed to follow Rachel. This understanding allowed her to be the first to recognize

the unspoken pain Rachel carried—and compelled her to share the story of Rachel's family in Tarsus. That story began long before Rachel's birth.

Rachel's laughter drifted from outside. Anna and Miriam both knew the happiness Rachel fought so hard to find was fragile. The inevitable conversation would soon disrupt it.

After a meal of fresh bread with cheese and olives, the four women—Mary, Miriam, Anna, and Rachel—sat together in quiet companionship. The comfort of their time together passed quickly, overshadowed by the responsibilities ahead. Miriam soon stood to leave, having finished her time caring for Mary. She was one of the many women in the mountain community who came together to support Mary, particularly with John's extended absence. Tonight, Rachel and Anna would take their turn, continuing the cycle of care that had become essential to Mary's well-being.

Tomorrow, John and his mother, Salome, planned to visit and stay with Mary for the upcoming nights.

After saying goodbye to Mary, Miriam hugged Anna and Rachel in turn, then walked home alone along the path they took earlier. The cool evening air carried the faint scent of wildflowers, but Miriam hardly noticed. Concern for Anna—and the difficult conversation she faced with Rachel—filled her thoughts.

Soon, Anna would tell Rachel things that would bring her sorrow. Not only did Anna see how the puzzle of Rachel's childhood fit together, but she also knew something that Rachel did not yet realize, something that would break Rachel's heart. The burden of revealing this to Rachel pressed heavily on Anna, yet she knew she could not avoid the responsibility.

Mary was dying.



Chapter 3

Saul

Saul's story begins in Jerusalem, Judea (modern-day Jerusalem, Israel). The year is 22 CE, twenty-two years earlier than Rachel's story on Nightingale Mountain.

Saul felt miserable. He and his family traveled to Jerusalem for Passover and family business every year, for as long as he could remember. But this time felt different. Now Saul lived in Jerusalem with his older sister, Judith, and her husband, Baruch. He had moved in just a week ago.

His father always dreamed that, after Saul's *Bar Mitzvah* (the traditional coming-of-age ceremony for Jewish boys at thirteen), Saul would become a rabbi by furthering his studies in *Bet Midrash* (Hebrew for house of study) under the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem.

But after only a week in the city, the thrill was already fading for the 14-year-old. Saul was homesick. Back in Tarsus, Saul had been happy.

"Your name is Saul, right?" said the boy who sat on the same bench as Saul.

Saul spent most of his time in *Bet Midrash* sitting on this bench, in this synagogue, listening to Gamaliel's lectures to his youngest students. When not here, lessons took place in the Temple courts or private homes. Under Gamaliel's guidance, his students practiced *Midrash*—the interpretation of the Scriptures.

Startled by the question, Saul replied, "Yes, that's right."

The boy offered a friendly smile. "*Shalom*, my name is Nathan. I'm from Antioch in Syria. I noticed your accent when you spoke, so I figured you aren't from Jerusalem either."

Surprise at being spoken to gave way to shock as Saul realized that Nathan had greeted him first with "*Shalom*" (a Hebrew word meaning peace), and then continued in Greek. Until now, he had only heard Greek from Romans and other foreigners in the marketplace—never in the Temple or during *Bet Midrash*.

Saul felt a flicker of relief, though he remained wary. None of his classmates had spoken directly to him since his arrival—until now.

"Hi, Nathan," Saul replied in Greek, the words feeling foreign in this setting. "I'm from Tarsus."

It seemed to Saul that all of his classmates had grown up in Jerusalem. Their fathers and uncles sat on the Sanhedrin—the seventy rabbis who convened as the Jewish ruling council in the Temple's Chamber of Hewn Stone. They carried themselves with airs of superiority, their confidence rooted in family prominence.

Nathan might be different. He did not seem like one of those *I'm-more-important-than-you* types who made Saul feel so isolated in his new life.

Back in Tarsus, Saul thrived. In *Bet Sefer* (Hebrew for house of the book), where boys ages six to nine learned to read and write Hebrew by studying the Torah, he always had the answer when Rabbi Jonathan called on him. His sharp mind and quick recall made him a favorite of his teacher.

Back in Tarsus, in *Bet Talmud* (Hebrew for house of learning), among boys ages ten to fourteen, he was at the top of his class, mastering Scripture and oral tradition with ease.

Back in Tarsus, he loved practicing Aramaic with the hired hands in his family's tent-making workshop on the outskirts of town—and with customers who came from far and wide to buy the tents and awnings they produced.

Back in Tarsus, he relished debating in Greek, whether with visiting merchants' sons or with local friends who accompanied their fathers on business to the market stall in the city center.

Saul loved words and ideas, whether in Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew. Testing ideas, sharpening his reasoning—he had thrived

in the back-and-forth of argument. In addition to his well-rounded education in Jewish Scripture, Saul was also familiar with topics like commerce, philosophy, and even sports.

But now, every day reminded him—he was not in Tarsus. Here in Jerusalem, his confidence was taking a beating.

Saul had grown tired of the name-dropping by the grandsons and great-grandsons of this priest or that lawyer or this Levite who were—or who had been—influential leaders in the Temple.

Perhaps these other boys had traveled to Antioch, Tarsus, Alexandria, or Rome. But Jerusalem was their home. Here, they carried themselves with airs of self-importance, as if they ruled the city.

Like Saul, most of his classmates came from wealthy families. Like Saul, they had enjoyed the best education money could buy. Like Saul, they had been exposed to the cosmopolitan world of international trade and renowned scholars.

But unlike Saul, Jerusalem—not Tarsus—was their home.

For once, he no longer stood alone as an outsider in Jerusalem.

"Who knows?" Saul thought, "Nathan might even become my friend."

† † †

During the next month, Nathan and Saul became friends. They spent their free time exploring Jerusalem, taking in its sights, sounds, and rhythms.

They listened to scholars debate in the Temple. From the steps of the Temple on Mount Moriah, also known as the Temple Mount, they observed the daily rituals and the ebb and flow of priests, scribes, and pilgrims around them.

Outside of the classroom, they mapped out where their classmates lived, becoming familiar with the Upper City on Mount Zion, home to Jerusalem's wealthy aristocracy, as well as the Royal Palace and Rome's administrative offices.

They wandered down the Herodian street, the main market road that ran south through the Tyropoeon Valley from the southwestern

steps of the Temple. This valley lay between the eastern ridge of Mount Moriah (Temple Mount) and the western ridge often called Mount Zion.

To keep life interesting, they occasionally slipped through the eastern gate and wandered beyond the Kidron Valley, through olive groves and the quiet hills beyond. These escapades offered a welcome relief from Jerusalem's relentless noise.

† † †

One day, Nathan asked, "Saul, do you have any plans for *Shabbat*?" *Shabbat*, the Jewish Sabbath, was a weekly day of rest and worship, beginning with a special evening meal. "My uncle Joseph said I could invite a friend."

"I would like that," Saul replied.

Nathan lived with his uncle and aunt in the Upper City, the prestigious neighborhood situated on the slopes of Mount Zion. Saul knew this because he had been to their home once when he and Nathan stopped there during a walk. "Nathan," Saul continued, "you've never told me much about your uncle. I look forward to meeting him."

† † †

On Friday, when Saul arrived for *Shabbat*, Nathan introduced him to his cousin Ephraim, a man in his early thirties. Ephraim entertained them with tales of his recent trip to Britannia for the family's tin mining business. Saul listened, captivated by the descriptions of travel, commerce, and the clash of cultures.

As the sun set, they gathered around the table for *Shabbat*. When Nathan's uncle took his seat at the head of the table, Saul's stomach tightened in shock. He recognized him immediately.

Joseph of Arimathea. A member of the Sanhedrin.

Saul felt both honored and betrayed. Honored to be at Rabbi Joseph's table for *Shabbat*, betrayed by Nathan.

For weeks, he and Nathan bonded over their shared status as outsiders. They mocked their classmates who flaunted their family connections. And now, Saul realized, Nathan had never mentioned his connections.

Though Nathan's family welcomed Saul with kindness, he ate little, scarcely noticing the food. He could hardly wait to confront Nathan about his duplicity.

After the evening meal, Saul thanked Nathan's uncle and aunt for their hospitality and excused himself for the walk home. Nathan offered to accompany him part of the way.

A few doors down from Nathan's home, Saul stopped abruptly, turned to face him, and blurted, "I can't believe what just happened."

Nathan blinked. "What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? You kept the truth from me this whole time! I thought we were friends. We had so much in common. We weren't like all those other guys at school. We didn't fit in with them. It was the two of us against the rest of them."

At a loss, Nathan said, "Right. So why are you so angry? What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" Saul's voice rose. "For the past month, you've been lying to me. You're just like everyone else. You're the nephew of a famous rabbi, a member of the Sanhedrin!"

Nathan took a step back. "He's just my uncle. He's kind, and I feel at home living with him. He's not important to me because he's famous or influential.

"He's family—like your sister and brother-in-law, the people you live with. I wasn't pretending to feel like you do. I appreciate having family and a place to live, but that doesn't change how I feel when I'm out in the city or during our studies at the synagogue or the Temple.

"Saul, Jerusalem is not my home. And I would be miserable here if you hadn't become my friend."

Saul's anger cooled as he listened to Nathan. "Yeah, well, I needed to tell you how I felt. I'm still not happy that you waited so long to tell me you're related to Joseph."

Nathan sighed. "I hope this doesn't come between us, Saul. I didn't mean to keep it a secret. I didn't see it as a big deal. I'm sorry."

Saul exhaled. "OK. Well, thanks for walking with me. Please tell everyone how much I appreciate their hospitality. We can talk more later."

"I'm glad you joined us for *Shabbat* tonight," Nathan said. "I'll see you in *Bet Midrash*."

With that, Saul and Nathan parted ways for the evening.



Saul was now in his fourth year of study under Rabbi Gamaliel, a year after his successful debut at the Annual Assembly of Young Scholars, hosted by Jerusalem's two leading rabbinic schools, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai. Though Hillel had died, his grandson Gamaliel continued to shape the House of Hillel with wisdom and authority.

The brightest young scholars from Jerusalem's leading schools had competed to prove their mastery of the Torah and oral tradition. Among them, Saul emerged as the champion of the House of Hillel, while Levi stood as his equal from the House of Shammai.

Soon after that event, to everyone's surprise, Levi and Saul became close friends.

When Saul thought about it, his friendship with Levi surprised him, too. Levi was a Jerusalem insider. His father, a senior Temple administrator, managed priestly and Levitical affairs.

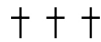
The *kobanim*—the priests, descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses—oversaw the daily operations of the Temple: the rituals, sacrifices, and offerings. They cared for the sacred vessels used in priestly rituals, preserved and maintained sacred scrolls, handled the Temple's financial affairs, and adjudicated legal matters related to the Temple courts.

The other Levites—those not descended from Aaron—were responsible for the Temple's physical upkeep. They managed maintenance, security, the Temple choirs and musicians, educational programs, and logistics for major festivals, as well as providing support services for pilgrims.

Levi's father knew everyone connected with the Temple. By all accounts, Levi should have been the last person Saul would relate to as his friend. But Saul had changed.

Saul loved basking in the wisdom of the rabbis. He loved the energy of the pilgrims who arrived for the great festivals: *Pesach* (Passover) in the early spring, *Shavuot* (Pentecost) in the early summer, and *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles) in the fall.

Now, Saul not only felt comfortable in Jerusalem—he loved it.



One afternoon, Saul and Nathan met Levi at the Temple steps, eager to hear the outcome of a Sanhedrin discussion about a new city tax to be imposed on pilgrims for the upcoming Passover.

Levi said, "I spoke with my father's assistant. The decision has been made."

Nathan frowned. "What did he say? Is the new tax going to be imposed on the Passover pilgrims?"

"Unfortunately, yes. The Sanhedrin didn't have much of a choice. The Herodians and the Romans had already decided."

"But why?" Saul asked. "Why would they do this? Passover is supposed to be a time of celebration and remembrance, not a time for taxation."

Levi sighed. "It's the Herodians. They've been working with the Romans to push this tax through. They claim it's necessary for the upkeep of the city and the Temple. And to ensure the Temple supports it, ten percent of the revenue will go to the Temple treasury."

"Here we go again!" Saul interjected. "The same old political game—Herodians conspiring with the Romans to bleed our people dry for their benefit. And to keep the Temple from opposing it, they offer a cut of the profits!"

While his friends discussed the latest political affairs, Saul, now eighteen, reflected on how much had changed since he first arrived in Jerusalem. He now had two close friends, both with relatives on the Sanhedrin—Nathan's uncle and Levi's father.

Saul respected both men. Not only did Saul look up to them, he felt sorry for them as he considered how much others depended on them to preserve their ancestral faith and traditions during these difficult times of foreign occupation.

What's Next?

You've just read the first three chapters of *The Vigil*. The full book continues Rachel's journey, Paul's mission, and Mary's legacy, leading to moments of courage, heartbreak, and faith that shaped the early followers of Jesus.

Get the full book today on Amazon

- Available in Kindle, Paperback, and Audiobook editions
- [Click here to view on Amazon](#)

Stay Connected

- Join our readers' circle for updates, behind-the-scenes insights, and early news about the next books in The Nightingale Mountain Trilogy.
- Visit us online at: StHansBooks.com

Thank you for being part of this story. Your journey with Rachel, Mary, and Saul is just beginning.

Nightingale Mountain Trilogy

Book 1—*The Vigil*

Book 2—*The Reunion*

Book 3—*The Legacy*