

THE NEW WAY SERIES

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Hearing the Truth
in
Cana of Galilee

Dale Weatherford

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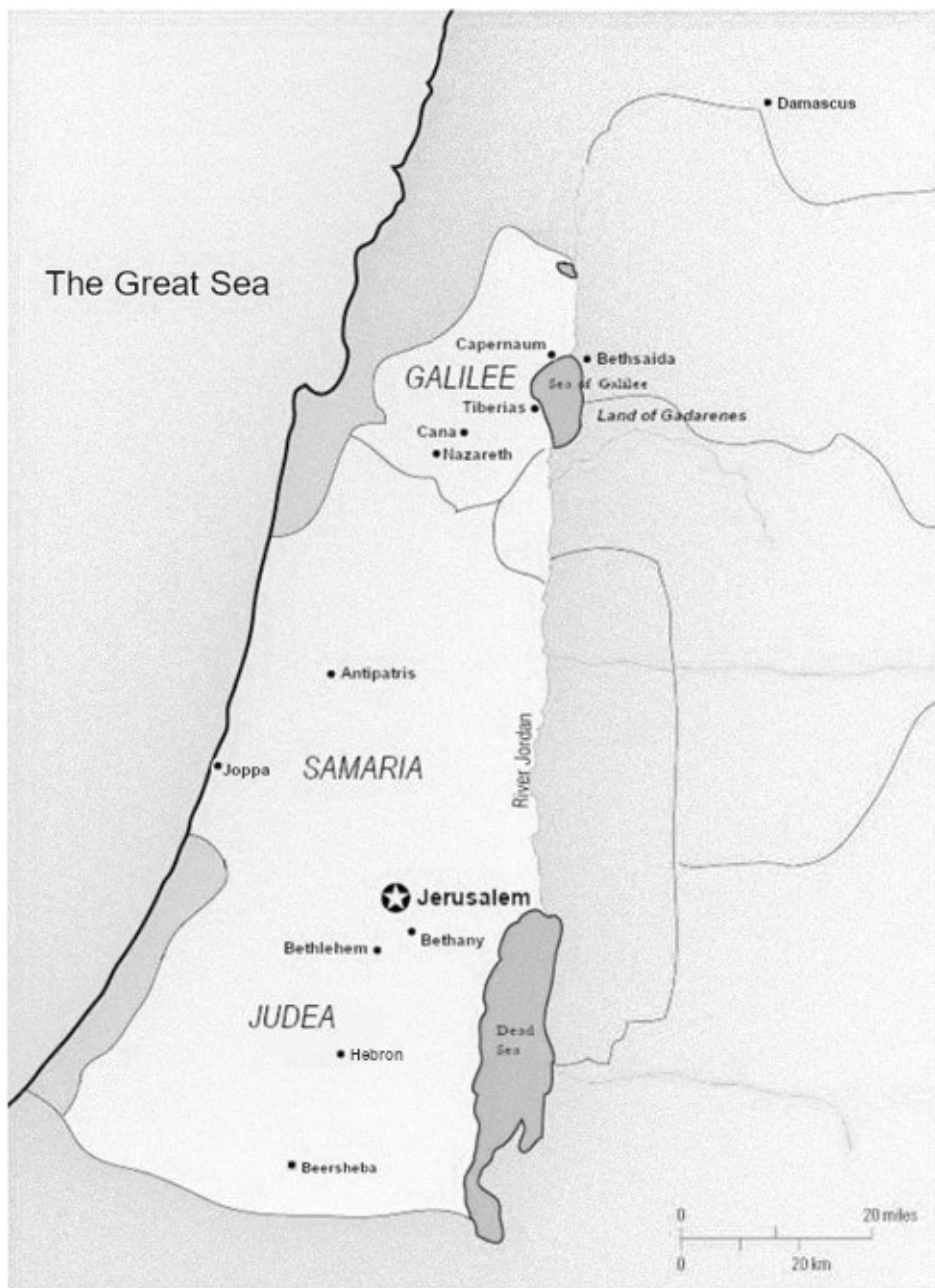
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Special thanks to my husband for all his patience in getting this Series ready for publication. He is not only the technical genius behind the production of these books, but he's my editor, cheerleader, and sounding board. These books would never have happened without his help, encouragement, and prayers.



First Century Times and Measurements

In First Century Israel, a new day began at sundown and was divided into two twelve-hour segments. The first hour of the night was approximately what we call 6 pm to 7 pm. The first hour of the day was approximately 6 am to 7 am. So, the tenth hour of the day would be approximately 4 in the afternoon. But since no one had clocks, everything was based on the sun's setting and rising.

Normally there were twelve months in each year. Each month started at the new moon and was 29 or 30 days. Occasionally another month was added to keep the seasons straight. The first month was Nisan and occurred at the Spring Equinox, sometime in what we would call March or April.

Length or distance was not used except as travel time. However, I have used miles to help the reader comprehend the distances involved. They would have actually said, "It was a two-days' journey" or "It was a half-day's journey."

The money used at that time was a mixture of Roman and Greek coins. The most common were the pieces of silver that equaled small fractions of the denarius. There were various names for these (mites, lepta, quadran). So, I just called them pieces of silver. The denarius was considered a day's wage for a common laborer.

I used the English measure of gallon instead of the Hebrew terminology for volume.

A handbreadth is approximately four inches.

PREFACE

THE NEW WAY SERIES #2

Hearing the Truth in Cana of Galilee

As I studied the manuscript of *Acts*, written by Luke in the first Century, God kept showing me that this was not just ancient writing, but something that happened to real people in a real time period. I began by envisioning what might have happened as the children in *Through the Eyes of a Child (The New Way Series #1)* began to grow to adulthood. Oswald Chambers wrote in *My Utmost for His Highest* that we should use our imagination to let God show us His power and glory and renew our sense of wonder. Luke records that the New Way began to spread first in Jerusalem, then Samaria and Galilee. This is a work of fiction, about people in the small town of Cana, who heard about Jesus. Just like you and me, they dealt with the question: How do I live out the New Way in my world?

Dale Weatherford

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Chapter 1

“Orly, there’s something I need to talk over with you if you have some time tonight.” Orly had stopped by the kitchen to drop off some fresh fruits he had just picked.

“I don’t know what Master Kenan’s plans are, Mother, but I’ll let you know at dinner. Is everything okay?” asked Orly.

“Yes, Son, don’t worry. We need to talk about our future, and I have some ideas.”

“I’ve got to get back to work. Do you need anything from the garden? That’s where I’m heading.”

Orly and his mother had been slaves since he was five years old. He was eleven now, and in only two weeks they would be free. He was so excited about not having to get up before dawn and often working late into the night. He would be free! Oh, the excitement he felt.

They had been sold into slavery after his abba died and Mother couldn’t find enough work to pay their taxes. That’s just the way it was under Roman rule. They had both been bought by Master Kenan and taken to Cana in Galilee, but they had been allowed to be together. Orly was very grateful for that. He used to spend a lot of time crying about being a slave and dreaming about being free, and now that day was almost here. He and his mother had been well cared for. Working for Master Kenan and Mrs. Vada was really all he could remember. His mother was the head cook and supervised a full crew of kitchen servants. Orly was assigned to work outdoors under Hosea, an older slave who supervised the others but wasn’t able to do much work anymore. The only time Orly got to be with Mother was when all the servants gathered in the kitchen for breakfast, and dinner, and on Sabbath afternoons. Sometimes, if he didn’t have an assignment after dinner, they would arrange to meet behind the garden for a few minutes. That didn’t happen often, because he was not usually free.

Tonight, after Mother had served dinner to Master Kenan and his wife, she came and ate with the rest of the servants in the kitchen. Orly still had not been given an assignment for the evening, so they planned to slip away and talk for a few minutes. He helped her and the kitchen servants clean up the meal and prepare for tomorrow. Mother was always free after the kitchen was cleaned.

They went to their favorite place just behind the garden where they could sit and talk privately. Orly was eager to hear what she was thinking, but he waited patiently while she got settled on the grass. “Orly, I don’t know where to begin, because we really haven’t talked much about what’s going to happen in two weeks.”

“Well, I know that we will no longer be slaves, and you won’t have to cook all day. Of course, you’ll still have to cook for me, but I’m not picky. It’s going to be great to be free!”

“Oh, Orly, I should have better prepared you for this day. I’m afraid you don’t understand what it means once we leave here. We have nowhere to go. We have no place to live. I will probably be able to find another job cooking for a family, but once we are free, I will have to earn enough money to pay for our food, and a roof over our heads, and Roman taxes. My greatest fear is that we will be in the same predicament we were in after your abba died. Orly, I forget that you don’t remember those days, but they were very, very hard.”

Orly’s stomach lurched as he felt his dreams crumbling. Maybe freedom wasn’t all that great. “Mother, could we be sold into slavery again?”

“That’s a very real possibility, and there’s no guarantee who our owner would be or even if we would be together.”

Orly’s heart sank. He was eleven years old and had no real understanding of cruel owners because Master Kenan had been so kind and generous to them, but the thought of being separated from his mother was almost unbearable. Now, his head was spinning from all the possibilities. *I will have to learn to please a new master. There will be new responsibilities to learn, and I will be living with strangers.* His fellow servants here had become like family, and they had helped him to grow up. The thought of freedom suddenly became very scary. *And who would take care of old Hosea? He is like an abba to me and has taught me so much.* Orly often brought him his dinner when he was too tired to come to the kitchen. Orly’s thoughts were swirling so much that he totally missed what his mother was saying.

“...so, that’s what I’ve decided to do.”

“Mother, I’m sorry. I ...”

“You don’t agree? I thought it was the best solution!”

“No, Mother, I ...”

“What do you suggest then?” Mother asked tersely.

Orly recognized that tone of voice and knew he had better get the direction of this conversation changed. “I love you, Mother. You are always looking out for me and planning what is best. I’m sure you have a great idea, but I wasn’t listening. Please forgive me. I was still thinking about what it would be like to have to change masters, and I missed everything you said after that.”

Mother sighed with relief. “I thought you were disagreeing with me.”

“No, Mother. I’m eager to hear what you have planned.”

“Okay, but please listen carefully because I’m really tired and I’ve got to rise early.”

“I know, and I’m sorry. I’m listening now. I promise.”

“Have you ever heard of a bond-slave?” began Mother again.

“I’ve heard the word, but I don’t know what it means.”

“A bond-slave is a slave who has earned his or her freedom but chooses to remain a slave to their master. Hosea is a bond-slave and I’ve talked with him about it. He thinks it is a good idea.”

“Hosea is a good man, and I respect his opinion.”

“Good. If I were to become a bond-slave, then I could stay here and work for Master Kenan for the rest of my life. He would have to provide me with everything I need to live — clothes, food, and shelter. I would have all the rights of a slave, and I could stay here with a master that I trust and a family I have grown to love. I believe that is the best option for me, and I’m praying that Master Kenan agrees.”

“Mother, that sounds wonderful! Then, we wouldn’t run the risk of being sold to a different master.”

“That’s right,” continued Mother. “Becoming a bond-slave is for the rest of your life. I could never purchase my freedom, but Mr. Kenan would not be allowed to sell me to anyone else. It’s permanent. The problem is that I don’t know what will happen to you. I think Master Kenan would hire you as a worker until you are ready to be on your own, but I don’t know. I don’t want you to be forced to commit to being a slave for the rest of your life. In fact, I don’t think you can until you are thirteen and fully an adult.”

“So, you would become Master Kenan’s bond-slave, but I would go free. I’m only eleven and probably couldn’t find a job. Ay-yi-yi, that doesn’t sound good to me.”

“No, it doesn’t. I’m hoping that Master Kenan has come up with a plan. But that’s why I wanted to talk with you tonight. He will surely want to talk with you soon.”

“Thank you for warning me, Mother. I don’t know what to say. But I’m glad that you will be well taken care of, even though you’ll still have to work hard.”

“We’ll have to wait and see what Master Kenan suggests. He may not want another bond-slave. I love you, Son. Let’s get some rest and trust Jehovah to guide us. He has always provided everything we’ve needed.”

“Good night, Mother.” They headed to their separate quarters where they slept with the other slaves.

It was only a few days later when Master Kenan sent word for Orly’s mother to come to his office. It had been a long time since he had summoned her. Ruth knew that he was pleased with her work. When she had first arrived, it seemed she was called into his office at least twice a week. He was very patient in explaining all the new things that she had to learn, and she felt that he was pleased that she had mastered her responsibilities. Something deep inside her knew that he dreaded her leaving. He would miss having her run his kitchen just the way he wanted it. She smiled to herself because God had blessed her with such a good master and given her the strength to do all the work that was required. It was a satisfying feeling to be in charge of his kitchen. She would gladly exchange her freedom for this feeling of accomplishment and purpose. *But what would happen to Orly?* She knocked on Master Kenan’s office door and went inside when invited.

Master Kenan greeted her warmly and inquired about her health. She knew that she was expected to wait for him to start the conversation, so she simply answered his questions and waited.

“Ruth, are you aware of what it means to become a bond-slave?” asked Master Kenan.

Her heart leapt with joy. She knew that Jehovah had heard her prayer and was providing for her. “Yes, sir. I am aware and willing.”

Master Kenan looked pleased, but added, “I don’t want this to be a hasty decision. You would be committing yourself to being my slave for the rest of your life. You would have all the same responsibilities, and I would be required to provide everything that you need.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Hosea is a bond-slave to me, and I suggest that you talk with him about your decision.”

“I have already discussed it with him, and we both feel that it would be best for me.”

“Well, that’s a relief. You have certainly taken good care of my kitchen and you do an excellent job keeping the staff busy and happy. That’s a rare combination! Now, there’s another matter that we need to discuss. It concerns Orly.”

“Yes, sir. I am fearful for his future.”

“Please, don’t be. Let me tell you what I was thinking and see if you agree. Please speak freely, because he is your son, and you know him best.”

After he outlined his ideas, Ruth left the meeting with a song in her heart. How she wanted to run to Orly and let him know that Jehovah had provided everything and more. But she needed to be in the kitchen, and she didn’t know where Orly was working today. She would have to wait until dinner to see him.

When Orly arrived for dinner with the other outdoor slaves, he looked exhausted. They had been repairing a stone fence around the pasture and had been lifting heavy rocks all day. But, as a mother, she could tell that Orly hadn’t slept all week. *Maybe I shouldn’t have burdened him with my worries about the future. He looks as if he’ll fall asleep at the table.* While she wondered whether or not to talk with him, she realized that he had slipped away without even saying good night. She hoped that he would be able to get some rest. Maybe tomorrow night they could talk, and she could relieve his mind.



Orly was asleep almost before crawling into his blanket. His body and mind were exhausted. Sleep mercifully relieved him from all his worries until dawn. Master Kenan tried to mix heavy workdays with lighter ones so that his slaves would stay in good health. Today was no exception. Orly was directed to work in the garden with Hosea. Hosea started picking the produce and assigned Orly to pull weeds, but it wasn’t long before Hosea was sitting down for a rest. Orly finished picking the vegetables and took two large baskets to the kitchen. Mother was nowhere to be seen, so he assumed she was

cooking in the outdoor kitchen. He left his baskets and started to return to the garden when a house slave brought him word that he was wanted in Master Kenan's office.

Orly would have liked to check on Hosea first, but he had learned to obey quickly and always keep a smile on his face, even if he didn't like what was required of him. He returned to the house and gently knocked on Master Kenan's office door.

"Orly, I wanted to talk with you about your upcoming freedom. I believe that you are only eleven. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir, but I will turn twelve next month."

"You are certainly a good worker for an eleven-year-old. Your mother has raised you well, and you've got a good head on your shoulders. I believe your abba would have been proud of you."

"Thank you, sir."

"I assume that your mother has told you that she has decided to stay with me permanently as a bondslave."

"Yes, sir, and thank you."

"Your mother and I talked about your future, but it's really up to you. Did she discuss it with you?"

"No, sir." Orly regretted slipping out so quickly last night, but that couldn't be changed.

Master Kenan continued, "Here's the decision I need you to make before Monday of next week. First of all, you may go free. I want to make that perfectly clear. You have earned your freedom. I am pleased with your work and will give you a very good recommendation. But because you are not yet an adult, it will be very difficult for you to find a paying job — at least something that will pay enough to keep you from ending up back on the slave block. I really don't want that to happen. But it is your choice.

"My suggestion is that you remain a slave for the next two years. At the end of those two years, I will apprentice you in whatever field you choose. Your duties would change so that you could explore different possibilities for an apprenticeship and prepare for your future. I think you would make a great blacksmith at my Metal Shop, but there are many other possibilities. You still have over a week to make your decision. If you choose to accept my offer, we'll talk about what you would like to explore during these next two years. I want to see you succeed as a free man."

"Thank you, Master Kenan."

"Get back to work and spend some time thinking about my offer. I'll meet with you again next week."

"Yes, sir."

Orly could not believe what had just happened. His head was swirling as he realized that all his worries and fears had been replaced with hope. *Yes, God was providing — just like Mother said He would.* He quickly ran to the garden and found Hosea sleeping under the tree. Orly began pulling weeds but couldn't resist singing a little louder because he just had to tell somebody. When Hosea stirred, Orly excitedly began shouting his good news while still pulling weeds. He

didn't want to goof off now, not after such a generous offer from Master Kenan. He would be the best worker ever!

"So, what do you want to learn? Have you thought about it?" inquired Hosea.

"Not really. I guess working as a blacksmith would be okay, and that is what Master Kenan suggested."

"Blacksmithing is really hard work, but you could make enough money to support a family. That would be a good choice and you are very strong. But what does your heart want to do?"

"I'm just not sure. I've had this crazy dream of wanting to learn to make bread. I went to a Bread Shop once when I was very young and was running errands with Mrs. Vada. I thought that would be a wonderful place to work. The smells were incredible, and you could eat all day long."

"You would eat all your bread and have nothing to sell!" They laughed together as Orly agreed. Orly was glad that his hands were busy, but his mind was free to wander. The only problem was, he really didn't know what else there was to do. He had been a slave most of his life and had seen very little outside this property. He had a lot of thinking to do before he met with Master Kenan next week. Maybe Mother would have some ideas. And for the first time, he wondered what job his abba had done.

When Orly met with Master Kenan, Orly stated that he would like to continue his work as his slave in exchange for an apprenticeship at the end of two years. They agreed that Orly would spend early mornings in the garden with Hosea, but then split his time between the Metal Shop and working in the kitchen. It had been Orly's idea to learn to cook if he was going to survive on his own. The added benefit was that his mother would be his supervisor and they would get to spend some precious time together before he left Master Kenan's home. On Tuesday, Orly's last two years as a slave for Master Kenan began.

He already knew the routine with Hosea in the garden, so that wasn't really different. But he had never been to the Metal Shop and had to learn the names of a lot of new tools. He was just a helper, but he needed to be able to obey quickly and he sometimes felt overwhelmed with the newness of it all. The men yelled when he got confused. But he was determined to learn quickly, and he did. Master Kenan seemed pleased with his progress. His favorite days were spent cooking with his mother. They not only cooked together, but they could visit during the slower times. Mother began teaching him his favorite recipes, but she also taught him more about his heritage and about his abba.

Chapter 2

In early spring, Master Kenan sent word to Orly that he should prepare a travel bag with a blanket and his spare robe. Jewish Law required that every male over the age of thirteen attend three festivals a year in Jerusalem. Master Kenan always allowed his Jewish employees and male slaves to travel with him for these festivals. Orly's heart was bursting with excitement at the thought of being allowed to travel with them. He couldn't remember ever being outside of Cana and couldn't imagine what Jerusalem would be like.

Mother cried when he told her that he would be going to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and would be gone for a couple of weeks. "Orly, this is an answer to my prayers. Master Kenan is keeping his promise to prepare you for being a man — a good Jewish man. Your abba never missed Passover in Jerusalem. Now, you will learn the traditions of our people. I am so happy."

"So, you are not sad to see me go?" Orly teased.

"I won't have to cook so much food if you are away!" He was glad to see her smiling again, and he knew that she would miss him.

Early Monday morning, the slaves who were accompanying Master Kenan were up and loading the oxcart. The kitchen staff had prepared food that was stored behind the driver's bench. The bench would seat Master Kenan and his slave Enoch, the driver, but the other four men would ride in the back of the cart. Even with their blankets folded under them, it was a long and bumpy ride. It was a new experience for Orly in many ways. He had never been away from his mother, he had never been outside of Cana that he could remember, and he had never had time to just sit with nothing to do. But most of all, Orly loved seeing the new scenery.

When the oxen needed to rest, Enoch knew exactly where to find grass and water for them. That night, the men threw their blankets on the grass and slept under the stars. Many other Jewish families were traveling to Jerusalem from all over Galilee and even farther north. Each group would set up a campfire, but would often mingle and talk after dinner. Orly especially loved lying on his blanket, looking up at the stars, and listening to the songs that the travelers sang. He had never heard these songs, which were mostly Psalms about Jerusalem and the beautiful temple.

Before dawn on Tuesday, Master Kenan had them up and on the road. They ate their breakfast in the cart to save time. Each man was given a round of bread and a bowl of olives. It was hard trying to eat while lurching along, but there was a lot of laughter and fun.

They were entering the mountainous region leading up to Jerusalem. The oxen were capable of traveling faster, but the roads were crowded with people. Enoch had to take it much slower than he wanted. Early in the afternoon, Master Kenan suggested that the men run ahead to their usual camp site to fish for dinner. The other men

knew the exact spot. First, they collected firewood and started a large bonfire. Orly had never been fishing and was delighted to be included. The kitchen slave showed Orly how to clean the fish he caught. By the time Master Kenan, Enoch, and Mr. Abraham arrived, they had prepared more than enough fish. Each man roasted his own fish on a stick over the embers, and everyone had all they wanted. Orly thought nothing on earth — not even his mother's cooking — could possibly taste as good as that fish cooked over an open fire.

That night as they sat around their campfire and ate the fish with the bread that Mother had prepared for them, Master Kenan asked Orly if he had any questions. He explained to the group that this would be Orly's first Passover in Jerusalem, but that he was only twelve, so would not participate in the sacrifices at the temple. Orly was amazed that the other men not only accepted him but seemed to respect him. They were eager to answer his questions. There was a sweet feeling of family, and Orly realized his time with Master Kenan was growing short. He wondered what it would be like to be free and if he would ever feel so connected to other people as he did on this night.

Wednesday morning brought a welcome change. Because the mountains were getting steeper, the crowds who were walking were moving even slower. But Roman soldiers on horseback were directing the people to stay to the right and let the wagons pass on the left. The roads were now wide enough for both. Orly and the other men stayed in the oxcart because they didn't want to get caught in the crowds. Orly had never seen a Roman soldier and his heart lurched each time he saw them treat a traveler cruelly. But for the most part, they were just trying to keep the crowds moving as they pushed and shoved their way into Jerusalem. Orly had never imagined that there were this many people on earth and was fascinated by the sound of people from every nation speaking in their native tongues. There were so many new sights and sounds and smells, he couldn't take it all in.

Late afternoon on Wednesday they turned off the main road and took a small dirt road up to Master Kenan's brother's house. It was a grand house and had a large barn for the oxen. That was where the slaves slept. Master Kenan, his personal servant Omri, and Mr. Abraham, a free man who was the accountant at the Metal Shop, went inside to visit his brother, Zeke. Orly, Enoch, and the kitchen slave were sent to the barn. Mr. Zeke's servants helped Enoch care for the oxen, and they all helped unload the oxcart.

Soon they were sent to the kitchen to eat with the other servants. Because Enoch had made many trips to Jerusalem, he was eager to visit with his friends. Much of the talk focused on Jesus' arrival on Sunday. Everyone wanted to tell what they had heard about Jesus entering Jerusalem as king and conqueror. They felt certain that it would only be a short time before he would establish his kingdom and take over leadership from the Romans.

Orly returned to the barn and crawled into his blanket. He was overwhelmed with all the new things he was seeing and hearing. He lay awake thinking about the elaborate houses, the Roman soldiers,

and the deafening noise. He had never imagined that the city would be so noisy. As he began to relax, he remembered the first time he had met Jesus. It was just over three years ago at Master Kenan's son's wedding. *I remember Jesus asking us to fill the ceremonial washing jars and then Jesus had somehow turned that water into wine. My mind was blown. I remember Hosea taking a cup of water to the ruler in charge of the wedding. Hosea was so scared. He knew he was going to be in big trouble for serving him water. But the ruler had complimented Master Kenan for saving the best wine for last. Everyone was rushing to us to have their cups filled and I remember being exhausted. I promised myself: Someday, when I'm free, I'm going to find Jesus and become one of His followers.* The next thing Orly knew, a new day was beginning in noisy, noisy Jerusalem.

Orly was delighted to be assigned to help Benjamin while he was in Jerusalem. Benjamin was fifteen years old and would complete his time of slavery in three months. Benjamin was a kitchen slave, but he primarily ran errands for the cook because he knew the city so well. Their first assignment was to go to the market for things they would need for the Passover Seder. He and Orly took four baskets apiece and the cook told them what to purchase. "Hurry back because I've got to get that fish sauce and bean stew cooking soon."

Benjamin warned Orly to stay very close to him because of the crowds. "It wouldn't look good if I lost you on the first day!" Benjamin explained that the market wasn't as crowded today as it would be tomorrow because most of the Jews from Judea would celebrate their Seder meal on the second night of Passover. Jews from Galilee still celebrated the Seder on the first night as commanded in the Jewish Scripture. Since Mr. Zeke had been raised in Galilee, he celebrated the Seder with his brother on the first night of Passover. Orly couldn't imagine the market being more crowded than this. He was terrified of being separated from Benjamin and stayed as close to him as possible. Benjamin filled the baskets with vegetables and fresh fish. Orly had never seen so much food in one place. Cana was just a tiny village and would probably fit entirely inside this market area. He was amazed. They had no time for sightseeing and moved as quickly as they could through the crowds and back to the house. The kitchen crew efficiently emptied their baskets as the cook told them what to purchase on their second trip.

Once again, they pushed through the crowds to purchase other fresh supplies for the meal. Just as they returned to the kitchen, Mr. Zeke gathered all his guests and servants into an area behind the courtyard to witness the sacrificing of the Passover lamb. Their host explained that the lamb had been purchased as directed by Jewish Scripture. Now, it would be sacrificed, and the blood would be sprinkled on the doorposts of the house to remind them of the first Passover. When their ancestors had obeyed God's commands, the death angel had passed over them, and they had escaped being slaves in Egypt. Orly had never seen this ceremony. It was sad to see such a beautiful and innocent lamb slaughtered. Its look of surprise

and betrayal haunted Orly. The blood was painted on the doorpost as the Jewish Law commanded: one spot at the top, one on the bottom, and one on each of the two sides about shoulder high. Orly watched, fascinated. When the ceremony was over, all the servants returned to their jobs and Benjamin and Orly reported to the cook. The lamb was put on a spit so that the servants could roast it over the fire. It would be ready in time for the Seder.

“Benjamin, take Orly to the temple. We want to know what’s going on with Jesus and what he is saying. He’s been teaching at the temple all week. Do not stay past noon. When you come back, pick up the wine that we will need. You won’t be able to carry enough, and I will need to send you back for more, so don’t be late.”

Orly could not believe his ears. He would get to see the temple and they had over an hour to listen to Jesus teach. He and Benjamin started off at a run for the temple. Just as soon as they came to the main road, though, things slowed down until it was almost impossible to make progress. At this rate, they would never even make it to the temple before noon. But Benjamin knew his way and soon they were entering the temple from the back gate. Orly gasped at the beauty and size of the stones making up the walls. “This temple is magnificent, but it is nothing compared to Solomon’s temple,” Benjamin reminded him.

Suddenly a group of Pharisees pushed through the crowd right in front of them. Benjamin and Orly quickly jumped into the wake they created and moved closer. Now they could hear, and occasionally get glimpses of Jesus as he taught.

Orly was struck by how much older Jesus looked since he had seen him in Cana. There was an urgency about him that had replaced the relaxation at the wedding. As they listened, they heard Jesus teaching about being prepared for the coming of God’s kingdom. They heard him use parables to teach about ladies who were prepared for the bridegroom and those who weren’t. Then they heard him begin another parable about a Master giving his servants a lot of money. But suddenly, Benjamin noticed that the sun was overhead, and they were running late. He pulled Orly’s arm, and it took them quite a while to extricate themselves. The courtyard was literally packed wall-to-wall with people.

They escaped out the back gate and ran as fast as they could to the winery and hurried back to report to the cook. The kitchen servants were eager to hear what Benjamin had seen. He reported that Jesus was telling the people to get ready for his takeover of Jerusalem. He wanted them to all be ready for this new kingdom. The cook reminded the staff that there was still much work to be done, and quickly ordered Benjamin and Orly to return to the winery for more wine. Even the back roads were filled with people from all over the world who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. Some came because they were Jewish, many came as vendors to sell their goods, and others came just to enjoy the celebration.

Orly and Benjamin sat at the servant’s table in Mr. Zeke’s kitchen, while one of the older slaves led their Passover Seder in the same

way that it had been conducted for 1500 years. Orly had celebrated this special meal at Master Kenan's house for as long as he could remember.

When the Seder was complete, the servants were dismissed. Some servants sat around visiting, but others had work to do and began clearing the tables and preparing for a new day. Orly had no assignment and decided to head to the barn and try to process his thoughts, but before he arrived, Benjamin joined him. "Orly, would you like to see something fantastic?"

"Sure!"

"Follow me!" Benjamin led Orly up a trail that went behind the barn and up the side of a mountain through some woods. The full moon was so bright it almost seemed like daylight. It was a steep climb, but Benjamin seemed to know the way quite well. When they reached the top, there was a breathtaking view of the temple. All the torches were lit, and the gold glistened in the moonlight. Orly was amazed at the beauty of the temple at night.

Benjamin said that normally there were very few people in the courtyards and the priests were usually indoors. He liked to come here and soak up the peace of knowing that he was looking at the place where God had chosen to dwell on earth. Tonight, that peace and quiet seemed to be missing. There were several people in the courtyards, and priests and temple guards were moving around. Benjamin wondered if this was just because Jerusalem was so filled with people, or if something else was going on. He knew it was unusual, but he didn't want to alarm Orly. "I guess with Passover, there's more people up and about tonight. Are you ready to go back down?"

"Whenever you are. I will always remember seeing the temple lit up like this. Thanks for showing me." The boys were immersed in their own thoughts and didn't talk as they headed back to the barn. They crawled into their blankets and were quickly asleep.

Orly made his way to the kitchen for breakfast and discovered that Benjamin was already there. Two servants had just returned from the well with news that Jesus had been arrested by the temple guards during the night. Everyone was trying to talk at once. Some believed that Jesus would suddenly announce that He was the Messiah and would bring in His kingdom. Some had other theories about how the arrest fit into His plans. All were questioning why the temple guards would arrest Jesus. They had assumed it would be the Romans who would be opposed to His taking over. Others reminded them that Jesus had been pretty harsh toward the Jewish leaders and Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews. The servants had sent word to Mr. Zeke, so the same discussion was happening at their breakfast table. Those who were serving breakfast shared the news and opinions between both rooms. Orly felt confused by all the chaos. How he longed to be back in the little village of Cana eating breakfast with his mother in peace and quiet. The servants were informed that Master Zeke and Master Kenan were going out to check on what was

happening. They were told to resume their usual tasks, but not to leave the premises.

Orly and Benjamin reported to the cook and were given brooms to sweep the courtyards. The servants sat in the yard and discussed what Jesus' arrest might mean. Everyone had their own opinion. Suddenly, at noon, the daylight disappeared, and it was as dark as midnight. The servants moved quickly into the kitchen and lit lamps. It was warm in the kitchen, but no one felt safe outside. *Is the world coming to an end? Is this the beginning of the new kingdom?* But the longer they sat all cramped together in the kitchen, the more the mood changed. Now there were only whispers, and the celebratory feeling was gone. They didn't know what was happening and hoped Master Zeke and Master Kenan were safe. All they could do was wait. Jerusalem was eerily quiet.

About midafternoon the sunlight returned, but just as it did, there was a violent earthquake. Everyone screamed as the room rocked and rolled. Orly's stomach felt queasy, and he cried out in fear. Benjamin grabbed his arm and asked if he had ever experienced an earthquake. Orly had never even known that they existed. He was horrified. Benjamin explained what was happening. He had lived in Jerusalem all his life and knew what to expect, even though he couldn't explain the darkness that preceded it. He warned Orly that the ground could continue to shake for several days. Orly just wanted to go home. But now that the major quaking was over, there were assignments for everyone. Broken pottery was all over the house and kitchen. The outdoor servants reported broken rock walls that needed to be repaired on the barn and one corner of the house. Orly and Benjamin were once again sweeping.

It was almost the Sabbath before Master Zeke and Master Kenan returned. They gathered their family and guests together and sadly reported the news that Jesus had not only been arrested, but He had been crucified. The family began to wail and grieve. Jesus was a beloved nephew, and the family was distraught. Soon house servants were bringing news back and forth to the kitchen so that everyone heard. They sat in disbelief. Gone was their hope that Jesus was the Messiah and would rescue them from Rome. Orly didn't know what he felt. He wanted to be home. But then, he wanted to be alone, but he was afraid to be alone as it seemed the world had gone crazy. Jesus was so kind, and he kept seeing the surprised and hurt look in the eyes of the Passover lamb as it was slaughtered. Orly got up from the table to leave — but then remembered that he needed permission. Here at Mr. Zeke's house, servants had to wait until orders were given, so he sat back down and tried to block it all out. It was only a few minutes later when Mr. Zeke's personal servant came into the kitchen and spoke to the group. He explained that Jesus had been crucified and that because he was a family member, there would be a period of mourning. They would be expected to go about their work, but they should be respectful of the family's needs. "You know your assignments for a regular Sabbath schedule. However," he stated,

“because the city is in such chaos, Master Zeke and Master Kenan require that you stay on the premises until further notice. You are dismissed unless you have an assignment.”

Everyone slowly got up to leave except the servants assigned to clear the kitchen and set out the Sabbath breakfast. Orly didn't even wait on Benjamin, he just bolted from the room. He headed for the garden and hid among the plants. This garden didn't have a wall and it was flowers instead of vegetables. The moon was bright enough to see the ceremonial washing jars sitting near the courtyard. They reminded him of the day he met Mr. Jesus. He closed his eyes and thought of Hosea and his other friends at home. He wondered what they were doing and wished he was there. He thought about going to the barn, but he knew there would be no sleep. He had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and learn more about being a Jewish man. Right now, he just wanted to go back to childhood and be taken care of. He didn't want to know that the earth sometimes shook and quaked so that there was no solid footing. That's the way his life felt. He had thought that Jesus was the Messiah. He realized that he had believed it ever since the morning he had gotten up early and proved to himself that Jesus really had turned the water into wine. That morning, before the sun rose, he had vowed to someday find Jesus and to become a follower of His. Now, that dream was gone, and he had never had a chance to pursue it. He felt the tears flowing down his cheeks and he just let them come. He didn't understand life. He wasn't ready to be a man. He wasn't sure he wanted to face the future. *What if everything I believe is wrong? Why had they killed Jesus when He was so gentle and kind and good? And who killed him? Some say it was the Jewish leaders who had taken Him to the Romans. Others said it was the Romans who had learned of his attempt to set up a new kingdom. I don't know. I guess it really doesn't matter anymore.* He got up and paced around the grounds. He found that most of the other servants were doing the same. No one wanted to talk. They avoided eye-contact and pretended they didn't see the tears on the other's face. Orly felt a hand on his arm and startled as Benjamin whispered, “Do you wanna' climb the hill?”

Orly whispered back, “Yeah, but I don't want to see the temple. Let's just get away from here.” Then he paused and asked, “Oh, is that still on the premises?”

“Yes, it is Master Zeke's land.” So, they began making their way to the barn and began to climb the trail behind it. They walked in silence. They had climbed about halfway up the hill when Benjamin said, “Here's a grassy spot. Let's just sit here.”

Orly agreed and sighed as he sat in the grass. He was grateful to have a friend but had no idea what to say. Benjamin seemed to feel the same way. They sat in silence, each buried in his own thoughts. Finally, Orly whispered a question, “Are you as confused by all this as I am?”

“Confused, sad, angry, scared — yeah, probably.”

“At least you knew what an earthquake was!”

“Yeah, but those things are scary any time they happen. And that was a big one.”

“I’ve just got so many questions and I don’t know the answers,” blurted out Orly.

“And midsummer I’ll be on my own and I’m supposed to know what to do,” agreed Benjamin.

“But Mr. Zeke and Master Kenan looked just as confused as we are, and they are grown men,” Orly added.

“You are right. I guess there are just things happening that no one understands right now,” said Benjamin.

They continued to sit for a while longer, but at least they had acknowledged that they weren’t the only ones feeling that their world had turned upside down. “We need to get some sleep. No telling what tomorrow will bring.”

“What’s the Sabbath schedule here?” asked Orly.

“We’ll report for breakfast, but usually it’s just a free day for me. Sometimes I go to synagogue, but I guess we can’t do that tomorrow. I usually walk up here or take a nap. Sometimes the guys play ball in the courtyard, but I doubt that will happen tomorrow. It will probably just be a day of rest.” Orly reluctantly pulled himself up when Benjamin offered him a hand. They headed back to the barn and crawled into their blankets long after midnight.

Dawn came quickly, and as Benjamin had predicted, they had no assignment for the day. They decided to get some more sleep. When Orly woke again, it was midday. He joined a group that was sitting in the yard. Orly had always observed the Sabbath, but today, he just wanted to get busy and pull weeds or sweep floors. There was too much energy pent up inside, and he spent most of the day pacing the yard. Finally, at sunset, Orly and Benjamin were called to help serve dinner. They were glad to be assigned something. The dinner was very simple as no cooking was allowed on the Sabbath. They set out some rounds of unleavened bread, goat cheese, pickled fish, almonds, and some fruit preserves. Hopefully, Mr. Zeke would let them go to the market tomorrow to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables.

Sunday morning dawned bright and clear. As the women returned from their trip to the well, they brought strange news. Rumors were flying that Jesus had risen from the dead! Suddenly, the room was filled with everyone talking at once and the news was passed on to Master Zeke. While there was excitement and anticipation for some, most felt that it was just rumors and refused to become too excited about it.

When Orly and Benjamin finished breakfast, Benjamin was assigned to purchase fresh supplies. Orly started toward the baskets when he heard the cook call his name. “Orly, you will not be allowed to leave the premises. Lemuel will help Benjamin today since they can more easily escape if there’s trouble. I was told that you know how to make unleavened bread. Am I correct?”

“Yes, sir,” Orly replied. But for the first time in many years, a surge of resentment welled up inside of him. He hated being a slave

and not having the freedom to make his own choices. He understood that Benjamin knew the city better, but he resented having to stay inside when he wanted to find out what was going on with Jesus. *Yes, I am ready to be free! Just over a year and I will be! Yes, I not only will be ready, I'm ready now. I don't care how scary it is, I can't continue to be imprisoned like this.* Orly was shocked by how strongly he felt. He quickly began to gather the supplies he needed to make the bread and stuffed his feelings deep inside. He hadn't struggled against his slavery in many years. Now, he needed to settle down and submit. He was grateful for an assignment to keep him busy. He and his mother had worked on his unleavened bread until he knew that he could do it without flaw. He worked quickly and soon had the first pan in the outdoor oven. Once it was done, he took a small piece to the cook for his assessment. When he tasted the bread, he smiled and complimented Orly on it. The cook stated that he should have had Orly cooking ever since he arrived. Orly smiled to himself. He was glad that the cook had not known, or he would never have gotten to see any of Jerusalem! Orly was informed that there would be guests for dinner, and he would need to make eight more batches of bread.

When Benjamin and Jonathan arrived back from the market, they said the crowds were in a frenzy and rumors were everywhere. The market was jammed, but no one really knew what had happened to Jesus. His body was not in the tomb, and some said that the disciples had stolen his body. Some said that angels had appeared and taken him. And some said that Jesus was alive and teaching again. The kitchen became a busy beehive of activity as the fresh produce was received and everyone began to work on dinner preparations. Benjamin and Lemuel were sent back to the market with another list of supplies. Orly was watching his second batch of bread baking in the oven and waved at Benjamin as he passed by. He knew that they would talk later tonight.

While Orly was outside using the stone oven, he could watch the outdoor servants setting up the courtyard for guests. They set up a head table, then five additional tables. Orly knew that he would be working all day to get enough bread made. It was almost sundown when he finally finished the ninth batch. He was pleased with the results and wondered if Master Kenan would know that he had prepared the bread. He was the youngest cook in the kitchen, and he felt that his mother would have been very proud.

As he carried the ninth batch of bread into the kitchen, the cook received word that two of the main guests were not coming. That required the tables to be shifted into a different arrangement and Orly was sent to help. There he discovered that this was a traditional meal where Mr. Zeke and Master Kenan's two sisters and their families got together each year on the third or fourth night of Passover. The cousins were all close in age and always enjoyed being together. But because of Jesus' death, they received word that their two sisters would not be coming. They sent their regrets. Orly felt that was understandable since they were still in mourning for Jesus.

Orly and Benjamin were busy moving the food from the kitchen to the courtyard. He hoped that they would be dismissed soon so that he could spend time visiting with Benjamin, but that didn't happen. Both found themselves assigned to serve the guests. They would be carrying the food to each table and would be busy until the meal was over. Benjamin had been running errands all over town, and Orly had been baking all day. They were tired, but both knew better than to show it. So, they smiled and served and refilled cups and took care of the guests. They were not allowed to speak to each other, so they simply served and listened. When the meal was over, Mr. Zeke and the other men climbed the stairs to the rooftop. The women moved into the house with their children. Orly and Benjamin began carrying the dishes back to the kitchen. Finally, the cook dismissed them. Other servants would finish cleaning and preparing for tomorrow.

Benjamin asked Orly if he wanted to climb up the trail. "I want to, but I'm not sure my feet will let me! Man, I'm tired!"

"Yeah, me too," Benjamin agreed. "Let's just go to that grassy spot again and talk. It's getting too late to talk in the barn. Some will be sleeping."

"Fine with me. I think I'm too tired to sleep and I've got a lot to sort out. So, did you know the guests?" Orly asked.

"Yeah, this was Master Zeke and Mr. Kenan's family. The man in the blue robe was Master Zeke's son, Jacob, and you probably knew Mr. Kenan's son, Seth. They were sitting together. Then the other two men were Jesus' brothers. The one sitting across from Jacob was Josie. I think they are about the same age. James is a little older. I don't know which of the women is married to which man."

"That's fine, I just wanted to know who Josie and James were. I figured out Jacob because he kept calling Mr. Zeke, 'Dad'. So, they are ... were ... Jesus' brothers. Curious."

"Yeah, Jesus was the oldest and then there are four other boys and two girls. When they are all here, plus the other sister and her husband and four boys and all of their families, it's a lot of mouths to feed." Both boys sat quietly for a while.

"What are you thinking?" Benjamin asked.

"I'm wondering what you heard while you were in town today. Is Jesus alive or dead? Even his brothers didn't really seem sure!"

"That's more or less what I heard in the market. No one really knows. Some say his followers stole his body to make it look like He came back to life, but most of Jesus' followers are in hiding. Some say that they've gone back to Galilee and others say they have just scattered."

"So, no one knows?"

"That's what I'm hearing. Oh, I did hear a peculiar thing, though. And I heard it several times. Apparently, someone tore down the curtain in the temple between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place. It was really thick, like four or five inches thick, so I can't imagine how someone could tear it. But apparently there's no barrier now between

the altar and the Holy of Holies. I'm sure they will get it repaired as soon as possible. Did you hear anything around here?"

"No," said Orly slowly. "So, we just wait and see what happens?"

"That's the way I see it. Right now, I prefer to sleep while I wait. Let's get some rest. Who knows what assignment we'll get at dawn tomorrow. Looks like you may be stuck in the kitchen. Your bread was very good."

"Thanks. Maybe I'll mess it up tomorrow so I can get reassigned to running errands with you!"

"I wouldn't try it! But I'd love to have you tag along. Let's get some shut eye." They trudged back down to the barn and quickly fell into a deep sleep.

For the next two days, Orly was happy to be assigned to help Benjamin with running errands. The cook kept them busy, but the crowds had thinned, and the market wasn't as packed. They could talk freely and take their time. Rumors were flying that Jesus had appeared to his followers and that He was like a ghost that could appear and disappear at will. Orly felt that if Jesus was truly alive, He would have appeared to all Jerusalem by now or at least be teaching on the temple steps again. Orly was beginning to believe that they would never know what really happened.

On their last night together, Benjamin and Orly climbed up the trail to see the temple again. They talked about their upcoming freedom. Benjamin would be free at the end of summer and said he would probably just become a bond-slave and stay with Mr. Zeke since he had no idea where his family was or how to go about getting started. Orly told him that he hoped Master Kenan would hire him to work at the Metal Shop and he would probably stay in Cana. "I'm pretty sure Master Kenan intends to bring me back next year. I'll try to find you." They slowly walked back to the barn. Sleep didn't come easy for Orly as he thought over all the things he had seen and experienced in Jerusalem. He was glad to be headed home.

Sure enough, Enoch was up before dawn getting the oxen ready for the trip home. The slaves were served breakfast in the kitchen one last time after the oxcart was packed with food for the trip and gifts from Mr. Zeke's wife to her sister-in-law. Orly took his place in the wagon with the other men and the oxen slowly threaded their way through the busy streets of Jerusalem. Once they passed the city gates, they were able to travel at full speed and, since it was downhill, they made great time. By late afternoon, Orly was thoroughly sore from the bumping and lurching of the oxcart. He was grateful to get out in the grass and stretch his legs. As the men gathered firewood and then sat around talking with other travelers, the prime questions were, "What happened to Jesus' body?" and "Was he dead or alive?" Everyone had an opinion, and Orly just listened quietly and wondered. Master Kenan shared that he had visited with his sister Mary, Jesus' mother. She was convinced that Jesus was really and truly alive. Master Kenan said that he wanted to believe it, but wasn't sure since there was no sign of him. He told them more about the crucifixion.

Mary had said that Jesus appeared to the followers and told them to meet Him in Galilee. So, her belief was that they would probably just continue their ministry of teaching and healing as before as if the crucifixion had never even happened. It didn't make sense, but he really didn't know what it all meant. They all agreed it was one of the most exciting, but also the most confusing, Passover trips they had ever taken. They assured Orly that it wasn't always this eventful.

Tomorrow they would be home if the oxen continued to travel well. Orly startled at the word, *home*, and thought of Benjamin. He wondered where he would be next year. Orly was ready to see Mother and Hosea and the quiet little town of Cana. And, yes, it did feel like home to him.

Chapter 3

Six weeks later, Master Kenan informed Orly that he would be traveling to Jerusalem for Shavuot, but since Orly was not yet thirteen, he had decided not to take him along. While he was away, Orly was assigned to the Metal Shop every day instead of helping Mother and Hosea part of the week. Orly was disappointed to not get to go to Jerusalem with the group, but he was primarily concerned about how he would be treated at the shop while Master Kenan was away.

On Sunday, Orly reported to the Metal Shop. With Master Kenan and two other men gone, they were extremely short-handed. Orly found himself busier than usual trying to keep the other three men happy. Lucas, Julius, and Markus were blacksmiths. Orly had always been afraid of them because they were so big and strong, and they were Romans. They yelled at him to hurry up and were not patient when he brought them the wrong things. He was really dreading the rest of the two weeks. But as the week went on, work slowed down and they caught up on projects. Most of their customers had gone to Jerusalem, and Orly found the three men to be more friendly than he expected.

“Orly, come take a break with us. There’s nothing pressing that needs to be done. I think you’ve worked harder than the rest of us today!” Lucas roared out and the others laughed and agreed. Master Kenan required that Orly keep working even when the other men took breaks. That was just normal for slaves. Now, he didn’t quite know how to respond. There really wasn’t any work to be done, and Lucas was his boss, so he decided he would sit in the cool grass under the trees with them for a few minutes.

When Orly joined them, Markus asked, “So how do you like working in the shop? Do you think you want to apprentice with us next year?”

Orly was surprised that Master Kenan had shared his plan with them. He wasn’t sure how to respond because he was still a slave and not free to speak candidly. “Yes, sir.”

“Hey, Orly, Mr. Kenan isn’t here, and you aren’t our slave. You can speak up. You need to decide what you want to do with the rest of your life. It’s a pretty important decision. I’ve got two grandsons about your age, and they are trying to decide what they are going to do,” said Markus.

“Well, I think, if Master Kenan agrees,” Orly said tentatively, “I would like to learn blacksmithing.”

All the men laughed and began to tease each other about who had won. Orly realized that they had been betting on whether he would stay or not. And he realized that these men seemed to like him. That was going to make it a lot easier to decide whether he wanted to apprentice here or not.

“Where did you come from, Orly?” asked Lucas.

“My parents lived in Bethsaida. When my abba died, Master Kenan brought my mother and me here and we’ve worked for him ever since.”

Julius said, “I grew up near Rome and am a Roman citizen. But my parents died young, and I became a slave soon after turning thirteen. My first three masters were very cruel, and I kept getting sold because I was stubborn and wouldn’t listen.”

“You still don’t listen!” exclaimed Markus.

“Not to you!” retorted Julius. “I had no trade and ended up with the worst of the worst jobs. Mr. Kenan bought me when I was seventeen and put me to work in The Metal Shop. He taught me to blacksmith and was very patient. I became free at age twenty-three and decided to stay put. Whoa, that was twenty years ago.”

Orly asked, “Do you enjoy your work?”

Julius replied, “Yeah, I guess so. I like the money I make! But I also like the satisfaction of making things that other people can’t. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah, there’s a satisfaction in seeing the customer admire what I’ve made for him,” chimed in Markus. “I’ve only worked here for the past six years, but I really like working for Mr. Kenan. He’s an interesting man. I wasn’t sure I wanted to work for a Jew, but it’s been good, really good.”

Lucas motioned for Orly to help him get up and Orly offered him a hand. “Come on and I’ll show you some blacksmithing.” They walked back into the shop while Markus and Julius were still arguing under the tree.

For the first time, Orly realized that all the rough talk and what he called fighting, was just their way of teasing each other. “Grab that little hammer over there.” Orly found what Lucas wanted and brought it to him. “No, that’s for you. I’m going to get this metal hot, and you hammer it into a pancake.” Orly fanned the fire to get it hot, and Lucas heated a scrap piece of metal. Once it was glowing hot, he dropped it on the anvil and instructed Orly to hit it. Orly swung with every ounce of his strength and felt pain shoot through his body as the iron hammer struck the metal.

“Good job! Hit it again!” Orly continued to hammer until the metal was too cool to mold. “That’s enough for today. You’ll be sore tomorrow. But if you do that every day, you’ll start building muscles so that you won’t be so sore when you actually start work. A lot of apprentices quit before the first week is done because they are too sore to move.”

“Thank you, Mr. Lucas. That sounds like a really good idea.”

“I’m glad to help. You remind me of my own son a few years ago.”

Soon Markus and Julius were back at work. Orly and Lucas didn’t have any projects, so they began to organize the piles of scrap metal by weight. Lucas had Orly guess how many shekels each chunk of iron weighed, another valuable skill that would help him in the future.

Once Master Kenan returned from Jerusalem, Orly went back to his regular schedule. He told Hosea what he had learned about

becoming a blacksmith, and what he'd learned about not being scared of the other men at the shop. Hosea encouraged him and warned him that being a free man was going to be a lot different than being a slave. It was also good to be back in the kitchen with his mother a couple of days a week. He had missed his special time with her. He was learning more and more recipes and she often put him in charge of certain dishes. "Someday," she said, "I'll let you prepare the entire meal while I just sit and put my feet up."

"I'll believe that when it happens!" He knew that his mother loved to cook and wouldn't give up her responsibilities. Both knew that their time together was short, so they treasured each day.

After Master Kenan's return, he came into the kitchen and addressed the servants while they were finishing dinner. Everyone stood up, startled by his presence. He smiled and asked them to be seated. He told them that while in Jerusalem he had talked with several followers of Jesus. They assured him that Jesus had risen from the dead. Many of them had seen him, talked with him, and even eaten with him. They were certain that he was alive. "But," he said, "about a week before we arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus left his followers and returned to Heaven. So, I didn't get to see him myself. From what the disciples said, there is no doubt that he was sent from God, and they say that he will return soon and fulfill the rest of the prophecies concerning Messiah. I really don't have any more information, but I wanted to share that with you because I know many of you had questions." After Master Kenan left, the room erupted with discussion, some of it quite heated. Some believed one thing, and others another. Orly listened for a while and then left to go think alone behind the garden.

Orly was enjoying his time at the Metal Shop and whenever Master Kenan had other business, or stayed home to supervise projects there, Lucas would allow Orly to work with him. Orly was progressing to heavier and heavier hammers and Lucas was pleased with his muscle building. Now, Orly needed to learn how to shape the metal into something besides a pancake! Lucas began to challenge him to hammer the scrap metal into a ball or a square. This was a lot harder and required Orly to learn to control his muscles. He began to look forward to his days in the shop.

At the beginning of summer, Master Kenan went to Jerusalem for Sukkot and again assigned Orly to work full time at the Metal Shop. This time Orly was glad to be left behind. The first few days were very busy, and then the remainder of the three weeks were much slower. Lucas taught Orly more and more about blacksmithing.

During one break Orly learned that Markus was born a Roman free man and was apprenticed in the town of Antipatris. He stayed there and worked for almost thirty years. Six years ago, he had moved his family to Cana and began to work for Mr. Kenan.

"I can't imagine staying anywhere for thirty years! I like to see the world," bragged Lucas. "Since blacksmiths can find work in just about any town, I just worked long enough to move on to the next place."

“So how long have you been here, Lucas?” demanded Julius.

“Twelve years.”

“And why is that, Lucas?”

“Because my wife won’t let me leave!” replied Lucas sheepishly. “She and the children wanted to settle down, and now we have grandchildren here in Cana. I don’t think we’ll ever leave.” Everyone laughed.

The three weeks passed quickly and when Master Kenan returned, he brought a young man with him. Soon everyone learned that he would be an apprentice at the Metal Shop. He would live in the room behind the main house and take his meals with Master Kenan and Mrs. Vada.

Orly went back to his regular schedule working with Hosea in the garden and his mother in the kitchen, but he was greatly troubled about his status at the Metal Shop. *Is Master Kenan displeased with me? Why did he hire another apprentice? I thought Master Kenan promised it to me!* He was due to work at the shop tomorrow, but he couldn’t sleep. He wasn’t sure whether he was more angry, or sad, or disappointed, or just scared — but whatever this feeling was, it wasn’t pleasant. Something inside him screamed that it was unfair. He tried to get his feelings back under control, but the rage continued for several hours. Finally, his training as a slave took over and he was able to submit to whatever Master Kenan thought was best. Then the wrestling would start all over again. When dawn arrived, he still hadn’t managed more than a few minutes of sleep.

“I sure feel sorry for the weeds this morning,” commented Hosea. He knew Orly well and knew what was troubling him.

Orly threw himself down beside Hosea. “I’m just so disappointed. I thought that job was mine.”

“Who says it isn’t? You are jumping to conclusions. And you know that whatever happens, God will work it out and provide for you. You just go in there like normal and work as hard as you always do. And don’t forget to greet the new man and make him feel welcome. Let’s see what God might be up to!”

“Hosea, you are so wise. Thank you for reminding me. God has given me great favor. I have nothing to complain about. Now, I’ve got to get to work. I’ll let you know in the morning how it turns out.”

“Have a great day, Son.”

Orly jogged to work and greeted Master Kenan who was already busy at the anvil. Orly quickly began to sweep the work area. While he was picking up some scraps, Lucas asked Orly if he had met Kobe. “Kobe, this is Orly. He’s helping out here until he earns his freedom, then he will be the other apprentice we told you about.” Once again, Orly was grateful for his training as a slave. He hoped he didn’t show any surprise. But he wasn’t certain how to respond.

Kobe quickly put out his hand and shook Orly’s limp one enthusiastically. “I’ve heard nothing but rave reviews about you and know that we’ll be great friends.”

Orly properly said, "Welcome to Cana," then quickly got back to work, but his head was spinning. So, *I haven't lost my apprenticeship to this Kobe fellow. I spent all night fretting over nothing.* He laughed at himself and thought about how sweet it would be to tell Hosea in the morning.

Orly was now entering his final year as a slave. It seemed that all he could think about was being free. He had to keep reminding himself that he was still a slave and needed to remember his station. He found himself wanting to be alone and felt that he didn't really fit anywhere. He wanted to be friends with Kobe and the other men at the shop but that wasn't allowed. Yet, he no longer fit in with the other servants at Master Kenan's house. Hosea and Mother were the only two who seemed to understand that he was caught in the middle of two different worlds.

About three weeks after Mr. Kenan returned from Sukkot, he and Mrs. Vada surprised Orly with a small party for his thirteenth birthday. Mother had made some raisin cakes and the Jewish men from the Metal Shop and their families were invited as well as the servants. The ruler of the synagogue made the pronouncement that Orly was now a man. He would be expected to carry out the Law and the requirements of all Jewish men. It was very special and Orly was touched that everyone had such kind words to say about him.

He felt certain that he would be invited to attend Passover in the spring. He was looking forward to connecting with Benjamin. But since he was still a slave, there was the possibility that he would be assigned to stay and work at the Metal Shop, so he was afraid to get his hopes up too high.



As Orly was leaving the shop one evening, Master Kenan told him to pack a travel bag and be ready to go with him for Passover. This time, he knew what to expect, and that made it even more fun. Master Kenan and Enoch sat in the front of the oxcart, but this time the wagon was crowded. There were the four Jewish men who had traveled last year, but now a new kitchen slave and Kobe made it six in the back. The only way they could all sit and still stretch out their legs was to sit side by side like sardines packed in a can.

Orly was especially fascinated by Kobe. Kobe was only a couple of years older, but he seemed so confident of himself. He seemed different from the other men and Orly was determined to figure out what made him tick. On the second day, the oxen had to slow down because of families walking along the narrow road. Kobe and Orly often jumped out and ran ahead to stretch their legs. "When will you earn your freedom, Orly?"

"Two weeks after Sukkot in the summer."

"Jesus taught that there is no difference between slave and free. He treated everyone as equals."

Orly's eyes opened wide. "Did you know Jesus?"

“Yes, my mother and I traveled with Jesus for two years after my abba was killed by the Romans.”

“I’m sorry for your loss. There’s so much I want to learn about Jesus. I saw him turn water into wine at Master Kenan’s son’s wedding, and I’ve wanted to know more about him ever since.”

“I’d love to teach you. Maybe that’s why God sent me here to Cana. We should get together sometime and talk.”

“That would be incredible. I want to hear all about him. Did you see a lot of miracles?”

“Oh, yeah! And He changed my life.”

“Hey, that was our ride! We better catch up!” Orly yelled. The oxcart went darting past them as it found a clearing and the oxen were able to make full speed.

Orly and Kobe took off at a run. They jumped into the oxcart and the men scooted closer together to make room for them. They teased that they had hoped to lose them and have more food for themselves.

After another day of traveling in the oxcart, they arrived at Mr. Zeke’s home. Master Kenan, his personal servant Omri, and Mr. Abraham and Kobe, who were both free men, were all welcomed into the house. Orly and the other four were shown to the barn. The cook gave Orly the news that Benjamin was on his own and working at the market. He reminded Orly that he would need permission to leave the premises. Orly was disappointed as he realized he would be confined for the entire visit and knew he would have to control his temper. Orly was still a slave even though he was only a few months away from freedom.

The next morning, Mr. Zeke called everyone together to sacrifice the Passover lamb. Orly shut his eyes so that he wouldn’t have to see the lamb’s look of surprise. That look still haunted him and made him think of Jesus’ crucifixion. Orly worked all day helping to prepare the Seder meal. He performed his tasks perfectly, but he was frustrated at not being able to visit Benjamin.

That night, the slaves gathered in the kitchen for their Seder meal. Suddenly, Orly felt a sharp stab of pain as he realized for the first time that he would never again celebrate Passover with his mother. *Mother will always celebrate Passover as a slave in Master Kenan’s kitchen, while I’ll be here in Jerusalem celebrating as a free man.* Orly sighed deeply. He figured that he would be welcome at Mr. Zeke’s table just as Kobe was, but he wasn’t sure. *Why is there such a division between slave and free, and what did Kobe mean when he said Jesus taught that there was no difference? What does that look like? So many things I want to know. So many things I don’t understand.* He tried to enter into the Seder celebration, but somehow, his questions overshadowed his worship.

After dinner, he was released from duty, but was reminded to stay on the premises. Orly remembered the trail behind the barn and decided to climb it. “Orly!” a voice in the darkness whispered.

Orly knew it was Benjamin and whispered back, "It's safe. It's just me." Benjamin stepped out from behind some trees and ran to hug Orly.

"I knew you would come here. So, I sneaked in while everyone was at dinner. I don't want to be thrown in jail for trespassing."

"No, that wouldn't be good. Did you leave on such bad terms with Mr. Zeke?"

"Not really. He just said that he didn't want to commit to a bondslave who was nothing but an errand boy. He said he was disappointed that I hadn't learned more while I was with him. But you know that I was just obeying the cook's orders. As far as I know, I did everything that he asked me to do."

"Man, that's tough."

"Well, I'm okay for now. I sweep out the market and make deliveries for various vendors. They all treat me well and I'm free."

"Where do you live?"

"One of the vendors allows me to sleep for free inside his booth to protect it, so I guess I'm also a security guard. That's why I've got to hurry back — but I had to see you."

"I'm so glad. Can you come back on the Sabbath when I'm free?"

"I'll try. But getting on the property will be harder. I would have to come before dawn to not be seen. Hey, why don't I sneak up here during the Sabbath dinner and spend the night. That might work."

"If I can, I'll come up after dinner and spend the night with you!"

"God bless you, my friend. I would love to catch up," and with that Benjamin disappeared into the woods. Orly hoped that Benjamin could get out without the night watchman seeing him.

All week Orly was busy in the kitchen helping the cook. Orly wandered around alone each night whenever he was released from duty. He avoided the trail. It just reminded him of Benjamin and how different their lives seemed to be heading.

Orly worked hard all day on Friday helping to prepare the Sabbath meals. He was pleased to be dismissed immediately after dinner with no cleanup duties. During dinner, Orly had sneaked a couple of apricots and a small piece of lamb into his robe pocket. He figured that Benjamin would be hungry. It was the least he could do to help. Orly headed to the garden and sat still until he knew where everyone was. While the watchman was visiting with another slave near the front of the courtyard, Orly casually got up and went to the barn. He got his blanket and grabbed another one off the shelf and stuffed it into his robe. He rehearsed what he would say if caught. He knew that Mr. Zeke would turn him over to Master Kenan for punishment, and he trusted that Master Kenan would understand. At least he hoped he would.

No one stopped him, and Orly climbed all the way to the top of the trail. He was beginning to wonder if Benjamin had been caught or wasn't coming. "My friend!" Benjamin whispered. "I don't think it's safe for us to stay here. Others may hike up here tonight. So, take a good

look at the temple and then I'll show you a grassy spot in the woods that I found a few minutes ago."

Orly looked at the temple, but it didn't seem to glow like it had the first time. Somehow it seemed marred. *They say the first time is always the most special. I guess that's the problem.* He turned to follow Benjamin and wondered if their friendship would also be different now that Benjamin was free, and he was still a slave. But deep down, he knew that it wouldn't.

Benjamin led Orly to a grassy spot not far from the top but totally out of sight. Orly produced the two blankets and Benjamin was grateful. But when Orly showed him the two apricots and piece of lamb, he savored every bite. He offered to share with Orly, but Orly reminded him that he had just eaten Sabbath dinner. "When will you be free, Orly?"

"Two weeks after Sukkot."

"I knew it was this year but couldn't remember the exact date."

"I've been working at the Metal Shop and Master Kenan has said that he will let me continue to work there."

"That's great, Orly! Then you'll have a steady income and before you know it, you'll have a wife and children to support."

"I don't know about that, but I will be close to my mother. She's staying with Master Kenan as a bond-slave, so I assume I will be allowed to visit her on Sabbath afternoons when she is resting." Orly didn't feel comfortable telling Benjamin about being an apprentice to Master Kenan. It just seemed to be wrong since Benjamin was having such a hard time. "So, tell me more about what you do?"

"Well, like I said before, I sweep and clean up the entire market. I pick up the trash and leaves that accumulate there and the Sanhedrin pays me to keep it looking good. Then, at night, I crawl into my friend's booth and sleep there. He sells knives and swords and doesn't want to carry them back and forth all the time. So, I'm getting by."

"Have you ever thought about what you really want to do?"

"Well, when I first came to Mr. Zeke's, I wanted to learn to cook. I remember cooking with my mother when I was very young and it's a pleasant memory. But apparently, I didn't apply myself at Mr. Zeke's."

"No, don't say that. From what I saw, you were a hard worker and obedient to everything the cook asked you to do. Did he ever let you cook?"

"No."

"So, don't blame yourself for not being able to learn. It makes me very angry at the cook and at Mr. Zeke. I'm having a hard time with my attitude toward the cook. He's deliberately keeping me confined to the premises so that I can't see you. He's just being mean."

"Orly, don't be bitter. God has provided for me and it's okay — not what I expected or wanted, but it's okay, and I'm free for now and able to do as I please."

"May you always stay free, my friend."

The young men continued to talk. They talked about Jesus, and Benjamin said that there seemed to be a group of his followers who

were setting up a new religion that was different from what the Pharisees taught. He hadn't checked it out because he needed the money the Sanhedrin paid him. The Sanhedrin were not at all happy with anyone who was following Jesus. But he liked what he saw and thought he would someday check it out.

"I'll look forward to hearing what you find out. Next year we can meet and talk whenever we wish!"

Both men settled down into their blankets and dawn came quickly. Orly started down the trail and Benjamin disappeared into the trees. Orly folded one blanket and put it back in the pile. He threw his blanket down at his spot in the barn and made his way to the kitchen for breakfast. He didn't want to be late.

As he settled into his place, the cook demanded to know where he had gone since he was not sleeping in the barn. Orly was glad that he had rehearsed his alibi. He calmly told him that he slept under the stars in the woods behind the barn. "I found a trail that went all the way to the top of the mountain. I guess that's my way of enjoying the Sabbath. It's just a habit of mine. I'm sorry if I concerned you."

"I'm going to report this to Mr. Kenan. He'll deal with you."

"Yes, sir."

Orly realized that he had acted like a free man and made a decision without asking permission. He hoped that Master Kenan would understand. But at least he wouldn't need to get Benjamin in trouble.

Middle of the afternoon on the Sabbath, Master Kenan called for Orly. Orly quickly obeyed and entered the courtyard where Master Kenan and the other men were sitting. "Did you enjoy your campout last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is there anything that I need to know?"

"I couldn't sleep and took my blanket up a trail behind the barn. There's a beautiful view of the temple from there. I will wash the blanket if that's a problem."

"No, that's not a problem."

Master Kenan turned to the other men and said, "I've never known Orly to be disobedient to me in any way. I totally trust him. I knew that there was not a chance of his being disloyal to me."

"Sir, I was told the trail was part of Mr. Zeke's premises. Was I misinformed?"

Mr. Zeke responded, "No, Orly. You are welcome to hike the trail anytime you wish — that is, if you are not on duty."

"Thank you, sir."

"I haven't been up there in years. But it is a great view of the temple," said Mr. Zeke.

Master Kenan dismissed Orly, and he returned to sit in the garden and think.

On Sunday, Orly reported to the cook and began preparing breakfast. But soon after breakfast, the cook sent him to the main house saying that Master Kenan wanted to talk with him. Orly could

tell that the cook was hoping that Orly was in trouble. He couldn't understand what he had done that had made the cook dislike him. Everyone at Master Kenan's house loved him and helped him to succeed. He had never encountered such a bitter attitude.

Orly quickly took off his apron and reported to Master Kenan. "Orly, we are going to the temple to offer a sacrifice. Since you are now thirteen, you will go with us."

"I have nothing to offer, sir."

"I will provide for you and my other men. Don't worry about it." So Orly went with Master Kenan and the other six men who had traveled with them from Cana. Orly was excited to see the inside of the temple. He had seen the courtyards when he and Benjamin had listened to Jesus teach from the temple steps. Master Kenan purchased a turtledove for each of his slaves and his apprentice. He and Mr. Abraham, his accountant, each purchased a lamb. Then they stood in line waiting their turn. Orly refused to look at the turtledove and just held it down by his side. He had never killed anything and certainly not offered it to God. He remembered the eyes of the Passover lamb and tried to prepare his heart. *So, this is what it means to be a man.* Slowly the line inched forward. The men in line were standing quietly, but the crowds around them caused a terrific cacophony of noise as they haggled for the best price for the animals and argued about the condition of each one. Orly felt confused and conflicted about what it all meant. As they gradually started up the courtyard steps, Orly saw two men teaching and he tried to listen. He could tell they were talking about Jesus, but they were too far away to understand. Orly thought about what he had heard Jesus teaching. *Was that just a year ago?* So much had happened since then, and yet it all looked the same. *Was Jesus the Messiah? Is He really alive after being crucified? Why isn't he teaching?* Then they were inside the temple. The men passed through the court of women and entered into the sacred place reserved for Jewish men. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he felt that surge of emotion from being in the very presence of God Himself. He was still standing in line, but he felt that he had entered Heaven. The walls were pure gold and the candlelight made everything glow. The line was gradually inching forward and before Orly realized it, he was standing before a priest who took the bird from him, wrung its neck and poured out its blood. Then he tossed it on the altar with all the other offerings. Orly suddenly didn't feel worshipful. He felt angry and he wasn't sure why. He had expected this to be a very holy and sacred moment — his first sacrificial offering to God. But instead, the priest treated it like it was nothing. *Did God even know that he had brought his first offering? Did it matter to Him?* Orly had to admit that the priest was probably exhausted after doing this all day with thousands of men bringing their offerings, but still.... His heart ached with the things he couldn't understand. He continued to follow the line as it circled back around to a side door, down some steps and into the courtyard. Now Orly was blinded by the sunshine, and he shuffled along until his eyes adjusted. Master Kenan led them to a side gate

and down a steep ravine. They scrambled up the other side and found themselves in an olive garden. Kobe whispered to Orly that he had often spent nights here with Jesus and that this was where Jesus was arrested. Master Kenan sat down under one of the trees and all the men joined him. He reminded the men that this was Orly's first time in the temple and asked if he or anyone else had questions. Orly didn't know what to ask. Kobe spoke up, "I've spent many happy nights in this garden as I traveled with Jesus. It brings back good memories. Thank you for bringing us here."

"How long did you travel with Jesus, Kobe?" asked Mr. Kenan.

"Just over two years, sir."

"I'd be very interested in learning more about what Jesus was teaching. When we get back to Cana, let's meet and talk."

"I would consider it a privilege to share with you and answer any questions that I can," said Kobe.

"Well, if no one has questions today, we had better start making our way back to Zeke's house or we'll be late for dinner. I didn't realize this would take all day. It seems that Jerusalem gets more crowded each year. We'll need to be ready to leave early tomorrow morning since it is the last day of Passover."

The men promised to be up and ready to travel. Of course, that meant that Orly and the other slaves would be up before dawn to get the oxen and wagon packed and ready to leave. Orly asked, "Will we eat breakfast at Mr. Zeke's, or should we prepare to eat in the oxcart?"

Master Kenan replied. "I think we will eat breakfast with Zeke as usual and then leave. Maybe we'll miss some of the crowds."

Orly's built-in clock woke him exactly one hour before sunrise and he reported to the cook. He prepared breakfast for Mr. Zeke's family and guests while the cook set out leftover bread and olive oil for the servants. While he was cleaning the kitchen, Master Kenan sent a message to the cook that Orly was needed in the wagon. Orly quickly grabbed his travel bag and jumped into the oxcart. He apologized to Master Kenan for holding them up. But Master Kenan explained, "I recognized your cooking at breakfast. I think you've cooked quite a bit while we were here. You were right to be obedient to the cook, and you didn't disobey me. The least I can do to repay Zeke for his hospitality is to let him eat good food occasionally." And with that Master Kenan mounted the seat and they began their slow journey through the crowded streets of Jerusalem. Orly was so glad to be back with Master Kenan and let his praise sink in. *He's proud of me and he likes my cooking!*

Soon they left Jerusalem's crowds, and the oxen began the downward journey at a much faster clip. It was good to clear his head of Jerusalem. This was not the trip he had expected. He felt dirty and tired and sickened by the noise and the filth of the city. He knew that a lot of it was because he had been confined to the kitchen instead of being allowed outdoors. And he was disappointed that he hadn't had more time with Benjamin. But he also knew that the sacrificial offering had something to do with his melancholy. *I guess I thought this year*

would be different because I'm a man, but I'm still a slave — a very impatient slave. He enjoyed feeling the wind in his hair and soon he would see Mother and Hosea again. They would want to hear all about his trip. He needed to rehearse what he would tell them because he didn't want to disappoint them.

That night the men gathered around a campfire for dinner and slept under the stars. Orly noted that Master Kenan seemed more comfortable with the men when Mr. Zeke was not around. He realized again that Jehovah had truly blessed him with a good master. He committed to being the best slave possible for the next few months.

Chapter 4

Master Kenan called Orly into his office one morning while Orly was working with his mother in the kitchen. “Orly, I want you to understand why I am not taking you to Jerusalem with me to celebrate Shavuot. I know you are a man and I promised to take you, but Zeke doesn’t feel that I can treat you differently while you are still a slave. He feels that it would cause trouble with his slaves. So, I need you to report to the Metal Shop every day while I’m away.”

“Yes, sir,” responded Orly. *What a relief! I don’t want to go to Jerusalem, and I certainly don’t want to work for Mr. Zeke’s cook. I would much rather be here!* But of course, he couldn’t say it aloud.

Just like last year, the first few days at the Metal Shop were very busy. But after that, work slowed down and the men had more time to visit and teach Orly the things he needed to know. The two weeks flew by as Lucas challenged Orly to harder projects. Orly’s muscles ached, but it was a good ache. Lucas was pleased with the progress he was making. He still needed to increase his strength, but he knew, with daily practice, his muscles would grow and adjust. Lucas kept encouraging him not to push too fast. It was important to let his body gradually become stronger rather than injuring himself at a young age.



As Kobe shared dinners with Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada, he had been teaching them about his time with Jesus. While in Jerusalem for Shavuot, Kobe invited Mr. Kenan to attend a worship time with friends of his. After they returned from Shavuot, Master Kenan announced to the Jewish men at the shop and all the Jewish servants at his home that they were welcome, but not required, to attend a class each Sabbath afternoon. Kobe would be teaching what he had learned while following Jesus. Orly knew that this was something he wanted to hear. He could hardly wait for the Sabbath.

Orly rose early on the Sabbath to help his mother. There was no cooking, but Mother always set out the food trays for both the house and the servants. Orly sat beside Hosea at breakfast and promised to call him in time for the afternoon meeting. Hosea agreed that he was looking forward to it.

Since he had turned thirteen, Orly had attended Cana’s only synagogue each Sabbath. He was relegated to the back of the room, but enjoyed learning the Psalms that they sang, and he loved hearing the Holy Scriptures read by Ruler Jedidiah. In the afternoon, Orly and his mother sat in the yard while the other servants played games or visited in small clumps. Everyone seemed curious about this gathering that Master Kenan had announced.

When Kobe entered the courtyard and began pacing around, Orly went to get Hosea from his quarters. He held his arm as they crossed the yard and entered the courtyard. He was glad to see that his mother had taken her seat with the other women and children in the back. Master Kenan motioned for them to join him and the other men. Orly noticed that the other slaves were sitting mixed together with the free men. *What is going on?*

Master Kenan realized that the newly arriving servants were uncomfortable and didn't know where to sit. He stood and invited everyone to take a seat — men in the front and women in the back, regardless of slave or free status. He told them that Kobe would be teaching today that Jesus treated all people alike. "But I'll let Kobe do the teaching."

Kobe nervously began, "Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada, thank you for letting us gather here in your courtyard. Jesus not only taught that all men were created equal, but He practiced it daily as He healed and taught. He taught that God created women, and while they are weaker than men in muscles, they are in no way inferior. God created both male and female, both free and slave. The only reason we have separated the women is because we didn't want to make you feel uncomfortable.

"My mother and I were taken into Jesus' group of followers after the death of my abba. I was only twelve at the time and we had no place to go. We would have become slaves if Jesus had not rescued us. We lived and traveled with Jesus for just over two years before He was crucified a year and a half ago. I want to show you that this is not a perversion of the Holy Scripture, but rather a truth that has been ignored. In Moses' writings we are taught that God said that He had created both male and female in His image to rule the earth."

Kobe continued to speak to the group, "Like I said, my mother and I were accepted into the group of Jesus' followers. I was not yet a man, but I was treated with respect. My questions were taken seriously, and I was allowed to help with ministry projects. I had only been with them for about two weeks when the Apostle Philip came and talked with my mother and me. He treated us as equals, even though my mother was, of course, female." The group laughed and seemed to relax as Kobe continued. "The Apostle asked that I call him Philip. There was no pretension or ceremony among Jesus' followers. In fact, Jesus taught that not only was everyone equal in God's eyes, but that the greatest was the servant of all. I want to begin to teach you some of the things I've learned and try to practice as a follower of Jesus. Mr. Kenan and I have been talking and he has agreed to allow us to meet here each Sabbath afternoon. Next week, I want to tell you about the first miracles I saw Jesus perform.

"My challenge to you this week is to treat each other as equals in God's eyes. We may be slaves or free, women or men, children or adults in the world's eyes, but in God's eyes we are all His children and should be treated with respect. Let's put that into practice this week. I'll lead us in prayer, then you are free to go. Abba, Father,

thank You for allowing us to meet and learn more about Your Son, Messiah, Jesus. Thank You for Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada and thank You for each person that attended today. I ask that You bless each one with understanding and the desire to follow You. I ask this in Jesus' name."

Orly listened and knew this was the information he needed. He could hardly wait for the next meeting. All week he thought about what Kobe had taught and tried to understand what Jesus would want him to do and be. But he also knew that he still had two more months of slavery and didn't want to do anything that would displease Master Kenan.

The next Sabbath, Orly noticed that almost thirty benches were set up in the courtyard and just about every Jewish slave was present with their families, plus a couple of families from the Metal Shop. Instead of the women being seated in the back, there was a special section for them set up beside the men, but with an aisle separating them. Mrs. Vada sat with the women servants and Mr. Kenan sat with the men servants mixed with the free men from his shop. No one hesitated since Mr. Kenan seemed totally comfortable with it.

Kobe, as promised, told about his first trip with Jesus. He emphasized that, while he was only twelve, Jesus included him and treated him with respect. He told about the laughing and teasing and about his learning to row a boat. Kobe was a good storyteller, and everyone could identify with learning new things in a scary new environment.

Then he talked about seeing Jesus heal individuals. He told about seeing the blind, the lame, the deaf and mute, the crippled, the sick, and even the leper healed. Then he asked how many of them were present when Jesus turned the water into wine at Mr. Kenan's son's wedding. Most of the servants raised their hand. "I wasn't here for that event, but I saw something very similar." Everyone was all ears. "I saw Jesus take two small fish and five rounds of bread and feed five-thousand men, their wives, and children with it! I was so shocked I couldn't take my eyes off Jesus. I saw the fish and bread. I know there wasn't enough to feed two grown men. But Jesus broke it and blessed it and started handing the broken pieces to his apostles and they started passing it out. I tasted it. It was the best I had ever tasted. It wasn't fake. It wasn't a magic trick. It was an incredible experience to be there." Tears began to flow down Kobe's cheeks as he remembered. "I knew then that I was in the presence of a superman. He was no ordinary human being. He was God in the flesh.

"But that wasn't all that I saw on that trip. After we had gathered up all the leftover fish and bread, Jesus told us to return to Capernaum. We got in the boats and started back. Jesus stayed to spend some time in prayer. We made it about halfway across the lake when a terrific storm came up. We rowed and rowed, but the wind was against us, and we weren't making any progress at all. About that time everyone started screaming that there was a ghost walking toward us. Something white was walking on top of the water. It definitely had a

human shape. We were all so very tired, some of the men began crying, others were screaming for help, and others were trying to find weapons. It was total chaos. I tried to scream, but nothing would come out. I've never been so scared, and all this time the storm was raging around us. I was supposed to be bailing water, but I forgot everything and just watched the ghost come closer. Our boat was pitching and tossing like a toy. At least when the waves tipped it on its side, it helped pour the water out and I didn't have to bail so much, but I thought for sure I would be poured out into the sea, too. Finally, the ghost spoke, and we recognized Jesus' voice. He said, 'Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.' There's no way to describe the relief we felt. Nor could we explain how Jesus was walking on the water even in the middle of the storm. There is no explanation because it is impossible for a mere man to do. When some of the men helped Jesus into the boat, the wind just stopped, and we were docked in Capernaum. Thinking back on this event, I see multiple miracles. I saw Jesus feeding the five-thousand men plus their families. I saw Jesus walking on the water. I saw Him stopping the storm, and I saw Him transporting all our boats three or four miles to the shore. And that is just my first adventure with Jesus.

"Today, I want to encourage you to bring your worries and fears and questions to Jesus and hear His words, 'It is I. Do not be afraid.' Following Jesus doesn't keep you out of the storms of life, but He promises to go with you and help you through them." Kobe then prayed and dismissed the group.

Orly wondered how Jesus could help anyone when he was obviously dead. Yet, it seemed that Kobe felt that he could. That was fascinating to Orly. His hunger just grew bigger. For four weeks Kobe taught what he learned from Jesus and each week the group listened.

Master Kenan, Kobe, and the other Jewish men traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot. The Sabbath meetings didn't happen for the two weeks they were away and once again Orly was left behind to work at the Metal Shop. Two weeks after Sukkot, he would be a free man.

Master Kenan and the group returned from Jerusalem late on Friday and soon the word was being passed around that the meeting would take place on Sabbath afternoon as usual. Kobe had been teaching what he had learned from Jesus in more or less chronological order, and everyone was eager to hear what came next. Kobe told about Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and the outrage of the Pharisees. He talked about Jesus' statement that God had made the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath. He closed with prayer and stayed around to visit with those who had questions. Everyone seemed glad to have Kobe back.

Orly went back to his normal schedule and was eager to hear how Hosea was doing and what he thought of the new slave that had been assigned to take Orly's place when he became Master Kenan's apprentice next week. "Orly, there will never be another one like you. I'm so proud of you. It would be a shame for you to stay here and pull

weeds for the rest of your life. And trust me, I may be old, but I'll get that young'un straightened out and make him into a fine man." Orly grinned as he remembered the many times Hosea had "straightened him out." Hosea had always been kind and wise, but he had been firm and unbending when he set the rules.

On Monday, Orly was working in the kitchen with his mother when Master Kenan sent for him. His mother gave him a quick hug and sent him on his way. She knew that everything was changing and, while she was so very proud of Orly, she felt afraid for all that it would bring. Once again, she was very grateful that Master Kenan was allowing slaves and free men to talk and visit together. She wouldn't totally lose her son. For that she was very grateful.

Orly knocked on Master Kenan's door and entered when invited. Master Kenan looked at the sun dial in the yard and declared it to be official. Orly was now a free man. "I would like to welcome you as my newest apprentice. You will need to move your things into the room with Kobe. As my apprentice, you will take meals with Mrs. Vada and me. You will work from one hour after sunrise until sunset each day except the Sabbath. You will be allowed a break at noon with the other men. I will be your supervisor, but Lucas will help with your training also. When you enter your second year as an apprentice, I will pay you per job for the work you do. This will allow you to save up some money to take care of yourself when you complete the apprenticeship. I may or may not be able to offer you a job when you are done, but that is my plan. It will be based on how good of a blacksmith you become, but I will do my best to teach you well. Do you have any questions?"

"I don't think so. Thank you, sir."

"Good. I'll let you go and get settled in your new quarters and then we'll meet at the water pots at sundown. Kobe will join us there when he's through with work."

"Thank you, Master Kenan."

"Orly, I'm no longer your master, so you'll have to learn to call me Mr. Kenan."

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I'll try to remember."

"It's okay. I know it will be a hard habit to break, but you are a free man now."

"Yes, sir." Orly continued to sit quietly waiting to be dismissed.

Once again, Mr. Kenan reminded him that he was a free man and he should stand and leave the room while saying, "Good day, sir." Orly's mouth fell open. He had never even considered that he was free to get up and leave when he wanted. His head was spinning.

"Mr. Kenan, would it be all right if I disturbed your cook for just a moment. I know that she is busy but I think she deserves a quick hug."

"I certainly agree. You may disturb my cook."

"Good day, sir, and thank you for ... everything." He stood in the hallway leading to the kitchen and just let it sink in. *I am free. I am finally free.*

Orly entered the kitchen and surprised his mother with a hug. She was busy finishing the preparations for dinner. He told her that he was going to get his stuff and move in with Kobe and that he would be eating with the family. She already knew those things but realized that Orly just needed to say them out loud to make them real. "Get out of here. I've got work to do!"

Orly walked to the slave quarters where he had spent the last eight years of his life. He didn't have anything except an extra work robe and a heavy robe for traveling to Jerusalem. He wasn't sure whether to take his blanket or not, but he packed it in his travel bag just in case he needed it. He could always bring it back. He picked up three little rocks that he had collected and hid in the corner by his spot on the floor. He had found them at various places as he worked, and each one contained enough quartz to make it sparkle in the sunlight. As he entered the small room that he and Kobe would share, he was startled to find two thick mats for sleeping. There was a nice soft blanket on the mat that looked like it belonged to Kobe. The other mat was empty, so he threw his blanket down on that one. He placed his extra robes in one of the boxes that was beside the mat and tucked his rocks into the other one. The room was bare except for the two mats and the boxes and a lamp on a small shelf. All they really needed was a place to sleep and it was adequate. Orly sat down on his mat and realized that he'd never sat on anything so soft and comfortable. He began to weep as he wished his mother could sleep on this mat instead of him. Today had been such a big day — bigger than turning thirteen. Now he was a man, and he was free.

As the sun began to set, Orly walked to the ceremonial washing pots to meet Mr. Kenan. Soon Kobe joined them. Orly had seen the Jewish men doing this, but he had always been the one filling the pots or handing them the towel. He tried to copy Mr. Kenan and Kobe as they washed their faces and their hands. A young slave handed Orly a towel and called him "sir." Orly's heart wanted to assure the youngster that slavery didn't have to be forever. But he knew that he was supposed to play the part of the new apprentice and wanted to make a good impression on Mr. Kenan, so he just said, "Thank you."

His only experience in the dining room was as a servant, and Kobe whispered what was expected of him several times. It was hard to sit and be served instead of serving others. Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada did all they could to make him feel more comfortable. After dinner, Kobe stood and said, "Orly, are you ready to go to our room? I'll help you move your things."

"I moved in this afternoon. I hope that was okay with you. But I am ready to go if you are."

"Shalom. Thank you for a lovely meal," said Kobe.

"Yes, thank you and shalom," echoed Orly.

As they walked to their room, Orly wondered how Kobe felt about sharing his room with him. But the minute they walked into the room and shut the door, he was completely convinced of his welcome. Kobe grabbed Orly in a huge bear hug and began to dance around the

room. “Free! Free! You are a free man! And now we get to room together. I’ve been so lonely I thought I would die. I could hardly wait for dinner to be over so that we could visit, just the two of us.”

“Okay,” said Orly, still unsure of what was expected of him. He was thoroughly shocked by Kobe’s exuberance. “I hope you don’t mind my being a slave and all.”

“Orly, you are no longer a slave, and I would have been your friend even while you were except for Mr. Kenan’s rules about not hanging out with the slaves. I’m really, really happy to not be alone after dinner every night. I didn’t fit with the older men from the shop since they all have families, and I wasn’t allowed to visit with the slaves. It has been a really hard year for me.”

“I didn’t realize that. I guess I assumed you visited with Mr. Kenan after dinner.”

“Sometimes, but not very often. After all, they are old enough to be my grandparents. But I have enjoyed getting to know them. So, tell me about yourself. How long have you been with Mr. Kenan?” asked Kobe.

Orly stretched out on his mat and watched as Kobe blew out the lamp and crawled into his blanket.

“Are you sure I’m not in heaven?” asked Orly. “I have never felt anything this soft.” He yawned and stretched.

“Don’t you go to sleep! I want to know your story — at least talk to me for a little while. I’ve looked forward to this night for a whole year,” said Kobe.

“Okay. My mother and I were from Bethsaida and my abba made ropes for the fishermen there. I don’t remember him at all. He died on the Sea of Galilee with two other fishermen in a sudden storm. My mother obviously couldn’t make rope and I was only five. She couldn’t find a job that would pay enough to cover the taxes on our little house, so the Romans took our house and sentenced us both to six years of slavery. Mr. Kenan was visiting his cousin in Bethsaida and heard that we would be on the slave block. My mother was a friend of Mr. Kenan’s cousin, so he bought us to keep us together. When he tasted my mother’s cooking, the rest is history.”

“Not so fast. If you were five and now you are thirteen, that doesn’t add up,” exclaimed Kobe.

“Exactly. I became free just before I turned twelve. But Mr. Kenan offered to set me up in an apprenticeship of my choosing if I continued as a slave for two more years. He is a very kind man, and I will be forever grateful that he let me stay with my mother until I was old enough to be on my own. If I had left at age eleven, I would have ended up back on the slave block. Instead, I will learn a career that will support me for the rest of my life.”

“Orly, I’m so glad you are here. It’s going to be good to have a friend. I’ll let you go to sleep now. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Kobe. It’s been a big day for me, and there’s lots of work to do tomorrow.”

Orly woke up exactly one hour before sunrise. He jumped up and started to run toward the door, when he realized that Mr. Kenan would not expect him for breakfast until sunrise. He hoped that he hadn't woken Kobe, but when the sun began to brighten the sky, he realized that Kobe was not on his mat. *That's curious.* Orly lay back down on his mat and wondered what the slaves were talking about in the kitchen. He missed helping Mother set out breakfast and he wondered what his first day as an apprentice would be like.

Soon Kobe opened the door and informed Orly it was time. They quickly washed their faces and hands and joined Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada for breakfast. Afterward the three men walked to the Metal Shop together with a young slave boy. Mr. Kenan told Orly that he would be working under Lucas this morning as he would need to train the new shop boy to take his place.

When they arrived at the Metal Shop, Lucas already had the fire going, and the other workers were beginning to arrive. The new shop boy looked scared to death and Orly wanted to assure him that he would be fine. But of course, he wasn't sure if he was allowed to mingle with the slaves. Kobe, however, had no such qualms and quickly greeted the boy. He warned him that there was a lot of hard work, but that if he had any questions, he would be glad to help him. Orly remembered the first time he had come to the shop two years ago. No one reassured him that day. It was weeks before he felt comfortable. He was glad that Kobe was changing that.

Mr. Kenan told Lucas, "Just start Orly out anyway you see fit. I'll take over whenever I get the new shop boy started."

Lucas whispered to Orly, "I haven't told Mr. Kenan about our work for the past two years. He's going to be totally surprised. And I've got the perfect project for you to work on. I just got an order for twenty ox yokes. They are stacked in the back and each one needs four eye rings put in them. Think you can do that?"

Orly grinned and thanked Lucas again for getting him ready for this day. He asked Lucas to sketch out the two sizes for the eye rings since he couldn't remember the exact measurement. Lucas took a piece of charcoal and sketched them out on the table by his anvil. Then Orly went to the storeroom and picked up one of the yokes. He grabbed a piece of iron and started the process of hammering it into a long snake. Using the charcoal drawing, he quickly shaped it into the proper-sized eye. This eye would hold the ropes to whatever the ox was pulling. He started the second eye while the first one was cooling. This eye would hold the reins. Just as he was finishing, Mr. Kenan came up behind him. Lucas let out a yell and Orly turned just in time to see Mr. Kenan's look of total surprise.

"Orly, what are you doing? I mean, you are doing this like you know what you are doing. I mean, where did you learn to do this? I thought I was going to teach you to hammer a pancake!"

Everyone in the shop laughed at Mr. Kenan's surprise and at the joke Lucas and Orly had played on him. Lucas explained, "During those festival weeks while you were in Jerusalem and work was slow, I

have been teaching Orly to be a blacksmith. It just so happened that our order this morning is something that Orly has already mastered — so I put him to work.” Mr. Kenan was beyond pleased. “I think I will retire and let you two run the shop!” Everyone laughed and Lucas assured him there was still plenty that Orly needed to learn. As Mr. Kenan watched Orly work, he commented that he had had a very good teacher. *Thank You, God, for making my first day easy. You have blessed me so much.* Orly returned to the storeroom, grabbed the next yoke, and began working on the rings for it. At noon, he joined the men under the trees and stretched out on the grass. The work was familiar, but standing in one place was going to take some getting used to. By the end of the day, Orly had finished five of the yokes. Mr. Kenan was extremely pleased, and Lucas was bursting with pride in his protégé.

Mr. Kenan, Orly, Kobe, and Joshua, the new shop boy, walked home together. The free men went straight to the washing pots and joined Mrs. Vada for dinner. This time it was Mother who served Orly’s dinner, and he wasn’t sure what the protocol was. He thanked her politely as he saw Mr. Kenan do, but he was afraid to acknowledge her for fear it would get her in trouble. After they went to their room, Kobe asked Orly why he didn’t say hello to his mother.

“Kobe, being a slave is probably as foreign to you as being a free man is to me. There are things that are just drilled into your head. One of my earliest crimes was speaking to a free man without permission. I was only five. A guest of Master Kenan’s dropped his wallet. I picked it up for him and commented that it was nice or something to that effect. I was not beaten, but I was not allowed food or water for twenty-four hours to teach me not to speak to free men. A different master might have beaten me, or I could have been killed. I know in my heart that Mr. Kenan has relaxed his rules, but my head keeps warning me not to get her in trouble. She knows I love her. But she is still a slave, and I don’t want to cause her any problems. I felt the same way at the shop today when Mr. Kenan introduced Joshua. I wanted to assure him that everything would be okay. I’m so glad that you put him at ease and welcomed him. Things are so much better since you have been here. I’ve really seen a difference in Mr. Kenan,” said Orly.

“That’s good.”

“Kobe, I know you want to talk, but I promised to check on Hosea before night, do you want to go with me? I won’t stay long, but I need to check and make sure he’s all right.”

“Sure, I’d love to go with you.” So, the two young men headed across the yard to the men’s quarters. Orly led Kobe to Hosea’s spot, but Hosea was sound asleep already, so they didn’t wake him. Several of the slaves were already sleeping and others were getting settled with their blankets on the floor. They headed back to their room.

Once they were settled on their mats, Kobe whispered, “Orly, are you awake?”

“Yeah, what’s up?”

“Orly, when I traveled with Jesus, we mostly slept on the ground, but I’ve never seen people sleeping on a stone floor like that. They don’t have pillows or anything. After working all day, that must be terrible.”

“It’s hard and it’s cold, too. The women slaves sleep the same way.”

“Even your mother?”

“Yep. Even my mother. And I’m sleeping on a mat. If there was any way possible, I’d give her my mat. She works harder than anyone I know. But that’s your introduction to slavery. And don’t forget, Mr. Kenan is a very, very good master. Mr. Zeke’s slaves sleep in the barn on a dirt floor with the animals. Let’s call it a night.”

“Thanks, Orly. Good night.”

When Orly woke the next morning an hour before dawn, he got up and walked over to check on Hosea. They met as Hosea was headed toward the kitchen for breakfast. Orly walked beside him, and they visited briefly. Hosea agreed that evening visits probably weren’t going to work. Orly didn’t enter the kitchen but turned and sat in the courtyard until he saw Kobe coming toward the water pots. Together they washed and went into the house for breakfast.

Nothing was mentioned about Orly turning fourteen, but he knew the day it happened. After dinner he walked around awhile before joining Kobe in the room. So much had happened in this past year, and he wanted time to process it alone.

Orly and Kobe fell into a good routine as roommates. Kobe had his early morning prayer time, while Orly checked on Hosea. Then, after breakfast, they walked to work together. After work and dinner, they either went for a walk or went straight to their room and talked until sleep overtook them. Since neither one had siblings, they learned how to be brothers. Each Sabbath morning, they would attend synagogue together. Each Sabbath afternoon Kobe would teach Mr. Kenan’s group the things he had learned from Jesus. Often Kobe would join Orly and his mother afterward as they visited under the trees.

Chapter 5

Soon it was time for the Passover trip. Kobe was looking forward to seeing his friends in Jerusalem, but Orly was dreading it and wishing he could stay in Cana. As Mr. Kenan's apprentice, he felt that he had no choice. He knew the trip itself would be fun, but he dreaded being at Mr. Zeke's house and felt that he would not be welcome. *Two more years. I can do it for two more years. It seems I'm always waiting for something. First it was freedom, then turning thirteen, then freedom again. Now it's finishing the apprenticeship. Will it really ever end?*

As Orly expected, the trip to Jerusalem with Mr. Kenan's Jewish slaves and employees was fun. There was a total of seven men, four of them free men and three of them slaves. Yet, there was no difference as they visited and camped together under the stars. Orly relaxed and was so grateful for the changes that Kobe had brought. Mr. Kenan was still the boss, but there was much laughter and teasing without the differentiation between slave and free. And then they arrived at Mr. Zeke's just before sundown on Wednesday.

Immediately, everyone could feel the tension. Mr. Zeke welcomed Mr. Kenan, Mr. Abraham, and Kobe warmly. Then he stopped and stared at Orly, but he addressed his brother. "I see you decided to bring your former slave." Orly wasn't sure what to do. He stood totally frozen with fear. He hadn't been treated like this for several months and he had forgotten how degrading it felt to be talked about as if you were not present. Kobe turned to Mr. Kenan and said, "I know you said you would provide our accommodations, but Orly and I will be staying with friends of mine." And before Mr. Kenan could reply, Kobe pulled Orly toward the gate. Orly was so shocked he could hardly get his legs to move. Orly's thinking had switched to that of a slave. He had totally forgotten that he was a free man. Once they were out of sight, Kobe led Orly to a grassy area where they could sit. "My friend, you will not be treated like that in my presence!"

"But what will happen? Will we lose our jobs? I don't want to get you in trouble," Orly blurted out.

"I am a free man. You are a free man. We can make our own choices. Nothing says that we have to celebrate Passover at Mr. Zeke's. And I know for a fact that Mr. Kenan doesn't approve of his brother's attitude. He told me the last time we were here that he was worried that this would happen. I told him I could always find lodging for us with friends. So, he's known all along that this might come up."

And finally, Orly could breathe. "So, Mr. Kenan knew that you were going to do that?"

"Yes. I told him if there was a problem, I would leave and take you with me. He agreed that that might become necessary."

"I wish you had told me ahead of time. I haven't been that afraid in a long time. I felt like a slave disobeying orders. You can get killed for that!"

"I know, but you are not a slave. I was hoping Zeke would be reasonable. I didn't want you getting all worried about the visit."

"I've been worried about this visit since last Passover!"

"You should have told me!" cried Kobe. "I could have assured you I wouldn't let it happen."

"Thanks." They sat in silence while Orly let it sink in that he didn't ever have to stay at Mr. Zeke's again. "So, what's the plan?"

"I've got friends all over Jerusalem and any of them will welcome us to their Seder. Then tomorrow we can look up your friend, Benjamin, while the market is open. Tomorrow is the Judean Day of Preparation, so he should be at the market."

"Okay by me. I'm starving."

"Me, too. Let's head to Mary's house. She'll have a houseful and won't mind two more. Her only son, John Mark, is a friend of mine, but I think he's living in Greece. Mary leads a home group similar to the one I lead at Mr. Kenan's." Orly was shocked that a woman would be leading anything, but remembered that Jesus had taught that women were spiritually equal to men. He looked forward to meeting Kobe's friends. Most of them had traveled with Jesus and could tell him first-hand what had happened after Jesus' resurrection. His heart was pounding with anticipation.

He was not disappointed. Mary's house was filled with people and soon the sound of "Kobe's here!" was repeated through each room. Everyone greeted Orly warmly. He felt that he had fallen into an ocean of peace, love, and joy. Here the men and women mingled together, and little children were everywhere. Smiles and laughter dominated the house, and occasionally groups would begin to sing Psalms. There was no room large enough for everyone, so, they moved into the courtyard and James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus, led them through the traditional Seder. The Apostle Peter spoke about the last Seder that they celebrated with Jesus, and Orly didn't understand a lot of what he was talking about. They passed out rounds of bread and refilled the wine glasses. Everyone was quiet as Peter reminded them that Jesus said that the bread would represent His body and the wine His blood that was poured out for them. Orly felt strange and wasn't at all sure what was happening. But there would be time to ask Kobe later. After singing a song together, many of the families with small children left, but people were still coming and going. Kobe introduced him to Philip the apostle, and his wife and daughter. Kobe picked up the little five-year-old girl and hugged her. She was thrilled to see "Uncle Kobe." Kobe explained that when he and his mother first arrived, Sarah was a newborn, and his mother did a lot of babysitting for her.

"Where's Jordan?" Kobe asked Philip.

"Oh, you wouldn't recognize him. He's twelve now and thinks he's full grown. He's off with friends somewhere. I think I'm feeding him too much. Oh, there he is. Jordan! Kobe's here." Jordan quickly dashed across the room and embraced Kobe. Even though he was only twelve, he was taller than Kobe.

Someone was calling for Kobe in the courtyard. "Go on and visit with your friends. I'm comfortable here and I'm sure Philip will straighten me out if I have questions." So, Kobe joined a group of men out in the courtyard while Orly visited with Philip. He learned that Philip had recently moved his family to an area just outside of Jericho in Samaria. He was leading a small home group and was traveling around Samaria preaching and teaching about Jesus. Soon Thomas, another apostle, joined them with twin boys who were just about Orly's age. Thomas owned a farm north of Capernaum. Orly wanted to spend more time with the boys, Daniel and Gideon, but Thomas said it was getting late and they could visit all week. As Thomas and his boys left, Philip said he was going to take his family to the olive garden to get settled for the night. He asked where Orly and Kobe were staying, and Orly replied that he had no idea. He assured Philip that he would wait for Kobe, and they would probably join them in the garden later. Orly didn't want to keep Philip's family waiting. He mingled with other late visitors and found some apricots to munch on while he waited for Kobe to finish. About an hour later, Kobe came into the house with a glow about him that Orly had never seen. Orly told him that Philip and Thomas said they were welcome to camp with them in the olive garden. Kobe just quietly agreed and led them to a place near the back of the garden where Philip and Thomas and their families were sleeping with several other families. Kobe and Orly threw down their blankets and were quickly asleep.

Orly woke at dawn and lay quietly in his blanket waiting for sunrise. He thought about the people he had met and the joy that just oozed out of each one. People had come and gone all evening, but all exhibited that same special confidence that Kobe had. Orly hoped that somehow this trip would explain all that. *I've wanted to be a Jesus follower since I met Jesus when I was only nine. Now I'm fourteen and it's time to figure this out. And what is with Kobe? He was acting so strangely last night. He was literally glowing like a lamp was burning inside of him. I've never seen him look that way — happy, serious, determined. What was that look?* Kobe stirred and Orly realized that he was going deeper into the garden to pray alone. *I wonder if we'll find Benjamin today.*

As the sun rose, the other campers began to stir, eat their breakfast and scatter. Kobe said, "Orly, I need to talk with you. I know you want to see if you can find Benjamin, but since this is the Judean Day of Preparation, he's probably going to be too busy to visit. Would it be okay with you if we just stayed here and talked for a while?"

"Sure," said Orly, wondering if he had done something wrong.

"Let's walk around. I've got so much I want to say, and I feel like I'm going to explode. Orly, those men I was praying with last night were the main leaders of our group. James the Just is Jesus' half-brother. He oversees all the groups in Jerusalem. The other two men were the Apostles James and John. They do a lot of preaching in and around Jerusalem. They are originally from Capernaum, so they travel and teach all over that area, too." Kobe continued, "They asked me to

tell them about the group that I was leading in Cana. So, I did. They seemed pleased and encouraged me to continue. Then they asked me how many had become followers and I told them that I hadn't gotten to that part yet. They insisted that I had it all backward. I got so excited when they told me I should start with the resurrection and what it all meant because that's the most important." Kobe was becoming more and more excited as he spoke. "That makes a lot more sense! I was getting discouraged just teaching about Jesus. I need to be helping the group, and you, know how to follow Jesus for yourselves!"

Orly assured him, "That's what I've been wanting to hear. But I know I need to hear what Jesus taught, too."

"Yes, I want to teach you everything that Jesus taught, but I must teach you about who Jesus is, why He died, what His resurrection means, and what following Him is all about. He's not just our example or teacher. He came to give us life. Oh, I'm so excited and feel that I can't wait to get back and begin to teach from the other direction! I think that's why I was getting discouraged. I was getting bogged down because I was starting at the wrong end."

"Uh, Kobe, I really don't understand what you are talking about, but I want to know. I've never understood why Jesus had to die, or what it all means. So, I think the men are right."

"I know they are right. Jesus died because He was the Messiah promised by God since the very beginning. God told Adam and Eve that someday one of their offspring would defeat Satan. Then Moses recorded it again when God promised Abraham that the Messiah would come from his seed and pay the price for our sin. Then God just kept promising to send the Messiah for 1800 years."

"I didn't go to Hebrew School, so I'm not following you," Orly informed him sadly.

"That's great! I didn't either!" Kobe exclaimed to Orly's amazement. Kobe assured him, "It's great, because if I can explain it to someone with no background, then I should be able to explain it to anyone. Oh, this is going to be so fun! There's so much I want to tell you. Do you mind if I practice on you?"

"Not at all! I want to understand."

"Orly, you know I've told you about Jesus doing lots and lots of miracles."

"Yeah."

"You need to know that Jesus wasn't doing that stuff by Himself. It was God inside of Him."

"Whoa, I'm already lost." Orly shook his head in dismay.

"It's like this. You have a physical body, right?"

"I certainly think so," agreed Orly.

"And inside of that, you have a self, or a mind, or a personality, or whatever you call it. I call it a self. Even if someone chopped off my arm, I would still be me."

"Okay, I understand that, but what has that got to do with Jesus?"

"Hold on, I think I can explain, just give me a minute. This is so new for me to try to put into words."

“Okay, take your time. I have a physical body and I have a self.” Orly waited quietly while Kobe tried to figure out how to explain more.

Kobe continued, “Inside of that, everybody has an empty spot. It’s like their core. At their very core, they are empty. They feel empty and they are always looking, and longing for something to make that core not feel so empty. Does that make sense?”

“I think so. I know that I often just feel a deep loneliness or maybe feel almost like a hunger for something, but I don’t know what I’m hungry for. Maybe I need a wife.”

“Okay, but let’s not go there!” Both men laughed.

“What I’m trying to say is that Jesus came to earth the same way. Jesus had a physical body and a self, but inside of Him, instead of an empty core, His core was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

“Sorry, I don’t know what that means.”

“Okay, God’s Spirit is like His thoughts. I guess the Holy Spirit is like God’s self. Jesus was filled with God’s Spirit or self. His core wasn’t empty like ours. And the Holy Spirit was guiding Him and telling Him what to do and giving Him the power to do it.”

“You are saying that this Holy Spirit was God inside of Jesus like his boss or Master?” Orly asked.

“Exactly!” exclaimed Kobe. “That’s a great way to put it! Several times, I heard Jesus say that it wasn’t Him doing the miracles. It was God. That’s how He healed people. That’s how He walked on water. And He was always saying that the Holy Spirit led Him to do things — like told Him where to go or what to say.”

“That’s cool,” agreed Orly. Kobe seemed deep in thought and Orly waited for him to begin again.

After a few minutes, Kobe continued. “I think I’m making a mess of this. I think I started in the wrong place. This is harder than I thought it would be. There’s so much I want you to understand, and I keep leaving out important stuff.”

“That’s okay. I’m willing to let you practice on me, as long as you eventually answer my questions.”

“Thanks,” sighed Kobe. “I was just praying and trying to figure out what I need to tell you to make everything connect.”

“I can wait,” said Orly.

“Okay. Let’s try it this way. I told you that the Messiah was promised over 1800 years ago, but I left out why. God said that He would send a Messiah to pay for our sins. You see, God is holy and we’re not. We mess up. God wanted the people of Israel to know that they needed a Messiah, so He gave them plenty of rules and regulations to prove to them that they needed a Messiah. Does that make sense?”

“Sorta. Are you saying that He set it up so that they would fail?”

“No,” said Kobe, “they were already failing. They just didn’t know it. So, He gave them this bunch of rules to show them how badly they were failing. For example, one of the rules is to not lie. He knew that all of them lied at times, so He gave them the rule so they would know that it was wrong. Does that explain it better?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“From the beginning, God has said that if you sinned, the penalty was death — eternal separation from God. But then He sent Jesus to pay the penalty.”

“I’m totally lost again. I thought all Jews went to heaven. Are you saying they don’t?”

“Jesus taught that the entire Jewish sacrificial system was temporary and just a picture of what He would someday do. God promised that, someday, He would send a Messiah to be the sacrificial lamb who would die in our place and pay for our sins.”

“So, Jesus died to pay for my sins?” Orly asked incredulously.

“Yes, yours and everyone else’s. Even back in Moses’ writings, God declared that Jesus wouldn’t die just for Israelites. He died for everyone — Jews and Greeks and Romans and, well, everyone! What is amazing to me is that since God spelled out the plan to Abraham, our Jewish leaders have been making changes and setting new rules and ignoring others. They essentially created their own religion. When the Messiah finally arrived, He messed up their plans. Jesus came to set things straight. He died for our sins and to set up the New Way which is actually the old way that God had planned all along.”

“So, it was the Jewish leaders who had Jesus crucified?” Orly whispered. “Benjamin and I were wondering about that.”

“Well, not exactly. Jesus came to earth for the express purpose of dying for our sins. God just used the current Jewish leadership to make it happen. Jesus had to die to pay for our sins.”

“Wow. That makes sense.” Orly sat quietly for a few minutes then added, “But I don’t know what that has to do with the Holy Spirit being inside Jesus. Are those two things connected?”

“Oh, yeah! Jesus told the apostles during their last Seder together that He would send the Holy Spirit to live inside of them. Fifty days after the crucifixion, on the first day of Shavuot, or Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and began to dwell inside all of the followers of Jesus who had accepted Him as their Messiah. I was actually there. It was incredible! The Holy Spirit filled my empty core and has been guiding me and helping me with stuff ever since.”

“Can you walk on water?” asked Orly seriously.

“Well, I haven’t tried. But I have heard Him speaking to me and leading me. I haven’t healed anyone because I haven’t heard Him tell me to. But He did tell me to talk with Mr. Kenan about starting the group — and that happened. And He told me to invite the women — and that happened. So, I know it’s real.”

“I know it’s real, too, because ever since I met you, I’ve felt that you had something that I wanted,” said Orly. “You seem to have a supernatural confidence and wisdom. I was determined to find out what that was all about. When I walked in the room last night, it seemed that everyone there had that same special something. I couldn’t identify what it was, but I knew it was the same thing that you had, and the same thing that Jesus had when I met him at Seth’s wedding.”

“That’s reassuring to hear that you can actually see the difference from the outside. I feel the difference, but of course, I can’t see it.”

“You still haven’t told me how I can get it, too,” laughed Orly. “I think that was the point of this whole discussion.”

“Oh, man. I’m sorry. Let’s back up and try it again. Before Jesus died, no one had this access to God except Jesus. Everyone just had the empty core. God designed it inside of each person so that they will search for Him, their Creator, and desire to be in a right relationship with Him. But lots of people try to fill their core with other things like money, or fame, or religion. Solomon said he tried to fill his empty core with wine, women, and song — or entertainment. He said that it was pointless. That’s because the only thing that will fill the empty core is a relationship with God. And the only way to have a relationship with God is to have your sins forgiven. And the only way to have your sins forgiven is to ask Jesus to be your Messiah and accept his payment for them.” Kobe ended with a flourish and then realized that Orly was still puzzled. “So, what did I leave out? You still look like you have questions.”

Orly struggled to express his question, but finally just blurted out, “But how? How do I do that? I think I understand what you are saying, and I agree with it. But what do I have to do?”

“Just ask. Just pray and ask God to let Jesus pay for your sins and be Your Messiah. He’ll do the rest. Your sins have already been paid for, but you have to claim it. It’s sorta like me bringing you a gift. God has brought you the best gift possible, but you have to choose whether to take it or reject it. It’s entirely up to you.”

“Kobe, I’ve wanted to become a follower of Jesus since I first met him. Can I do it right now?”

“Sure!”

Both young men got on their knees and Orly prayed, “God, I’m asking that You’ll let Jesus be my Messiah to pay for my sins and let me be in a right relationship with You. I want that more than anything.”

Kobe added, “Thank You, Father, for hearing Orly’s prayer. Fill him with Your Holy Spirit and lead him forward. In Jesus’ name I pray.”

Orly had the biggest grin on his face. He felt a peace that he had never known. He wanted to shout to the world that Jesus was his Messiah and that something really good was happening inside of him. He could feel the empty spot disappearing. He felt like he was filled with a happiness that would just gush all over anyone he met.

Kobe was pacing up and down. He was so excited for Orly. “Do you want me to answer some more questions, or do you want to go back to Mary’s house and tell everyone, or do you want to see if we can find Benjamin? I’ll be glad to let you choose what you want to do.”

“Well, I definitely want to go to Mary’s house again and tell my big news. And I definitely want to be there for dinner. I’m starving already and it’s only midafternoon. Do you mind if we go by the market and let me see if I can find Benjamin?”

“No, I don’t mind at all. I should probably purchase some fruit or something to contribute to the meal tonight since we’ll be eating there

again. But remember, it's going to be really, really crowded at the market." As they walked out of the garden, Kobe said, "Thanks again for listening and figuring out what I was trying to say. I've got to get better at this and I'm going to need some practice. Please let me know if you have any questions. There's still so much I want to teach you about following Jesus."

"I thought becoming a free man was the happiest day of my life, but this is even better. I had hoped that I would have time to talk with you while we were here in Jerusalem. And now, I'm just so excited. I can't explain it. But I'll always be grateful to you for teaching me."

They climbed across the ravine and into the main part of Jerusalem. The streets were packed with Passover travelers. Kobe led Orly along the back streets so that they missed some of the crowds. The market wasn't as crowded as they expected because it was getting late in the day and most of the Judeans were home preparing for their Seder. The men wandered around for a while but didn't see any sign of Benjamin. They did find the Sword and Knife Shop, but the owner said that Benjamin was no longer spending nights there. "I don't know where he spends his nights now, but he's still around. I see him sweeping, and every now and then he runs an errand for me. Sorry, I don't know where he is right now. You'll probably find him if you come back earlier tomorrow."

"Thanks," said both men as they left. Kobe bought some grapes and apricots and they headed to Mary's house. Orly wondered if the people he met last night would notice the difference in him. He felt brand new inside and so full of peace.

As expected, Mary's house was filled with people. Kobe greeted old friends and introduced Orly to them. It seemed that he knew everyone, but he got really excited when he saw the Apostle Simon. They greeted each other with a long hug and Orly left them alone to catch up.

A group from Bethany arrived and everyone was excited to welcome Lazarus and his sisters. They brought a wagon filled with food to share with Mary's guests. There was another family with them, but Orly didn't catch all the names. But one name stood out. Her name was Gabriela, and she was beautiful. Orly had never really been around girls. He became totally tongue-tied and felt hot all over. When she held out her hand to greet him, he wasn't sure whether to kiss it or shake it. He decided it was safer to shake it gently, but his heart did flips when he touched her soft skin. She greeted him and stated, "I don't believe I've met you before. Are you a new follower?"

"Yes," Orly stammered, "very new. I mean, I've been trying to figure it out for years, but this morning Kobe told me how to accept Jesus as my Messiah, and so I'm really new and so happy."

"Well, I should say you are new! No wonder I didn't recognize you. What's your name?"

"It's Gabriela. That's a beautiful name," Orly replied.

Gabriela giggled and Orly thought it was the most beautiful sound in the whole world. "So, you don't have a name, but if you are a friend

of Kobe's, then you are a friend of mine. Do you mind if we sit over there? My feet are tired. I only live in Bethany, but it took longer to pull the wagon, and we had to go back once because Miss Martha had forgotten to pack some things she wanted to bring."

"I'm sorry, I've had such a big day, I'm not really thinking straight. Please forgive me for being rattled. Of course, I have a name. My name is Orly and I'm from Cana in Galilee. Kobe and I work together for Mr. Kenan — I mean, we're apprenticed to Mr. Kenan and Kobe is my best friend." Orly was having trouble getting his tongue to work. All his brain could think about was how beautiful she was and how soft her hand was. He had never dreamed that that's what girls were like.

He noticed that Gabriela's abba and Lazarus were busy unloading the cart. He excused himself from Gabriela and offered to help. He was amazed at the amount of food in the wagon. They had apparently cooked enough for an army. Orly returned to Gabriela but found that she was surrounded by girlfriends. He wondered if he had made a mistake by being helpful instead of keeping her talking.

Kobe called for him and introduced him to the Apostle Simon. He told him that Simon was the one who helped him understand how to follow Jesus. "Do you want to share with Simon what happened this morning?" Orly excitedly told him that Kobe had answered all his questions and he had prayed and accepted Jesus as his Messiah.

"Well," said Simon dourly, "if Kobe can answer all your questions, he must have grown an awful lot because when he was starting out, he was full of 'em. He asked questions so fast, I couldn't keep up!" Orly immediately felt comfortable with Simon. "Did he tell you about the ghost we saw out on the Sea of Galilee?"

"Oh, yes! That was one of the first things he told us — and the feeding of the five thousand."

"That wasn't just five thousand! That was five thousand men plus their wives and children. There must have been a million people there!"

"That's incredible! I wish I had been there," said Orly, grinning at the old fisherman's exaggeration. Other people came and went, and Kobe introduced him and encouraged him to share his news. Orly thoroughly enjoyed meeting Kobe's friends, but he had two things on his mind. He wanted to speak to Gabriela one more time and he was ready to eat!

As the sun set, Mary asked everyone to move to the courtyard and thanked the families from Bethany for supplying most of the food for tonight. She graciously welcomed everyone. When she bowed her head, everyone became totally quiet while she thanked God for the food and asked for Jesus to be present with them while they enjoyed the fellowship. Orly made a mental note to ask Kobe what the word "fellowship" meant.

Kobe and Orly picked a place on the grass. Orly was excited to see that Gabriela was in his line of sight sitting with her family. He watched as many young men stopped and greeted her. He wasn't sure how to describe what his heart felt, but he knew that he wished

he could do that, too. He wondered what girls liked to talk about and wished he could ask Kobe, but he was off and visiting with more friends. So Orly sat alone and was lost in thought when someone called his name. He realized that it was Gabriela's abba. "Orly," he called, "Come join us. No one should be alone in this crowd!"

Orly was amazed that her abba knew his name. She must have told him. He stood and shook hands with her abba and thanked him for the invitation. "I thought I was sitting with Kobe, but he seems to have forgotten me."

"That's Kobe!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I didn't catch your name earlier," said Orly a bit more boldly.

"Sit down, Son, my name is Simon, but everyone calls me Simon the Leper because there's way too many Simons around here. Jesus healed me of leprosy when Gabriela was little, and I've been following Him ever since. This is my wife Keturah, and Gabriela has two little brothers running around here somewhere."

"My name is Orly.... Oh, I guess you already know that." Orly suddenly became tongue-tied again and didn't know what else to say.

He started to just go back and sit alone, but Mr. Simon rescued him by asking, "Where are you from, Orly, and what do you do?"

Orly took a deep breath to calm himself and plopped down on the grass beside Mr. Simon the Leper. Maybe if he couldn't see Gabriela, his brain would behave, and he could think straight. "I work for Mr. Kenan in Cana of Galilee. I'm his apprentice and I'm learning to be a blacksmith, but I'm only in my first year."

"Do you like your work? Do you think you'll continue with blacksmithing?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I really do enjoy it. I hope that Mr. Kenan will hire me to stay on because I like living in Cana. What line of work do you do, Mr. Simon?"

"I own the Mercantile Store in Bethany. But my two older sons are doing the work and I'm just supervising these days. Since Lazarus was raised from the dead, we've been doing some preaching in the mountainous area south of Bethany." Mr. Simon continued, "Gabriela tells me that you just became a follower of Jesus this morning."

"Yes, sir. Kobe and I work together, and he's been teaching me a lot about Jesus, but this morning, we finally found time to talk, and I asked Jesus to be my Messiah."

"That's the biggest and best decision you'll ever make. Will your family be okay with your decision? Oh, it looks like it's our turn for food. Let's go before they eat it all up. I earned a plate by helping get that wagon here. I didn't know it would be so heavy, or I would have hired an ox!"

"Thanks for your hard work. I'm starving!" said Orly.

He waited patiently as Mr. Simon helped Mrs. Keturah get up from the grass and realized that he should probably offer his hand to Gabriela. She seemed light as a feather and once again his brain was focusing on sweet, sweet thoughts. He was excited to be standing in

line beside Gabriela. When he reached for a potato dish, she said, "I made that one. I hope you like it."

Orly blurted out, "I'll eat anything, I'm so hungry. I think all the excitement today has taken more energy than a day at work." Then he realized, he had probably said the wrong thing. He had missed his opportunity to say something sweet to her. He wasn't sure how to correct his mistake. He felt so stupid when it came to girls. *What is this strange power that she has over my tongue and brain?* He'd never felt this way before.

He followed Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah back to their spot in the grass. They seemed to expect him to sit beside Gabriela and he certainly wasn't going to refuse. He held her plate while she got seated but when she offered to hold his, he had already plopped down beside her, balancing the plate easily.

Sitting on the grass, eating good food with the most beautiful girl in the world, could anything get sweeter? Then Mr. Simon repeated his question, "Orly, what will your family think about your decision?" He hesitated for just a minute wondering how they would respond if he told them about his family. *Is this when I lose Gabriela?* But something (or was it Someone?) deep inside nudged him to tell the truth. He didn't want to hide his former life and he felt confident that, no matter what it cost him, it was the right thing to do. "My mother and I have been attending Kobe's group and I've been interested in knowing more about Jesus since I saw Him turn water into wine at Mr. Kenan's son's wedding." Orly took a deep breath and then continued. "You see, my mother and I were sold into slavery after my abba died, and Mother is Mr. Kenan's bondslave. When I became free, Mr. Kenan offered to apprentice me and that's where I am now. I feel certain that he will hire me, but even if he doesn't, a good blacksmith should be able to find work just about anywhere."

"Orly, I think that Mr. Kenan allowing you to apprentice as a blacksmith is an indication of his approval of your work as a slave."

"Thank you, sir. Mr. Kenan has been a very good master and now boss. I am eager to get back to Cana and tell my mother and friends what has happened to me. I think that most of them will choose to accept Jesus as their Messiah, too."

Talking about other things helped Orly to relax and enjoy visiting with Mr. Simon, and he became more comfortable sitting beside Gabriela. When he tasted her potato dish, he remembered his earlier mistake, and commented, "Oh, this potato dish is wonderful. Is this the one you made?" Gabriela blushed with pride and affirmed that indeed she had made it.

"I was fortunate enough to get to train as a cook under my mother for a couple of years. I learned so much and it's a good thing, because, in another year, I'll be cooking for myself."

"I don't think I've ever met a man who cooks," replied Gabriela. They chatted together and Orly assured her that he knew several male slaves who cooked, but not any free men. But he also added that he enjoyed it and felt it was a good thing for a man to know how to do. Mr.

Simon and Mrs. Keturah went to look for the twins to make sure they ate their dinner before it was time to head home.

Soon the Apostle James led them in what Orly learned was called “communion.” Rounds of unleavened bread were passed around and each one broke off a piece. The wine cups were refilled. Orly remembered what to do because he had participated last night, even though he wasn’t yet a follower. Now, he felt his heart would explode when he realized that the bread represented Jesus’ physical body being broken for his sins. Tears flowed down his cheeks as he chewed the bread and remembered the Passover lamb that he had seen sacrificed. He could hardly drink the wine and was choked with emotion as he thought about how good God had been to him. He wondered what the future held. They sang a song that Orly didn’t know, but he enjoyed hearing Gabriela’s sweet voice singing beside him. Orly was deep in thought and Mr. Simon returned and helped Gabriela to her feet before Orly realized he was there. He stood and said his goodbyes. He didn’t know when or if he would ever see her again. “I hope I see you next time I’m in Jerusalem.”

“I hope so, too, Orly,” said Gabriela and then she was gone.

Orly began to search for Kobe and found him with a group who were animatedly talking about fun times they had had together. When Kobe saw Orly, he stood and said goodbye to the group. “I didn’t mean to interrupt you. I was just wondering where you were,” apologized Orly.

“Actually, if it’s all right with you, I’d like to get some shut eye. I’m exhausted. Do you mind if we just go on to the garden? There will be people to visit with if you are not ready for sleep.”

“Sure, that’s fine with me.”

They said good night to several people and headed back to the garden. “Who was the young lady you were sharing dinner with?” asked Kobe.

Orly was surprised that Kobe didn’t know her. “Her name is Gabriela. I assumed that she and her family traveled with you.”

“No, I don’t think I’ve ever seen her before.”

“Well, she — or at least her abba — knows you.”

“Hmm. Who is her dad?”

“Simon the Leper, from Bethany.”

“Oh, that explains it. Simon and Lazarus were good friends of Jesus, but they didn’t travel with us. I think they probably supported us financially, and Jesus usually spent the night in Bethany whenever we were in Jerusalem. Mother and I always stayed in the olive garden. I don’t think they had room for all the followers, just the apostles.”

They climbed down the ravine and up the other side. The moon wasn’t up yet but the outside torches around the temple wall threw some light that helped them see the path. None of the other followers were in the garden, so Kobe and Orly just found their blankets and stretched out to wait. Orly intended to wait up for Philip’s family to return. But next thing he knew it was an hour before sunrise and Kobe was stirring. Orly lay still in his blanket and thought about all the things

that had happened in the last twenty-four hours. He thought of all the questions he needed to ask, but he also just relaxed knowing that he was happier than he had ever been in his life.

Chapter 6

On the second day of Passover, Kobe suggested that they make looking for Benjamin a priority. He also wanted to go to the Apostle James' house for just a few minutes, and visit with Mrs. Mary, the mother of Jesus. "We've still got three more days to visit before we need to meet Mr. Kenan at the temple."

"Oh, are we going to do that again?" Orly asked sadly.

"Yes. Even though Jesus died for our sins, we still want to bring our sacrifices to God to honor Him and thank Him for our salvation."

"Maybe it will mean more than last time. I was really disappointed because I wanted it to be special, but it just seemed bloody and brutal."

"I think God wants us to never forget the price that Jesus paid for our sins. It was a bloody and brutal sacrifice. We still participate each year even though we don't follow all the Jewish rules."

"So, let's see if we can find Benjamin," agreed Orly, "unless you want to visit Mrs. Mary first."

"No. John said that she wouldn't be awake until midmorning. Her health is really failing, and he thought late morning would be best."

"That works. We can find Benjamin and set up a time to visit later." Kobe led them to the back side of the market area. Orly and Kobe searched and searched for Benjamin. When they asked the booth owners, everyone assured him they had seen him yesterday or earlier today, but no one seemed to know where to find him. They were just about to give up when they heard, "Orly! You came!" Orly knew immediately it was Benjamin, and soon they were embracing. Orly introduced Kobe and asked when Benjamin would be free to visit. "I'm a free man. I can stop work anytime I want."

"Do you want to meet tonight? I know it's the Sabbath, but we camped out last year, so we could make it our tradition."

When Benjamin agreed that that would work for him, Orly asked for a specific place to meet so that they didn't have to look over the whole market again. "We've been searching for you for hours!"

"Do you know where the Sword and Knife Shop is?" asked Benjamin. They agreed to meet there just before sunset.

"And Benjamin, I found out why Jesus had to die. I'll tell you all about it when we meet."

"I've never figured that out. I will look forward to seeing you again, my friend. But I've got to run. Shalom!"

As Kobe and Orly left the market and headed to James' and John's house, Orly commented that Benjamin looked tired and hungry. Kobe assured Orly that he would send some food for both of them to enjoy together. "I can't let you use your own money," said Orly.

"As a follower of Jesus, we all share together everything that we have. I think God will provide some food so that Benjamin can hear the

good news. Maybe he will become a follower, too. It will be well worth the cost.”

Soon they arrived at the house owned by the Apostles James and John. A servant girl led them into the living area where Mrs. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was eagerly waiting for them. Kobe greeted her like a mother and told her all about his work with Mr. Kenan. Kobe reminded Orly that Mrs. Mary was Mr. Kenan’s sister and had arranged his apprenticeship. He told her about the home group and how glad he was that he had talked with others on this trip who had encouraged him. He let Orly tell about his accepting Jesus as his Messiah. Orly assured Mrs. Mary that Kobe was a great teacher and that he had learned so much about Jesus, not only from Kobe’s teaching, but from the way he treated everybody. That pleased her. Kobe realized that she was getting tired. He told her goodbye and promised to see her when he returned to Jerusalem for Pentecost. She very confidently said, “Kobe, I may not be here then. I may be with Jesus, but either way, I will see you again. I may be busy visiting your mother. She would be so proud of you.” Orly saw the tears on Kobe’s cheeks as he kissed Mrs. Mary goodbye. She hugged Orly and told them to keep encouraging each other.

As they left Mrs. Mary, Kobe asked, “Do you have any place you want to go?”

“Not really. I’m with you — whatever you want to do,” said Orly.

Kobe led Orly to what looked like a dense forest on one edge of Jerusalem. Kobe found a trail and led them to a grassy area hidden deep in the woods. There was a stream running along one side, but it was well hidden from the hustle and bustle of the city. It was quiet and still except for the noise of the water rushing over the rocks. Kobe and Orly stretched out on the grass and neither one said anything for a long time. They just soaked up the silence. Finally, Kobe spoke. “After my dad died, my mother and I came here and stayed for three days. When my mother was killed suddenly, I came here again. I couldn’t fish because I didn’t have a net or hook or, really, anything. I just had fresh water to drink and that sustained me. I stayed here and cried for several days. When I felt that I couldn’t cry anymore, I went to the olive garden to find the group, but they were not there. I felt that they had deserted me in my time of need. I didn’t know where to go or what to do. That was on the Sabbath. I remembered how to find John Mark’s house, so I went there. The doors were locked, but they finally let me in. Everyone was in hiding and grief because Jesus had been crucified. First my mother’s death and then Jesus’. My world totally crashed. Everyone was so kind to me but Mrs. Mary, Jesus’ mother, just took me in her arms and held me even though I was fifteen at the time.

“Then Jesus came back to life on Sunday, and everything changed. I knew then that my mother was safe in heaven and that Jesus was alive. But I was still walking around like a zombie. Mrs. Mary and I stayed at John Mark’s house for a few weeks. I don’t remember how long. I was supposed to be doing an apprenticeship

with Philip's brother who is a jeweler in Jerusalem, but it wasn't working out because my hands were too big. I hadn't shown up for work for a week, so they fired me. I didn't care. I didn't care about anything. I didn't know what I was going to do. Nobody in the group knew what they were going to do either. It was just chaos and overwhelming grief. I spent a lot of my days here, just thinking and crying for my mother. Mrs. Mary was so kind to me. I think it helped her to try to help me. She assured me that everything would be okay and that I would learn to cope and to trust God with my grief. We just stuck together and became very close.

"Then, fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion, Pentecost happened. I've told you about that. I felt alive again for the first time and I felt God's Holy Spirit inside of me. I knew that I was going to make it, but I didn't know how or where to start. James and John bought a house in Jerusalem and invited both of us to live with them and their families. Jesus had told Mrs. Mary to let John take care of her, so we moved there, and I helped out wherever I could.

"When her brother, Mr. Kenan, came to Jerusalem for Sukkot, we visited him at Mr. Zeke's house. Mary arranged my apprenticeship with Mr. Kenan, and next thing I knew I was in Cana. I missed being with Mrs. Mary and the rest of the group, but Mr. Kenan promised we'd return for each festival, and I could see everyone. They were my family. But Mrs. Mary... it's so hard to think of losing her, too. I figure I won't see her again until Heaven."

Orly had listened in silence and now it seemed that Kobe had talked himself out. They continued to lay on the grass and stare up at the trees surrounding them. It was beautiful and peaceful here. *I didn't know that Jerusalem had places like this.*

After a while, Kobe roused himself and sat up. He thanked Orly for listening and Orly assured him it was what friends were for. "It's getting late, and I wanted to pick up some food for you tonight. I don't want to send you empty-handed. I'll be praying that you will be able to tell Benjamin how to accept Messiah for himself. Feel free to invite him to breakfast in the garden. Everyone will be glad to share with him and make him feel welcome."

So, the two men went to Mary's house and Kobe explained that he needed two portions of food packed for a ministry trip. Mary quickly put together some fish and bread and fruit. She also packed some onions and radishes and put it all in a travel bag. Kobe and Orly headed to the market and quickly found the Sword and Knife Shop closing for the Sabbath. They assured the owner that they were just waiting for Benjamin who was supposed to arrive any minute. The sun was touching the horizon when Benjamin arrived, and the men greeted each other warmly. Kobe said his goodbyes quickly and left the two alone to visit.

"Come on, I know the perfect spot for a picnic." Benjamin led Orly to a small grassy area behind the market. There was a small stream, but it didn't block out the noise of downtown Jerusalem. They lit a small campfire and Orly and Benjamin dug into the bag. Benjamin

asked Orly where he got the food. Orly told him a friend of Kobe's had packed it for them. Benjamin wanted to know how he knew Kobe. "I work with him in Cana. We both work at Mr. Kenan's Metal Shop. We are learning to be blacksmiths. Mr. Kenan provides our housing, so we are roommates." Orly felt something uncomfortable inside him. He wasn't sure what he felt, except that Benjamin seemed to be pushing for information rather than being really, genuinely interested.

"It's been a year since we've talked. How are you?" asked Orly.

"Pretty good, actually. I'm still working at the market every morning, sweeping and cleaning and running some deliveries for the merchants. But during the night, I sweep up and clean the temple courtyards. It's a dirty job, but it pays well. I usually sleep in the afternoons wherever I can find a quiet place. I come here a lot. This food is really good. Please thank whoever prepared it. Who did you say you were staying with?"

"Oh, Kobe and I are just camping in the olive garden. Mr. Zeke didn't want a former slave sitting at his table, so Kobe and I left."

"Is Kobe a former slave, too?"

"No, he's just a friend."

"But he's a Jesus follower?"

"Yes. He's told me a lot about Jesus." Again, Orly felt that jab inside telling him to be careful what he said. He had never felt that before and wasn't sure what it all meant. "He told me that he believes that Jesus is the Messiah and had to die to pay for our sins. God told Abraham that He would send the Messiah and we both believe Jesus was the One that God sent."

"So, you're a Jesus follower, too?"

"Yes. Last time we talked, I thought we were both searching for answers about what happened to Jesus and why He had to die."

"That was a long time ago. And Jesus died. I guess that sorta settles the matter."

"But He came back to life! He appeared to many, many people before He returned to Heaven," insisted Orly.

"I don't think so. I think Jesus' friends took his body and hid it and just said he had risen."

"Man, you have changed," Orly said with sadness.

"No. I have grown up, that's all. Remember, we talked about how unexplainable it all was and how even Mr. Kenan and Mr. Zeke were having trouble figuring it out. Mr. Kenan hasn't become a Jesus follower, has he?"

"No," said Kobe, again feeling that he was being probed for information. "Since you've got it all figured out, why are you so interested in Jesus followers?" asked Orly boldly.

"I just like to know things. I hear all kinds of things at the market."

"Apparently, it has changed you. Where is the Benjamin that was my friend?"

"Hey, I'm your friend. I met you here. Maybe you are the one who has changed!"

"I guess we have just been apart too long. Let's see if we can start all over."

"Okay. So where did you spend Passover if you weren't at Mr. Zeke's?"

"At some friend of Kobe's."

"So, he has connections in Jerusalem?"

"He used to live here, so he knows a lot of people."

"And you are not going to tell me their names," Benjamin stated in an irritated way.

"No, I'm not," replied Orly quietly.

"Why not?"

"I'm not sure. But I don't feel safe sharing that information with you. You seem to be using me to get information. But you aren't interested in hearing about Jesus or how He's changed my life. That makes me really sad. I think I should go now."

"So, you admit you are the one who's changed!"

"Yes, I've changed, and it's brought so much peace and joy. I wanted to tell you all about it. I thought you would want to hear."

"Well, I don't. Jesus followers are just a bunch of dreamers who are trying to destroy our way of life. I have no interest whatsoever in hearing about your peace and joy." Benjamin was shouting now.

"I'm sorry, Benjamin. I'll be praying for you." Orly walked away and tucked the food bag under his robe.

"I don't need your prayers," shouted Benjamin, "but thanks for the dinner."

"Sure." Orly walked out of the grassy area and toward the torches around the outer walls of the temple. He crossed over the ravine into the garden and fell to his knees crying out to God. He felt that he had failed Benjamin. He wanted so much to tell him about this wonderful feeling, but something was wrong. It was like Benjamin was a totally different man than he was a year ago. He didn't understand, but he knew that he had lost a good friend and he grieved. After a while, he felt ready to meet up with fellow followers. He hoped Kobe would be back from Mary's. He followed the path to the back of the garden. Orly sat with Philip and some other men around a campfire and tried to follow the discussion. Finally, he asked Philip if they could talk privately.

Orly told him about his encounter with Benjamin and Philip agreed that it was really hard to face rejection. He reminded Orly that Benjamin was not rejecting him but was rejecting the best thing that could ever happen to him. But then Philip became very serious. "Orly, how much information did you give Benjamin?"

"Only that I was staying in the olive garden with a bunch of followers. I didn't tell him about Mary's house."

"That's okay. They know we stay in the olive garden, and they know that Mary's house is a hub of Jesus followers, so that won't be new information. Did you give him any names?"

"No, sir. Well, he met Kobe earlier and I told him that Kobe had told me about Jesus. I had this strange feeling I should not give him any information. I've never felt anything like that before," said Orly.

Philip got a huge grin on his face. "When did you invite Jesus to be your Messiah?"

"Yesterday morning. Oh, I forgot that I haven't seen you. Are you saying that that was Jesus speaking to me?"

"Yep. That was the Holy Spirit who lives within you now. He will guide you, protect you, warn you of things, and prompt you to remember things. You need to be very careful to always obey Him." Philip gave Orly a hug. "I'm sorry about your friend. Were you able to share anything about Jesus with him?"

"I just told him that I was sorry that he didn't want to hear about the peace and joy that I have found since I invited Jesus to be my Messiah."

"Then you shared what he needed to hear, and you need to release it, and let Jesus use it in his life. Don't give up on Benjamin; he may be ready to talk later. You never know. Jesus said that all we could do was plant the seed. It's up to them to decide whether to let it grow."

"Thanks, Philip. I didn't mean to disturb your time with your friends. But I sure did need your encouragement."

"No problem. That's what I'm here for. Any other questions before we head back?"

"I've been wondering why you packed up your family and moved to Samaria?"

"Good question. You know that little nudge that you felt to not tell Benjamin everything."

"Yes sir," replied Orly.

"Well, as I said, that's the Holy Spirit inside of you. I kept hearing the Holy Spirit tell me that He wanted me to go and teach there. It meant leaving the other apostles and not being a part of the Jerusalem group. But Jesus had commanded us to take His teaching all over the world. The more I prayed about it, the more I was convinced. Basha and I prayed together, and we both agreed that that's what we were being called to do. Many Samaritans have already come to accept Jesus as their Messiah and I am currently leading a group. It's been really good. It's hard sometimes, because there's people like Benjamin that don't want to hear, but so far, I've not had a lot of opposition."

Orly thanked him again for his help and decided to stretch out on his blanket and wait for Kobe, but the next thing he knew, it was morning. As he found a place to pray quietly away from the others, he still felt sad about losing Benjamin's friendship, but he felt worse for Benjamin's decisions. He prayed that God would open Benjamin's eyes and help him hunger for the truth.

Orly and Kobe met up at breakfast. "I need to talk with you after breakfast," Kobe said.

"And I need to talk with you!" Orly replied. They decided to spend some time together in the garden after the others had left instead of

attending synagogue. They knew the synagogue would be packed. Soon, the families were stashing their blankets in a pile. After everyone had gone, Kobe explained, "I talked with Philip last night after I returned. You were already asleep, so we didn't wake you. I heard you had a rough time with Benjamin."

"Yeah, it was rough, but mostly just sad. He was the first friend I ever had that was near my age. I thought we would be friends for life. It was hard, but Phillip explained it to me and I'm okay. He's got to make his own decisions."

"Yeah. Now I need to make sure you didn't give him any information. I need to know if you mentioned Simon the Leper or his family?"

"No," said Orly. "I intended to talk with him about Gabriela, but when he kept pushing me to tell him names and places, the Holy Spirit told me not to stay or tell him anything. So, I left. I'm sure I didn't mention anyone other than the olive garden and Mr. Kenan and Mr. Zeke. He wanted to know if Mr. Kenan had become a Jesus follower. I told him I didn't think so. Philip said they already knew about the olive garden. But Kobe, what does this all mean? I mean, why does he want to know who and where the followers are? I don't understand."

"That's my fault, Orly. I didn't want to alarm you. But it's a fact of life here in Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin want to know all the followers' names and where they are meeting. They are determined to destroy what they call the New Way. Last year they stoned Stephen, one of our leaders. They've arrested Peter and John multiple times and one time they even scourged all the apostles. That was horrible. But there are thousands and thousands of followers. Even a lot of their own priests are followers. They can't stop it. But the persecution is getting worse. Apparently, Benjamin is working for the Sanhedrin as an informant."

"I know that they have hired him to clean the temple courtyard at night and keep the market clean during the mornings. He sleeps during the afternoons wherever he can."

"And they probably pay him extra for letting them know what he hears in the marketplace. Philip is meeting with the other apostles this morning and will put out a warning so that others will know not to talk freely in the marketplace. But there are spies everywhere. I don't want you to be afraid, but you must be careful. I didn't even think of Benjamin being a problem. He seemed like a really good man, and I felt safe leaving you with him. I take responsibility for not staying and checking things out, but I figured you two wanted to visit alone."

"Yeah, I was looking forward to it. I'm just glad it turned sour so fast. All through dinner, I just felt like he was grilling me, and the Holy Spirit was telling me not to answer. So, I'm grateful. If he had been friendly, I might have given him more information. So, what did you do last night?" asked Orly.

"Why do you want to know?" teased Kobe, acting very sinister.

"Okay, so don't tell me. Maybe I shouldn't know!"

“Oh, you’ll want to know where I was. You were the topic of a lot of our conversation,” teased Kobe.

“Me? Why?”

“Well, I spent the evening at James and John’s house. Mrs. Mary was already asleep, but I finally connected with Jonathan and Jenay, James’ twins. They will turn ten next month, so they aren’t so little anymore. They were good friends of mine while we traveled with Jesus, and we did quite a few ministry projects together. They walked home with Gabriela and her family and spent the night in Bethany. Apparently, you made quite an impression on Gabriela, and she wanted Jon and Jen to find out all they could about you. I told them that I thought you’d make a great husband if you could just get your foul language and drinking under control.” Kobe ducked as Orly took a swing at him. “Maybe I should have told them about your violent temper, too.”

“Kobe, don’t tease me. Did they really ask about me? This trip has been incredible. I’m going to need at least a month to sort out all that has happened. Has it really only been three days?”

“Today is the fourth day of Passover and I have one more important question to ask you,” said Kobe. “As I was visiting with James and his family last night, they asked me where I baptized you. I told them that I had totally forgotten that part.”

“Why would I need to be baptized? I thought all I had to do was let Jesus be my Messiah and I know I have the Holy Spirit directing me. What is baptism? I thought you did that to become a Jew!”

“All I know is that Jesus was baptized when He began His ministry, and He commands us to be baptized when we become followers. I think it’s just a public way of announcing that we have died to our old empty self and now we’re letting Jesus be the boss.”

“Well, I certainly want to do that, but where and when? I thought we were just talking about keeping it private, now you are talking about making it public. I’m confused!”

“I’m sorry. You are probably thinking about the baptism that Gentiles do to become a Jew. That is very public. This baptism that Jesus commands is really just a personal commitment. It can be public if you want it to be, but it doesn’t have to be. It is confusing because there’s so many different kinds of baptism. John the Baptizer preached about a public baptism of repentance. But Jesus taught that we should baptize those who decide to follow Him as a new beginning. I forgot all about it yesterday because you are the first person I’ve ever prayed with to make that decision.”

“I’m the first?” Orly asked incredulously.

“Yep! But you won’t be the last. Anyway, I was wondering if you wanted to get out of Jerusalem tomorrow and walk toward Bethlehem. There’s a lake about four miles from here that’s a little warmer than any of these mountain streams. We could go and be back to visit with friends by dinner time.”

“It actually sounds good to get out of town. It’s so noisy and busy here and I’ve got so many questions.”

The men continued to talk, and it wasn't long before other families began to return from synagogue and join them. Orly enjoyed visiting with the men, but he was especially drawn to the children. He tried to picture what it must have been like to grow up knowing Jesus and seeing Him heal and teach. Now, these children all had parents who were following Jesus and would teach them the things they needed to know.

Kobe and Orly decided to head to Mary's again to see who might be there. Orly returned the travel bag to Mary and thanked her for the delicious meal. He sadly told her that Benjamin was not open to the New Way, but that he did share with him about the peace and joy he felt since he had invited Jesus to be his Messiah. She assured Orly that it sometimes took time and for him to not be discouraged.

They enjoyed a simple post-Sabbath meal made up of whatever people brought to share. The Apostle Matthew led the group in communion and was so excited to see Kobe. As they talked, Orly visited with other followers and got acquainted. Before they left and headed back to the olive garden, Kobe and Orly told Mary about their plans for walking toward Bethlehem tomorrow. She said that she would feel better if they headed toward Emmaus and gave Kobe the directions to a lake that was about the same distance. She said there hadn't been any trouble in that area, whereas the road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem seemed to be a hot spot for trouble with the Romans. She also handed them a bag of apricots and prayed with them before they left. "Was that the Holy Spirit guiding us?" asked Orly.

"Yep. That's why it's so important for followers to stick together and help one another."

The next morning, Orly and Kobe enjoyed breakfast with their fellow campers. Each day the group was getting smaller. The two men began their walk toward Emmaus. It was a hilly but beautiful road, and mostly deserted. Kobe was familiar with the landmarks that Mary had told him to look for and soon they saw the quiet lake that she had recommended. "Kobe, I don't know how to swim and I'm a little scared of water. We won't go out deep, will we?"

"No, we'll just walk out a little way, and then you can kneel down in the water. It will be safe. But if you can't swim, maybe I'd better go out by myself and check the depth before you try it." Kobe walked out about six feet from shore and found that the beach was gradually slanting and seemed perfectly safe. "Come on in. It's fine," Kobe yelled.

Orly tentatively waded in. The water was cold, but not unbearable. He tried to concentrate on the meaning of it all but kept wondering if Kobe knew what he was doing or if he would drown them both. When Orly reached Kobe, Kobe instructed him to kneel. He reminded Orly that he would simply put his whole head under the water to symbolize death to self, and then Kobe would help him raise his head out of the water to symbolize his new life with Jesus in charge. It made Orly feel better that he could choose when to put his

face under the water since he'd never done that before. "You might feel better if you held your nose shut with your fingers, like this," Kobe demonstrated. "That keeps the water from going up your nose."

"Okay. Here goes." Orly held his nose and ducked his head under the water. Kobe gently pushed his head down until it was completely submerged and then Orly brought his head up for air. Both men were grinning from ear to ear.

"I baptize you in the name of Jesus."

They hugged and then realized that no matter how special it was, the water was still freezing cold. They waded back to shore quickly. They sat on the beach and talked for several hours. The apricots were a nice midday break and made it feel like a special celebration.

Since they had taken so many meals at Mary's house, Kobe wanted to go to the market and purchase some supplies for her. Orly was familiar with what was needed and showed Kobe the items to purchase that would help Mary restock her kitchen. She had fed so many people over Passover and continually fed those in her home group as needed. Instead of fruits and vegetables, they purchased large bags of corn meal, flour, and salt. They had their arms filled with supplies when they arrived at Mary's door. She welcomed them and expressed her appreciation for their thoughtful gifts.

Mary was busy in the kitchen and Kobe was busy talking with friends, so Orly wandered into the kitchen and offered to help. At first Mary dismissed him with a smile, but he assured her that he knew his way around the kitchen and asked what she needed most. He quickly took over the task of finishing the soup. There was something very satisfying about being able to contribute to the good of the group. Without being told, he began to prepare the vegetables that other people brought. Mary watched with approval as he deftly prepared the vegetables and put them on platters to be served. They asked for help carrying food to the courtyard.

Mary's one servant, Rhoda, brought hot unleavened bread from the outside oven. Mary sat down on the grass beside Orly and again thanked him profusely for his help. He told her that if he had realized she was doing all the cooking, he would have gladly helped her all week. "Next year, let's plan on it!" Mary exclaimed.

"Mary, I haven't had time to ask Kobe, but do followers of Jesus celebrate Shavuot? I mean, I know that Mr. Kenan will bring me to Jerusalem, but I'm not sure what it all means."

"Well, for Jesus' followers it's a special celebration on Pentecost. It was exactly fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion that He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within believers. So, while Shavuot is a three-day feast for Jews, it is a one-day celebration for us. Last year we spent time celebrating all together in the streets. We sang, and danced, then went to each others' homes and ate together. It's such a special time for sharing and sweet fellowship."

"There's that word again. I meant to ask what fellowship means."

"Oh, that's easy," said Mary. "It just means two fellows in the same ship." Orly looked puzzled, so Mary continued. "You can be

friends with anyone regardless of their beliefs or religion. But because you have the Holy Spirit inside of you and I have the Holy Spirit inside of me, there's a special relationship. There's a deeper bonding because we are all fellows in the same ship. We work together, play together, pray together, minister together, cry together. We sometimes fuss and fight together, but there's a special feeling of oneness — that's fellowship. You can't have that with someone who is not filled with the Holy Spirit."

"That makes perfect sense. I've been experiencing fellowship and I really like it!" Orly said with a grin. Soon it was their turn to get food and Mary got busy greeting other visitors.

Early the next morning, Kobe and Orly said goodbye to more of their friends in the olive garden and then walked across town to Mr. Zeke's house to meet Mr. Kenan and the other men from Cana. They waited just outside the front gate. Shortly the men joined them and seemed glad to see them. As they walked toward the temple, the somberness of the occasion took over. Mr. Kenan provided his apprentices and slaves with turtledoves to sacrifice. Orly felt that he was in a time warp. *So much has happened. Have I really only been in Jerusalem with Kobe for six days? How much my life has changed.* As they walked up the courtyard steps, he recognized the Apostles Thomas and Matthew preaching. His heart stirred as he realized what Jesus had done for him. He gulped hard to try to keep the tears from coming. As he held the turtledove in his hands, he could feel it struggling and fighting for its life. As he handed it over to the priest, he watched as the bird's life blood was poured out. He was almost overcome with emotion as he realized that Jesus poured out His life blood for him to cover his sins and make him right with God. He realized that nothing but the blood of Jesus could wash away his sins.

Afterward the men hiked down the ravine and up into the olive garden. They sat down to reflect on the time of sacrifice. Mr. Kenan asked the men if they had any questions or anything they wanted to share. This time Orly could not keep silent. He boldly said, "Last year I thought the sacrifice was brutal and bloody and gross. I dreaded coming back this year. But last week Kobe told me that the reason Jesus died was to pay for my sins and everyone else's. He was the Lamb of God. Today was awesome. I know that Jesus died for my sins. He's my Messiah, and that puts me in a right relationship with God. The sacrifice today just reminded me of the terrible price He paid for me, and I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. Sorry, I just ..." Orly didn't know what else to say. He wasn't usually very talkative, and the other men were surprised by his outburst. But they seemed to be thinking about what he said. Mr. Kenan thanked him for sharing and asked if anyone else had anything they wanted to say or questions that they wanted to ask.

Kobe added that he and Orly had had an incredible week with other followers of Jesus and that now he was eager to get back to Cana and continue to teach those who wanted to learn more about

Jesus. He thanked Mr. Kenan for providing them with the opportunity to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. All the other men agreed.

When no one else seemed to have any questions, Mr. Kenan suggested they start back to Mr. Zeke's. Since their oxcart would be traveling right past the olive garden, he told Kobe and Orly to just wait beside the road and they would look for them near the temple wall about the first hour. They parted ways and Kobe and Orly needed to decide where to spend their last evening in Jerusalem. Orly suggested that Kobe choose since he had no preference.

"I guess I would prefer to go back to Mary's home, if that's all right with you. I feel that I've already said goodbye to Mrs. Mary, and I don't want to go there again."

"That's fine with me. I'll probably help out in the kitchen while you visit." Mary greeted them and welcomed Orly's help, but only if he wanted to. Orly assured her that he would enjoy that more than anything else. Together they finished up the meal that Mary had been preparing for the final night of Passover. Because many of the travelers had already gone, there were fewer visitors and mostly those from Mary's group. After dinner Orly helped Mary clean the kitchen and then sat and visited with two brothers named Gersham and Mario. Gersham had been born blind but had been healed by Jesus. He and his brother were now part of Mary's home group. They shared with Orly how they were unwanted in their family home and yet, still lived there and worked at their dad's Carpentry Shop. They were trying to let others see the difference that Jesus made in their lives, but this group was the only place where they felt truly comfortable. His heart was heavy for them as he and Kobe started back toward the olive garden.

"Oh, yes," confirmed Kobe, "many followers of Jesus are rejected by their families and friends. Many are thrown out. They are kicked out of the synagogue, and often lose their jobs. We are both very blessed to not have encountered that kind of persecution."

"This has been my best Passover yet. I am still overwhelmed by all that has happened to me and the difference I feel inside, but I can't wait to get home."

"I'm excited, too. Only six more months and I will complete my apprenticeship. Then I will be ready to follow God's call in my life without having to worry about offending Mr. Kenan."

"What do you mean?"

"It's too early to talk about, but I'm strongly feeling the need to teach others about Jesus and why He died. It may cause some problems with the Jewish leaders at the synagogue, but I hope not."

As the men crossed through the ravine and up the other side, Orly asked Kobe, "May I ask you a question?"

"You just did! But of course!"

"Why do you get up and pray every morning? I mean, you have the Holy Spirit guiding you, so what's the point? I don't mean to be disrespectful, but I don't get it."

“No problem. Jesus spent a lot of time praying. He said that He needed to be quiet and away from other people so that He could make sure that He was hearing the Holy Spirit clearly and not get confused by what He or others wanted Him to do or be. After Pentecost, I felt that the Holy Spirit was directing me to do the same — just take some time to be quiet and still and really concentrate on what the Holy Spirit is saying. Sometimes I pray or ask questions, but most of the time, I just sit still and listen.”

“And He tells you what to do?” asked Orly.

“Sometimes. Sometimes not. But I don’t want to miss hearing Him if He has something to say.”

“That’s cool.”

There was only one other family in the olive garden. All the others had left earlier in the day. Orly and Kobe stretched out on their blankets and soon were fast asleep.

On Tuesday morning, they wished they had bought some food because there was no one left in the garden, and they didn’t have time to go to the market before meeting Mr. Kenan. So, they stood by the road and waited for the oxcart. It was going to be a long day!

Soon Mr. Kenan and the group from Cana slowed the oxen just enough for Kobe and Orly to jump aboard. Everyone greeted them and the laughing and teasing began. The day passed quickly but Orly thought dinner time would never arrive. Finally, Enoch stopped for the night, and everyone helped unload the boxes Mr. Zeke had provided for their dinner. Soon they were sitting around a campfire and enjoying the comradery of men who shared the same boss. But Orly noted that it felt different from “fellowship.” He kept thinking about Mary and the things she had taught him while he helped her in the kitchen. He was surprised that he actually looked forward to his next trip to Jerusalem. Now, he wouldn’t dread it like he had dreaded this trip.

Chapter 7

Mr. Kenan and his men arrived home almost an hour after sunset, but Mother had a nice meal prepared for them. Orly greeted her and assured her he had had a good time, and they would talk on the Sabbath. It felt strange that he didn't need to empty the cart, take care of the oxen, clean up the table, or prepare for breakfast. He and Kobe just excused themselves, went to their room, crawled into their blankets, and were quickly asleep.

The next morning, Orly greeted Hosea and helped him walk to the kitchen. Hosea assured him that the new slave was treating him well, but he still missed Orly. They promised to catch up on news when they met on Sabbath afternoon. Mr. Kenan wasn't going in to work today, so Kobe, Orly, and Joshua walked alone to the shop. They were greeted exuberantly and were quickly inundated with work. Lucas showed Orly an intricate new plow that he had been working on and challenged Orly to make a matching one. Orly asked a few questions, but for the most part was able to figure it out on his own. When he was finished, everyone agreed that Orly's version was as good as Lucas' plow. The men totally accepted Kobe and Orly back into the shop but never mentioned their time away. Orly wanted so badly to share with them all the new things that were happening inside of him but felt that Mr. Kenan would not approve. He wondered if that was what Kobe was talking about when he said that after his apprenticeship was over, he wouldn't need Mr. Kenan's approval to share the New Way.

The men enjoyed the Sabbath meal with Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada and caught them up on news from the shop. As they crawled into their blankets, Orly asked Kobe what Jesus taught about Gentiles. Kobe said he was too tired to get into it, and he wanted to focus on his message for tomorrow afternoon. Orly turned over and tried to ignore the Holy Spirit saying that his Gentile friends at the shop deserved to hear the good news, too.

The Sabbath morning dawned bright and clear, and everyone seemed eager for the afternoon meeting. Instead of going to synagogue, Orly chose to sit in the yard and visit with his mother and Hosea. He wanted to tell them about his decision, but by the time he answered their questions about the trip, it was time for the meeting.

Kobe came rushing up to Orly and asked him if he would tell his own story about what happened. "You can say no, but you did a great job in the garden. So, I think that would be the best." Orly wasn't sure what to think. He had told his story many times in Jerusalem, but he hadn't rehearsed it in several days and he wasn't sure what to say. *What if I mess it all up?* Then, just as suddenly, he felt the Holy Spirit nudging him and he agreed. "Thanks!" and Kobe was off and surrounded by those who were welcoming him back. Orly felt the Holy Spirit assuring him that He would tell him what to say.

Mr. Kenan stood and greeted everyone. He introduced Kobe as a man who had spent over two years traveling with Jesus. He was teaching this class about who Jesus was and what He taught. Kobe seemed a little nervous as he stood before the group. He began, "While I was in Jerusalem for the Passover, I got to spend time with some of the apostles and disciples. They encouraged me, but they also scolded me for only focusing on Jesus' teachings instead of explaining who Jesus was and why He had to die. I need to teach you that He was resurrected from the dead and what that means to us as Jews." Kobe could tell that the crowd was eager for him to continue. He took a deep breath. "As far back as the Garden of Eden, God promised that He would someday send a Messiah. Then throughout history, the Messiah was promised. Jesus was not just a prophet sent by God; I believe that He was God Himself in the flesh. He came for one special purpose, and that was to be the Messiah, the sacrificial Lamb of God to take away our sins. He wasn't killed by the Romans or by the Jewish leaders. He laid down His life for you and for me to pay for our sins. All we have to do is decide whether to accept this gift that God has given us, or to reject it. We all know that we sin and mess up before God, we need a Messiah to pay for our sins. I believe Jesus was that Messiah. I've asked Orly to come and tell you what happened to him this week."

Orly hesitated only a minute, then boldly walked to the front of the group. "I've wanted to know more about Jesus since that day at Seth's wedding when Jesus turned the water into wine. I'm so glad that God sent Kobe here to tell us more about Jesus. But last week was the first time I realized that Jesus died for me. I just bowed my head and asked Him to forgive my sins and be my Messiah. I promised to obey Him if He would just tell me what to do. It's been an amazing ten days. Once I asked God to forgive my sins and fill me with His Spirit, I have felt Him speak to me and tell me what to do and say. I feel happier than I've ever felt. This feeling is better than being free of slavery or becoming a man. It is the best thing that has ever happened to me." Orly couldn't think of anything else that he needed to say, so he sat down.

Kobe thanked him and asked the group if there were any questions. All over the courtyard, men and women were standing to ask questions. It took a while to get everyone quiet enough so that they could hear. After answering several questions, Kobe led them in closing prayer and encouraged them to speak to him or Orly after the meeting. Both men were surrounded by friends seeking answers. By the end of the Sabbath, fourteen new followers of Jesus had emerged, both men and women. Kobe had prayed with Mr. Kenan and Orly had prayed with Hosea. Both were glowing with joy. They knew that more men and women would accept Jesus in the coming days. They began to spend time in the yard after dinner each night to answer questions. A few more of the servants prayed to receive Jesus as their Messiah.

Each night after they went to their room, they prayed together for God to grow a mighty group in Cana that would desire to tell the whole

world the New Way. Several times, Kobe mentioned that it should be city-wide, and Orly would agree. Neither man knew what the next step should be. They would simply be obedient one day at a time.

Orly had always found satisfaction in his work at the Metal Shop. Now he felt a sense of frustration because he wanted to tell his Gentile friends what had happened to him but knew that it was forbidden by the Jewish Law. He kept praying for wisdom to know what to do and when.

The following Sabbath morning, a messenger arrived from Jerusalem and told Mr. Kenan of his sister Mary's death. Even though Mr. Kenan and Kobe were both deeply grieving, they decided to continue with the service. Mr. Kenan told the group that the woman God had chosen to be the mother of Jesus, His Messiah, had died. But because of Jesus' death and resurrection, he was certain that Mary was in Heaven. Kobe told about Mrs. Mary's love for him after his own mother died and how strong she had been through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. He assured the group that Jesus had indeed taken away the sting of death because, someday, we will all be together again for all eternity. It was a short meeting, and everyone left quietly to allow the men to grieve their loss.

Orly sat with his mother in the yard and answered her questions about his decision to follow Jesus. That afternoon, he prayed with his own mother as she accepted Jesus as her Messiah. Mother asked what would happen to Orly's dad who died before Jesus came. Orly explained, "Mother, I asked that same question of the Apostle Matthew. He believes that Jesus' death was for everyone. He believes that Jesus is currently teaching all those who died before the resurrection about Himself and giving them a chance to accept Him as Messiah. We have to trust that Dad will make the right decision, and we'll get to spend all eternity with him."

"I hope so."

"Me too," agreed Orly.

Mr. Kenan, his personal servant Omri, Kobe, and the messenger left early the next morning with Enoch driving the oxcart. They weren't sure how long they would be gone.

Thursday morning, while Mrs. Vada and Orly were eating breakfast, Mother sent word to them that Hosea had died in his sleep. With Mrs. Vada's permission, Orly immediately left and helped the slaves prepare for Hosea to be buried behind the garden. Mrs. Vada spoke to all the servants about her love for Hosea. Then she looked toward Orly, and he realized that she expected him to take charge. He reminded the group that Hosea had accepted Jesus as Messiah and had entered Heaven in a right relationship with God. He bowed his head and prayed publicly for the very first time, "Father, we have loved Hosea and he's loved us, but we thank You for preparing a place for him for all eternity. Thank You for sending Jesus to be his Messiah. In Jesus' name I pray." He watched as the other servants placed Hosea's body in a hole that they had dug between the garden and the pasture. He was wrapped in his blanket, and they covered him with dirt. Slaves'

bodies were generally thrown in a trash heap, but everyone knew that Mr. Kenan would want something nicer for Hosea. It was a pleasant resting place, but Orly believed that he was already in Heaven celebrating.

Orly felt sad about going to work as if it were a normal day but felt that he had no choice. He stopped by the kitchen and gave his mother an extra hug. He knew that she was grieving the loss of her dearest friend. "Son, I was very proud of you this morning. What a man you've turned out to be! And a lot of it is because of Hosea's help. God is good. Now get to work the way he taught you!"

Lucas fussed about Orly being late to work, but when Orly told him what had happened, Lucas agreed that he had done the right thing. Orly quickly got to work on projects that were waiting on him. He worked hard all morning and was surprised when Lucas reminded him to take his noon break. As he sat down on the grass, Lucas told the group that Hosea had died. Markus asked, "I don't mean to intrude in your grief, but what do you Jews believe about the afterlife?"

Orly looked up surprised. He felt so unprepared, yet this was the opportunity that he had longed for. He tried to keep it as simple as he could. "Jews believe they are all going to Heaven based on their relationship with Abraham. I don't agree with that belief. But it's what I was taught. Recently, God sent the Messiah that He's been promising. His name is Jesus. You've probably heard that He was crucified after doing a lot of miracles and good things. But three days after the crucifixion He came back to life. He taught that anyone could go to Heaven by simply accepting Him as their Messiah, the one who would pay for their sins." Orly could tell that he had totally lost the men who had no idea what he was talking about. But he added, "Just over a week ago, Hosea asked Jesus to be his Messiah, so I firmly believe that he is in Heaven with Jesus. I am sad, because he was like an abba to me. He was my supervisor when I came to Mr. Kenan's home when I was five. I guess he's just always been there for me. I will miss him."

The men finished up their break and then returned to work. Everyone seemed sad for Orly and while he appreciated it, he wished he could have better expressed the joy he felt that Hosea was in Heaven. He had never lost someone that he loved since he was old enough to remember, and this was hard stuff. He was glad when the sun began to set, and Lucas announced quitting time.

Orly washed up and joined Mrs. Vada for dinner. She, too, commented that she was very proud of the way he handled the impromptu service for Hosea. She said that it made her feel good to honor Hosea for his faithfulness.

Orly excused himself immediately after dinner and went into the kitchen to see how his mother was doing. She seemed to be okay, and was busy training a new kitchen slave, so Orly wandered out to the garden. He missed having Kobe to talk with and wondered what was happening in Jerusalem. He also felt a strange urge to go ahead and set up for the Sabbath meeting. He prayed for a while, then went back

to his room and tried to sleep. He felt so inadequate to lead the group, but definitely felt that the group needed to support each other. He would need to pray some more but would have to make a decision by morning. He decided to talk it over with Mrs. Vada at breakfast.

The next morning, Mrs. Vada brought up the question. “Orly,” she asked, “should I have the benches set up for our gathering? I know Kobe won’t be here, but you could meet with us and maybe answer the questions that people have?”

“Well, I’m pretty new at this, and don’t know a lot, but I, too, feel that it would be good to be together. It will probably be very short! But I would be honored to lead it — that is, if you think I should.”

“I think you should.”

“Do you have any specific questions that I should prepare for?”

“I was wondering about Hosea’s body. I mean, Jesus stayed in the tomb for three days before He rose. When will Hosea resurrect and go to Heaven? Will we see it happen? I just don’t know these things.”

“It’s okay to ask me anything. I may not know the answers, but I’ll pray about it and see what the Holy Spirit teaches me. It is my belief that Hosea’s self is already in Heaven. I’m not sure why Jesus was in the tomb for three days — but I know that that’s what was prophesied in the Jewish Scripture, so it had to be fulfilled.”

“See, you do know the answers! I’ll have the benches set up and let you decide what you want to teach us.”

“Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead me to what I should teach.”

“Of course.”

Orly left for work feeling that it would be a long day, but instead the day flew by. There was plenty of work to keep him busy and his head was filled with questions and thoughts about what to say to the group of followers who would be depending on him to lead them. After Sabbath dinner, he excused himself and took a long walk through the woods. When he found a grassy spot, he stopped and spent time in prayer. But even as he crawled into his blanket, he wasn’t exactly sure what he would say tomorrow.

After breakfast, he walked with the other men to the synagogue and listened to the Jewish Scripture being read and explained by the local ruler of the synagogue. When he returned, he spent time with his mother in the yard. She looked tired and he knew that it had been a hard week for her. And in that moment, the Holy Spirit reminded him of something Kobe had taught him.

Orly moved to the courtyard to signal the group to come and take their places. He had hoped it would be a smaller group, but it seemed that all the usual men, women and children were present except those who were traveling with Mr. Kenan. Orly simply told them that Mrs. Vada had asked him to lead the group to come together and support and encourage one another since it had been such a hard week. “I want to share with you something that Kobe taught me. Jesus said, ‘Come unto me if you are weary, and I will give you rest.’ I believe that many of us are weary today. We are weary from grief. I want to remind

you that on a Sabbath not so very long ago, the apostles and other followers of Jesus were weary, too. They saw their Messiah, their friend, crucified on Friday and the Sabbath was a long, hard day. But I want to remind you that on Sunday morning, Jesus conquered death. He not only conquered His own death, but He conquered death for all of us who have chosen Him as our Messiah. We can be assured that, as we bring our weariness to Jesus, He will surround us and remind us of our eternal home in Heaven. I have found great comfort in that truth this week.

“And there’s something else that the Holy Spirit has reminded me of this week. Mr. Kenan told us that during Jesus’ crucifixion, there were two other men crucified at the same time. One of the men asked Jesus to be his Messiah and Jesus replied, ‘Today you will be with me in Paradise.’ I feel that Jesus was saying that when a follower of His dies, he immediately enters Heaven. I hope that brings comfort to you as it has to me.

“I’m going to close in prayer and then if you have questions, I’ll be available. Heavenly Father, You have taken two special people to Heaven to be with You. We miss them and grieve, but we also rejoice because both of them knew You as Messiah and You promise that they will live forever with You. Help us to tell others about this wonderful, good news. In Jesus’ name.”

Orly spent the rest of the afternoon answering questions. He and his mother were together, but never alone. By evening, he was glad to retreat to Mrs. Vada’s dining room and soon excused himself and went to his room. He didn’t realize how draining it was to feel responsible for each and every person.

On Sunday morning, he woke early as usual, but spent his time on his knees in the room. He didn’t want to encounter any questions before he had his time alone with God. It was good to be still and let God soothe and replenish him. When the sun began to rise, he was ready to face another day.

All week Orly felt totally surrounded and comforted by the Holy Spirit. His work went smoothly, his days passed quickly, and each evening he slept refreshed. But by Thursday, Mrs. Vada was visibly fretting that Mr. Kenan and Kobe had not returned. She explained that the family would traditionally grieve with friends and neighbors for a week. Then, the family would spend the eighth day alone with just family before returning to normal life. Depending on the family and whether they could afford to be off work, some mourning periods lasted longer or shorter, but she had expected they would arrive no later than midweek since Mrs. Mary had died two weeks ago. They might have stayed until after the Sabbath, but now she was beginning to worry. “I’m sure they would send you a message if there was anything wrong. And I can’t imagine them missing another Sabbath here, so maybe it will be today,” said Orly as he left for work.

As Orly washed up for the Sabbath meal, he was relieved to see that the benches for the group had been set up in the courtyard. He assumed that the men had returned. But he discovered that Mrs. Vada

was still alone, and the men had not sent word. He couldn't decide whether to fret over the men, or fret over needing to prepare a message. Mrs. Vada lit the Sabbath candles and Orly said the prayer of blessing. As he ate, he felt the Holy Spirit telling him to depend on Him and not rely on his own knowledge or understanding. Orly shared that with Mrs. Vada, and she agreed that fretting would not change the outcome. They would come home when they came. So, they tried to enjoy the Sabbath meal and Orly stayed and visited with her for longer than usual to make sure she was okay. He knew he needed to spend the evening in prayer but remembered Kobe teaching about putting other people first. Once again, Orly headed to the woods and walked to his favorite grassy spot where he could pray.

Chapter 8

Mr. Kenan, Kobe, Enoch, and Omri left before dawn on Sunday. Enoch drove the oxen hard and they arrived by nightfall on Monday. As expected, the family was gathered at James and John's home where Mrs. Mary had lived for the past two years.

Many of Jesus' followers came to express their grief. The family had not been together for several years. The fact that some believed Jesus was the Messiah, and some believed He was a lunatic or demon-possessed, made it hard to be in one room together. Zeke, Mary's brother, was bitter that Mary had chosen to live with her nephews instead of with him during her final years. Josie, her son, also questioned why she didn't choose to live with her own three sons and two daughters in Nazareth and let them care for her. Kenan tried to assure them "This was Mary's decision. I'm just grateful to James and John and Kayla and Marta for giving her such good care and surrounding her with many good friends. Every time I visited, she seemed so happy." And because Kenan was a beloved uncle, that would usually settle the discussion. There was enough love among the followers of Jesus to cover over the hateful words that were spoken by the others. And all remembered Mary as being kind and good. Their memories of their big sister, aunt, mother, and friend pulled them together for this time of mourning. James and John agreed to let their Uncle Zeke hire professional mourners to play dirges and wail even though they would have preferred to celebrate her passing with joyful Psalms and songs of Heaven.

Midmorning on Wednesday, Zebedee and Salome, Mary's sister, arrived from Capernaum. They were the parents of James and John. Another son, Jonas, and his son, Benji, had traveled with them. Jonathan and Jenay were thrilled to see Benji again and couldn't believe how tall he had grown. He and Kobe made friends immediately.

On Thursday morning, Kobe told Mr. Kenan that he was going to a special place to be alone and would join the family for dinner. Mr. Kenan insisted that he was welcome to stay even though this was the eighth day and usually reserved for family. Kobe chose to go to the special hiding place where he had mourned the passing of his dad, his mother, and now Mrs. Mary. This was different though. He felt sad, but he was also filled with an incredible joy. He sang songs of praise and enjoyed his day alone after being in such tight quarters with so much tension. Here he could worship and relax. He spent time in prayer and felt a deep sense of God's presence with him. The day passed quickly, and he reluctantly returned to James and John's home. He tried to slip in quietly but was warmly greeted and assured that he was part of their family.

They moved to the courtyard and everyone spread out on the grass to eat. Kobe remembered Jesus feeding the 5000 and began to

count Mary's family members. He estimated over sixty in all, but the little ones kept moving around so he couldn't get an accurate count. He was thinking about going back for seconds when there was a commotion at the door. The servants came running into the courtyard and were calling for Mr. James. About twenty temple guards entered the courtyard and ordered everyone to stay exactly where they were. Kobe froze in fear, then felt God's peace returning in an amazing way. He didn't know what was happening, but God did, and that was enough.

The guards quickly sent the servants into the house and separated the men from the women and children in the courtyard. They took the children from the women and handed them over to the servants to be cared for. The older children were trying to comfort the younger ones and Kobe watched as Jenay carried a screaming toddler into the house. The guards tied the fourteen women's hands and ordered them to follow in single file. Some of the women were crying for their babies, others were defiant and angry, while others quietly obeyed without question. They could not comfort each other without the guards ordering them to be quiet. They were marched to a dungeon near the temple and locked inside. The young mothers were assured that the servants would look after their babies. It was a long, miserable night of not knowing what was happening or what the future held for them or for their husbands and sons.

Back at the courtyard, the men were also being herded into smaller groups and led to separate dungeons. They were bound hand and foot. Zeke and his son Jacob were screaming and cursing at the guards, demanding to see the High Priest immediately and generally making a scene. Kobe was fascinated by the difference between the two brothers. Mr. Kenan was standing quietly and calmly. Kobe knew he was scared, everyone was, but he also knew that most of these men had watched their Messiah die and knew that they, too, would spend eternity with Jesus. Kobe was so grateful that Mr. Kenan had invited Jesus to be his Messiah only a week ago. He was concerned about Mrs. Mary's sons who seemed to be in the same predicament; two brothers calmly accepted the situation and three raged against it. The twenty-eight men were divided into three groups and Kobe saw that Benji was in his group. The groups were thrown into filthy dungeons and left in the darkness. It was terrifying to not know where the other men were, where the women were, and what else might be living in these dungeons. Yet, for those who were followers of Jesus, there was a peace that passed all understanding. They simply committed themselves and their loved ones to God and tried to find a comfortable position to sleep.

As the sun rose on Friday morning, the men began to try to identify who was in the cell with them. Kobe already had located Benji, but now they found that Benji's dad Jonas and his Grandpa Zebedee were in the same group. He knew that these three were all strong followers of Jesus, but he wasn't sure about the others. Seth, who was Mr. Kenan's son, seemed to be in shock. He was primarily concerned

about his wife and the four young children they had left behind. Josie, Mary's son, was furious that his mother's funeral was being ruined. He was angry, but Kobe couldn't determine whether he was angrier at the temple guards, at Uncle Zeke and his Pharisee friends, or at James and John and their Jesus follower friends. Kobe knew that Josie's anger was probably grief over his mother and confusion because he didn't understand Jesus. Nathan, Mary's son-in-law, and two of his sons stayed out of the discussion and away from the rest of the group. Nathan seemed to desire not to get into any conflict with his wife's family.

Soon after sunrise, slaves from James and John's house brought them breakfast. They whispered that they were told that the High Priest had issued orders for the guards to arrest the group but were unaware that they had interrupted a funeral instead. They felt they would be freed just as soon as it was cleared up. Everyone thanked them for the food and asked about the children. They were assured that friends of James and John were staying at the house and caring for the children. When the slaves left, Zebedee led the group in prayer thanking God for the food and asking for His help in straightening this out quickly. He carefully kept it neutral so that all the men would feel included. Everyone ate with little discussion. None of them had ever been near a dungeon, let alone inside one with locked doors. It was not a pleasant experience, even if it was a mistake.

After several hours of just sitting and waiting, mostly in silence, Josie spoke up. "Uncle Zebedee, I never understood what happened with Jesus. All my life he was just my big brother, and then all of a sudden he was supposed to be the Son of God, and I just don't get it."

Zebedee looked around the room and said gently, "We are in a locked room, and I don't want to offend anyone. A question has been asked that I would love to answer, but if anyone objects, I will refrain and talk with Josie privately when this is all settled. Does anyone object to my talking about Jesus and what I know about His birth and life?"

The men all seemed to agree that it was better than sitting with nothing to do. Zebedee began, "As most of you know, Salome, my wife, was Mary's younger sister. When I first met Salome and we began our espousal, it was common knowledge that Mary had become pregnant during her time of espousal to Joseph. Salome indicated that Mary had told her some strange things about an angel speaking to her and the Spirit of God impregnating her, but she really didn't understand it. All she really knew was that Joseph married her and her parents refused to have anything more to do with her. When I married Salome, we had no idea where Mary and Joseph were. They had gone to Bethlehem for a census, and then just disappeared. But then, soon after you were born, Josie, they returned to Nazareth, and Joseph took over his dad's Carpentry Shop. Everyone seemed to accept them as just a couple that made a mistake, and all was forgiven and forgotten. We lived in Capernaum and you guys lived in Nazareth, but we still got together pretty often. Salome always said

there was something different about Jesus. When she would ask Mary, Mary would just repeat, 'He's my son, but He's not Joseph's. He's God's Son.' Salome kept trying to get her to admit that there was another man, but she wouldn't.

"Salome had an aunt Elizabeth, who lived south of Jerusalem in a mountainous area. Uncle Zechariah was a priest. We visited them once after we married, and they told us an incredible story. They said that several years before, while Zechariah was ministering at the temple, his number was chosen to go into the Holy Place. While there, an angel told him that he was going to have a son and his son would be a prophet to go before the Messiah and announce His arrival. God sent that son even though they were old, and he became the now famous John the Baptizer that Herod killed some years ago.

"John was a really strange man who lived most of his life out in the mountains and wilderness of Judea. But he says that God spoke to him and told him to go and announce the arrival of the Messiah, so he did. He baptized people to get them ready for the Messiah. God also told him that when he baptized a man, and saw the Holy Spirit descend on Him like a dove, and saw the heavens open, he would know for sure that that man was the Messiah. Well, that's what happened. He started preaching for people to get ready for the Messiah and repent of their sins and huge crowds from all over Judea and Galilee came to hear him preach. One day he baptized a man and not only did a dove descend out of the heavens, but God actually spoke, and everyone there heard it. The Voice from Heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' So, John announced Him as the Messiah. Of course, that man was Jesus. John taught that the Messiah wasn't going to be a political Savior, He was the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

"Soon after that, Jesus began preaching and teaching and healing people and doing all kinds of miracles and drawing huge crowds. The Jewish leaders and Sanhedrin were not happy with Him claiming to be God, but as far as I could tell, everything was pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. Then, just over two years ago, Jesus was crucified for claiming to be God. He not only predicted His crucifixion, but He promised to meet His apostles in Capernaum afterward. Three days later He came back to life and appeared to many, many people for about forty days. He had breakfast with my sons and the other apostles on the beach just past my fishing business. I say if a man can predict his death and his resurrection and pull it off — I'm following him. I'm not trying to push that down anybody else's throat, that's just my personal belief.

"Two of my grandchildren, Jonathan and Jenay, told me that they not only saw Jesus after the crucifixion, but they were out playing in the woods with some friends near Bethany when they saw Jesus return to Heaven. Suddenly, He just started rising up into the sky like He was floating. They said that two angels told the apostles that Jesus would come back the same way — floating on the clouds."

Kobe said, "I didn't know they saw that. I want to ask them for more details."

"All I know is what they told me."

Kobe nodded and added, "My mother and I lived with Jesus and His followers for two years and we saw so many miracles and things that could not be explained any way except that He was who He said He was: God in the flesh. He's my Messiah, too."

The group was quiet, each mulling over what had been said. It was getting close to noon and the cell was hot and the smell was overpowering. They wondered aloud what was happening and why they hadn't been released or at least brought before the Sanhedrin. Some of the men slept, some just sat and stared. Kobe and Benji talked softly about things that they had seen Jesus do and heard Him say. Kobe again was amazed at the incredible peace that he felt.

Late Friday afternoon, servants from James and John's house delivered food. They reminded them that they would not be allowed to bring food on the Sabbath. They brought enough for tonight and all day tomorrow but would return with fresh food after the Sabbath ended. Benji laughed and said, "Looks like the troops have been rallied to keep us from starving to death!"

"Where did all this food come from?" asked Josie.

"I imagine that other followers of Jesus have been notified that we are in prison, and they are dropping off the food to encourage us. We stick together like that," said Kobe.

"That's cool," said Josie as he grabbed a plate and started to fill it.

Zebedee began the Sabbath prayer and all the men joined in together. At least they had their Jewish heritage in common. Soon it would be too dark to see. They filled their plates and then wrapped the food as tightly as they could and put it back in the boxes, hoping it would be safe from rodents through the night.

At the end of the meal, Zebedee prayed aloud for them. "Our Heavenly Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth, You have taken us through a hard day, and we are weary of waiting for answers. We ask for safety through this night for ourselves and for our loved ones, our wives, children, and grandchildren. Help us to celebrate Your Sabbath and feel Your presence with us. In Jesus' name I pray." After a few minutes, he added, "Good night, my sons, rest well."

There was a feeling of good will as everyone said good-night and settled down knowing that with the coming of the Sabbath, there would be no end to this until probably Sunday. It wasn't comfortable to sleep on the filthy floor with no blankets or pillows. They had managed to get the ropes off their hands, but the shackles around their ankles were iron and were tight and painful. It was another long night.

Just as soon as there was enough light to see, some of the men were rummaging through the food. Zebedee was used to fishing all night and sleeping all morning, so he had no trouble sleeping through sunrise. But by midmorning, everyone was awake and feeling restless.

It was Josie who once again broke the silence. "Hey, could some of you that knew Jesus as an adult, I mean, after he started his

ministry, could you tell me about the miracles you saw? I never really knew him as an adult. I've never heard about these miracles and stuff you talked about yesterday. That might help us pass some time — if it's all right with everybody else." He looked around and all the other men seemed to agree.

"Can I start?" asked Benji.

"Sure. Why not?" replied Josie.

"Grandpa Zebedee can help me because I will probably forget some stuff. But I was working for him repairing fishing nets. I showed up for work one morning and there was nothing but chaos. The guys had fished all night and caught nothing. As far as I know, that had never happened." Zebedee nodded his agreement. "Anyway, the nets still needed to be checked and repaired, so I was busy when I noticed a crowd gathering on the beach. There were about a hundred people standing around someone teaching. Of course, that was Jesus, but I didn't know it then. He came over and asked if He could borrow a boat to teach from. Simon Peter and Andrew, a couple of my cousins who worked for Grandpa..."

"My nephews," interrupted Zebedee.

"They took Jesus out to one of the fishing boats and pushed offshore just enough so that the people couldn't crowd Him. The water helped them to be able to hear Him better. He taught for about an hour, I guess. I was working on the nets, and only half listening. Then Jesus waded back to shore and Peter yelled for his crew to join him. He said that Jesus wanted them to go fishing. The crew was not happy because they were ready to sleep. But they had to obey the boss, so they joined Peter and Andrew. They pushed offshore about a hundred yards and let down a round net where Jesus had told them. Trouble was, they couldn't pull it back up. Grandpa started running for another boat and yelled for his crew to join him. They rowed out to help. Both boats together couldn't lift that round net. They started bailing fish out of the net and into the boats until it looked like both boats were going to sink. Finally, they were able to row both boats and tow the round net behind them and dump it on the shore. It took probably twelve men to dump it because the net was so full. Then they still had two boats full of fish to sort. Everyone started sorting fish and Grandpa said it was the most fish he had ever seen in one catch. Wasn't it, Grandpa?" Again, Zebedee agreed, but let Benji continue his story. "He ran out of barrels to store them in. He started giving them away to the townspeople. That's the day my Uncle James and Uncle John and Simon Peter and Andrew started following Jesus. It made a big impression on me."

"So, you think that Jesus was controlling the fish?" asked Josie incredulously.

"Yeah, I think He is the Creator, and I think He knew exactly where that school of fish was because He's God," said Benji confidently.

"Uncle Zebedee, was that what happened?" asked Josie.

“That’s exactly what happened. It was an amazing day. And I lost four of my best fishermen when they chose to follow Jesus.” Zebedee continued, “I saw such huge changes in those four. They became real men. They were confident and caring. But maybe the biggest change was in James’ and John’s marriages. They treated their wives differently than I had ever seen before. They said that Jesus not only said that God created women equal to men, but He treated them that way. Jesus expected them to protect and care for the women and children. But He also taught them to respect and honor them. I saw them holding hands in public and walking side by side. They made decisions together and their marriages were just ... different. It changed how I treated Salome.” At that the big strong fisherman wiped tears from his face and looked away. Everyone became quiet realizing how much Zebedee was missing Salome. All were wondering what was happening with their families.

After a while, Josie asked again if any of them had seen other miracles. Kobe spoke up, “Oh, yeah. Almost every night after He would finish teaching, Jesus would start healing. I’ve seen Him heal hundreds of people. I even saw Him raise people from the dead. I saw Him raise a twelve-year-old girl in Capernaum. Her abba, Jairus, was the ruler of the synagogue there. I saw Him raise a young man in Nain. I saw Him raise a man from Bethany named Lazarus after he had been dead for four days. I could never remember all the things I’ve seen. There were demon-possessed people set free and lepers totally restored. I’ve been in storms out on the Sea of Galilee that he calmed by just speaking to the wind. And remember, these things are all prophecies foretold in The Law and The Prophets. Jesus didn’t come to start a new religion. He came to fulfill these prophecies. He became the Lamb of God that was predicted in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned and needed a Messiah. God promised that someday He would send one. I believe that Jesus is that Messiah,” Kobe added.

“So, why does the High Priest want to arrest you guys? If indeed that’s what this is all about,” asked Seth.

Kobe answered carefully. “Seth, I believe that the Jewish religion has become just that — a religion. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin are more political than spiritual, and most are focused on what they can get rather than what they can give. They saw Jesus as a major threat to their way of life. I believe they thought if they killed Him, then everything would just get back to normal. But God has other plans. He is teaching a New Way. There’s close to a million people who follow Jesus all over the world — probably more. Daily they are spreading the good news. Jesus said there would be no stopping it — like a wildfire. I don’t believe that there’s anything that the Jewish leaders, or Rome, or anybody else can do to stop us. We’ve seen too much, heard too much, and absolutely believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God. When you see a man predict his death and his resurrection and then it happens, you can’t stop that. They can kill us, but others will take our place. Jesus told Peter that Satan would not win this battle. So regardless of how this arrest turns out, God will still win and

that's okay by me." Kobe didn't know what else to say and the men sat in silence for a few minutes.

"Hey, anybody else hungry? I think I missed breakfast somewhere, and I declare it time for a midday snack," said Zebedee. "Let's finish off this food before they bring us the post-Sabbath meal." So even though a noon meal was not customary, the men pulled out all the food and filled their plates. They enjoyed the feast together and then most of them gathered in small clumps to talk about other things.

The afternoon seemed to drag on forever. Finally, Kobe thought of a question that might help fill the time. "Josie, you asked us to tell you about Jesus as an adult. I would love to hear what Jesus was like as a boy, you know, before He started His ministry. Maybe you or Zebedee could fill us in on that."

"Sure," said Josie. He told the group about Jesus getting lost in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old. "But it turned out that he was helping some people. He seemed to really, really care about people. He always had friends. He loved to fish and often cooked fish for the family so that Mother could take a break. Let's see, I was eight when Jesus turned thirteen and started working full time at the Carpentry Shop. He had always helped out there, but he had only worked there full time about a year when our abba died. That meant Jesus was the boss and maybe it was grief, or just that age, but I didn't want Jesus telling me what to do. I missed Abba a lot. I thought Jesus was a really mean boss, but when I look back on it, he was just trying to get me to shape up. I mean, what he fussed about is if I cheated a customer, or didn't complete a task, or took a short-cut on a project. You know, those things that a real abba would correct. But I didn't want my brother telling me what to do, so I left as soon as I could. But yeah, Jesus was always sticking up for the underdog, and protecting the customer, and taking care of other people. My parents tried really hard to treat us all the same, but I realize now how hard that must have been. I mean, how do you compete with God?" Everyone laughed but agreed that it would have been hard to put up with a perfect big brother.

Everyone was surprised when Nathan spoke up. "I think when I married Rebecca, you were all working at the Carpentry Shop under Jesus. I had to ask Jesus for permission to marry Rebecca, and I felt so lucky that I didn't have to deal with a possessive abba, but man, was I surprised. He asked me every question in the book. He wasn't mean or harsh, he was just thorough. I knew better than to misbehave with Rebecca because he was watching out for her." Everyone laughed.

"Think how scary it would have been if you had known he was God and could read your mind!" Josie teased. "Man, that's just weird." Kobe admitted that he'd never thought about that. But agreed that maybe that was why he always felt so understood by Jesus.

Before the sun set, the food arrived, and they filled their plates quickly before it got too dark in the dungeon to see. Zebedee again prayed for God's blessing of the food. Later, he prayed for them to get

some sleep and asked God to watch over their wives and children and to work things out for His glory tomorrow. It was a long, uncomfortable night.

After breakfast everyone was restless. Something was holding up their release and it was hard to be locked in a stinky cage with no information. No one felt up to storytelling, so they just sat quietly with their own thoughts.

They were startled when a temple guard stomped to the door and began to unlock it. They all stood, and he warned everyone to step back. "I just want Josie." Josie gave the thumbs up to the men left behind and shuffled toward the guard. Everyone's hopes were high as the door clanged shut again and the guard turned to lock it. Now, the talk turned to how long it would be before they would all be free.

About midafternoon the guard returned and called for Seth, Mr. Kenan's son. He hugged Uncle Zebedee and Jonas and then followed the guard — hopefully to freedom. It was near the end of the day before the guard returned and called for Nathan and his two sons. They shuffled out of the cell, and then Nathan looked back to the remaining men and said, "Thank you."

Kobe could only hope that he meant that the experience had been worthwhile and that he had learned something from it. Now it was just the followers of Jesus who were left, and since it was nearly sunset, they assumed they would be spending at least another night. But there was a change. Now they could talk freely, and Kobe could not remember a sweeter time of fellowship. Everyone was in the same boat, and they were amazed at the peace and joy that was present with them in the filthy cell. The servants arrived with food and whispered that the others were gradually being released. The remaining four enjoyed the food quickly but now the prayers were spoken openly. After dark they sang one Psalm after another as they tried to find comfortable positions to sleep.

At times the men wondered if they would be flogged or killed tomorrow, but each time, the Holy Spirit replaced those thoughts with joyful thoughts of times with Jesus. Kobe slept soundly and was surprised when he was awakened by the slaves bringing breakfast. He couldn't remember when he had slept through his prayer time. The morning passed quickly as they shared stories. Late in the morning, Zebedee, Jonas, and Benji were called out together. They each hugged Kobe and promised to pray for him. The guard became impatient as Zebedee laid his hand on Kobe's head and took his time to pray a blessing on him.

As the door clanged shut and the guard locked it behind him, Kobe felt overwhelmed with panic. But just as quickly, he felt an incredible peace come over him. He felt totally surrounded by love and peace and even joy. Kobe fell to his knees and worshipped. He praised God for allowing him to be here and prayed that he would represent Him well. He then began praying for the seed that had been planted in Josie, Seth, Nathan, and his two grown sons. He prayed that that seed would grow and bear fruit. He began to pray for the

other followers of Jesus, but decided he had better not pray aloud in case a guard was taking notes. So, he just quietly prayed for all his fellow followers and hoped that they were now comfortably reunited with their wives and children and that all was well. At times he was tempted to fret and wonder if they had been scourged or were possibly even dead, but he submitted those thoughts to God and the peace would return. He was eager for the servants to bring food — but more eager to hear news of everyone’s release. When the servants arrived, they announced that everyone including James and John had been released and only he remained. They brought plenty of food, and Kobe took his time eating even though it grew dark quickly. He began to think about his journey. He remembered the day he was told of his mother’s awful death. A Roman centurion in a chariot had been in a hurry and had trampled her to death as she crossed the street. *No, I can’t think about that. She is in Heaven with Jesus. I have no doubt about that. Now Mrs. Mary is with her, and they are both with Jesus.* He again began to pray for Josie, Nathan, and Seth. And soon he was sleeping soundly.

Kobe woke early and began to pray that he would be found faithful if he was killed or scourged today. He realized that he needed to release those feelings to God and focus on praising Him for the privilege of sharing with the captive men for those three precious days. He began to pray that they would continue to ask questions and that God would grow the seeds that were planted. He assumed that the reason he was being held was because he was not a family member. He wondered what charges they could bring against him, but again felt the need to relinquish those thoughts to God. He alone knew how this would turn out, and he prayed that he would trust Him completely. Soon a servant brought him breakfast and told him that James and John and Kenan had all been pleading for his release. He assured him that all the followers in Jerusalem were praying. Kobe thanked him and told him to report that God was keeping him in good spirits, and that he was grateful for their prayers.

Kobe was positive that he would be released today. He didn’t know what the outcome would be, but he was ready for it to happen and get this waiting over with. But Tuesday dragged by, and Kobe kept trying to find ways to keep his mind focused on God. He sang every Psalm he knew. He preached every sermon that he had heard Jesus preach. He outlined future sermons to share with his group in Cana and tried to make the time productive. He continued to pray for the men he had been imprisoned with, and he began to pray for the temple guards, the Sanhedrin, and the High Priest. When the servant returned to bring his dinner, he told Kobe that James had said that they felt his release would be soon. They had provided the Sanhedrin with everything that they knew about Kobe — the death of his mother, his failed apprenticeship at the Jewelry Shop, and Mrs. Mary’s taking him in to live with her for those nine months. They felt that once they verified his reason for being with the family, he would be set free. But since it was getting dark, Kobe needed to eat and get settled for the

night. Kobe thanked the servant for the news, the encouragement, and for the food.

As Kobe lay in the dark, he began to ask God to reveal to him what the plan was for the Cana group. For several months he had felt that the Holy Spirit was encouraging him to speak to the synagogue ruler about letting him lead a group on early Sunday mornings or maybe evenings to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. He wanted to open up the possibility for every Jew in Cana to hear the New Way. He loved teaching the group at Mr. Kenan's home, but he felt the need to expand it. He also knew that he needed to focus on finishing his apprenticeship. *Will Mr. Kenan offer me a job, or tell me to set up shop in another town?* He wondered how far Nazareth was from Cana. He knew it was somewhat close. *I wonder if they need a blacksmith* For the first time he thought about starting a second group and wondered if it would be possible to lead both and commute back and forth. As he was thinking about possibilities, he thanked God for giving him a vision of productive ministry for the future and hoped that was a good sign of his impending release.

It was not long after breakfast on Wednesday when the temple guard unlocked the door and released Kobe from his shackles. Kobe followed the guard out of the cell but wasn't sure exactly what he was supposed to do. He had imagined that he would be brought before the Sanhedrin and would need to explain why he was there. But the guard just grunted, "You are released. Go home or wherever you want to go." Kobe's eyes were not accustomed to the bright sunlight, and his legs were weak and swollen from the shackles. He had no idea where he was, but he wasn't going to stay there! So, he began walking slowly, blinking his eyes and trying to get them to adjust. He couldn't see anything except glaring light. He found a grassy spot and sat down for fear of falling. As his eyes adjusted, he discovered he was sitting near the fountain of Siloam near the temple. He stood and began to move slowly toward James and John's home, but realized that Mary's home was much closer and decided to stop there to rest. He was amazed at how weak his legs felt after seven days of being shackled. He knocked on Mary's door and was immediately surrounded by her loving welcome. She sent a messenger to James and John to let them know that Kobe was free and was resting at her house. Soon Mr. Kenan and Enoch arrived with the oxcart to take him back to James and John's house. Kobe was welcomed like a hero by Kayla, Marta, Jonathan, and Jenay. They helped him get settled and encouraged him to walk around as much as he could to get the swelling out of his legs. Mary's family had all returned to their homes, and the apostles were preaching at the temple. Kobe was sad to not get to visit with Josie and Nathan. He had hoped to cultivate the seed that had been planted, but he knew that was God's job.

Around the dinner table, Kobe discovered that God had arranged the groups so that each dungeon had included followers who were able to share their stories. While they were all sorry for the ordeal that had interrupted their family's farewell to Mrs. Mary, they rejoiced to

realize that probably more was accomplished by the arrest than would ever have been normally. John reported that even Uncle Zeke had listened to his stories about Jesus and seemed touched by them. They promised to continue to pray for their extended family and for the seed to take root.

After dinner, Mr. Kenan asked Kobe whether he felt up to traveling tomorrow, or if they should wait until after the Sabbath. Kobe assured him that he was ready to travel. Mr. Kenan, his two servants, and Kobe said their goodbyes and headed out of Jerusalem early on Thursday morning. Once they passed the temple, the oxen were able to travel at full speed. When the oxen had to stop to take breaks, Kobe was grateful for the time to get out of the wagon and walk around. His legs were still weak, so he usually jogged ahead of them whenever they stopped to rest. On Friday late afternoon, Kobe began to recognize signs that they were not far out of Cana. It was going to be close, but they were pushing the oxen to arrive before the Sabbath began. They pulled into Mr. Kenan's gates just as the sun dipped below the horizon. Mrs. Vada and Orly had already lit the candles and prayed and had just sat down to eat when they heard the commotion and ran outside to greet the travelers. Mr. Kenan ordered the slaves to care for the oxen properly because they had been pushed all day, but to leave the cart and supplies until after the Sabbath.

Chapter 9

Dinner was a mixture of joy and sorrow as all four of them tried to catch up. Mr. Kenan was saddened by Hosea's passing but thrilled that Mrs. Vada and Orly had made decisions that pleased him. Mrs. Vada was horrified by the arrest and detainment of Mr. Kenan and Kobe. But both she and Orly were thrilled to hear that God's good news had been shared with Jesus' earthly family. They agreed to continue to pray for them. Orly wanted to know how much persecution the home groups were experiencing in Jerusalem. Kobe replied, "We've been in danger ever since Jesus' crucifixion, but the Holy Spirit continues to assure me that nothing can stop this. Even if they kill all the current followers, they can't stop others from coming to know Him as they see our peace and love and joy in the midst of persecution. The more they hurt us, the more it spreads." Kobe thanked Mrs. Vada for having the benches set up for the group tomorrow. She told him what a fine job Orly had been doing leading the group. Orly shared that his mother had accepted Jesus as her Messiah and was helping the other women slaves to understand. They talked late and realized that the morning would come quickly.

Kobe and Orly headed to their room but ended up talking until the wee hours of the morning. Orly wanted to hear all about Kobe's experience in prison, and Kobe wanted to hear about Orly's messages to the group. Orly went to synagogue the next morning, but Kobe headed to the woods for some time to pray before he met with the group. Everyone was glad to have Mr. Kenan and Kobe back safely, but were saddened to learn that such things were happening to followers of Jesus in Jerusalem.

The following Sabbath, when Mr. Kenan greeted the group, he announced that he had decided not to go to Jerusalem for Shavuot, but Orly and Kobe would be taking anyone who wanted to attend. So, the next week Kobe, Orly, Mr. Abraham, Enoch, and three other men began their journey. They would be camping in the olive garden and that Kobe would be in charge. Mr. Kenan gave Orly an allowance to provide all the men's food and prayed with them before they left.

All six men were new followers of Jesus, so Kobe explained about the celebration of Pentecost and what it represented and how the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem would celebrate it. "I will be celebrating Pentecost, the first day of Shavuot, with other followers of Jesus. Then I will celebrate Shavuot at the temple for the final two days." Then he explained his dilemma. "There is a distinct possibility that the Jewish leaders will arrest or even kill those who participate in the Pentecost celebration. Each man must make his own decision. You are free to go to the temple to celebrate Shavuot where it should be safe." He asked if there were any questions and was surprised (but pleased) when every man insisted that attending Pentecost was why

they had chosen to come. Kobe wondered what Mr. Kenan would think if they were all arrested or killed.

Enoch knew all the best places to rest and water the oxen, so Kobe didn't have to concern himself with those details. He was a little worried about bringing seven additional men into Mary's home group and wondered if that would put his Jerusalem friends in too much danger. As he prayed, he felt assured that the Holy Spirit would lead him one step at a time.

They arrived at the olive garden well before sunset on Wednesday and quickly unloaded the remaining supplies and the boxes of first fruit, bread, and jugs of oil that were to be given as a sacrifice at the temple for Shavuot. Then Enoch took the oxen and the oxcart to a pasture outside of town. Orly took four of the men with him to buy supplies at the market. He wanted to be able to prepare quick and easy meals, and he didn't want to have to return to the market before the trip home, so he purchased everything he would need to feed the seven of them for the next six days. He bought fresh things that would last for two nights, and then traveling food that would keep for the rest of the trip. He spent his last mite and was pleased with what he had purchased.

The men gathered around the campfire and cooked their own fish. They still had some leftover bread that Orly's mother had sent, and Orly prepared the fresh vegetables. The men declared it a wonderful feast. As they fellowshiped around the fire, other followers began to gather around Kobe, and he introduced them to the group. Soon Kobe and Orly realized that the olive garden was going to be the perfect place to expose their group to other followers of Jesus. It seemed to be literally filled blanket to blanket with followers of Jesus.

At sunrise on Pentecost morning, the group ate breakfast and then joined the other followers climbing down the Kidron Ravine and up the other side. They joined in the singing of Psalms of praise to God. Each song told of the coming Messiah and how He would rule the world. It seemed that the whole town of Jerusalem was celebrating Jesus. Kobe felt certain that soon Roman soldiers would come and demand that the riot stop. The crowd sang and danced and celebrated the day that God sent His Spirit to dwell among them. At various street corners, the apostles preached boldly and told the crowds how Jesus died and was resurrected and that He sent His Holy Spirit on this day two years ago. They told how Jesus' death and resurrection put all people in a right relationship with God. They encouraged the people to kneel and pray and ask God to let Jesus be their Messiah. When followers saw someone kneeling, they would go to them and ask if they could answer any questions or help them in any way. All day long the crowds roamed the streets, singing and praising God, listening to the teaching of the apostles, and receiving instruction. As the sun began to set, the apostles encouraged everyone to find a group of followers to join for a fellowship meal. Orly and Kobe agreed that it would be best to just return to the olive garden and enjoy the crowd of followers there. They had tried to keep the five men in sight and had

managed to stick together most of the time. Now, they found all but one of their men. They were missing one of the kitchen slaves, and Kobe and Orly shared a look of horror. *What would happen if he had decided to escape?* But only a few minutes later, they found him praying with a stranger who had just accepted Jesus as his Messiah. The seven rejoiced together with the new follower and invited him to join them for their feast in the garden. Kobe and Orly led the men back to the olive garden. There they found total chaos. They had always left their travel bags and food stashes in the garden during the day and returned to find them safe each night. But as each family returned, they discovered that everything had been ransacked. There were probably a thousand people staying in the olive garden and no one had been spared. While the men salvaged what they could, Kobe and Orly felt an amazing peace come over them. Not once during the day had anyone tried to stop the celebration. As far as they knew, no one was harmed. They began to praise the Lord and lifted their voices in song. All over the garden, followers of Jesus began to sing. Their stomachs were empty, but their hearts were filled with celebration and praise. As they came together around the campfires, each one shared what they had experienced during the day. Kobe shared that he had lost count of the number of people who had prayed to receive Jesus as their Messiah. And then something strange began to happen. Word had reached the home groups in Jerusalem and a steady stream of lanterns began to cross the ravine into the garden. Followers were bringing baskets and baskets of food until every person was fed. Blankets were distributed for the women and children, and Kobe was thrilled that his group from Cana got to see God's provision in a very visible way. Tomorrow, they would go to the temple and celebrate Shavuot to say thank You to God for His provision for them.

That night, Orly met privately with Kobe and Mr. Abraham. Orly told them that he had spent every piece of silver that Mr. Kenan had sent to feed the men. He didn't have anything to purchase food for the next two days or for the two-day trip home. They couldn't do without food for that long. Kobe had a little silver with him, and Mr. Abraham had a little, but neither had brought enough to feed seven men for four days. They gave Kobe what they had, and he was waiting at the market when the sun rose on Friday morning. He only bought flour and salt and olive oil to make unleavened bread. He knew that it would be enough to keep them alive. Then he bought two onions and that finished off the coins. He quickly returned to the garden and began to bake a batch of unleavened bread. They ate quickly and went to the temple to worship. They just quietly watched as others offered their grain and first fruits. After an hour or so, they returned to the garden to fellowship with other believers. Most were packing up to leave since they couldn't afford to purchase more supplies either. Kobe and Orly talked with the group, and they, too, decided to head home.

The men helped Orly pack the little bit of food that they had for the trip home and then they all walked with Enoch to the farm near Emmaus. By noon on Friday, they were on their way out of Jerusalem.

At the first rest stop, Kobe and Enoch decided that they would stop early to prepare for the Sabbath. Enoch knew the perfect place. Soon they were fishing for their dinner. Orly told them to catch and cook twice as much fish as they intended to eat. So, on the last day of Shavuot, which was the Sabbath, the seven men celebrated God's provision by eating leftover fish for breakfast. It was the strangest Sabbath breakfast that any of them could remember. They rested and talked and enjoyed being together. Kobe shared that he had been reminded that he had never baptized Mr. Kenan's group and there were at least twenty followers who would want to be baptized. Mr. Abraham suggested that Kobe could use the stream behind his house for baptizing. They continued to talk about what they had experienced at Pentecost. Kobe reported that the home groups in Jerusalem were under severe persecution and were often raided and some were killed. It was causing whole groups of followers to relocate outside of Israel. The men asked if the persecution would come to Cana and Kobe simply said that he didn't know.

After Sabbath had ended and for Sunday morning breakfast, all Orly had to give the men was some unleavened bread and oil. He measured it out carefully hoping that they would have enough for tomorrow. When Enoch pulled off the road suddenly at an unplanned stop, Kobe and Orly both feared the worst — then he pointed to the grassy area beside the road. There was an apricot tree completely covered with ripe apricots. All the men picked as many apricots as they could reach. They quickly returned to the oxcart and began to enjoy the bounty.

The men made camp late that night. Orly passed out a piece of unleavened bread and a slice of onion for each man. They assured him that they were not disappointed with their trip and were still rejoicing that they had experienced Pentecost. They were so grateful that the raid happened when they were out celebrating, not while they were sleeping!

Monday morning, Enoch felt that they could easily be home by midafternoon. They ate the last of the unleavened bread and olive oil and began the last segment of their journey. The land had flattened, and the sun was hot. The apricots provided sweet relief. As they pulled into the gates at Mr. Kenan's, the men cheered. Everyone was surprised by their early return, and Mr. Kenan invited Kobe and Orly into the house to hear their account of the trip. Mr. Kenan apologized for not supplying Orly with emergency money but agreed that it was a fantastic opportunity for the men to see God provide for them.

On Tuesday the men returned to work at the shop. As the group met on the Sabbath, Kobe explained the meaning of baptism and announced, "Next week, we will meet here, but then walk to Mr. Abraham's house for a baptism. Please talk with me sometime this week if you are ready to be baptized to show that you are following Jesus as your Messiah."

When Kobe realized how long it would take to baptize twenty-four people, he asked Orly if he would baptize half of them. Orly was

shocked, but Kobe assured him that he was as qualified as anyone else to baptize in the name of Jesus. On the Sabbath, the group gathered and walked to Mr. Abraham's house. They walked down a trail to a quiet stream with a large pool of reasonably warm water. At least it wasn't as cold as the mountain lakes around Jerusalem!

Kobe and Orly both entered the water, and each baptized a dozen new followers of Jesus. The ones who desired baptism lined up on the shore, and Kobe and Orly took turns baptizing them in the name of Jesus. Orly thought his heart would explode as he watched Kobe baptize his mother. But then he realized that he would be the one to baptize Mr. Kenan. Afterward they hugged as brothers. *How can this be happening? God, You are too good to me.*



As summer approached, Mr. Kenan talked with Kobe about whether he wanted to travel to Jerusalem for Sukkot. "I don't feel a need to celebrate Sukkot, but I need to re-establish my relationship with Zeke. We are brothers even if we disagree about Jesus being the Messiah. I also want to see Seth and his family. I haven't seen them since Mary's death and, I feel a strong leading to go."

Enoch drove the oxcart with Mr. Kenan by his side, while Kobe and Omri rode in the back. They left early on Tuesday morning since Sukkot would begin on Friday. They dropped Kobe off near the olive garden and promised to pick him up there the next Sunday. Sukkot lasted eight days and they couldn't travel on the Sabbath.

Kobe had planned to visit several of the home groups and spend as much time as he could with the apostles and other leaders who could instruct him and encourage him. He was surprised to find that there were very few families camping in the garden and most of them were not followers. He walked to Mary's house to see if anyone was gathered there. She welcomed him warmly and introduced him to two couples who were staying with her. They had been fired from their jobs and were unable to pay for housing. She was allowing them to stay in exchange for helping with the cooking and taking care of the grounds. Mary shared that she was grieving over a home group that had been stoned to death just last week. She was trying to get the orphaned children placed in homes with followers of Jesus and trying to comfort the grieving families left behind. "So, the persecution continues?"

"Yes, very much so. Some of the home groups are moving all together to other parts of the world. Just this week, one group set out for Damascus and another to Antioch."

"Has it affected your group?"

"I think, if anything, it has strengthened it. A few have fallen away, but remember, many fell away when Jesus began to meet opposition. It is not necessarily a bad thing. The church must be purified, and persecution has a way of purifying it. Oh, and let me tell you what happened at James the Just's group about a month ago."

“Jesus’ brother?” asked Kobe.

“Oh, sorry. Yes, Jesus’ half-brother. He has somehow gotten that title, and it’s better than saying, ‘James, not the apostle,’” said Mary.

“He leads the group that meets at the temple, doesn’t he?”

“Yes, it’s probably one of the largest groups in Jerusalem.

Anyway, just like everyone else, they have a lot of members who are being fired from their jobs, and there are a lot of followers losing their homes. Barnabas, one of the leaders in the group, sold some land and brought the proceeds to James the Just. He told him to distribute it any way he saw fit. Everyone was impressed because the land had been in Barnabas’ family forever and it was a precious gift. Anyway, there was a couple that was attending the group and they apparently decided to sell a piece of property, too. As I heard it, the man made a big deal about bringing the proceeds to the front of the group and laying it at the feet of the apostles. Peter immediately spoke up and asked if this was the complete price of the land or a portion of it. It really didn’t matter. It was the man’s choice how much of the gain he wanted to give. But when he said, ‘Complete,’ he died right there on the spot. Some of the men in the group went out to bury him.”

“Wow! How did Peter know that he was lying?” asked Kobe.

“He didn’t. But the Holy Spirit did, and He wasn’t going to tolerate that in the church,” explained Mary.

“Wow! Talk about cleansing!”

“Yeah, but that’s not all. Near the end of the service, his wife came into the group looking for her husband. Peter called her to come to the front. She thought she was going to be honored. Peter very calmly asked her if the amount of silver that they had given for the good of the group was the complete proceeds or a portion of it. When she said, ‘Complete,’ she too dropped dead.”

“That’s incredible. So, they had agreed to lie to the group and God stopped it. How did the group handle that?”

“Well, from what I heard it has doubled the crowd. Even non-followers are showing a great respect for the New Way. They know that God is leading us and blessing us even though the persecution keeps getting harder. Peter is also becoming quite a leader and has been doing a lot of healing. He and John preach at the temple and have been traveling all over the region where Jesus taught — even up into Samaria, Galilee, and into Phoenicia. The good news is certainly spreading. There are a lot of priests and even members of the Sanhedrin who are following Jesus. Jesus said that the gates of Hell would not defeat us, and He’s been faithful to sustain us daily. I know some groups are hungry or without housing, and some are being put to death, but it just seems to make the others stronger.”

“Mary, I need to hear what is happening here. My people need to hear it, too. We have no persecution and I wonder if it’s time for me to branch out. In two weeks, I will complete my apprenticeship with Mr. Kenan. I’m pretty sure that he will offer me a permanent position, but I’m wondering if it would be better for me to try to plant more groups around Cana. I have been especially concerned about Nazareth,

Jesus' hometown. I know that they were opposed to Jesus declaring Himself to be the Messiah earlier, but I keep wondering if that has changed since the resurrection."

"Well, there's only one way to find out! But be careful. You don't want to just antagonize those who don't want to hear."

"I was imprisoned with some of the men from Nazareth, and I could visit there on the premise of wanting to check on them and see if they have any questions. I'm not sure I want to work at Mr. Kenan's. But I'm not sure I want to be without an income. I just don't know where the Holy Spirit is leading me."

"I promise you my prayers. What would you do about your group at Mr. Kenan's?"

"For right now, I intend to do both. Nazareth is less than an hour's walk, so I could lead both groups. I could probably work part time with Mr. Kenan and start more groups. I just don't know, or whether I should depend fully on the Holy Spirit to provide."

"Well, you should always depend fully on the Holy Spirit to provide, but sometimes He says to keep your job, and sometimes He says to leave it. We need to pray for you to hear His leading clearly."



Kenan and his two servants arrived at Zeke's house by midafternoon on Thursday. Zeke was surprised to see him and expressed that he didn't expect he would return to Jerusalem after such a harrowing experience the last time he was here. Kenan greeted him and asked if he was welcome to celebrate Sukkot with him. Zeke assured him that he was always welcome but added "As long as you don't get us arrested again." Kenan chose to ignore the comment and asked about Jacob and his family. Zeke seemed glad to change the subject. He ordered his servants to care for the oxen and help Kenan's servants bring the boxes into the house.

Sukkot began on Friday and Kenan spent the time catching up with Zeke and news of Jerusalem. On the Sabbath, they went to synagogue together and continued the celebration and quiet visit. Kenan resisted the urge to mention the name of Jesus and listened closely to the Holy Spirit's instructions to just be quiet. Kenan and his personal servant Omri left Zeke's early Sunday morning to visit with Seth and Joelle and their family. They planned to return after dinner to spend the night at Zeke's. Seth's four children were delighted that their grandpa had come. They were excited to show him the tabernacles they had built in their backyard to celebrate Sukkot. Kenan learned that while the children were camping out, Seth and Joelle were staying in the comfort of their own room.

Seth and Joelle joined Kenan in the courtyard to watch the children play. Seth wanted to know how his mother was doing and all the news of Cana. He inquired about Seth's businesses, but again, felt

he shouldn't mention Jesus unless Seth brought it up. Kenan encouraged them to visit Cana soon so that his mother could enjoy her grandchildren. Joelle shared that they were hoping to come, but it was hard to get Seth away from his work. She had lost both of her parents in the past two years and realized how important these visits were. Now that the baby was two, the trip would be much more feasible.

Dinner was a wonderful time that Kenan treasured with his grandchildren. Joelle excused herself to get the baby down for the night, while Seth and his dad helped the three older children get settled in their tabernacles. Seth and the children insisted that Grandpa tell the story of the Israelites escaping Egypt as was the tradition for Sukkot. Afterward, Kenan thought it was time to return to Zeke's, but he felt that nudge deep inside that told him to stay and visit Seth and Joelle for just a few more minutes.

When they came inside, Joelle had set out some raisin cakes and wine for them to enjoy. "Dad," said Seth, "we have some questions for you."

"Certainly, Son, you know you can ask me anything." Kenan's heart was hoping that this was the question he was praying for.

"Dad, Joelle and I both heard things during our time in prison that shocked us and made us wonder what it's all about — I mean, about Jesus being the Messiah and all. We would like to find some answers, but we don't want to put the children in danger. How do we go about getting the answers we need?" Seth ended lamely.

"Son, I believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Everything that I have checked out has convinced me of this truth. But I don't want you to make your decision until you know for sure. I'll be happy to answer any questions, or you could invite James and Kayla over anytime."

"Dad, I know it's late, but we'd really like to hear what made you decide to become a Jesus follower. You are welcome to spend the night. We've been miserable trying to decide what to do for the past six months. Can you please spend some time with us?"

Kenan instructed Omri to return to Zeke's and inform him that he was spending the night with Seth and Joelle, and they would all join him midafternoon tomorrow for the family celebration with Jacob as planned. Omri left promptly, and Kenan prayed for wisdom to know how to share with his son and daughter-in-law about Jesus.

"Well, actually, my questions began at your wedding feast. Do you remember how Jesus turned the water into wine?" asked Kenan.

"No. I don't remember anything about that," replied Seth and Joelle agreed that she had no knowledge of that happening.

"Well, so many people showed up for your wedding that I ran out of wine before you two decided to leave. That was quite a party!"

"Yes, it was! It was so much fun and a very special week with all our family and friends and a few strangers who came for the free food!" said Seth.

"It happens! Your mother and I were so embarrassed that we had run out of wine, but your Aunt Mary said she would take care of it, and

suddenly she was having the servants serve wine from the ceremonial water pots.”

“Oh, I remember that! I thought it was strange but didn’t really question it. And that wine was really, really, good,” added Seth.

“Well, later I found out from my servants that Jesus had ordered them to refill the washing pots with water from the well — one hundred and twenty gallons total. Then He had ordered Hosea to take a cup of water to Ruler Jedidiah who was conducting your wedding. The ruler declared it was great wine and was surprised that I had saved it for last.”

“Are you saying that he turned water into wine?” asked Joelle.

“Yes. The next day, I took Mary aside and asked her what happened. She reminded me of things that I had forgotten, or maybe didn’t even know. I remember being a very young boy when she left and went to stay with Mother’s sister Aunt Elizabeth. Then when she came back, we weren’t supposed to mention her name. I remember Salome and Mother crying a lot and I thought that Mary had died. Then maybe six or seven years later Mary and Joseph and three little ones moved back to Nazareth and were treated as if nothing had happened. By that time, I was grown and apprenticed in Cana at the Metal Shop.”

“What does this have to do with Jesus?” prodded Seth.

“Well, apparently, what happened is that an angel appeared to Mary, and she became pregnant with God’s Son while she was espoused to Joseph. Joseph married her, but our parents disowned her. Long story short, according to Mary, Jesus is not Joseph’s son. But they were instructed to raise Him as if He was. So, I really didn’t know any different.

“Then when this happened at the wedding, I asked Mary and she said that our cousin, John the Baptizer, had recently announced that Jesus was the Messiah and that He came to be the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for our sins. That’s when she explained about Jesus not being Joseph’s son, but I still didn’t really understand. I mean, this was my sister. Jesus was my nephew. It just didn’t make sense.

“Zeke and I were actually present at His crucifixion. We watched Him die. It was horrible. But He was our nephew and we stayed to support Mary. When I left town on that Sunday, I didn’t know what was happening. I didn’t learn about Jesus’ resurrection until the following Sukkot when Mary sent Kobe home with me to apprentice at the shop. Kobe had traveled with Jesus for the two years before His crucifixion and he started answering my questions and filling in the missing pieces. Then, just two weeks before Mary’s death, Orly talked about asking Jesus to be his Messiah and it all made sense. They explained that Jesus died as the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for our sins. All we have to do is ask Him to be our Messiah. I’m really new to this, but I can tell you that I have experienced an incredible peace that I’ve never felt before. He’s guiding me and telling me what to do step by step. And He told me you would be asking these questions tonight. All

I can do is encourage you to follow Jesus until you feel comfortable asking Him to be your Messiah. Keep asking questions and seeking. If you don't feel safe asking questions here, then come visit me and talk with Kobe or Orly. But don't ignore it. Get the facts."

"Thanks, Dad. That helps a lot, and we intend to. Joelle and I were thinking that we need to visit Mother anyway. Would it be all right if we planned to come to visit next month?"

"Son, you and your family are always welcome anytime! It will be so good to have you, and I know Mother will be thrilled."

"Let's try to get some rest. We're expected at Uncle Zeke's tomorrow afternoon. Dad, we've prepared the boys' room for you since they are outside. Sleep as long as you wish, I know it's late."

"Thanks, but I don't want to miss a minute with my grandchildren, and if I remember right, the little ones will be up with the sun!"

"Unfortunately, you are right!" agreed Joelle.

The next morning, Kenan enjoyed a sweet visit with his grandchildren and then, soon after noon, they all walked together to Zeke's house. The children played with their cousins and the ladies were happy visiting in the yard.

Kenan and Zeke and their two sons began to talk about Israel's future and what was happening in Jerusalem. Nothing was said about Jesus. Seth announced to the others that he and Joelle were going to make a trip to see his mother next month and everyone agreed that that would be a good thing to do, since Vada could no longer make the yearly trips to Jerusalem. It was up to the younger generation to honor their parents as they grew older. The servants walked the women and children home when they became tired, while the men continued to visit late into the night.

The rest of the week was fairly quiet. Zeke and Kenan visited cordially and walked to the temple each day to worship and offer sacrifices. On Friday they went to the Great Assembly. The High Priest spoke from the courtyard steps, and he was surrounded by Jews from every nation. He encouraged them to renew their commitment to his leadership and not to be swayed by false teachers who would lead them astray. The men walked home in silence.

Finally, Zeke spoke, "So, is Seth coming to visit you to find out more about Jesus or to visit his mother?"

"I honestly don't know, Zeke. You would have to ask him. He did mention wanting to do both. I know Vada won't care why he comes — as long as he comes. She's never even met their two youngest, and you know that's hard on any grandmother."

"Kenan, I just want you to know that I don't believe Jesus is the Messiah, but I really don't like the direction of the Sanhedrin. They seem to be more political and less spiritual every day," said Zeke.

"I agree. I was in hopes the High Priest would encourage us to be more interested in our relationship with God."

"Yeah," agreed Zeke.

They enjoyed the Sabbath meal and talked about the weather and about Vada's health, but nothing of importance. They went to the

synagogue on Sabbath morning and heard nothing but politics. They spent the day quietly visiting and looking forward to spending Passover together in the spring.

After an early breakfast, Kenan and his two servants left Zeke's and slowed the oxcart enough to pick up Kobe as he waited near the olive garden. The men stopped early to fish on Monday and enjoyed their time together. They arrived home by midafternoon on Tuesday. Vada was beside herself with joy at the prospect of seeing Seth and Joelle and their babies.

Kobe and Orly talked late into the night and Orly asked what Kobe had learned of Mr. Kenan's plans for him since tomorrow was Kobe's final day as an apprentice. Kobe laughed and said that he had no idea whether he had a job tomorrow or not. Both men laughed at how God had changed their priorities. They both agreed to wait and see what happened.

Chapter 10

At breakfast the next morning, Mr. Kenan asked Kobe to stay and talk with him. Orly went on to the Metal Shop with Joshua, the shop boy. “Kobe, my apologies for letting this day slip up on me! It seems that in all our excitement over Seth, we’ve forgotten an important business decision.”

“That’s okay, sir. There are more important things in life than business.”

“How true, and I’m just now learning that. I still want to do right by my employees. You have now completed your apprenticeship with me. Have you thought about what you want to do?”

“Well, that depends ...” started Kobe.

“Kobe, I really am scattered this morning. Let me start over. You have done an excellent job learning to be a blacksmith. I certainly would like to hire you if you are willing to work for me, or I will give you my highest recommendation if you want to go elsewhere,” interrupted Mr. Kenan.

“Thank you, sir. In that case, I would like to accept your offer and continue to work for you — at least for a while. But I have a few questions that I need to ask a fellow follower. May I?”

“Of course, you may speak freely.”

“Mr. Kenan, I feel that the Holy Spirit is calling me to start additional groups in the area. I would like to talk with Ruler Jedidiah, the synagogue ruler here in Cana, about starting a Sunday worship service early in the morning or possibly a dinner fellowship or maybe both, if he’s agreeable. I would like to offer to teach them about the New Way. Then, I would like to visit the synagogue in Nazareth and see if the priest there would be open to my leading a class about Jesus. I feel there might be someone in the town who would be willing to start a home group. Now, my question is, are you going to be comfortable with my working at your Metal Shop if this turns into outright persecution? I want you to feel free to fire me at any time because I don’t want any harm to come to you, your family, or your business.”

“I appreciate your concern, Kobe, but let’s just take this one step at a time. Are you thinking that if you get several groups started, then you’ll be looking at cutting back on your work?”

“Yes, sir, or quitting altogether to focus on starting even more home groups. There are so many people within walking distance of Cana. I just feel the Spirit is leading me, but I don’t have clarity.”

“I’m not afraid of the persecution, but if it starts to affect the Metal Shop, I will need to protect my employees.”

“I understand, sir, and will totally support your decision.”

“Have you secured a place to live?”

“No, but I will start looking on my break and after work tonight.”

“Well, I always give my apprentices a full day off work before they start as employees. So, you’ll have all day to get things set up before starting work tomorrow.”

“Thank you, sir. That will really help.”

“You will be welcome to eat and lodge with us for one more week. I will pay you as a full-time employee unless or until you become a part-time one, then, I’ll go back to paying you per job so that you will be free to focus on your ministry. Is that what you desire?”

“Yes. Thank you, sir.”

“Do you have any other questions?”

“I don’t think so and thank you, sir. I’m thrilled that Seth is coming to ask questions. I hope to find Nathan and Josie when I visit Nazareth. They may have questions, too. I guess I better get started looking for a house.”

Kobe headed to the Mercantile Store. He had heard that the owner, Mr. Hiram, might know of places to rent. He walked with a spring in his step. His pay would increase, and Mr. Kenan had said he had a place to sleep and eat for the rest of the week. One day at a time; that was good enough for him. Mr. Hiram recommended a small one-room house not far from the Metal Shop. He checked it out and agreed with the owner to move in after the Sabbath.

So, Kobe and Orly spent their last two nights together as roommates. Orly was thrilled to hear that Kobe was planning to begin ministry to the synagogues in both Cana and Nazareth, but he still didn’t feel comfortable talking with him about his increasing desire to minister to his Gentile friends. Kobe put off his trip to Nazareth for one more week and decided to focus instead on visiting with the ruler of the synagogue in Cana. He walked with Orly and the other men to the synagogue, but then felt a distinct leading to not speak to the ruler. He didn’t know whether he was hearing the Holy Spirit right, but something felt all wrong. He needed to focus on his message to the group at Mr. Kenan’s and walked into the woods to pray quietly before the meeting.

Kobe shared with the group about the persecution happening in Jerusalem and how it was strengthening the church. He explained that the Holy Spirit was doing some miraculous healings through James, John, Peter, and other apostles, just as Jesus had predicted. Jesus had said that his followers would do greater works than He had done. Kobe encouraged the group to be vigilant in their obedience to the Holy Spirit’s leading. “He will not lead you wrongly even though many times you will feel that He’s leading you on a very circuitous path. If we understand and can explain the way He is leading, it is probably not Him leading us at all! I had a very definite feeling of where I should be this morning, but when morning came, I had a totally different leading. It is vitally important for us to listen closely because God is at work. He knows what, and when, and where He wants us to be at any given time.” He closed the time in prayer and reminded the group that he would be available for questions afterward.

Kobe plopped down beside Orly and his mother and visited for a while. Orly offered to help him move his things out just as soon as the sun went down. Mother offered to make them a simple dinner to share in Kobe's new home. And that's when Kobe realized that he was probably going to starve to death. *I don't have the first idea of how to cook. I will have to go to the market — but when? I guess I will need to go on my breaks. Oh, this adult life is getting complicated! All the men I work with are married or have servants to cook for them. Do I need to hire a servant? That seems ludicrous for a one room house. But can I really survive on food from the market? I will also need to go to the well. I don't even own a water jar!*

"Kobe, what is wrong? Let's take a walk," suggested Orly.

"No, thank you. I need a mother." Kobe gushed out his concerns and asked her what he should do. He explained he wanted to live as simply as possible but would still need to eat in order to do his job and minister to others.

"Didn't you just preach that we should stay in tune with the Holy Spirit and let Him guide us?" lectured Mother.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then what is He saying?"

"He's saying to ask you what to do!" They all laughed and agreed that it was Satan's attack to worry about such things. Jesus taught that He would provide everything that they needed to accomplish everything that He called them to do.

Kobe asked them, "But is it wrong to plan? I seem to be so unprepared for this step even though I've known it was coming for the past two years."

Mother said, "I suggest that you ask Mr. Kenan if you can pay for meals until you get on your feet and decide what to do."

"Do you think he would allow that?" asked Kobe.

"There's only one way to find out. But you'll need to wait until after Sabbath is ended. You know he won't do business on the Sabbath."

As the sun began to set, the men helped Mother to her feet. She prepared the men a sack and put out food for Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada in the dining room, and food for the servants in the kitchen. She loved Kobe like a son, but it was going to be even harder one year from now when Orly would be taking the same steps.

She sent the bag to Orly while Kobe and Orly gathered up Kobe's few belongings in his blanket. He really didn't need help carrying it, but he appreciated Orly's companionship. They walked quietly to the new house and found the owner waiting for them. Kobe gave him the rent money and asked where the nearest well was. Inside he found a water jar. Outside there was a skillet with a fire pit. Kobe made a note that he would need to buy a mat to sleep on the floor, but there was a grassy area in the back that would suffice as long as the weather stayed nice. He wondered why he was paying rent, if he wasn't going to sleep inside, but dismissed the thought quickly. He and Orly walked to the well and filled the water jar. They ate the meal that Orly's mother had prepared and prayed together for God to guide Kobe.

Orly headed back to his room and tried not to feel guilty for enjoying the room while Kobe was sleeping outside. He committed to using this time for prayer and seeking God's will for his own future. He wanted to be better prepared than Kobe but didn't want to run ahead of the Holy Spirit's leading.

The next evening after work, Kobe walked with Orly to Mr. Kenan's to join them for dinner. "I'm going to talk to Mr. Kenan and see if I can pay him for dinners. I just don't have time to do everything."

"At least then we'd have some time to talk each evening. That would be nice. I already miss having you around." Mr. Kenan and Kobe went into his office and worked out a price that would come out of his pay each week.

This week Orly would start his final year of apprenticeship. Orly began to carefully set aside the silver he was earning now that he was a second-year apprentice. His prayer time was filled with questions about his future. He really enjoyed teaching the group at Mr. Kenan's when Kobe was unavailable, but deep down, he knew that God was calling him to teach Gentiles. That was scary. That was not allowed. That would be wrong — but that's what he was sure he was hearing from the Holy Spirit and from the things that Kobe taught about Jesus. Jesus didn't shy away from Gentiles. He loved them, healed them, and encouraged their faith just as much as He did the Jews. The weeks passed quickly for Orly, and while he missed Kobe and their talking together each night before sleep, it gave him more time to pray and seek God's direction.

It was almost a month after Sukkot when a messenger arrived at the shop informing Mr. Kenan that Seth had arrived for a visit. Mr. Kenan quickly left and headed home to greet Seth and Joelle and four lively grandchildren. Vada was beside herself with joy and the children fell in love with their grandmother. When Orly and Kobe arrived after work, the children had already been fed and were playing in the back courtyard. The adults enjoyed their dinner while the servants kept an eye on the children.

Seth and Kobe began to take long walks together after dinner each night and Kobe reported to Orly that things were going well, even though he didn't share details. Orly, on the other hand, was having trouble with his prayer times in the evenings. As he watched Seth and Joelle work together to parent their four young children, Orly began to yearn for a family of his own. And he knew who he hoped would be the mother of his children. Yet, he felt that such thoughts were not spiritual and certainly were an interruption from what he was supposed to be praying about. He struggled to keep his thoughts on his job and on his future ministry but was finding it an impossible battle. He felt that Satan was surely trying to distract him from the ministry that God needed to define for him. He buried himself in work and tried valiantly to turn off any thoughts of Gabriela by praying harder about other things.

Orly decided to skip going to synagogue and instead, talk with his mother. They had not had a lot of time together recently and Orly felt

that maybe she could guide him, or at least distract him. After the family and most of the servants had left the house, Orly and his mother sat in the yard under a shade tree. Almost immediately, Orly's mother said, "Orly, what is troubling you? You look like you haven't been sleeping."

And even though Orly was a man, he realized that talking to Mother was exactly what he needed to do. "Mother, I'm having trouble with my prayer times," Orly confessed.

"Well, you've been a follower of Jesus longer than I have, but I'll listen if you think it will help. What kind of trouble?" asked Mother.

"Ever since Seth and Joelle have come to visit, my mind has just been filled with the desire for a family, a home, a wife, and children. I can't seem to think about anything else. I've prayed and prayed that God would take away these thoughts and let me get back to focusing on what my future ministry looks like, but I'm not winning the battle. Please pray for me!" said Orly.

Mother was quiet for a few minutes. Then she said very gently, "Orly, don't fight God. Maybe these thoughts are from Him, and maybe that's your next step in ministry. Have you asked Him that?"

"But, Mother, I've only just turned fifteen and I've still got another year of apprenticeship."

"Yes, I know. But when your abba was fifteen, we had been espoused for a year. I don't think you are too young to be thinking such thoughts if this is God's direction for you. Now, I'm not saying that it is God's direction. I'm just saying that it's time you figure out if these desires are from God or if they are indeed a distraction. Don't forget that just because Kobe is not feeling inclined to support a family doesn't mean that God has the same plan for you."

"You are a wise woman. I love you, Mother. I knew there was some reason that God instructed me to spend my morning with you. So, tell me, how are you holding up with cooking for eight extra guests. Did Mr. Kenan assign you any extra help?"

"Oh, yes. Master Seth brought Deborah, the head of his kitchen staff, and two of his other kitchen servants and they are helping me with the cooking. They have all promised to attend the group meeting this afternoon. Orly and his mother continued to catch up on what was happening while others began to return from the synagogue. Soon the yard was filled with servants ready to relax and waiting for the group meeting.

"You seem far away. What's on your mind?" asked Mother.

"It's funny, but I know exactly what I would teach today if Kobe were not teaching. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm glad he's teaching, but I'm hearing what I feel needs to be said. I hope that Seth and Joelle are ready to listen to what the Spirit is saying to them."

"I'm so surprised every time I hear the Spirit tell me things, too. I'll just be going about my business, and I'll hear that I need to talk with someone or even what to prepare for dinner. It's amazing to be guided this way. It sure would have made life easier if I had known about this when you were little," said Mother.

“Yeah, but don’t forget, the Holy Spirit didn’t come until two years ago. There’s Kobe. Let’s move up to the courtyard.”

“Help me up. These legs aren’t getting any younger.” Orly helped his mother up and gently kissed her cheek. She brushed him away, but he could tell that she was pleased.

Seth sat beside his dad, and Joelle and the children sat with Mrs. Vada. Orly’s mother spotted the three visiting slaves and welcomed them to sit with her just behind Mrs. Vada.

When Kobe began the message, Orly smiled to himself as he realized that Kobe was explaining that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit at His core, but also had a self just like we do. *Why should I be surprised that the Holy Spirit gave me the exact same message that Kobe is teaching?* Orly knew that this was the explanation that helped him to understand Jesus better. He hoped that Seth and Joelle would accept Jesus as their Messiah today, and he concentrated on praying for them while Kobe talked. After group, he visited with several of the free men in the courtyard and answered a few questions. He wanted to go to his room and pray about his future but felt that he needed to be available to the group. Mr. Kenan asked Ruth to serve dinner in the courtyard since there would be too many to fit inside. Orly assisted her in carrying out platters of fruits and vegetables for the family. The new slaves were wide-eyed with amazement that a free man would come into the kitchen and help with the work. But Orly was glad to help his mother any way he could.

After dinner, Orly excused himself and went to his room. Finally, he could spend some time in prayer about his future. He thought back over his conversation with his mother. *What had she said? Something about not fighting God.* He fell on his knees and began to earnestly pray that God would reveal to him the next step he needed to take. *Am I supposed to talk with Mr. Simon about Gabriela becoming my wife?* He clearly heard the Holy Spirit telling him that He was preparing him to lead the group at Mr. Kenan’s. That was not what Orly was expecting. Now he was more confused than ever. He decided that following Jesus one step at a time would be safer than trying to figure out the future. He was surprised that he slept soundly.

At breakfast the next morning, he rejoiced that both Seth and Joelle had asked Jesus to be their Messiah. Now they asked Orly what he thought about whether they should return to Jerusalem or stay in Cana. Orly was totally caught off guard. But immediately, he knew what to say. “You will need to listen closely to what the Holy Spirit instructs you. Only God knows what is best. Obedience is the safest place to be. If God is directing you to return to Jerusalem, it would be unsafe to remain here and vice versa. God will direct your steps if you take the time to consult him.”

“We’d appreciate your prayers for us as it seems we need to make a pretty major decision,” said Seth.

“You have my prayers. But you’ve already made the biggest and best decision of your lives. I promise that having Him guide you won’t

always be easy, but it will be best and it's much easier if you take it one step at a time."

Orly couldn't understand where the peace came from, since he still didn't understand anything about his future, but he felt the difference because he was committed to obeying whatever God wanted. And he knew God would show him when He was good and ready.

Lucas already had the fire going and Orly began his work. *I can pound out my frustrations, and no one really interrupts a man with a large hammer! But seriously, I do enjoy seeing the iron take shape and become whatever I desire it to be. Hmm. Is that the beginning of a message for the group?* Mr. Kenan and Lucas were very pleased with his progress and there were very few times that he needed to ask for advice on his projects. Lucas worked at his station, and Orly worked at his. Mr. Kenan was taking time off to spend with his grandchildren and Seth. The days passed quickly. Each evening Kobe, Orly, and Joshua would walk back to Mr. Kenan's house together. But it wasn't the same as their late-night discussions since there were always others around.

"Have you had a chance to visit with Nathan?" asked Orly.

"No. I've been spending quite a bit of time with Seth, and I just haven't made it over there. I'm not sure whether I will. I'm not feeling the same call I thought I was earlier."

"Yeah, it's hard to know sometimes what is best. I'm trying to take it one day at a time," said Orly.

Seth and Joelle stayed for almost a month before they returned to Jerusalem. Kobe gave them several suggestions for home groups to attend and promised to pray for them as they looked for the right place to grow.

Chapter 11

As Passover approached, Mr. Kenan made it perfectly clear that Jerusalem was not a safe place to be, and that he could not provide lodging for anyone except Enoch and Omri at his brother Zeke's home. Mr. Abraham had already decided that he was not physically up to the trip, but Joshua, the shop helper, wanted to go. Kobe promised to keep an eye on him. The six men left on Wednesday.

On Thursday afternoon they stopped early to have their traditional fish dinner. "Kobe," Orly asked, "Would you mind taking a walk with me after dinner? I've got some questions for you."

"Sure," said Kobe. They enjoyed the fish dinner around the campfire, but then took a walk along the road.

"Kobe, there's something I haven't told you, and I'm not really asking a question. I'm informing you of a plan that I have. You know that I met Gabriela last Passover. Well, ever since Seth and Joelle's visit, I haven't been able to think about anything else except marrying her and having a family in Cana. I just wanted you to know that I'm going to Bethany tomorrow to talk with Mr. Simon. I'm sure that that's what the Holy Spirit is telling me to do. I need to let him know that I want to be considered as a future husband for Gabriela. Am I crazy?"

"I think that's a question," teased Kobe.

"Yeah, I guess it is. You know me better than anyone on earth. Every time I start to pray, the Holy Spirit tells me that it's time to talk with Mr. Simon."

"Then I think you'd better talk to Mr. Simon."

"I don't think I can live with myself if I don't at least let him know that I'm interested in being considered."

"Are you planning to spend the Seder with them?"

"I have no idea. They may kick me all the way back to Cana!"

"Orly, you are a good man. I think you would make a great husband for Gabriela, or whoever God brings to you. Have you talked with Mr. Kenan about this?"

"No. I guess I just don't want anyone to know if Mr. Simon won't consider me."

"Orly, you've got to trust that God is guiding you."

On Friday midafternoon the oxcart arrived at the olive garden and Enoch stopped long enough for Orly, Kobe, and Joshua to jump off. Orly promised to be back by Tuesday noon and then started walking to Bethany.

When Orly arrived, he could clearly see the Mercantile Store. He was greeted by the steward and was shown to a back office. *What am I doing here? This is crazy. Mr. Simon will think I'm nuts.*

When Mr. Simon saw Orly standing at the open door, he jumped from his desk and enveloped him in a huge hug. "Orly, what brings you here? Come in! Come in! Have a seat." He poured Orly a glass of juice and asked if he had just walked from Jerusalem.

“Yes, sir. In fact, I just arrived from Cana today. I knew my best chance of catching you would be before the Sabbath began, so I hurried here. Mr. Simon, I need to let you know what the Holy Spirit is telling me.”

“Okay. Let’s hear it,”

“I have no idea what I’m supposed to say or do. All I know is that for the past two months, the Holy Spirit keeps saying that I should let you know that I am very interested in your daughter. I lost my dad at the age of five and I have no idea how one goes about getting a wife. I just need to let you know that that’s what I’ve been hearing in my prayer times and I’m here out of obedience.”

“Orly, I will confess to you that I am not surprised that you are here. For the past year, Keturah and I have been reminded of you many times, and the Holy Spirit has been warning me that Gabriela is no longer a child that I can keep. He told me to expect you this Passover.”

“Wow,” exhaled Orly.

“Yes. We serve a mighty God, and He knows what is best. Let me hear your plans.”

“Actually, I’ve been afraid that would be considered presumptuous since I hadn’t talked with you. But I’m in the last year of my apprenticeship and am sure Mr. Kenan will hire me full time. He pays me by the piece right now. I am saving my money and I have a lead on a house that I think would work. It’s small but has a large back courtyard where we could start another home group. Right now, the only home group in Cana is for Mr. Kenan’s family, employees, and servants. I’m feeling God’s call to grow another group of followers, but I’m not sure where that will lead.” Orly wasn’t sure whether he had said too much or too little, but at least he had said what was in his heart.

“Orly, it’s almost the Sabbath. Come and join us. What are your plans for Passover?”

“Thank you, sir. I would enjoy that very much. I promised Mary that I would help her with preparation day on Sunday. So, I need to return to Jerusalem when Sabbath is over.”

“That will give me time to discuss things with Keturah and Gabriela. I’ll give you an answer when we come to Mary’s house on Monday. Is that agreeable to you?” asked Mr. Simon.

“Oh, yes, sir! That would be better than I had thought.” Orly hoped he didn’t sound too optimistic. He knew the answer might still be no.

Orly and Mr. Simon walked the short distance to Lazarus’ home. “The ladies take turns hosting the Sabbath meal, but our families always celebrate together.”

Orly was introduced to Lazarus and to Mr. Simon’s two younger boys, Jared and Jabet. They were seven-year-old identical twins. The women were all busy in the kitchen and Lazarus suggested they sit in the courtyard since the house was small. They began telling Orly about their most recent ministry trip to southern Judea. Their goal was

to preach at every synagogue until they reached Idumea. They had taken eight trips to this region. Each trip they found more and more people who were eager to hear the message.

“Will you move into the area and start groups there?” asked Orly.

Lazarus shook his head and said, “I just don’t know. We know we are supposed to plant the seed, but I don’t know what will happen after that. I’m hoping that maybe some younger men would be willing to go and lead groups if we get them started.”

“A few people in Hebron and many in Beersheba are close to becoming followers. This last trip we focused on Beersheba, which is the farthest we’ve ever traveled. We stayed there longer than usual because they were so open,” Mr. Simon added.

“I don’t know when we’ll be able to go back, but I hope soon because I feel that they are close to understanding, and even the priest at the synagogue is searching the Scriptures and seeking truth. If the priest were to become a follower, we would encourage him to continue to lead the group. But in Hebron, the priest is not happy that we are there. We met with a couple of families away from the synagogue because of his opposition.”

“Dinner is ready, and Miss Martha says it’s time to wash up,” reported one of the twins. As the men headed toward the washing jars, the ladies began bringing food out to the table in the courtyard. Orly got his first glimpse of Gabriela, and she was just as beautiful as he remembered.

Miss Martha lit the Sabbath candles and Lazarus led the family in a prayer of blessing. When the prayer was over, Orly looked up to see Gabriela smiling radiantly. “What brings you to Bethany?”

“I came to Jerusalem for Passover, but since there was time, I decided to do some exploring,” said Orly, trying to keep from just gushing out the true reason for his visit. “Your abba invited me to join him for the Sabbath.”

Orly’s heart felt at ease, and he thoroughly enjoyed Gabriela’s home. It just seemed natural to be here listening to the stories about Jesus. All too soon, Mr. Simon gathered his family and left. Lazarus and Orly visited for a while longer before retiring.

As he lay in his blanket waiting for sleep to come, he felt peace and quickly fell into a restful sleep. After his time of prayer, he joined Lazarus’ family for Sabbath breakfast. They started toward the synagogue and were soon joined by Mr. Simon’s family as well as several families from the village. Orly enjoyed the singing and the reading of the Scripture, but the message from the priest surprised him. The priest taught that Jesus was the Messiah and explained how to follow Him. He was not just reciting lessons he had memorized as a child and Orly was fascinated.

Afterward, the two families gathered at Mr. Simon’s courtyard. Gabriela asked if she and her brothers could take Orly up the mountain trail to show him where Jesus had ascended back to Heaven. The boys ran ahead, and Orly and Gabriela followed. He wanted so badly to tell her the real reason for his visit. Soon the boys

stopped and showed Orly the bushes where they hid when they saw Jesus teaching His apostles. They pointed out the grassy area where He was standing and blessing each apostle when He suddenly began to float up into the air and was surrounded by clouds. The boys began to sing Psalm 150 just as they had three years earlier. Gabriela and Orly joined in. It was a precious time for Orly, and he realized what a special place it was for Gabriela. It was getting late, and they hurried back down the steep trail. Soon the sun would touch the horizon and the Sabbath would be ending. Orly knew that he would treasure this day for the rest of his life.

After a relaxing post-Sabbath meal, Orly said goodbye to everyone and promised to see them again on Monday at Mary's house. Then he had to leave. "Shalom," he called, and they all responded.

Orly was suddenly filled with an incredible energy and began to run toward Jerusalem. Soon he could see the golden glow of the temple and decided to spend the night in Kobe's special hiding place. That would exactly match his mood. He threw his blanket down and cooled off after his six-mile run.

Sunrise surprised him and he headed to Mary's house and slipped in the kitchen door. Mary and Rhoda were trying to plan out the day. Mary rushed to hug Orly and expressed her surprise. "Kobe told me that you would probably not be back until Tuesday."

"Yes, I had forgotten my promise to you in my haste to talk with Mr. Simon, but the Holy Spirit reminded me and here I am. Now, put me to work."

"Orly, you are a gift from God! Why don't you start the bread while Rhoda and I head to the market and get the fresh supplies. I couldn't cook ahead because of the Sabbath, so we're going to be pushing it. But I think that everyone will be fed — they always are."

Orly began preparing the unleavened bread and was just finishing the second batch when Mary and Rhoda returned. Orly helped them sort out their baskets and then began another batch of bread. Mary made a bean stew and Rhoda began to prepare the fish sauce.

Soon the Apostle Thomas and several members of Mary's group arrived for the sacrifice of the lamb. Orly remembered the first time he had seen this service three years ago. Now he understood that the lamb represented what Jesus had done for him on the cross. All day, Orly continued to cook batches of bread as he greeted people arriving from all over the world. The yard was filled with wonderful smells of fresh bread and simmering dishes and the lamb roasting over the open fire. Kobe and Joshua had arrived in time for the sacrifice and were mingling with the crowd.

As the sun got closer to the horizon, Orly left Rhoda making more bread while he went inside and saw that many had brought fresh vegetables and fruits to share. He began to search for platters and quickly prepared and sliced the assortment. Many were volunteering to carry the platters to the courtyard and soon the day was over, and Passover began. Thomas led the Seder, but it was not the traditional

one. He kept inserting things that explained how the historical Seder pointed to Jesus all along. As Orly sat and reflected on the Seder meal and the price that Jesus paid for his right relationship with God, he was overwhelmed with gratitude.

First thing on Monday, Orly, Kobe, and Joshua headed to the market to find something for breakfast. Orly was unprepared for an encounter with Benjamin. "Orly, you came! Man, am I glad to see you!"

"Yeah, I'm sure." Orly replied dryly.

"I want to apologize for what happened last time. I'm sorry I hurt you," said Benjamin.

"So, how are you?" Orly changed the subject.

"Worse and much better. I quit my job at the temple. I'm through with religion. But enough about me — who are your friends?"

"You met Kobe last time, and this is Joshua; he also works for Mr. Kenan. We need to find some breakfast. Do you want to join us?" reluctantly asked Orly, trying to determine what the Holy Spirit was telling him to do.

"No, I've got errands to run. But I could meet with you tonight," said Benjamin.

"No, not tonight. I've already made plans. But I will meet you at the Sword and Knife Shop tomorrow at sundown if you'd like and we'll catch up."

"That sounds great, my friend. Shalom." agreed Benjamin.

"Shalom," the three replied.

"Whoa, what just happened?" asked Kobe.

"I'm not sure, but I felt the Holy Spirit saying that he was being honest. Maybe this time, he will listen. I know the dangers now and I won't give him any information," promised Orly.

When they finished breakfast, they decided to check on James and John and their families. The big news there was that Jenay was now espoused to Yanis. Yanis was a friend of Kobe's who had welcomed him when he first started traveling with Jesus. It seemed strange to be there without Mrs. Mary, Jesus' mother, and they didn't stay long.

When the men arrived at Mary's, they greeted Philip and his family. Orly noted that Jordan had grown quite a bit since last year, and he wondered what his plans were for the future. He would make a great blacksmith with those muscles. Philip told them about his latest ministry in Carthage. He and Jordan had traveled across the Great Sea to the coast of Africa and had such a positive reception that he had returned after a month and took his wife and daughter. They were currently leading several groups in the area, and they desperately needed trained leadership. Orly could tell that Kobe was deeply touched by Philip's description of people eager to hear about Jesus and wondered how long he would be content in Cana.

But those thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of Lazarus, Mr. Simon, and their families. Of course, Orly and others quickly helped unload the wagon that they had pulled from Bethany. It was filled with food that they had prepared to help feed this hungry crowd. Orly

wanted to run to Gabriela, but he was afraid and stayed busy with the unloading. Mr. Simon startled him when he asked if he would like to take a walk. “Orly, I’ve prayed about this and talked it over with Keturah, Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and of course Gabriela. We are all in agreement that God is leading me to pledge Gabriela to you.”

Orly hadn’t realized how much he had been holding his breath, but now he let out a deep sigh of relief. All he could think to say was, “Thank you, sir.”

“Can you arrange to come back for Shavuot or Sukkot. We could do the espousal with either of those festivals. You would just need to send me word when you and Mr. Kenan are ready, and I will arrange it with our local priest in Bethany.”

“I would be in agreement with whatever date works for you,” replied Orly.

“Okay. Then I understand that you will be finished with your apprenticeship a few weeks after Sukkot this year. Is that correct?”

“Yes, sir. I have not discussed with Mr. Kenan whether he plans to keep me as an employee or whether I’ll be looking for a job at that point.”

“I understand. In my discussion with Gabriela and her mother, we saw no reason to make you wait, since you really can’t spend time getting acquainted. You will have to get acquainted after your marriage like our ancestors Isaac and Rebecca. But we would like to travel to Cana so that we can see where she would be living,” stated Mr. Simon.

“Oh, that would be wonderful! When would that happen?” asked Orly.

“That’s entirely up to you and whatever arrangements you and Mr. Kenan make. Right now, I am simply pledging Gabriela to you for a future marriage. Then whenever you are ready, you can enter into an espousal, and then receive her as your wife when you are prepared.”

“Wow!”

“Wow, indeed. It’s a terrific responsibility to care for a wife and future family.”

“Mr. Simon, I promise you, I have wanted a wife and family and a place to call home since my abba passed when I was five. I want nothing more than to serve God with Gabriela by my side. I promise you I would give my life for her.”

“Well, apparently, she has equally strong feelings. So, this is my rule: You are not to be alone with Gabriela until the espousal is performed. Is that clear?”

“Oh, yes, sir! I will do nothing to bring you or her dishonor,” promised Orly.

“Are you ready to get back to the celebration?” asked Mr. Simon.

“Yes, sir.” When Orly offered Mr. Simon a hand in getting up, Mr. Simon wrapped him in a huge bear-hug. “Welcome Orly. You have taken a tremendous load off my mind. I have prayed for Gabriela’s

husband since the day she was born. Now, God has provided clear direction and I'm eager to see how you two will serve Him together."

They walked back to Mary's house in comfortable silence. The rest of the evening was a blur. Gabriela sat with Orly during dinner but was busy visiting with other friends most of the evening. She and Jenay seemed to have more than ever to talk about. At one point, Gabriela asked Orly how far Capernaum was from Cana. When he told her sixteen miles, both girls became very excited and ran off talking and making plans.

Orly managed to find Jordan, Philip's son, and talked with him about his life as a blacksmith and the possibility of talking with Mr. Kenan about an apprenticeship. Jordan was interested, especially when he found out he would be working with Kobe and Orly, but he needed to talk with his dad.

When the group from Bethany was preparing to leave, Gabriela came and sat beside Orly. She whispered to him that she was very, very happy that her abba had agreed to let them be pledged. "Your happiness means the world to me." Orly whispered back. But then she was gone. He felt that the light had gone out in the room and went to find Kobe to see if he was ready to go to the olive garden. Once again, he found Kobe on his knees with a group of men that he didn't recognize.

He called Joshua and the two of them helped Mary clean up the kitchen. Orly asked her if she had heard the news and her face lit up, "Of course. You two will make a wonderful ministry team."

"Thanks, Mary. I think Joshua and I are going to head to the garden. It's been a big day for me."

Joshua and Orly walked to the olive garden. He wanted to talk with Philip about his meeting with Benjamin. He asked if they could talk privately, and Philip rose to his feet and excused himself from the group. Orly apologized for interrupting. Philip put his arm around Orly and said, "When are you going to learn that helping someone with a question or problem is the most satisfying thing I can imagine? It's what God has called me to do."

"Well, I seem to need a lot of help. I talked with you last year when I tried to share my decision to follow Jesus with my friend Benjamin who turned out to be an informant. You guided me at that time, and I need your prayers and suggestions again."

"Is he still pursuing you?" asked Philip.

"No, I believe it was a complete accident that Kobe and I ran into him at the market this morning. He claims that he no longer works for the Sanhedrin."

"How did you feel deep inside when he said that? Was it genuine? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?" probed Philip.

"I felt it was genuine. I agreed to meet him at the market tonight. But I decided I'd better run it by you since I apparently endangered a lot of people last year."

"Orly, I think I told you last year not to give up on Benjamin. When we plant a seed, we have to be ready to cultivate it as the Spirit leads

us. Be sure to spend time in prayer before you go, and don't get taken in by your old friendship. I will be praying for both of you.

"Thanks, Philip."

"And Orly, remember there are no such thing as accidents."

When Orly looked puzzled, Philip reminded him that he had said that he accidentally ran into Benjamin. "I believe that God orchestrates things even when we don't recognize them."

"Thank you, Philip. It's great to have fellow followers that I can trust to talk with."

"I agree. You always need fellow followers to encourage and pray for you."

"Oh, and Philip, have you talked with Jordan this evening?"

"No, he's been hanging out with Jonathan and he's spending the night there."

"I talked with him earlier this afternoon about considering doing an apprenticeship as a blacksmith with Mr. Kenan. I could keep an eye on him and it's a wonderful trade because it's needed everywhere. He seemed interested. I just wanted to let you know."

"Thanks, Orly. I'll think about it. That might be a really good fit for him."

Orly crawled into his blanket and was quickly asleep. He wasn't even aware when Kobe arrived. But the next morning, Kobe asked if they could spend some time alone to talk. Kobe had arranged with Philip to supervise Joshua for a few hours.

"Do you want to talk here, or go to your hidden retreat?" Orly asked.

"That's a good idea. I love it there and it's more private." So, the two young men walked to Kobe's special place. As they settled on the grass, Kobe began by saying, "I have no idea where to begin. I need your wisdom and guidance on a matter."

"Me? Kobe, you know how new I am at this!" cried Orly.

"You may be new at it, but the same Holy Spirit that led Jesus is within you in a powerful way. I trust that He will speak to you and confirm or correct what I think I'm hearing."

"Okay. Let's hear it," agreed Orly.

"Orly, have you felt God calling you to lead Mr. Kenan's group?" asked Kobe bluntly.

He hesitantly replied, "At times I feel that God is giving me a message to share with them. Then you get up and share that same message. It's really uncanny."

"Orly, I feel that God is calling me to do a ministry led by Simon the Zealot. He's the one who taught me so much about Jesus transforming my heart."

"Sure. That's no problem. I can cover you for a few weeks," agreed Orly.

"That's not the issue. Simon has gathered together a group of six men. They have been praying and have invited me to complete the group. They will be leaving next month and heading due east into

unknown territory. There will be no return date. We will just share the good news and keep walking east as the Spirit leads.”

“Kobe, that’s a big step,” whispered Orly. He knew that going into unknown territory was dangerous because Mr. Simon and Lazarus had told him about some of their encounters in southern Judea — and that was inside Israel. Kobe was talking about going beyond the borders and who knows what he would encounter. “Kobe, may I ask you a question?”

“You just did. No, seriously, that’s why I wanted to talk with you. I want you to ask me anything. Please be my brother and friend,” pleaded Kobe.

“Okay. When did you first start thinking about preaching beyond the borders? Did the Holy Spirit prompt you in any way before you met with these men?”

Kobe nodded to say he understood the question. “Do you remember when I told you that once I finished my apprenticeship with Mr. Kenan, I felt that there were plans in my heart that he would not approve of, and I didn’t know whether he would allow me to continue to work for him?”

“Yeah, I remember that. And I remember you talking about starting a group in Cana or possibly in Nazareth. But that never happened.”

“It never happened, because even though I felt the call and was willing, I felt that the Holy Spirit was saying that it was not the right time or place. I’ve been out of sorts ever since then. I enjoyed the distraction of visiting with Seth, but I kept thinking, ‘Anybody could have led Seth to Jesus. He was ripe for the harvest.’ But I keep thinking about the people who have never heard that Jesus loves them. I keep thinking about them never hearing that He died for them. I’ve been praying for the privilege of sharing the good news, and yes, possibly suffering for it. I’m not afraid and I want to go.”

“Sounds like this isn’t just their influence on you,” ventured Orly.

“No, I don’t think so. I’ve been thinking about it ever since I spent that time in prison after Mrs. Mary’s funeral. I was amazed at the peace that I felt even though I didn’t know whether I would live or die. I just have an amazing peace and excitement, even though I know it will be dangerous. Last night, I expressed to the men that my only concern was the group. They asked me to consider if maybe God was calling someone else to lead, and I was standing in the way. I had never thought about it that way.”

“Oh, I would never want you to feel that way!” declared Orly.

“But it’s true. If God wants me to go with Simon, and He’s clearly calling you to lead the group, then both of us will be right in the center of God’s will when I’m obedient.”

“And both of us will be disobedient if one of us is not,” Orly gave a low whistle. “I thought that once Gabriela and I were married and settled, I would like to start a home group like Mary’s. So, yes, the Holy Spirit has placed inside my heart the desire to lead a group and watch them grow.”

“Glory be to Jesus. He works out all the details. He knows what is best. O Father, I surrender my life to You. I want to be completely obedient. If this is not Your will for me, then please make it clear. Thank You for Your confirmation this morning. Please guide me.”

“Father, please bless my brother Kobe. His desire is obedience. My desire is obedience. Please use us both for Your kingdom here on earth. Lead us wherever You want us to be.” The two men sat in silence, each deep in thought. Tears ran down Orly’s face as he realized the significance of this moment. But Kobe’s face was filled with determination and resolve. He was ready to leave tonight and hated the thought of delaying for another month.

After a while, Orly stated, “Don’t forget that I’m meeting with Benjamin tonight. I will need your prayers for that.”

“Oh, I haven’t forgotten. We need to get some food for that venture. Why don’t we head to Mary’s house and see if we can visit before the crowd arrives.”

“Okay. But I need to pray for a few minutes, if you don’t mind,” suggested Orly. Kobe got up and began to skip rocks in the stream. As Orly sat quietly and prayed, he felt certain that this was God’s plan for Kobe and for him. But he wasn’t as certain about God’s plan for Benjamin. Orly sat a few more minutes to see if God would give him any further instructions, but then decided to join Kobe. Like two little boys, they tried to skip their rocks the farthest and they felt God’s peace in a way that they hadn’t for a while. It was good to be right in the center of God’s will, no matter what the future held.

When they arrived at Mary’s, there was already a crowd, and Mary was busy in the kitchen. Orly stuck his head in and asked if he could grab some food for a ministry trip. He told her about his meeting with Benjamin and she promised to pray. When Orly arrived at the Sword and Knife Shop, he recognized Seth’s mark. It was only a few minutes before Benjamin arrived well before sundown.

“Do you want to go to my hiding place?” asked Benjamin.

“Sure,” agreed Orly. Benjamin began building a small fire so they could see each other and talk and then they shared dinner.

“Orly, I really messed up last year. I don’t know how to thank you for giving me another chance.”

“Hey, that’s what friends are for. When I needed a friend, you were there. And now I’m here for you. What can I do for you or where shall we begin?”

“Are you still working for Mr. Kenan? Is that going well?”

“Yes, I’ll be finishing my apprenticeship right after Sukkot and I hope to purchase a home and get settled because I’m pledged to be married to a beautiful young lady. But the date is dependent on whether Mr. Kenan offers me a job, or whether I have to move and get settled again.”

“Wow. I knew you would be a family man. God has blessed you, my friend.”

“How is it with you?”

“Well, not that great, but I get by. Please thank whoever prepared the meal tonight. It was wonderful. Like I told you, I quit working for the Sanhedrin. I don’t want anything to do with them. So, I don’t have a regular income. I am just a delivery boy for all the owners at the booths, and I’m sleeping at the Sword and Knife Shop again.”

“Did you know that Mr. Kenan’s son, Seth, owns that booth? I recognized his mark on the front.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever met him. I guess I just deal with a steward. I thought he was the owner.”

After some awkward silence, Benjamin finally asked, “Orly, you said that you knew why Jesus had to die. I’ve been going to the temple to listen to James the Just preach. But I don’t understand everything he talks about. I mean, he assumes that everyone knows the background, and I don’t. Where do I find out basic stuff like: Who was Jesus and why did He have to die? And did He really resurrect from the dead? And is He the Messiah? I need the basic questions answered. Do you know what I mean?”

“I know exactly what you mean. I sat under Kobe’s teaching for about six months before I finally met with him one-on-one and got my questions answered. Do you want me to point you to one of the apostles who can answer those questions, or do you trust me to tell you what I’ve learned so far?”

“I think I want to hear it from you and once I understand more, then I might be willing to talk with James the Just. I’ve got more questions than answers and I’m feeling really confused.”

“Okay. But remember, take as long as you need to research it, but it is vitally important that you figure it out.” He was glad that Philip had encouraged him not to give up on Benjamin. “Why don’t we just let you ask your most pressing questions, and we’ll deal with them one at a time. Does that sound better than me just giving you a big speech?”

“Yeah. I guess. Let me think about what I want to ask.” A long silence was followed by an outburst by Benjamin. “Can I ever be forgiven for all the people I hurt by working for the Sanhedrin?”

“Yes. You know The Law and The Prophets point out that we need a Messiah to truly take away our sin. I believe that Jesus was the Lamb of God promised to Abraham. He died for our sins. His blood was poured out to pay for them. And when we simply ask, He will be our Messiah and we can stand in a right relationship with God totally forgiven.”

“That’s what I thought James the Just was saying, but it sounds too good to be true.”

“It is too good to be true — but it’s the Truth! God created us, we sinned, and then He sent His only Son, Jesus, to pay for that sin so that we could be in a right relationship with Him and spend all eternity in Heaven.”

“I thought all Jews were going to Heaven,” countered Benjamin.

“Nowhere in Scripture is that promised. God makes it clear that everyone would need a Messiah and those that received Him would be allowed in Heaven. And that isn’t limited to just Jews.”

“You mean even Gentiles can go to Heaven? But that’s counter to everything I’ve been taught,” cried Benjamin.

“Yeah, me too. But John the Baptizer was sent as a prophet to tell us about the Messiah. He pointed out that God had said that the Jewish nation would be the incubator or cocoon for His Son, so they could share Him with all nations. Jesus came, not to start a new religion, but to put the nation of Israel — and really the whole world — back on track. We really should call His teachings the Old Way, not the New Way. Jesus taught that He came to fulfill every prophecy.”

“But He didn’t! He didn’t set up an earthly kingdom!” challenged Benjamin.

“Not yet. But He will. When He left, He said He would return and then He would set up a kingdom where all the kings of the earth will bow their knees to Him.”

“Orly, this has been really helpful, but I need to get back to work. I’m supposed to be at the Sword Shop before the third hour and I think it’s a lot later than that. I can’t afford to lose my job there.”

“No problem. I’ll walk back with you.” As they hurried to the market, Benjamin asked, “Can we meet again before you leave?”

“Sure. When is good for you?” asked Orly.

“I’m good for any time.”

“I’m free on the Sabbath. Could we meet here again?”

“That would be fine with me. I’ll see you here about an hour after sunrise.”

“Shalom.”

“Shalom, my friend, and thank you again.”

Chapter 12

As the families in the garden gathered for breakfast on Wednesday morning, Orly shared with Philip and Kobe that his time with Benjamin was very positive, and he felt Benjamin was genuinely seeking answers about Jesus. He reported that Benjamin had been listening to James the Just preach at the temple and just needed some questions sorted out. He asked for their prayers when he met again with him on the Sabbath. Orly and Kobe were excited to hear that Jordan might be interested in apprenticing with Mr. Kenan, and Kobe offered to introduce them since Orly felt unwelcome at Mr. Zeke's. "Come on, Jordan, let's go meet Mr. Kenan and see what we can work out," called Philip. Kobe agreed to meet Orly and Joshua at the market later.

Kobe told Jordan about how he became Mr. Kenan's apprentice and felt that, while he could not promise, he was pretty sure that Mr. Kenan was always looking for young people to apprentice. The walk also gave him time to talk with Philip about his call to ministry with Simon the Zealot. Philip promised to pray for him.

Kobe knocked at Mr. Zeke's door and when his personal servant answered, he seemed glad to see Kobe. Kobe said that he needed to speak with Mr. Kenan and the servant invited them to meet him in the back courtyard. They went around back and waited. Mr. Zeke and Mr. Kenan came out and greeted Kobe and inquired as to his well-being. Mr. Zeke seemed genuinely glad to see him. Kobe introduced Philip and his son as friends who had welcomed him when he first began following Jesus but didn't mention that Philip was an apostle. Zeke instructed his servants to bring fruit juice. "Mr. Kenan, Orly and I were impressed by Jordan's size, since he has only recently turned thirteen. We suggested to Philip that you might be interested in training him as a blacksmith. Philip asked me to introduce the two of you to talk about an apprenticeship for Jordan."

"Well, that depends on whether Jordan wants to learn blacksmithing. Size isn't everything. Why do you want to be a blacksmith, Jordan?" Mr. Kenan wisely asked.

"Orly has been telling me that it's a good job that would allow me to support a family or ministry trips. And if I move to another city, I can probably find a job quickly and easily."

"Have you ever been to a Blacksmith Shop?" asked Mr. Kenan gently.

"No, sir."

"Zeke, is that shop down past where Nate used to live still there?"

"Yes. I'm not sure who runs it now. The owner died a few years back, but it's still there."

"Will you excuse us, Zeke? I'm going to take a little walk with these men. I'll be back in plenty of time for the family visit. Seth and Jacob won't be here for a few hours, I'm sure."

“Go ahead. I think I’ll get a nap while I can.”

Mr. Kenan pointed out the way and the four men walked together to the local Blacksmith Shop. When they entered, Mr. Kenan talked with the man in charge who agreed to his request. The man gave Jordan the smallest iron hammer and prepared a small piece of scrap iron for him over the fire. Then he laid the glowing mass on the anvil and instructed Jordan to hit it with all his might and make it into a pancake. Jordan took his best shot but was shocked at the pain that shot through his entire body. He stepped back and shook his head as if to clear it. Then to everyone’s amazement, he stepped up again and took another shot, and then another, and then another, until the metal blob had become flat and smooth.

Mr. Kenan told Jordan that he had done an excellent job and warned him that his body would be sore tomorrow. He assured Jordan that as his muscles strengthened, the pain would go away, but the first few months could be pretty painful. Jordan just grinned and said he wanted to become as strong as possible because that’s the way God had made him.

Mr. Kenan and Philip worked out the financial arrangement for the apprenticeship and it was decided that Jordan would say goodbye to his family and ride with Mr. Kenan’s group to Cana when they left on Sunday morning.

Philip and Jordan headed back to Mary’s, but Kobe walked Mr. Kenan back to Mr. Zeke’s. He didn’t want him alone on these hilly streets. They talked about meeting on Friday for the sacrifice and he assured Mr. Kenan that he and Orly were taking good care of Joshua. He decided not to tell him about his recent decision to quit working at the shop. There would be more time to explain on the trip to Cana.

Orly and Joshua had walked to the market and were looking around. Kobe walked up behind them and said, “Jordan will be starting his apprenticeship on Sunday.”

“So, Mr. Kenan liked him?”

“Yep, he took us to a Blacksmith Shop and let Jordan make a pancake. Mr. Kenan was impressed that Jordan just kept pounding at it, even though he was obviously grimacing with pain.”

“Same test that Lucas put me through. Man, that hurt! So, we get a little brother and I get a new roommate.”

“Orly, I think Jordan will be a great help to you. He’s been in the ministry since he was five or six years old and will be a good friend to you.”

“That’s true. I hadn’t thought about that.”

“So, it went well with Benjamin last night?”

“Yeah, he wanted to know if God would ever forgive him for what he’s done, and I was able to assure him that that’s why Jesus died. He asked if I could meet with him again on Sabbath morning. We just didn’t have much time last night because he’s a night watchman.

“So, we’ve essentially got two more days to spend doing whatever we wish. Is there anything you want to see or do, Joshua?”

“No, I saw the temple last year and I’m okay with whatever you two want to do,” said Joshua.

“Orly, how about you. Anything you want to accomplish today?”

“No, I’m okay to either visit Mary or go back to the olive garden and see who is there. I’m good either way.”

“Let’s go into the temple courtyard and see if any of our guys are preaching. I could use a good message right about now,” said Kobe, and the other two agreed. They walked through the beautiful temple gates. The courtyards were filled with animals being sold for sacrifices. As usual, Peter and John were preaching from the temple steps. The three were able to get fairly close and hear Peter telling about his denying Jesus on the day He was arrested. He skillfully moved to Jesus’ resurrection and how Jesus had forgiven him completely. He told about the day Jesus repeated His call by causing the fishermen to catch another amazing boatload of fish and he talked about how sweet it was to eat breakfast with Jesus — who was supposed to be dead. He challenged the crowd to think about this mighty God that came to earth, died for their sins, and then conquered death and rose from the dead. Jesus was indeed the Messiah promised by God and all they needed to do was pray and ask Him to be their Messiah. Many in the crowd were kneeling to invite Jesus to be their Messiah. The three men stayed and talked with Peter and John after the crowd had dispersed. Kobe asked Orly to take Joshua and meet him at Mary’s house because he wanted to talk with Peter and John privately. Orly and Joshua left Kobe at the temple.

Orly suggested that they go to the market and buy some supplies for Mary as they had done last year. Orly bought all that the two men could carry. Mary greeted them and Orly directed Joshua to help him put away the groceries in Mary’s kitchen.

“Rhoda, is there anything else we can do for you before we turn into guests?”

“Actually, if you don’t mind, I noticed that the water jars are empty. If you two could go with me, it would only take one trip.” So, Orly and Joshua grabbed two water jars apiece and followed Rhoda to the well.

“Orly, may I ask a question?” asked Joshua.

“You just did,” replied Orly automatically because that’s the way he always teased Kobe.

Joshua immediately became silent. “Joshua, I was just teasing. I forget that you are a slave. I consider you my friend and my equal just like Jesus taught. Of course, you may ask any question, at any time.”

“Thanks, Orly. You were a slave before becoming Mr. Kenan’s apprentice, weren’t you?”

“Yes. I was a slave for eight years.”

“That’s what I thought. Is that why Mary makes you work for her?”

“Oh, no, my friend. I’m not working for Mary. I’m working for God. Mary welcomed me into her house and has taught me so much about being a follower of Jesus. She works and works to minister to everyone around her that needs help. When I come to Jerusalem, I

spend as much time here as possible trying to help her with some of the work. But it's not because I'm a slave or a former slave. It's because I love doing things for others. That's just how God made me. And did you know that if we didn't help Rhoda with these water jars, Mary would do it herself?"

Rhoda quickly agreed that even though she was a slave, she was treated more like a sister, and Mary did as much of the work as she did. Then she added, "When Orly agreed to help with the Passover cooking, it really took a load off of both of us. Sometimes we cook for a hundred people, and while they help by bringing food, it's usually not cooked or prepared. Orly has really helped us out, and it's good that Mary can sit and talk with people and help them with their questions instead of cooking all the time."

They filled their jars and headed back to the kitchen. "Is this really all you need, or is there something else we can help with?"

"No, I think that's all we need. Thank you both so much."

Kobe arrived and all evening they visited with friends. As some would leave, others would arrive. Mary's house was the perfect place to visit with many of the apostles and fellow followers of Jesus. Thursday passed much the same way, except that they took a long nap during the heat of the day in the olive garden.

On Friday, Orly, Kobe, and Joshua met Mr. Kenan, Omri, and Enoch at the gate to the temple. Kobe purchased two young pigeons for himself, and Mr. Kenan purchased four turtle doves for his men, then went to pick out a lamb. They stood in line to offer their sacrifices. Once they entered the temple, Orly felt the Holy Spirit prompting him to worship. He tried to let all the happenings of this week fall away and just focus on the sacrifice that Jesus made for him on the cross. He began to weep quietly and let the tears just drip from his face. He handed the priest his bird and watched as it was slaughtered. He pictured the sacrificial lamb's eyes and Jesus' crucifixion. He allowed himself to be touched by the great sacrifice that had been made for him. He stepped out of line and remained in worship for a few minutes. He was grateful for the darkness of the interior of the temple. He didn't want to worry the men, so he joined them in the courtyard as soon as he could compose himself. Mr. Kenan seemed relieved to see him and together they all walked to the olive garden as was their custom.

Mr. Kenan asked if there were any questions about the sacrifice or anything else about the week that anyone wanted to share. Kobe asked if Mr. Kenan was able to see Josie or Nathan at the family gathering, and he reported that neither of them came. He said Zeke had asked some good questions. Seth and Joelle had found a home group where they felt comfortable. Their leadership was shared by Matthew and Andrew, and a young man named Enid. Kobe smiled because Enid was a good friend of his and they had followed Jesus together. He assured Mr. Kenan that Seth was in good hands. Mr. Kenan announced that he had hired a new apprentice for the Metal Shop. He was a friend of Orly's and Kobe's and would be riding home with them on Sunday. He reminded the three men who were not

staying at Mr. Zeke's to be at the corner of the temple one hour after sunrise on Sunday morning or they would have a long walk home. Mr. Kenan and his two servants headed back to Zeke's, and Orly, Kobe, and Joshua went to Mary's house.

The house was packed with members of Mary's group who were gathering for the Sabbath meal. Orly quickly slipped into the kitchen to help Rhoda finish up the meal. He asked Joshua and some of the others to help him get the platters out to the courtyard before the sun set. It was cooler outside and there was more room to spread out in the grass. They enjoyed the fellowship and found much laughter and joy in the group even though many were suffering from job loss and persecution because of their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. After the meal, one of the young ladies played her lute and led the group in singing the Psalms. Some were new to Orly, but some of them he recognized and could join in. When they sang Psalm 150, his mind wandered back to what it must have been like for Gabriela to see Jesus ascend into heaven. They headed back to the olive garden and crawled into their blankets. Soon Orly got up and found a private place to pray. He wanted to make sure his heart was perfectly tuned so that the Holy Spirit could lead him during his time with Benjamin in the morning.

As Sabbath morning dawned, Kobe, Orly, and Joshua were reminded that late in the week, not many people stayed in the olive garden, so there was no source for breakfast. They should have bought food at the market before the Sabbath. So, it was with empty stomachs that all three young men began their day. Kobe and Joshua were going to hear James the Just preach at the temple and Orly was meeting Benjamin at his place in the woods. The plan was to reunite at Mary's at the end of the Sabbath. Both promised to remember to grab something for breakfast for tomorrow.

As Orly walked toward the market and then to the wooded area, he once again prayed for wisdom and heard very clearly, "Don't push. Let him ask the questions." So, Orly felt at peace as he waited for Benjamin. He sat by the little stream and skipped rocks for a while as he waited. It was a beautiful day, but he forced his mind to pray for Benjamin instead of thinking about his future or Gabriela. That was more important than anything else at the moment.

Benjamin finally arrived and apologized for being late. A Roman soldier had forced him to carry his knapsack for a mile. It was just standard harassment from the Romans, but they didn't usually do it on the Sabbath since it violated Jewish Law. Benjamin hoped it wouldn't get him in trouble with the Sanhedrin. "But I wasn't going to say no to a Roman soldier who was pointing his spear at me!"

"No, I wouldn't either," agreed Orly.

Benjamin didn't seem to want to talk and so they sat together and then started skipping rocks. Once again, they found that comfortable friendship they had experienced three years ago when they had first met as slaves at Mr. Zeke's house.

"You didn't bring any food?" asked Benjamin.

“Nope, we didn’t have any breakfast, so we’re all fasting today. Sorry,” replied Orly.

“No problem. I’m used to it, but are you?”

“Not really. I’m a big man and I’m used to eating the breakfasts that my mother cooks for Mr. Kenan and his crew. So, I’m usually well fed,” confessed Orly. “But a little fasting would probably do me good.”

“I wonder what it would be like if I had learned to cook at Mr. Zeke’s,” pondered Benjamin out loud.

“Is that something you would still like to learn?”

“Sure. But I missed my chance. I don’t want to go back to the slave block. Slaves don’t get to choose, and they don’t get do-overs,” said Benjamin sadly.

“Benjamin, you used to say you would never leave Jerusalem, but would you consider moving to Cana for two years if it meant you could learn to be a cook?”

“What are you talking about? Mr. Kenan’s? He would never hire me. Remember it was his brother who said I wasted my time at his house.”

“I remember. But they are two different men, and I don’t mind asking Mr. Kenan about your apprenticing under my mother. She’s the best cook around.”

“Yeah, that will never happen.”

“Do you mean you don’t think Mr. Kenan would agree, or that you are not willing to leave Jerusalem?” Orly probed.

“Oh, I would leave Jerusalem. I have nothing here to hold me. But I can’t imagine Mr. Kenan giving me a chance.”

“I can’t promise anything will come of it, but I do promise that I’ll ask him. My mother isn’t getting any younger and needs some new staff to help her out. It won’t hurt to ask.”

“Why would you do that for me?” asked Benjamin.

“Because you are my friend and because that’s what Jesus asked us to do. He says that we are to love other people the way He loves us.” Orly didn’t know what else to say.

“Thanks.”

“I thought you were going to James the Just’s group on the Sabbath. I’m sorry you had to miss that today.”

“Oh, no. I didn’t miss anything. I go on Monday nights. He leads several different groups, and they all meet at different times. I don’t know if the one on Sabbath morning is considered a group. It’s way too big. The whole courtyard is packed and overflowing. Sometimes other apostles preach outside the walls to the overflow crowd. It’s rather amazing. But on Monday nights, there’s just about a hundred of us and I’m beginning to get to know some of the regulars.”

“That’s good. I want to encourage you to keep searching until you know for sure what you believe.”

“The other day I saw Peter heal a crippled guy right outside the temple. He was a friend of mine — I mean, I’d sat and shared some of my food with him and we talked some. Anyway, he’s healed, and I

guess he went home. I didn't know him well. But how did Peter do that?"

Orly explained how everyone has three circles: the body, the self, and the empty core. He explained that it wasn't Peter who healed the man, but God living inside of him.

"That makes sense. So, does this Holy Spirit live inside of you? Is that why you are so different?"

"Well, the Holy Spirit lives inside of me and directs me and tells me what to do. But I don't know about being different. How am I different?"

"Man, you are way different! You are confident and there's a peace about you. Before, you were so quiet and scared. I thought it was just that you had become a free man — but I'm a free man, too, and I didn't change like that!" admitted Benjamin. "What does He say? I mean, what is it like? Or is that a bad question?"

"There's no such thing as a bad question. If you want answers, you have to ask!" said Orly. "Okay, I'll tell you a really personal one. For the past three months, every time I've prayed, God has spoken to my heart about having a home, and a wife, and children, and even grandchildren. I kept thinking about this girl that I met last year during Passover Week. I met her, we ate dinner at Mary's with her family, and she was gone. That was it. She lives in Bethany, and I figured I would never see her again. But then, six months later, every time I tried to pray about my future and what I should be doing in ministry, the Holy Spirit kept bringing Gabriela to my mind."

"That's a pretty name."

"She's a pretty girl. So then, Mr. Kenan tells me to pack for the Passover trip this year, and the Holy Spirit very clearly told me that I needed to let Gabriela's abba know that I was interested. I thought that was pretty forward since I only met her once. I didn't know how to do it, but I wanted to be obedient. I went to his place of business, asked to speak to him, and told him what the Holy Spirit had told me."

"Wow, you are bold!" whistled Benjamin.

"That's not the point. When I finished telling him what the Holy Spirit had told me, he said, 'I'm not surprised because the Holy Spirit told me that you would be coming.' And now I am pledged to a girl that I've only seen twice in my life, but I know that she's going to be the perfect mate for me. I've only been following Jesus as my Messiah for one year now, but I could tell you a thousand things that the Holy Spirit has directed in my life."

"That is amazing. So, when's the wedding?"

"I have no idea. I hope the Holy Spirit shows me how to get all that organized. First, I have to tell Mr. Kenan and my mother! But the point I'm trying to make is that once I accepted Jesus as my Messiah, He paid for my sins and then the Holy Spirit came inside of me to tutor me in how best to follow Him and obey Him, and equips me to do so," said Orly.

"That helps. That's what I've been trying to figure out. So many times, James the Just talks about God leading him or telling him

something and it all just sounds so mystical or unreal or even fake. I wasn't sure what to make of it. Now, I think I understand."

"Okay. Is there anything else you want to ask? Like I said, I'm new at this, but I'm available."

"No, I can't think of anything right now. I just want to think about it some more," said Benjamin."

Orly wanted so badly to talk to Benjamin about praying to ask Jesus to be his Messiah, but he was definitely hearing the Holy Spirit repeat, "Don't push." So, he kept his mouth shut and waited.

Orly stretched out in the grass and looked up at the sky through the trees. He was amazed at all the things the Holy Spirit had directed him to in the past year, and it looked like the coming year was going to be just as exciting. *How in the world will I lead the group while Kobe is away? And how long will Kobe be gone? And who knows, I may be married by this time next year.*

"Orly?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm getting really hungry. Do you know anyplace that would give us some bread?"

Orly sat up and realized that it was well past noon. He decided to take Benjamin with him to Mary's house. He hoped that that would be okay with her. "Sure, let's go." Orly led them to Mary's back door and knocked. He told Rhoda that he and his friend had not had breakfast and he was wondering if they could get some bread or fruit to tide them over until dinner.

"Of course. Come on in. Mary's busy with a couple in the living room, but if you don't mind eating in the kitchen, we'll get you fed."

"Rhoda, you are a lifesaver. This is my friend Benjamin. Benjamin this is Rhoda," She pulled out olive oil and leftover bread from the Sabbath meal. She also found five small apricots that were a little over-ripe and needed to be eaten. Soon Orly and Benjamin were feeling much better. They thanked Rhoda, and Orly promised to return later for the evening group.

"Wow. You said that Jesus followers took care of each other, but that was amazing. I mean, I was just picturing going to one of the Pharisees houses and asking for food. First of all, I wouldn't get past their iron gates and guard dogs, and then they would charge me or enslave me for the price of the meal. That Rhoda lady didn't even mention the cost. She was really nice."

"Yes, she is. But I could have taken you to the home of any of the Jesus followers here in Jerusalem and you would have been treated the same."

"Wow, you are Mr. Popular."

"No. That's not what I'm saying. You could knock on their door at any time, day or night and they would give you what you need if they had anything to give. That's what Jesus taught: to love others the way He loved us. He loved us so much He died for us, so there's really nothing that we won't try to do for others."

"What if they knew what I'd done?"

“You mean, being an informant?”

“Yeah.”

“Rhoda knew. Did she treat you any differently?”

“She knew?”

“Yeah. She’s been packing the meals for you and praying for you for the past year. We are a tight-knit family because we all serve the same Master: Jesus, our Messiah.”

“That’s mind-blowing.”

“Kobe and Joshua may be back in the olive garden by now. Do you want to see if we can find them and hang out together?”

“Sure, if you don’t think they would mind hanging out with me. I would enjoy that.”

“Let’s go see if we can find them. They were planning to go hear James the Just preach this morning. But I don’t know where they were headed after that.” Kobe and Joshua were in the garden, but both were fast asleep. Orly and Benjamin just kept walking. Benjamin showed Orly some of the interesting views in Jerusalem and they walked past Herod’s palace and the praetorium where Jesus was tried and sentenced to death. Benjamin offered to show him Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified, but Orly declined. Orly wasn’t sure how to end the visit and suspected that Benjamin didn’t want it to end. He wasn’t sure whether it was okay to take him to dinner at Mary’s and wanted Kobe to make that call. He suggested they head back to the olive garden and see if the other guys were awake. The four men visited for a while, and then Kobe suggested that it was time to head to Mary’s house for group. He told Benjamin that he was welcome to come. So, the four of them spent the evening at Mary’s house and enjoyed the post-Sabbath meal. Benjamin knew some of the Psalms, but mostly just sat and listened as the Apostle John gave a short message to encourage the followers. He called Kobe to stand and asked the others to pray for his upcoming ministry trip to the unknown areas to the east of Galilee. Kobe appreciated the prayers and support of this group. Many placed their hands on his head and prayed for his boldness to share the good news with as many people as possible. They prayed for his courage and reliance upon God to meet all his needs. As the meeting closed and everyone was leaving, several people gave Kobe long hugs and promised their continual prayers for him.

Benjamin thanked Orly for a lovely day and said he needed to get to work. They said goodnight and promised to look each other up next year. Orly went back inside.

He slipped into the kitchen and thanked Rhoda for helping him to feed Benjamin this afternoon. Now, he needed to ask another favor. “I forgot to go to the market, so, could you please pack us three breakfasts?” He promised to leave her money to buy what she needed at the market. Rhoda absolutely insisted that he keep his money and use it wisely. He then asked if there was a place to leave offerings and Rhoda showed him a pottery jar at the side of the living room. He

dropped the few coins that he had into that pot and thanked Rhoda for all the meals. He hugged her and promised to see her next time.

The men were well fed before they met Mr. Kenan's oxcart on Sunday morning, which made the journey much more pleasant. Jordan had never ridden in an oxcart and was amazed at how fast they could travel down a road that he had walked a hundred times with his family. He kept trying to stand up and balance in order to see the Jordan River, but it was too bumpy. The men were laughing and teasing and enjoyed being together. Kobe had warned Joshua not to mention his upcoming ministry trip and Joshua had assured him that he would not. Both Orly and Kobe were trying to pretend everything was normal. They both knew that this was the last trip that they would take together for a long time.

At one of the rest stops, Kobe and Orly ran ahead of the cart to stretch their legs and asked Enoch to watch for them. The men needed to discuss when they were going to talk with Mr. Kenan about all the things that needed to be discussed. "I suggest that we make a big announcement at dinner tonight about your being pledged to Gabriela. Everyone will enjoy that news. Then you can talk with Mr. Kenan later about the espousal and timing and such."

"So when are you going to tell him about your leaving?" asked Orly.

"I thought I would tell him on this trip, but now, I'm feeling I should wait until we're home and maybe save it for Sunday," said Kobe.

"Right now, I want to just focus on this trip and enjoy it, and not think about the future." They had run for several minutes and now they were just walking slowly along the road when they heard the approach of the oxen. Enoch slowed and Orly and Kobe jumped onboard. The laughing and teasing continued, and Orly was glad to see that Jordan already knew everyone's name and he and Joshua were becoming best friends. Orly remembered his first trip to Jerusalem away from his mother and how out of place he felt. He was glad to see that Jordan was comfortable and attributed it to the Holy Spirit inside of him. He had that same confidence that Kobe showed.

As they sat around the campfire that night, eating the food that Zeke's cook had packed for them, Mr. Kenan encouraged them to share what they had seen or experienced while in Jerusalem. Kobe didn't hesitate. He made a drum roll and proclaimed: "Orly has an announcement." Orly turned bright red because he really wasn't expecting to go first.

"Uh, yeah. I, uh, am pledged to be married." The other men whistled and cheered and clapped in approval. Orly stood up and shouted, "I am pledged to be married to Gabriela, the most beautiful girl in the world! God has blessed me with His favor, and I am so excited! I'm sorry I didn't tell you first, Mr. Kenan, but Kobe pushed me!" The men roared with laughter. And Mr. Kenan joined in the fun and congratulated Orly. Later he assured Orly that he didn't need his permission, but he looked forward to hearing all about his plans.

“Thank you, Mr. Kenan. You’ve been so good to me, I wanted you to be the first to know.”

Joshua shared that he had had a really wonderful week meeting Kobe and Orly’s friends. He was amazed at how welcome everyone made him feel. Mr. Kenan shared that Seth and Joelle were growing in their marriage and parenting. He felt they might consider moving to Cana at some point to get out of Jerusalem. He also reported that Zeke, his brother, was becoming more and more dissatisfied with the Jewish leadership. He had asked some questions about Jesus, but then didn’t want to talk about Him. Orly thoughts kept turning to Kobe’s upcoming plans.

The next night they stopped early and fished for their dinner. It was a tradition that they all enjoyed, and Jordan fit right in. He and his family had fished all along this route and he shared with the group some fond memories of fishing with Jesus.

They were home by midmorning on Tuesday and Orly helped Jordan put his things in their room. They went to the kitchen and Orly put his arms around his mother and kissed her cheek before he introduced her to Jordan. “You are going to have to double your cooking. This guy is still growing! He’s our new apprentice, Jordan. He’s my friend Philip the apostle’s son.” Mother welcomed Jordan and assured him that if he was ever hungry, he should just knock on the kitchen door, and somebody would find him something to eat.

“Mother, I want you to know that Mr. Simon said yes, and I am pledged to be married to Gabriela. You are going to love her. I know you will. I’ll tell you all about it later. I’ll let you get back to work.”

“If dinner is late, it’s going to be your fault!” scolded Mother as she wiped a tear from her eye.

Orly and Jordan walked through the garden and Orly told him about Hosea. He showed him the wooded paths that he liked to walk when he needed time to think and assured Jordan that he was welcome to use them for prayer times, too.

Chapter 13

It felt good to be at the table with Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada, Kobe, and Jordan. But Orly hated this feeling that things were quickly going to change. Life was like that, he knew, but he could sense the foreboding, and the secrecy pulled him down.

Mr. Kenan usually stayed at home to check on the estate and be with Mrs. Vada for a day after being away, but since he needed to get Jordan started and he hadn't warned Lucas about getting a new apprentice, he walked to the Metal Shop with the men. They arrived early, and Lucas was already building up the fire. Soon the other workers arrived and welcomed Jordan. When Kobe asked if he could speak to Mr. Kenan privately, Lucas took over Jordan's training. Lucas was pleased with Jordan's work ethic but reminded him not to overdo or he would pay for it in soreness tomorrow.

Mr. Kenan invited Kobe to join him in his office. "Mr. Kenan, I don't know where to begin," said Kobe. "You so generously provided for me at a very desperate time in my life. Thank you for teaching me a trade and helping me to find a family to love. I will always treasure that."

"It's been my pleasure, Kobe, but this sounds like a farewell speech. Are you leaving?" asked Mr. Kenan.

"Yes sir. I've been feeling for almost six months that God was calling me to share the gospel with those who have never heard. During Passover, I was invited to join a ministry team led by the Apostle Simon. They are headed into unknown territory to the east of Galilee. After much prayer, and discussion with men that I respect and trust, I feel that this is my calling from God. I intend to join them in Capernaum on the fifteenth of next month."

"What about the group?" Mr. Kenan asked.

"That's an amazing story of God's provision, and maybe I should let Orly tell you, but I believe that God has raised up Orly to be the next leader for the group. I believe that the group will grow and continue to thrive under his leadership."

"So, you'll be leaving me within a month?"

"Yes sir."

"I feel like I'm losing a son."

"You are not, sir. You are sending me to spread the message of God's love in obedience to Jesus' commands. He said that we should take the good news to the uttermost parts of the earth."

"Who did you say you were going with?"

"I am going with the Apostle Simon. He's known as Simon the Zealot because he used to be a Zealot before he met Jesus. He's the man who led me to accept Jesus as my Messiah. He has gathered six other men from various home groups in Jerusalem, so there will be a total of eight of us. We will sail from Capernaum. Mr. Zebedee has

agreed to provide us free passage across the Sea, and then we'll continue traveling east as the Holy Spirit leads us."

"How long do you want to continue to work? Do you need some preparation time?"

"I would like to work until time to leave. I believe Capernaum is only a day's walk, so I should be able to work until the fourteenth."

"Kobe, I don't want you to pay for another meal at my house. You will be our guest and that will be the least I can do to contribute to your ministry trip. Is there anything else that I can do for you?"

"Not that I know of and thank you. Orly and I have agreed that I will continue to lead the group until I leave, but I will prepare the group for Orly to take over. They are already accustomed to Orly covering for me and, from what I understand, he does a great job."

"This is a lot to process. If you need to take any time off for preparation, just let me know."

"I will. And again, thank you, sir, for being so supportive of my ministry here in Cana. It has given me the opportunity to grow and determine God's call for my life. There's a part of me that wants to stay and just continue to enjoy this sweet fellowship, but I definitely know that God is calling me forward."

"Then, be obedient. And I will be praying that God blesses your ministry. Now, back to work."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Kenan sat and stared out the window for quite a while. This was not what he had dreamed of. He thought Kobe would stay and grow the group to include all the Jews in Cana. He never pictured Kobe leaving and risking his life to go into dangerous territory. He felt old, and tired, and glad that Lucas was training Jordan. He stuck his head into the shop and asked how Jordan was doing. Lucas gave him the thumbs up, and Mr. Kenan told him that he was heading home for the day



The weeks passed quickly, and Kobe would be leaving on Thursday morning. Earlier that week, Orly asked Mr. Kenan if he could take two days off so that he could walk with Kobe to Capernaum, spend the night, and return the next day in time for the Sabbath. Mr. Kenan agreed, even though he had never allowed an apprentice to take days off. He offered the oxcart, but both Kobe and Orly said that they preferred to walk and be able to talk with each other alone. So early Thursday morning, Kobe said goodbye to Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada. He went into the kitchen and gave Orly's mother a hug. He told her that she had helped him when he needed a mother. She started to tear up, and then grabbed a cloth and popped him, ordering him out of her kitchen. "How dare you come in here trying to sweeten me up!" Then she added, "You boys be careful." She handed them a bag packed with bread and nuts and apricots.

Orly and Kobe left the house with all the servants gathered in the front watching them leave. Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada stood in the front courtyard and waved one last time.

"Whoa. This is hard," whispered Kobe under his breath.

"You've made quite an impression here. Most of these people, including me, will be in Heaven because of you. I would say it's been a productive two years," reminded Orly.

"I guess so. It was where I grew up as a follower. I've learned so much more than just metal work. You've been a big part of that, Orly."

"Okay, we're absolutely not going to do this. I can't handle it. Which road do we take to Capernaum? I've never been there, and I've got to be able to find my way back."

"Yeah, I've walked all over this area with Jesus and His followers. It brings back good memories. There's really no way to get lost. We're heading due east on the only road out of Cana. It will gradually turn north. When you leave Capernaum, you'll leave on the only road headed south and it will lead you to Cana."

"So, talk to me about what you hope to see in Capernaum."

"Well, Jesus rented a house in Capernaum and so I have lots of memories there. Peter had a house there, Andrew lived there, and of course Zebedee and James and John and his other two sons, Jonas and Jaden, that you haven't met, and all their families. Then my best friend, Yanis, works on Thomas' farm and they live about a day and a half north of Capernaum. I hope they will come to see us off. I want you to meet Yanis. He's the one who is betrothed to Jenay, James' daughter. I hope that you two will become good friends. I know Gabriela will want to stay in touch with Jenay as much as possible. I've heard rumors that he is trying to purchase a farm closer to Capernaum before the marriage, so he may already be there."

"I'll beat you to that tree," challenged Orly and both men started running. They arrived breathlessly but admitted it was a tie. As expected, they found a grassy area and a well. They enjoyed a few minutes to rest before continuing their journey.

The talk soon turned to Orly's leading the group, and Kobe had some suggestions for subjects that needed to be addressed but admitted that the Holy Spirit would guide Orly one step at a time and let him know what to teach when. "This must be the way a mother feels when her son leaves home. Except I'm the one leaving. I know the group is in good hands."

They arrived in Capernaum just as the sun was beginning to get low. Kobe pointed out the houses where Jesus, James, John, Andrew and Peter used to live. They climbed a slight hill to Zebedee's house and could see that there was already a crowd gathering. Kobe found a grassy area and pulled Orly down beside him. He began to pray a prayer of blessing over Orly. Tears flowed freely as both men realized that this would probably be their last time together for a long time. Orly then prayed for Kobe. The time had come to join the group.

As they slipped into the back courtyard, cries of "Kobe's here" reminded Orly of the first Passover that he had spent with Kobe. *Was*

that really just a year ago? The evening was a blur of introductions and laughter and fun as the group remembered good times with Jesus. Orly felt that he was in a room with great men and felt honored and privileged to be there. The group talked long into the night, but then it was over and the men each found a place to throw their blankets. The yard was filled with the sound of snoring, and Orly was grateful that sleep came quickly.

Orly woke at his usual time, one hour before sunrise. He saw that Kobe was already stirring, so he gave him a quick hug and told him that he was going to start home now instead of waiting until after breakfast. Kobe understood and casually told Orly to be careful. "You, too!" replied Orly as he grabbed his blanket and food bag. And he was on his way. He headed south and the road just carried him step by step. At times he cried because the Holy Spirit had made it clear that he would never see Kobe again on this earth. But at other times, his heart was overflowing with joy and peace, and he sang every Psalm that he knew at the top of his voice.

Orly began to let his thoughts turn to what he should teach for the Sabbath group. He wanted it to be a message that would encourage and lift up the group, but he didn't know what it should be. He thought about challenging them to spread the gospel but wasn't sure whether he or they were ready to hear that. He knew that the Spirit would guide him.

He also knew that he needed to talk with Mr. Kenan about arranging the espousal with Mr. Simon. He tried not to fret about it as he was sure Mr. Kenan would agree to do it. Orly ran for a while to try to stop his thoughts and rested at a grassy area with a well where he finished off the bread and apricots. He was beginning to wonder if he was lost when he began to recognize signs that he was approaching Cana. He arrived home well before sunset and dropped off the food bag in the kitchen. Mother was busy with dinner preparations, but she looked up and smiled. He knew she was relieved that he had made it home safely. He went to his room and stretched out but found that he couldn't rest. He decided to take a walk and pray for a while. Soon it was time to meet the men at the ceremonial washing pots. Mrs. Vada lit the candles and Mr. Kenan led in the prayer of blessing. His voice broke as he prayed for Kobe.

Orly and Jordan left soon after dinner and went to their room. Jordan wanted to hear all about who Orly had seen in Capernaum since many of them were his friends, too. He was sad that Yanis had not been there. He assured Orly that he and Yanis would become great friends. Orly asked Jordan if he would like to share his testimony tomorrow with the group and Jordan agreed.

The next morning, Jordan went with Joshua and the other men to the synagogue, while Orly headed back to the woods to pray. When it was time for group, Orly was warmly greeted. He knew that everyone was missing Kobe, and he knew that he could never fill Kobe's shoes. So, when Mr. Kenan greeted everyone and introduced Orly, Orly simply spoke from his heart. "I feel totally inadequate to lead you. I

have been a follower for exactly two weeks longer than any of you and that makes me really fearful. But when I remember that it is the Holy Spirit that guides me, provides for me, and strengthens me and it is this same Spirit that guided Jesus, our Messiah, then I know that you are in good hands. Not my hands, but God's. And the Holy Spirit has already sent us someone to help me guide you. Have you met Jordan, our newest apprentice? Jordan, like Kobe, traveled with Jesus, and I've asked him to come and share his testimony with you. Jordan?"

Jordan moved to the front and for such a giant of a man, spoke very gently to the group. "I can't even remember when my dad started following Jesus as I was only five. All I remember was leaving our home and camping out. It was every little boy's dream. I do remember when Kobe joined our group, and I adopted him as my big brother. I wanted to be just like Kobe. My dad, the Apostle Philip, spent a lot of time with Kobe and I got to tag along on ministry trips with them. After Jesus was crucified and then resurrected, my dad felt led to share the New Way outside of Jerusalem. He moved our family to Samaria. Jesus had spent quite a bit of time teaching there, and the people were ready to receive Him as their Messiah. It was my privilege to get to do some teaching and training of the new followers there. Then two years ago, my dad and I went alone to the coast of North Africa to the city of Carthage. Dad felt the Holy Spirit leading us there. Within weeks we had a group of almost fifty followers. We agreed to return with Mother and my little sister. Our plan was to live there and disciple these new followers and that's what I've been doing this past year. Our family travels to Passover each year so that Dad can stay in touch with the other apostles, and this year it was time for me to be apprenticed. Orly and Kobe arranged for me to meet Mr. Kenan, and here I am. My desire is to serve God while I learn a trade that will support me wherever God leads. And that's my story. I'm available anytime you want to ask questions or need a listening ear."

Orly had been spending every free minute with Kobe and had not had much time with his mother. He relaxed and enjoyed sitting under the shade tree with her. Jordan joined them at times, but at others he was off and playing games. He had no problem mixing with the slaves, male or female. He seemed to be equally comfortable with everyone.

When they were alone, Orly told his mother he needed to talk with Mr. Kenan soon about the espousal and wedding. He said he would bring it up at dinner either tonight or tomorrow night, but no later. She promised to pray for him.

Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada were full of praise for both Orly and Jordan as they sat around the table for the post-Sabbath meal. Mr. Kenan had been shocked to learn that Jordan was the son of an apostle. When Kobe had introduced them, he hadn't mentioned it. Jordan asked Mr. Kenan, "Would it have made any difference to you?"

"Well, I ..., I ..., I don't know. But I don't think I would have charged him an apprentice fee. And I certainly wouldn't have questioned him about your behavior!"

Jordan laughed and declared, "Maybe that's why Kobe didn't tell you. He knew you'd better ask! I was quite a handful back when Kobe knew me!"

As the meal ended, Jordan announced that he planned to teach a group of men a new game that he had learned while in Africa. He asked Orly to join them, but Orly declined. Jordan excused himself and left. Orly felt that this was the right time to talk with Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada about his need for help with the espousal. "Would you two have time to talk with me for just a few minutes? I've been putting this off because I wanted to spend as much time as possible with Kobe and we needed to get Jordan settled in, but I don't want to put it off any longer."

"Just don't tell us that you are quitting and going on a ministry trip!"

"No, sir. At least not that I know of!"

"Good. Because I need you, Orly. I'm getting too old for all this excitement."

"Well, I've already told you that I'm pledged to Gabriela, and you seemed to be pleased with that."

"I am, because I hope that means that you'll settle down here in Cana and stay put!"

"I would like that very much, sir. But I need to finish my apprenticeship first."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, that's just a formality. You are already doing a full day's work and I ought to be paying you full wages instead of waiting until the two years are complete. After all, I believe you and Lucas had been working for quite a while before I started training you."

"Thank you, sir, but that's not necessary. You and I made a deal and I'm willing to keep it. No, I wanted to ask you two about my espousal. I believe that's the next step. Mr. Simon suggested that it take place in Bethany with their priest who is a follower of Jesus. They said it could take place as soon as I was ready, and so I have two questions. First, what is expected of me to be ready? And then, because I don't have a dad, I was wondering if you would represent me?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Kenan without hesitation. "It would be an honor to present you to the priest."

Mrs. Vada spoke up, "I believe what Mr. Simon meant is that in order to be ready for the espousal, you need to have prepared some gifts to show that your intent is serious toward Gabriela."

"What kind of gifts? Are they for Gabriela or for Mr. Simon? It's just very confusing to me because I've never seen an espousal and don't know what is expected."

"You are expected to give Mr. Simon and his wife a gift. It can be a joint gift or separate ones, and then you need to make Gabriela several gifts. They don't have to be expensive, but they should be made by your own hands to indicate your ability and willingness to care for her."

“Do you have any suggestions?”

“Why don’t you think about it? I think it would mean more to both of you if you came up with your own ideas. But we’ll be happy to guide you and listen to your plans. And we’ll certainly let you know if you are off track!” said Mrs. Vada.

“Thank you both so much. Do I need to be able to prove that I have a home for her? You know that I don’t,” stated Orly.

“No, not at the espousal. That will happen just before the wedding. You need to prove to the Priest and her parents that you will be able to provide for her, then he will declare it time for the wedding to begin.”

“Mr. Simon suggested that he and his family would like to bring Gabriela to me for the wedding. They have never been to Galilee and want to see her new home and community. So, I’ll need to prepare lodging for them, too. I’ve got a lot of planning to do.”

“Yes, it will be a busy, busy time. But how exciting!”

“Thank you both for your help. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Jordan was just settling onto his mat when Orly arrived. They prayed together for Kobe and the men who should be crossing the Sea of Galilee tonight heading to the East.

At dinner the next night, Orly asked Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada about the gifts that he had thought about. He explained to Jordan what was going on. “I don’t know Mr. Simon that well, but maybe I can help. Let’s hear your ideas,” offered Jordan.

“Well, my hardest one is for Mr. Simon. He owns a Mercantile Store, so I suppose he has everything he needs. But I was wondering if an axe would be a good tool for him to take on his ministry trips. You know that he and Lazarus travel through the mountains of Judea almost to the Southern border. That’s something that I can make. But I was wondering if it would be too heavy for a ministry trip or look like a weapon or something.”

“Every man needs a good axe, whether he uses it for a ministry trip or not. I think it’s a great idea and I know you can make one. You’ll have to order a handle for it, though,” said Mr. Kenan, “unless you have some wood carving skills that I don’t know about.”

“Is that okay? I mean, is it okay that I don’t make the whole thing?” asked Orly.

“Sure. Some young men just buy all their gifts. But I think it’s more special when you make them. I think the axe is a wonderful plan for Mr. Simon. What would you make for his wife?”

“That’s Mrs. Keturah. Well, let me tell you about the gifts I have planned for Gabriela first. We’ll need an iron skillet for cooking over the fire and in the outside oven, so I thought about making her the standard sized one, and then a smaller one just for the two of us.”

“Oh, that’s sweet,” said Mrs. Vada.

“Then I need to make a standard-sized soup pot for cooking over the fire pit, but I also wanted to make a smaller one that wouldn’t be so heavy for her to lift by herself. We won’t be able to hire servants in the beginning, and we won’t need that big of a pot for a while.”

“That sounds perfect. It shows that you are providing for your future home, but you are making something special to protect and care for Gabriela. Perfect.”

“Good. I couldn’t come up with anything else. Should I do more?”

“That sounds like plenty to me,” said Mrs. Vada.

“Then for Mrs. Keturah, I was thinking of making her a smaller soup pot, too. She’s often at home alone with the two younger boys while Mr. Simon is away, so it would probably help her to have a smaller pot to lift, too.”

“How thoughtful. I think it’s wonderful. What do you men think?”

“Sounds good to me,” agreed Mr. Kenan.

“Me, too,” seconded Jacob.

“Mr. Kenan, may I buy the iron that I need from you and pay Mr. Abraham? And may I have your permission to go back to work in the evenings until I can get these things made?”

“Certainly. Just don’t stay too late and let it interfere with your work.”

“Yes, sir, and thank you,” said Orly.

So, after dinner each night, Orly returned to the shop and worked on his love gifts for Gabriela and her family. Some nights Jordan would return to the shop just to keep him company. They would talk about the group and usually end up praying about the future that was on both of their hearts. One night, Orly spoke to Jordan about his hope that Gabriela would share his interest in turning their home into a ministry place similar to Mary’s: a place where all were welcome. But he admitted to Jordan that he had not had any time to talk with Gabriela about her desires and what the Spirit was saying to her.

“Yeah, that might be important to know. I know my mother feels as strongly called to minister as my dad does. They are a great team.”

“I know you miss them. It must be hard having them so far away,” said Orly.

“Yep, that’s why it’s so great to have this apprenticeship. I knew that God was working when you mentioned it to me.” And that’s when Orly remembered Benjamin. He had totally forgotten his promise to mention him to Mr. Kenan.

When Orly had Mr. Simon’s axe-head all finished, he decided that he needed to make one for himself, too, since he couldn’t always borrow Mr. Kenan’s tools. Lucas told him where to take the heads to get handles fitted for them. He went to the Carpenter’s Shop on his noon break. The owner, Palti, said he would have the handles ready by the end of the week, if there was no rush on it. Orly assured him that there wasn’t. Tomorrow night he would start on Mrs. Keturah’s soup pot. He hoped that it would go as smoothly as he expected, but it was hard to get iron stretched thin and evenly and smoothly, so he knew he couldn’t rush. Then he would be ready to start on gifts for Gabriela. He was looking forward to that.

At dinner that night, Orly asked Mr. Kenan if he remembered Benjamin, Mr. Zeke’s kitchen servant. Mr. Kenan didn’t remember but asked Orly why he wanted to know. “Mr. Kenan, I believe that

Benjamin was poorly treated by Mr. Zeke's cook, just as I was. The cook would only let Benjamin be an errand boy, and so Mr. Zeke wasn't interested in keeping him when he became free. Benjamin really wanted to learn to cook. He's been working as an errand boy and sweeping and cleaning up the market in Jerusalem. At times he has worked to clean up the temple courtyard. He also works as a night watchman for Seth's booth at the market. I have kept in touch with him these past three years. He still would like to learn to cook but has no money for an apprenticeship. I have no idea what kind of cooking, if any, he's ever done. But I do know that he's smart and a hard worker. I promised him that I would give you his name, but with all the other stuff going on, I forgot to mention it to you. Anyway, I think he might make a nice addition to your kitchen staff."

"Orly, I haven't thought about adding any staff. I really leave that up to your mother. Have you talked with her about it?"

"No, sir. Since he's a friend of mine, I wasn't sure if that was appropriate," said Orly.

"I appreciate that. Let me think about it and talk with Ruth," said Mr. Kenan. The conversation turned to other things and Orly decided not to fret over it. It would be up to Mr. Kenan now. He had done his part.

Orly was growing impatient with the soup pot he was attempting to make for Mrs. Keturah. On one of their noon breaks, he finally asked Lucas to look at it and give him some tips. Lucas agreed that its size posed some interesting problems. It was hard to shape the inside of the pot and keep it smooth enough to clean. Lucas agreed to meet him after dinner and they could work on it together. That night they talked about various solutions and decided that a wooden mallet might work better than iron on iron. But that left a black residue on the iron that couldn't be burned off. Finally, they came up with a rounded club of iron that Orly formed the pot around piece by piece. It was tricky, but with practice, Orly began to see hope of his dream becoming a reality. Now he understood why he had never seen a small soup pot. It was hard work. He diligently worked on it night after night. He wished he could let Mr. Simon know that he was working hard to get ready, but there was no way to send a message unless someone was traveling to Jerusalem. So, Orly just prayed that Mr. Simon understood and would keep his pledge to wait.

Chapter 14

As Shavuot was approaching, Mr. Kenan announced that he would be going to Jerusalem to celebrate with his brother Zeke. He explained that they would need to provide their own lodging since Zeke was not open to followers of Jesus. Orly reminded the group that he would be camping in the olive garden, and they were welcome to join him there. He described how the followers of Jesus celebrated Pentecost but reminded them of the danger since at any time the Romans or the Sanhedrin could declare the celebration unlawful. Orly's message to the group was on trusting God to provide, and he spontaneously called on Joshua to tell about God providing after the last Pentecost celebration. Joshua was pleased to be called upon but focused on the fear and chaos that happened in the olive garden. Joshua declared that it was an awesome experience, but it scared off most of the other men. Orly, Jordan, and Joshua were the only three who joined Mr. Kenan and his two servants.

Since Pentecost would be on Monday, Mr. Kenan and the five men left on Thursday and would spend Sabbath on the road. On Friday, several miles before stopping, Mr. Kenan ordered the three young men to get out and run to see if they could beat the oxen to the campground. They easily outran the oxen because of the crowd, but knew that it was their cue to collect firewood and start fishing. When Mr. Kenan, Enoch, and Omri arrived, they already had a large bonfire going. While the rest of the men were fishing, Mr. Kenan asked Orly to take a walk with him so they could talk privately.

As they walked, Mr. Kenan started off by stating, "Orly, if it's all right with you, we will go to Bethany first. We can let Joshua and Jordan off at the olive garden. I think they will be okay on their own, don't you?"

Orly was so surprised he hardly knew how to respond, but an automatic, "Yes, sir," came out. He had assumed nothing would happen until his gifts were finished.

"Do you think you can have all your gifts prepared for the espousal if we set it up for just before Sukkot? If not, we can set it for Passover next year. What are you thinking?"

"Yes, sir. I mean, Sukkot will be fine. I mean, I will have the gifts ready. Lucas helped me figure out the pot that I was having trouble with. Now, all I lack is finishing the skillets and I've made several of them before. I think I will be finished easily by Sukkot," Orly replied excitedly.

"You said that Simon was planning on bringing Gabriela to Cana for the wedding. I'm thinking that that will be sometime after Passover, and we can tell Simon the exact date during that visit. Does that sound right to you?"

“Well, I understand that I will need to get a house, secure a job, and plan a wedding. But maybe all of that will happen by Passover. I certainly hope so.”

“You can quit worrying about two of those things. Mrs. Vada and I will host your wedding, and the job is yours if that’s what you want. I assume you’ve been saving your money to be able to buy a house. We’ll just have to trust that one will be available when you need it. Otherwise, you’ll have to buy some land and hire Palti to build it. But I think by Passover, you would have a plan and we could give him a definite date.”

“Mr. Kenan, that is incredibly generous of you. I mean, I never expected you to host the wedding. I was going to ask if we could use your courtyard. Wow!”

“Orly, you’ve been with me since you were five and I’ve watched you grow into a fine young man. You and your mother have blessed us so much.”

“What can I say? I mean, that takes a great load off of me. It makes me think this might really happen! Now, I can’t wait until Sunday!”

“Oh, and another thing, Orly. If Simon invites you to spend Shavuot with his family, I’m okay with that. I think Jordan and Joshua will be fine without you. Be ready to catch the oxcart early on Thursday morning just before sunrise. We’ll leave early to try to make it home before the Sabbath.”

“Yes, sir. And thank you.” His brain was swirling with all he had just learned and with the possibility of spending these next few days with Gabriela.

The men had the fish ready to cook over the fire when Mr. Kenan and Orly joined them. Orly’s mother had sent bread and onion slices to make the meal complete. Mr. Kenan led in the Sabbath prayer of blessing and Orly realized for the first time that Mr. Kenan really did love him almost like a son. It touched him deeply, and he praised God for providing so abundantly for him and his mother.

Orly and Jordan were up before the sun to have their prayer time. They prayed separately for a while, and then Orly asked Jordan to join him as they prayed for the group back in Cana. He updated Jordan on Mr. Kenan’s offer to host the wedding and both men rejoiced in God’s provision.

After Sabbath had ended at sundown, Mr. Kenan once again asked Orly to take a walk with him. He wanted to know how to get in touch with Benjamin. “The only way I know to find him is through the Sword and Knife Shop that Seth owns in the market. At Passover he was working there as a night watchman. The steward usually knows where to find him because he does deliveries for him during the day.”

“You say he has never cooked before but wants to learn?”

“Yes, sir. That’s what he told me. I said that I would mention it to you — but made him no promises.”

“Thanks, Orly, and by the way, if you meet any blacksmiths or young men who would like to learn, just let me know. We need to be constantly training new men so that we can expand.”

“Good to know. A lot of my friends in Jerusalem are looking for places to work to move out of town. I’ll keep my eyes open.”

They rejoined the group and sat around the campfire talking. Jordan had never been to the Pentecost celebration since his family only came for Passover. Joshua was telling him about getting to pray with a stranger who invited Jesus to be his Messiah. Orly let Jordan and Joshua know that he would spend the night in the garden with them on Wednesday night.

Sunday morning, the men quickly ate olives and olive oil with rounds of bread that Orly’s mother had sent from home. They loaded the oxcart for the last leg of the journey. The road was now wide and divided and they were at the corner of the temple by noon. They let Jordan and Joshua off with strict orders for them to meet the cart just before sunrise on Thursday at this same location. Jordan and Joshua agreed that they understood.

Enoch drove the oxcart to Bethany, and Orly pointed out the Mercantile Store. Mr. Kenan and Orly went inside to see if they could speak with Mr. Simon. Orly introduced the men and then asked if he should stay, or if they would prefer to speak in private. Mr. Simon asked him to look around the shop and they would call him back in a few minutes. Orly was okay with that. *If my daughter were marrying a stranger, I would want to ask a lot of questions!* Orly wandered around the Mercantile Store and talked with the steward. He checked on Enoch and Omri then came back inside quickly. He was trying to not look nervous but was eager to hear what the men had to say. Finally, Mr. Simon called from the door, “Orly, would you come in?”

“Yes, sir, coming,” and Orly nearly tripped over a stack of rope in his haste to come. Mr. Simon laughed and assured him that he could relax. Mr. Kenan told Orly that they had gone over dates and agreed for the espousal to take place on Monday, the day before Sukkot. Then Mr. Simon invited Orly to plan to spend the week of Sukkot in Bethany with their family while Mr. Kenan was in Jerusalem. That would give him some time with Gabriela to get better acquainted and make future plans. Mr. Simon asked Orly if he had any further questions and Orly indicated that he did not. Mr. Kenan stood and thanked Mr. Simon for his time, and Orly realized that nothing had been said about him seeing Gabriela today. He decided to be bold. “I do have one question, Mr. Simon.”

“Yes, Orly, what is it?”

“Well, sir, I was wondering if I could see Gabriela sometime during this visit. Does your family celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem, or could I possibly visit afterward for a few hours?”

“We don’t celebrate Pentecost in the city. It is a very special day, but we feel that there is great danger there — especially for Lazarus. The Sanhedrin are determined to find some excuse to kill him. So, we celebrate here at home. But I see no reason that you could not join us

on Tuesday afternoon and stay for dinner. Unfortunately, Lazarus is out of town. I don't believe it would be proper for you to spend the night. Why don't you come here about the ninth hour, and I'll make it a short day so that we can all enjoy a visit before dinner. Then you will need to return to Jerusalem afterward."

"That sounds wonderful, sir. I will look forward to seeing you again on Tuesday afternoon."

Orly and Mr. Kenan joined the servants in the oxcart. When they reached the corner of the temple, Enoch slowed the cart and allowed Orly to jump off. Orly checked the olive garden for Jordan and Joshua before heading to Mary's. The olive garden was packed with Jesus' followers who had come to celebrate Pentecost, but he saw no sign of Jordan and Joshua. He went to Mary's and found her house filled with people as usual. He could hear Jordan's booming voice out in the courtyard as he was telling a crowd about one of his adventures in North Africa. He let Jordan know that he was back and would like to spend the night with them. He wandered around and spoke to many friends as he made his way to the kitchen to find Mary. He was pleased to see that Joshua was doing what he could to help. Orly took over the preparation of the vegetables that were being donated. Guests were helping to move the platters of food to the courtyard and Orly was amazed that there were so many new faces that he had never met. Mary's group was indeed growing. After eating, she took a few minutes to sit down beside him and rest. He told her about his upcoming espousal, and she was thrilled that the date had been set. And she commiserated with his not seeing Gabriela today. But she added, "Simon is right to stay away. The threats are not just threats. I'm worried about you men staying in the olive garden. From what I've heard, there could be an attack tonight or tomorrow night. I don't think they will try anything during the actual celebration, but I can't promise you."

"Is it the Sanhedrin or the Romans?" asked Orly.

"It's definitely the Sanhedrin, but they often bring in the Roman troops on the claim that we're trying to overthrow Rome."

"Thanks for the heads up. I know a different hiding place that was a special place for Kobe and me. I think I'll take Jordan and Joshua there. I've never seen anyone else using it to camp even during Passover. It's very hard to find."

"That sounds good. Be sure and take a bag of food for breakfast and dinner tomorrow night. I plan to shut down my house because Nicodemus warned me that it is on the list to be attacked this week. Tonight is your only time to gather here and hopefully, they will leave us alone. After dinner is complete, I'll let everyone know of the danger and suggest that we spread out. I don't want to be afraid, but I don't want to antagonize them either. It's a fine line."

"I've got to find Jordan and Joshua again and let them know the change of plans. Thanks for the warning and the offer of food."

"Orly, I feed over a hundred people some weeks and I've never run out of food. Sometimes it's just bread and oil, but God just keeps

providing. That's what Shavuot is all about and my heart is grateful for His provision. But pray for me. I'm weary of all the pain and death. Jesus said this would happen before He returned, so I wait with hope."

"Let me pray for you right now; then I will continue to pray. Father God, you have heard Mary's weariness and fears. Lift her burden as you lifted Moses' in the wilderness. Caring for so many souls is a heavy burden, but You said we could bring that burden to You. Open her eyes to Your angels that are ministering all around her, protecting her and her group. Lift her up and make her bold and courageous. In Jesus' name I pray."

Mary had tears in her eyes as she looked up at Orly. "You have truly ministered to me tonight. Now find Jordan and Joshua before they decide to leave and go to the olive garden."

Orly found Joshua back in the kitchen helping to clean up. He instructed him to fill bags for the three of them to cover breakfast and dinner tomorrow and to wait there. "I'm going to go find Jordan."

"No problem. I'll get the food packed."

"Thanks, Joshua."

Just as Orly found Jordan, Mary called for everyone's attention. She thanked them for coming but announced that there were credible reports that her place would be attacked sometime this week. She encouraged everyone to begin quietly slipping out in small groups. She would lock her doors until after Shavuot was complete. They would be welcome to return after Thursday. She also warned them not to stay in the olive garden. If they needed a place to stay, many of her group had back courtyards where they could camp.

Jordan looked at Orly and asked, "Is that what you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes, but I have a place to camp. Joshua is packing us some food and we need to meet him in the kitchen. We need to get out of here and Mary will feel better the sooner we do."

"Agreed. I have two other people I want to speak with, but I'll keep it short and meet you in the kitchen," promised Jordan.

When Orly got back to the kitchen, Joshua had their bags packed and was helping others pack food to take with them. There was too much food to let it waste. Soon Jordan joined them and had picked up their travel bags by the back gate. The three young men waved goodnight to Mary. They walked through the market to see if they could lose the watchful eyes they felt. Orly explained what Mary had told him, and also his plan to take them to Kobe's special hiding place. After wandering around for a while, Orly began to lead them. He found the trail head because the houses were still lit with people celebrating, but once they entered the woods, it was pitch dark. They walked from tree to tree along the trail until Orly could hear the stream. Then he knew that they were in the right place.

They threw their blankets on the thick grassy area and were soon sound asleep. All three woke before dawn and Orly and Jordan left to have their prayer time while Joshua laid out their breakfast from the bags. He tied up the remainder of the food and hid it behind some

bushes. While they ate, they discussed what they wanted to do about celebrating Pentecost. All three agreed that they wanted to join the throng of worshippers who would be celebrating the arrival of the Holy Spirit. But they also agreed to stay together and immediately return to this retreat if any one of them felt unsafe. They stowed their blankets behind some bushes and made sure the area looked totally empty. Orly showed the other two the secret of the trail. "As you walk in, at each of the three splits you go to the left. As you exit, you keep to the right." As they emerged from the woods, they were engulfed by followers of Jesus who were singing and dancing in the streets. The apostles were preaching while followers of Jesus were counseling and answering questions for those who wanted to know more. Once again it was an awesome day, but there was a dark cloud of danger hanging over Jerusalem. About twenty followers of Jesus had been randomly arrested from the olive garden last night. Also, one home group had been attacked, and the entire group arrested. Orly wanted to check on Mary but knew that that would just further endanger her. As the sun began to set, the apostles encouraged everyone to disperse and not endanger any of the local home groups by gathering in large numbers. It was a solemn crowd that ended the day, even though Jordan had heard from Peter that there were over a thousand people who had prayed to accept Jesus as Messiah. Just as Jesus had predicted, the greater the persecution, the more the followers of Jesus would multiply.

As they had the night before, the three men wandered through the market before heading to their retreat after dark. Joshua located the bag of food, and they enjoyed eating leftovers from Mary's feast. Unfortunately, they had hidden their blankets too well and had to sleep directly on the grass. They were grateful to be alive and the next morning found their blankets just where they had left them. They went to the market and purchased some rounds of bread and cheese for breakfast. They took their breakfast back to the hideaway and spent the day resting and sleeping. All three felt that the danger level would decrease as the followers of Jesus began to leave town. But they wondered if it was safe for Orly to travel to Bethany, since it would identify him as a Jesus follower not staying to finish celebrating Shavuot. He promised to be back late, safe and sound.

Orly wondered if he should take a gift and decided to stop in the market and pick up some pomegranates. As he was leaving, he saw Seth and Mr. Kenan walking toward the Sword and Knife Shop. He wondered if they would talk with Benjamin today. He had mixed feelings about whether that would be good or bad to have Benjamin in Cana and hoped he would be an asset to Mother. *I'm just not sure how Benjamin will fit in. He's never been out of Jerusalem and could be unhappy in Cana.* He was already getting close to Bethany, and it was entirely too early to meet Mr. Simon. He found a well and sat down to rest. He tried to pray and get his heart and mind cleared. He asked God to give Mr. Kenan wisdom to know what to do about Benjamin. He had to confess that being so close to the persecution in

Jerusalem was upsetting to him. He needed to make sure that he was as ready as Kobe to face whatever the future held. Only when that was settled did he allow his thoughts to turn toward his happiness at getting to spend time with Gabriela. He had hoped to spend the whole three days with her, but he needed to be grateful for these hours, and he knew it was probably for the best. He thanked God for Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah and prayed that they would have wisdom to guide Gabriela through this time of preparation. When his heart was at peace, he resumed his journey and felt ready for the future.

He arrived at Mr. Simon's shop at the ninth hour and greeted the steward. Mr. Simon was coming out of his office as Orly approached the door and they startled each other. They both laughed and Orly accepted his hug. Mr. Simon and Orly walked to his home. Orly had not noticed when he was here before how beautiful the tree-lined streets were and commented on them. "Yes, Bethany is a nice little village. Jesus loved it and stayed here often. He was really good friends with Lazarus and his sisters."

"Cana is not as hilly, but it is very fertile land and is surrounded by farms and lots of trees. I think Gabriela will be happy there, but I know she will miss her family," said Orly.

"Orly, her family will miss her, too. But I want you to know that she is eager to begin her new life with you, and God will bless you as you serve Him together."

"Thank you, sir."

As they entered the house, Mr. Simon called out, "We're home. Do you want us to come to the kitchen or shall we wait here?"

Gabriela replied, "Come on in. I have bread almost ready to go into the oven and need to finish it up." So, Orly and Mr. Simon went into the kitchen preparation area. Orly's first glimpse of Gabriela was her punching down the bread and then braiding it. He was impressed with her skillful touch and told her so. "I've been making bread since I was knee high. Miss Martha taught me a lot while Mother was busy with the twins."

"Where are the boys?"

"They are in the back courtyard supposedly helping Mother get set up," replied Gabriela.

Mr. Simon poured them both a glass of juice that was sitting on the table, and Orly realized that they did not have servants.

Orly carried the pans of bread to the outside oven and then ran back to greet Mrs. Keturah with a hug. She seemed pleased. He also told her he had brought pomegranates but had left them in his bag by the front door. She thanked him and asked him to put them in the preparation area. Orly smiled to himself. He was being treated like a son or close friend and that was good. He quickly returned to Gabriela and took his place on the grass beside her. Together, maybe they would remember to check the bread. They whispered but were constantly interrupted by one of the twins asking questions or needing Gabriela's help with something. Gabriela told Orly that Lazarus had gone with two other men into a new area in Judea close to where John

the Baptizer had grown up. They had not been there before and had no idea what the reaction to their teaching would be. Mr. Simon had stayed behind because he suspected that Orly would want to visit. She also warned him that her two older brothers and their families would be joining them for dinner as well as Miss Martha and Miss Mary.

Mrs. Keturah was cooking something that smelled really good in a soup pot over the fire. "I'm so happy the espousal date has been set. That will make it easier to talk freely about our future." And Orly agreed. The two older brothers and their families arrived and Orly's head was spinning with names. The brothers were Adam and Amram but he couldn't remember the wives' or children's names. Gabriela was holding a newborn and Orly thought his heart would explode with joy. *Someday soon she will be holding our little one.* Orly checked the bread to distract himself. It still needed a few more minutes. Orly returned and sat beside Gabriela admiring the baby. Orly had never been around such a tiny baby and said so. Gabriela insisted that he hold the infant, and to please her he gently took the bundle from her. Of course, the little man began to scream inconsolably, and Gabriela laughed. She took him and cuddled him back to sleep. She seemed to know just what he needed and whispered to Orly that she would teach him when he needed to know. Orly was embarrassed but also thrilled that she was also thinking of their future together.

The meal was wonderful but passed entirely too quickly. Mr. Simon invited the men to join him on the roof while the women cleaned up. Orly wanted to be with Gabriela, but knew he was expected to join the men. They sat on the roof and talked of the recent happenings in Jerusalem. Adam and Amram did all the purchasing for the Mercantile Store and most of their dealers were located in Jerusalem, so they were up to date on happenings there. They agreed with Orly that it was not a safe place to be right now. Orly told them about the latest attack in the olive garden and assured Mr. Simon that he and his friends were in a hiding place that Kobe had shown them. Then he realized that he had not told Mr. Simon about Kobe leaving. "Did you know that Kobe left to go on a ministry trip with Simon the Zealot?" Mr. Simon knew about the ministry trip but did not know that Kobe had joined them. He asked about the group that was meeting at Mr. Kenan's house and Orly told him that he and Jordan, the Apostle Philip's son, were leading it. He had to back up and explain that Jordan was now an apprentice to Mr. Kenan also and that they had become good friends.

The daughters-in-law had both taken the children and gone to their homes, but Miss Martha, Miss Mary, Mrs. Keturah, and Gabriela joined them on the roof. Mr. Simon told the women that Orly was now leading the group at Mr. Kenan's because Kobe had gone with Simon the Zealot's group to the East. Mrs. Keturah asked how that was going and if Orly felt comfortable leading the group. Orly shared how definitely he felt that the Holy Spirit had prepared him. It was hard to end the evening, but Mr. Simon reminded the young couple that their next meeting would be at their espousal service in seven weeks. Miss

Martha assured Orly that he would be welcome to spend the entire week of Sukkot with them. Mr. Simon led them in a prayer of blessing and then Orly and the two brothers said goodnight and left together. The brothers walked with Orly to the edge of town and wished him safety for his journey. Orly had never traveled this road after dark and had no lantern to guide him, but soon he could see the glow from the temple in Jerusalem. *God, You are so good to meet all my needs. I thank You and praise You for this special time with Gabriela and her family.* He continued to pray all the way into Jerusalem. He entered the trail to the retreat area and quickly located his blanket. The moon was overhead so he could see where Joshua and Jordan were sleeping. Once again, he praised God for His perfect provision, and was quickly asleep.

The three men spent Wednesday resting and talking. "Mr. Kenan was going to talk with Benjamin about working for him. I just wanted you two to know that that is a possibility. As far as I know, Benjamin is not following Jesus yet, so he may have questions."

"Will he be working at the Metal Shop?" asked Joshua.

"No, he wants to learn to cook. At least that was the plan." They went to the market to get dinner and walked around for a while. Later, they lay on their blankets and prayed out loud for each other, for Kobe, and for others who were sharing the New Way.

The men woke one hour before sunrise and then walked to the temple to wait for Mr. Kenan. "He will bring breakfast, won't he?" asked Jordan. Orly and Joshua assured him that when they left early, they would stop in about an hour to rest and water the oxen and they would eat breakfast then. Mr. Kenan was trying to get home before the Sabbath and that would take some pushing.

They arrived at the temple wall before sunrise and stood around waiting for the cart. They saw the oxcart approaching, but Enoch didn't even stop, he just slowed the oxen and let the men jump on. Omri and Benjamin greeted them. Benjamin was grinning from ear to ear. The oxen had picked up full speed and the bumps were so bad that the men just hung on to keep from being covered with bruises or thrown off the cart. The oxen made great time going downhill. After about an hour, as predicted, Enoch stopped at a stream to water them. The men all jumped out of the cart to stretch their legs and to get acquainted. Orly grabbed Benjamin in a bear hug and welcomed him to the group. Introductions were made while Mr. Kenan showed the men where the box of breakfast food was located. They each were given some olives and pomegranates and a round of bread. Trying to eat and hold on at the same time resulted in a lot of laughter and fun. At least Enoch slowed the oxen down for a while as he was trying to eat, too. But soon, they were bouncing along at full speed again. Orly could tell that Benjamin was looking confused and yelled, "What's wrong?"

Benjamin yelled back, "I didn't know there were this many trees!"

Orly laughed and yelled back, "Yep! Enjoy!"

They didn't stop again until around noon and Orly had Benjamin stand in the wagon and look east toward the Jordan River. Benjamin again expressed that while he had been to small, wooded areas in Jerusalem, he had no idea that the woods could stretch so far. "We don't usually travel this fast and furious, but we're trying to get home before the Sabbath. We usually take a more leisurely trip, but we need to push a little this time." And indeed, Mr. Kenan was ready to go just as soon as Enoch watered the oxen. They stopped once more in the midafternoon and when they stopped for dinner, they didn't make camp. They sat around on the grass and ate rounds of bread with pickled fish and goat cheese, while Enoch let the oxen graze. Mr. Kenan apologized for not having time to let Benjamin properly enjoy the trip but promised that the next trip would be more leisurely. "Make sure you know where your blanket is because we will travel late. Enoch knows of a good place to spend the night, but it will be dark before we arrive." The men all found their travel bags, and Mr. Kenan handed Benjamin a blanket as they once again loaded into the cart. This time the ride was a little slower since it was after dark, and Enoch needed the oxen to find their own way. When they stopped, Mr. Kenan set a lantern in the middle of a grassy area and told the men to get settled before it burned out.

Once again, the men ate their breakfast while being bounced around in the back of the cart. But now the roads were smoother, and the oxen weren't traveling quite as fast as the land flattened. Today the men could talk and enjoyed entertaining each other with stories. Everyone made Benjamin feel welcome. Benjamin expressed shock that Mr. Kenan seemed so comfortable with his servants, and Joshua explained that ever since Kobe had come and taught them about Jesus, things had really changed. Benjamin said he had accepted an apprenticeship with Mr. Kenan under Orly's mother, but he had to pay for it by agreeing to be his slave for two years. Orly assured Benjamin that that was the same arrangement he had had with Mr. Kenan and the one that Joshua hoped to get when his time of slavery was complete. Benjamin was shocked that Joshua was a slave. Everyone just treated him like a friend. They all assured Benjamin that he would be happy working for Mr. Kenan.

They arrived home just at sunset and Mr. Kenan instructed Joshua to show Benjamin around and help him get settled in the slave quarters. Enoch and the other servants tended to the oxen but left the cart to be unloaded after the Sabbath. Orly, Jordan, Omri, and Mr. Kenan entered the house to enjoy the Sabbath meal. Orly stood and hugged his mother after she had placed the food on the table. She welcomed him back but quickly returned to the kitchen. He would see her tomorrow to talk and catch up.

Chapter 15

Jordan and Orly left soon after Sabbath dinner to prepare the message for tomorrow's group. They were undecided on whether to talk about the persecution in Jerusalem or not. Both wanted more time to pray but felt too tired to pursue it until morning. Orly felt impressed to talk with them about Jesus washing the apostles' feet and His message to recognize greatness as being willing to serve others. He fell asleep composing his message.

After breakfast, Jordan agreed with Orly that they didn't see any reason to alarm the followers at this point, but they knew that they should prepare them at some point in case persecution came to Cana. Neither felt led to share it right now.

Life fell into a predictable pattern. Orly and Jordan worked hard at the Metal Shop, went home for dinner with Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada, then Orly would go back to the shop to work on his espousal gifts. He very seldom saw Benjamin or his mother except on Sabbaths. Benjamin was attending their group meetings but didn't seem to be interested in inviting Jesus to be his Messiah. Jordan and Joshua included Benjamin in their fun and games on Sabbath afternoons, so Orly felt free to just rest and visit with his mother.

On Wednesday, about a week before Orly and Mr. Kenan left for the espousal service and Sukkot, Lucas asked Orly to take a walk with him during the noon break. "Orly, I don't know how you would feel about buying a Gentile house, but I wanted you to be the first to know that my house will probably be available in a few months. It's just too big for me and my wife to take care of, and my son is trying to convince us to move in with him. Think about it and let me know if you are interested. I would love for you to have it."

"It doesn't bother me at all that you are Gentile. You've been a great friend to me and helped me in many ways. I would love to see your home. I could come over whenever it's convenient for you. Could I talk it over with Gabriela? If I could see it this week, then I could describe it to her, and we could decide together next week when I'm in Bethany."

"That would be fine. Why don't you come over after dinner and see it and then we can talk more."

"Thanks, Lucas, that would be great. Let's get back to work."

The men returned to the shop, but Orly had a hard time concentrating on his work. *I don't know what it will cost. Do I have enough money saved up for such a grand home? I'm not sure what Gabriela would think of having to take care of so much. She would probably need help. I wonder what she thinks about having slaves. We need to discuss it before I decide. It won't hurt to look tomorrow. Maybe she would prefer a little house. I'm glad we can talk about such things next week. Oh, I wish next week would hurry!*

That night, Orly ate his dinner quickly and walked to Lucas' house following the directions he had been given. The house was on the east side of Cana and was farther from the marketplace and synagogue. But Cana was a small village, so it was only about a mile from the shop. Orly noted that the courtyard in front was quite small, and he hoped the back courtyard was larger. When Lucas opened the door and welcomed him, Orly stepped into the first Gentile house he had ever entered. Lucas showed him the indoor kitchen, a comfortable-sized living area, and three good-sized sleeping rooms. Lucas took a lantern, and they went out to the back courtyard. It was certainly as large as Mr. Kenan's and would be the perfect place to start a group. He showed Orly the building for the slaves and Orly was amazed that each slave had his own mat to sleep on. There was room for six men and six women. Then Lucas told him there was a garden and a barn large enough for a couple of goats and a team of oxen. Lucas and Orly sat in the back courtyard and discussed a purchase price. It would take every penny that Orly had saved up to this point, but then he would still have time to save some before the marriage. He promised to talk it over with Gabriela and let him know.

"No problem. I would like you to have it. But I know it's a little large to start off with. And it takes a lot of work to keep it up. So, I'll understand if you decide not to buy it. Just let me know."

"You'll be the first to know! Good night, Lucas. See you in the morning."

When Orly got back to the room, Jordan was already in his blanket, snoring loudly. Orly crawled onto his mat but couldn't quit thinking about the slaves having their own mats. Of course, Mr. Kenan had closer to thirty slaves, so he supposed that would make a big difference, but still

The following Thursday, Orly said goodbye to his mother, and she handed him a small package to give to Gabriela. She wouldn't tell him what it was, but he promised to give it to her during the espousal ceremony. Enoch and Mr. Kenan rode in front and Orly and Omri rode in the back of the oxcart. They had loaded all of Orly's espousal gifts onto the cart the night before. They left midmorning and made good time because there was very little traffic. Few Jewish men could afford a third trip to Jerusalem each year and it was early to be traveling for Sukkot.

On Friday, they stopped well before sunset and fished to prepare for the Sabbath. The four men enjoyed the peace and quiet of the grassy area, and the oxen were staked where they could graze and drink from the stream. They would stay here until Sunday morning. Mr. Kenan led the Sabbath prayer of blessing, and they enjoyed the wonderful fish. Since they were all followers of Jesus, they felt comfortable sharing and talking at a deeper level, but there was also a lot of teasing and laughter. Mr. Kenan talked of his own espousal to Mrs. Vada. He had never met her or seen her before the espousal ceremony. He felt that Orly had it easy since he had at least met Gabriela! Orly gave a short message and led the men in prayer on

Sabbath afternoon and they prayed for the group back home, and of course for Kobe.

On Sunday they traveled almost to Jerusalem and then camped so that they would arrive in Bethany on Monday just in time for the ceremony at noon. Orly was almost too excited to sleep and walked down to the stream to spend time alone with God. He had never seen an espousal ceremony and even though everyone had told him what to expect, he was still nervous. His prayer time helped him to remember that this was God's plan, not his own and he was finally able to return to his blanket for sleep.

Orly woke before sunrise as usual and spent more time in prayer. When he returned to the camp, the men were still asleep, and it seemed like forever before they stirred and offered him breakfast. The espousal service was at noon. About the fourth hour, they loaded the cart and began their journey again. They arrived at the synagogue early, but the priest greeted them warmly and showed them the room and where to place the gifts. Orly and Omri carried the gifts into the room where the espousal would take place. They would be seated on one side, while Gabriela's family would be seated on the other. Orly wished that Kobe or Jordan could be there, but he was grateful that Mr. Kenan was willing to represent him.

The priest suggested that they take a walk in the gardens until Gabriela's family arrived. He would call them when they were ready. They found a beautiful flower garden behind the synagogue, a couple of benches, and a well. It seemed like forever before the priest called them back into the room.

The priest led the group in prayer and asked for the Holy Spirit's presence in all the proceedings. Orly wasn't sure where he was supposed to look. He didn't want to stare at Gabriela, but he couldn't seem to keep from looking. The priest asked Mr. Kenan to introduce Orly. Orly was humbled by Mr. Kenan's speech about what a good man he was and what a hard worker. He told about purchasing him as a slave and watching him become a man. He told about how he learned to do blacksmithing before the apprenticeship had even started, and how he had excelled at it. Then he told the group that his plan was to hire Orly as a full-time blacksmith and to allow him to become steward of the Metal Shop when he retired, since his only son lived in Jerusalem. He also told of Orly's feeling called to lead the group of followers of Jesus, and how he had excelled as a counselor and teacher for the group. It was strange to sit and hear all the things that Mr. Kenan said. It made him feel good but embarrassed at the same time. He was glad when that part was over. But when the priest asked Mr. Simon to present Gabriela, Orly sat fascinated by his every word. He was thrilled to learn of Gabriela's childhood and the way she excelled as a homemaker and would make a wonderful mother because of her experience with her younger brothers. He had never heard about her volunteer work at the synagogue helping the poor, babysitting for new mothers or those who were sick and couldn't take

care of their families. He knew that Gabriela would make a wonderful wife and partner.

The priest asked Orly if he had brought gifts for Mr. Simon's family. Earlier Mr. Kenan had instructed him to begin with Mr. Simon, then Mrs. Keturah, before giving Gabriela her gifts. Mr. Simon was pleased with the axe and declared he'd never seen a finer one. When Orly gave Mrs. Keturah the small soup pot and explained why, she was thrilled not to have to lift the heavy pot every time she wanted to make soup. Everyone exclaimed that it was a brilliant idea and Mr. Simon even said that he would like to be able to sell them in his shop. Then Orly proudly lifted the full-sized soup pot and set it before Gabriela. He was proud that it was shaped perfectly and that he had worked to make it smooth and beautiful as well as useful. Gabriela was obviously pleased. But when he offered her the smaller soup pot, she burst into tears and said that it was the most thoughtful thing she had ever seen. Then he gave her the standard sized iron skillet and a half-sized one for just the two of them. He promised to make her an outside oven and two fire pits for using the soup pots. Orly was glad that he had worked so hard and made gifts that pleased her, but he just wanted to keep on giving her more and more and thanked God that he would have a lifetime to make her gifts.

Gabriela handed Orly a small package and told him that it was for his mother since she couldn't be here today. Orly asked if he should open it. Gabriela responded, "No, it's for your mother, not you!" and everyone laughed. Suddenly, Orly remembered that he had a present for Gabriela from his mother. He asked the priest if he could present that to Gabriela now since he had forgotten it. He found the package in his travel bag and returned quickly. He told Gabriela that he had no idea what it was. Everyone watched as Gabriela opened the small box and discovered a pearl necklace. Orly realized that it was probably a gift that his dad had given his mother before he died. It brought tears to his eyes and Gabriela expressed that she could hardly wait to meet Orly's mother and find out the story behind the necklace. Her mother helped her tie it on and Gabriela kept touching it. It was a precious gift, and everyone wished that Orly's mother could have attended.

The priest then continued the ceremony and announced that Orly and Gabriela were espoused, and their wedding would happen when Orly provided Gabriela with a home and could support her. They joined hands while the priest prayed a prayer of blessing over them.

The young couple was allowed to walk to Mr. Simon's home unaccompanied, while the others loaded up the gifts in the ox cart. Orly and Gabriela continued to hold hands as they walked the short distance to Mr. Simon's home. Orly's mind was filled with questions he wanted to ask and discussions they needed to have about the future, but instead, they walked quietly, almost shyly. Each seemed hesitant to break the silence. "I'm so glad that we've got a whole week to be together. I've got so many questions to ask!" whispered Gabriela.

“Me, too. I’m glad that you are as excited about our upcoming marriage as I am. It’s going to be hard to wait for the wedding, because I want us to make plans together,” said Orly.

The twins were watching for them from the front courtyard, and suddenly their special time was over. The boys wanted to know about the gifts and were assured they would see them when the oxcart arrived. Orly helped Gabriela set out fruit juice and honey bread in the back courtyard. Mr. Kenan helped supervise which gifts to unload at Mr. Simon’s and which to leave on the oxcart and take back to Cana. Mr. Simon invited Enoch and Omri to join them in the courtyard for juice and cake, and Orly’s heart swelled with gratitude that Mr. Simon did not treat the slaves any differently than he did the free men. He knew that God had provided just the right parents for Gabriela.

When Mr. Kenan and his servants left, he reminded Orly to meet him at the temple wall on Wednesday at the second hour after sunrise. Orly thanked him again for his generosity and kindness to him. Mr. Kenan would spend Sukkot with Mr. Zeke and with Seth and his family.

Orly thoroughly enjoyed his time with Gabriela and her family. He helped in the kitchen when he was allowed, and they took long walks on the trail behind Miss Martha’s. They discussed the size of house they should buy. He told her that he could afford to purchase Lucas’ house, but it was so large that they would have to hire workers immediately and she would be running a huge home while he still needed to work every day and be available to lead the group on weekends. He was afraid that it was too much for Gabriela to take on. Gabriela was willing to try it, but agreed with Orly that it seemed wasteful since they didn’t need that much space yet. They talked about his feeling that they should start a group for the people of Cana, and he suggested that maybe it could be a home group like Mary’s. Gabriela was excited about that possibility.

Together they discussed whether they would own slaves or not. He told her the model that he had seen in Mr. Kenan and how he used every opportunity to help slaves to a better position in life. He told her his story and Benjamin’s. She wasn’t happy about owning anyone, but agreed that if Mr. Kenan had shared her belief, then Orly would still be a slave. They discussed inviting struggling families from Jerusalem to come and live with them and help out with the work. That would require a larger house, and together they decided it would probably be best to just start out with a small house and then grow as God led them. They couldn’t predict the future and when they might need additional help. That was a relief to Orly, but also a disappointment because he had envisioned having a garden. Maybe someday.

They also discussed housing her family for the wedding. Orly wasn’t at all sure what to do with that, but Gabriela assured him that whoever came would be prepared to sleep on any grassy area outside and not expect to sleep inside. “I can’t imagine your mother being comfortable on the grass,” said Orly. Gabriela laughed and said that with the four boys, they had done a lot of camping and Mother

wouldn't mind at all. They discussed their staying in Capernaum but felt it was too far away to enjoy the wedding. They didn't know how many of Gabriela's family would travel to the wedding and whether Lazarus, Miss Martha, and Miss Mary would come. She hoped her older brothers and their families would make the trip, but she wasn't sure. So many details to discuss; so little time.

They enjoyed the Sabbath celebration. This time it was at Mr. Simon's house and Lazarus and his sisters joined them. Orly felt totally comfortable with Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah and their friends. He praised God for that. On their last night together, Mrs. Keturah excused Gabriela after dinner and let her sit with Orly and Mr. Simon on the roof. Orly told them that in two weeks he would complete his apprenticeship and his pay should increase. That would help him to be able to finalize plans for a house. The major problem was finding a house that would be the right size for the two of them. He told Mr. Simon about Lucas' huge house and plot of land, and while he would love to own a place like that someday, it seemed wrong to start off with so much responsibility. Mr. Simon agreed. He asked the possibility of just building a house the right size and Orly responded that he would have more time to look around once they returned to Cana and got settled. He laughingly told them how he had been critical about Kobe not being ready for his apprenticeship to end, but he had been so focused on wanting to talk with Gabriela about what size of house, that he also had let the end of his apprenticeship surprise him. "But at least I can cook and take care of myself! I won't starve, even if I just throw my blanket by a stream."

He promised that he would return at Passover and let them know the exact date for the wedding. Mr. Simon invited him to stay with them for the entire week of Passover and assured Orly that they would be ready to travel whenever he was ready for the wedding.

Soon Mrs. Keturah joined them, and they prayed together for the upcoming marriage and for the time that they would be apart. Then her parents retired and left Orly and Gabriela alone, reminding them that he had to leave early in the morning.

The next morning, Orly awoke before sunrise and helped Mrs. Keturah and Gabriela finalize breakfast. Goodbyes were said and then Gabriela asked if she could walk with Orly to the edge of Bethany to the pine tree grove. Her parents gave her permission and Orly felt that his heart would break as he said goodbye yet again to Gabriela. He had held it together the first time, but now that they were alone, he couldn't keep the tears from falling down his cheeks as he thought about having to wait until Passover to see her again. Many couples could spend their entire espousal making plans and preparing their future home. Instead, he had no way to communicate with her and would have to make all the decisions alone. He promised that they would be married within a month of Passover and that he would have everything in readiness. "I don't care about stuff. I just want to be with you," boldly stated Gabriela.

“Me, too,” whispered Orly. He wanted so badly to take her in his arms but knew that it would only make the waiting harder. He prayed a prayer of blessing over her and then leaned over and kissed the tip of her nose. Then he turned and began to run toward Jerusalem. She stood and watched as her beloved grew smaller and smaller and then disappeared behind the hills. She turned and quietly returned to her home. But now it felt different. She was waiting now. Oh, how she wanted to move to Cana today.

Orly ran until he could run no farther. He sat beside a well and caught his breath and took a cup of water. His crying was over and now he must find a house and make plans for the wedding. He arrived at the temple wall in plenty of time to meet the oxcart. They bounced along in the ox cart until midmorning when Enoch stopped to water the oxen. Mr. Kenan just asked if he had a good time and Orly responded affirmatively. He asked for permission to run ahead, and Enoch said he would watch for him. Mr. Kenan understood that Orly was grieving having to leave Gabriela. They stopped early on the first night and fished for their dinner. Orly told Mr. Kenan that he had looked at Lucas’ house, but he and Gabriela felt that it was too large for them. He asked if he knew of a smaller home available in Cana but not as small as Kobe’s — maybe a three-room house with a yard where he could grow some vegetables and a back courtyard for friends and family. “And don’t forget the fire pits and oven that you promised. You’ll need room for those,” said Mr. Kenan.

“Of course.”

Mr. Kenan promised to keep his eyes open for one but suggested that he talk with Mr. Hiram at the Mercantile Store. Mr. Kenan assured Orly that he was welcome to stay with him and Mrs. Vada until he could get settled. And Orly promised that he would get moved as soon as possible and reminded him that he still had two weeks. He didn’t want to be a burden to them.

They arrived home by midmorning on Friday and Orly went directly to the Mercantile Store to ask about a house for sale. Mr. Hiram suggested two places and showed them to Orly that afternoon. They seemed too small but would do if that was all he could find. Both had a single sleeping room and neither had the space for a courtyard.

When Orly arrived back at Mr. Kenan’s in time for Sabbath dinner, he was told that Mr. Abraham, the accountant for the Metal Shop, was ill and had not been able to work for the past week. Even though it was the Sabbath, Orly and Mr. Kenan walked to Mr. Abraham’s house to express their concern and see what was going on. Mr. Abraham’s wife had died several years earlier, and his daughter Aari was taking care of him. She lived in Nazareth and said that if he was not getting better by Sunday, she would appreciate their help moving him to her house so that she could tend to him there. It was a hardship for her to be away from her own family. Mr. Kenan felt that it was just a matter of time before he died since he was unable to eat or drink. He offered to send one of his servants to help her with the work and she gratefully accepted his offer. Mr. Kenan sent Elias, one

of his kitchen slaves, to help her. He was a kind and gentle man and a follower of Jesus.

Orly spoke to the group on the Sabbath about the uncertainties of life and how Jesus lived His life under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes he would make plans to go one direction, but then hear something new from the Holy Spirit, and it made Him look inconsistent. He encouraged the group to be ready for whatever God brought their way and not focus on being consistent, but to focus on being obedient. He shared with them that Kobe was praying about starting a group in Nazareth, but God led him to head east instead. "We need to be ready to obey regardless of what, or where, or when the Holy Spirit leads us."

On Sunday morning, Mr. Kenan sent Orly and Jordan to Mr. Abraham's house with Enoch and the oxcart. They loaded a mat and blankets in the bottom of the cart so that it would be as soft as possible and instructed them to do whatever was necessary to help Aari before reporting to work.

Mr. Kenan headed to the Metal Shop because he was the only one who could deal with the accounting. Mr. Abraham had been sick for a week and the records had not been kept. Lucas had simply put the silver in a pile and Mr. Kenan had no idea what supplies had been used to make what. He assigned Joshua to start inventories of what was needed. The men had also not been paid for last week's work, so he took care of that.

About an hour later, Orly and Jordan reported to Mr. Kenan that Aari did not feel that Mr. Abraham would make it through the day and saw no need of trying to move him. They had chopped some firewood for her and filled the water jars, but there was little more that they could do. They reported that Elias was making bread and had stayed up with Mr. Abraham all night last night to allow Aari some much needed sleep. Mr. Kenan reported this to the workers. Everyone respected Mr. Abraham. He had worked at the shop longer than anyone could remember, and they were saddened to hear that he was so ill. Orly began work and Jordan reported to Lucas. Orly was concentrating on getting an axle attached to the wheels of a wagon when Elias arrived and announced that Mr. Abraham had passed. Mr. Kenan closed the shop and sent all the workers home for a day of mourning. The shop would remain closed on Monday but would re-open on Tuesday. Orly asked what he should do. Mr. Kenan suggested that they go back to Mr. Abraham's and see how they could best help Aari. She would let them know if she wanted help or just wanted to be alone. By the time they arrived, mourners, friends, and Aari's family from Nazareth were arriving. Orly quietly slipped into the kitchen preparation area and began helping Elias plan a simple meal for dinner. Elias needed to get some sleep, so Orly took care of the food preparation while Elias returned to Mr. Kenan's and slept for a few hours.

Aari had rented a public tomb where they placed Mr. Abraham's body and she had asked the priest from Nazareth to perform a

ceremony. When the mourners returned to Mr. Abraham's house, Orly prepared cups of juice. Since there was no extended family, they would simply spend tomorrow cleaning out the house. Aari expressed that she and her family would prefer to do that alone. Mr. Kenan offered any help he could give and reminded her where to find him.

Orly and Elias served dinner and then neighbors and friends began leaving until the family was alone. Elias continued to clean the kitchen, but Orly felt led to go and sit with the family. He told them that Mr. Abraham was a follower of Jesus, and he firmly believed that he was in Heaven with Jesus right now. The daughter nodded that she understood, but the husband seemed resistant to Orly's references to Jesus as Messiah. So, he just sat quietly with them. When Aari went outside to tend to the children, Orly told Aari's husband that he might be interested in purchasing the home but wasn't sure when it would be appropriate to talk about it. The husband looked relieved and said that he would make sure no one bought it without notifying him. He thought Aari would want to sell it as soon as she emptied it out tomorrow. "Are you prepared to purchase it right now?"

"Yes, sir. I will finish my apprenticeship next week, and I will need to secure housing as soon as possible. I think this would be the perfect size, but I would like a chance to see the property before I fully commit."

"Of course. Let's wait and see how Aari is feeling tomorrow. Where could we contact you?"

"I live at Mr. Kenan's now and should be there as far as I know. I work at the Metal Shop. It will be closed tomorrow, but I'm usually there during working hours and at Mr. Kenan's before and after."

"I'll talk with Aari and let you know in a few days."

"Thank you. If there's anything else I can do to help your family through this time of grief, please let me know. Otherwise, I'll bid you good night and hope to hear from you soon. I'll be praying for you tomorrow as I know it will be a hard day."

"Thank you," Aari's husband said softly, obviously touched.

Orly checked to make sure the kitchen was clean, and then went out the back door to say goodnight to Aari and the children. He again offered to provide them with any help they might need. Then he and Elias walked back to Mr. Kenan's. Jordan was waiting for him in their room. They had had little time to talk since Orly had returned from seeing Gabriela. They talked for a while and Orly told him about possibly purchasing Mr. Abraham's house. He told Jordan how the words just came out of his mouth, and he wasn't even aware that he was thinking about buying the house. But now, as he lay there thinking, he was getting more and more excited. Jordan reminded Orly of his message that following Jesus was a minute-by-minute journey. "It's old and a little run down, but I think I could fix it up and clean it. And it would be just the right size for the two of us. It depends on how much land is included with the house whether we could enlarge the courtyard. Gabriela and I both want to start a group for all of Cana just as soon as we get settled. We would need a large courtyard to do that,

and the current one is way too small.” The men agreed to pray about it and wait and see where God led.

Since the shop was closed on Monday, Orly decided to walk over to Lucas’ house and let him know that he was not interested in purchasing it. He knew he would see him tomorrow, but he was feeling eager to make some progress and there was really nothing he could do. He certainly could have used today to look for another house but wanted to see Mr. Abraham’s house first. He told Jordan he was taking a walk and would see him later. As he neared Mr. Kenan’s gate, Aari’s husband was approaching. He said that they had cleaned out everything that Aari wanted and planned to leave the rest. He was wondering if Orly would be available to look over the property right now. Orly agreed and asked him to wait until he could see if Jordan wanted to come along. Orly jogged back to their room and told Jordan the change in plans. Jordan was happy to be included. Together the three men walked back to Mr. Abraham’s house and looked it over. Orly was relieved that Aari had taken the children and walked home, so he didn’t feel like he would offend her by asking questions.

He had already seen the kitchen preparation area, but he had not seen the two sleeping rooms or the roof area. Then he asked how much property was included. Aari’s husband showed Orly the boundary markers and Orly was pleased that there was quite a bit of wooded land behind the house. There was a quiet stream and plenty of room to graze some animals, raise a large garden, or build extra buildings in the future if he wanted to expand. Suddenly Orly remembered that the stream was where he and Kobe had baptized the followers in Mr. Kenan’s group. He had baptized Mr. Kenan right there. His heart began to pound as his mind raced ahead to the future followers that might be baptized there. He shook his head in amazement at God’s planning. He needed to focus on what Jordan was saying. “The back courtyard is small, but there’s plenty of cleared yard to expand it and still have enough room for the outdoor kitchen of your dreams.” While the house was dirty, it seemed to be in basically good shape. There were some holes in the stucco that needed repair and weeds had taken over much of the yard, but he was sure that he could turn it into the perfect place for Gabriela. He asked for a few minutes to pray, and he and Jordan took a short walk into the woods. Orly shared with Jordan about the baptism. Jordan just grinned. Both felt good about the decision, and Orly returned and made his offer on the house. Aari’s husband accepted it without any haggling and looked very pleased. Orly hoped that he hadn’t made a big mistake in his calculations, but it seemed the fair amount to him. And that was that. The men agreed that the money would be exchanged tomorrow at noon at the Metal Shop.

After the deal was arranged, the two men began to walk back toward Mr. Kenan’s, but then Orly remembered that he needed to let Lucas know that he was not going to be buying his house. He invited Jordan to go with him but warned him that it was a Gentile household. Jordan was okay with that, and both men walked to Lucas’ house.

When Lucas came to the door, he invited them in, but they both declined, and Lucas joined them in the front courtyard as was proper for Jews and Gentiles. Orly told Lucas about loving his place and dreaming about it, but that together he and Gabriela felt it would be too big for them to handle just starting out. Lucas agreed that it took quite a staff to keep everything working.

Orly told Lucas that he had decided to purchase Mr. Abraham's house since it was much smaller yet had quite a bit of woodland surrounding it so they could expand slowly. Lucas agreed that that sounded like a wiser purchase and praised Orly for his wisdom. Orly didn't hesitate to remind Lucas that it wasn't his wisdom, but God's guiding him from the inside.

Lucas looked at him thoughtfully and said, "Someday, when you get some free time, I want to hear more about this god you worship."

"We've got all afternoon," replied Orly.

"No, not today, but soon. I'd like to hear more, but I've promised my wife to do some chores around here today."

"I certainly understand. Just let me know and I will be glad to answer your questions." The men started back to Mr. Kenan's house.

"Tomorrow I will own a house all my own! I just wish I could tell Gabriela. It's strange, but I already feel that we are somehow joined together and half of me is missing."

"I think that's the way God intended marriage to be. But you've got some work to do before Gabriela sees that filthy house!" reminded Jordan.

"Yep. But it will all be a labor of love. I just don't know when I'll have time to get it all done once the shop opens again."

"I'll come over and help after dinners and it will go quickly," said Jordan.

"Thanks. Jordan, have you ever shared your faith with Gentiles? Or has your dad? I'm not sure what I'm doing here, but I've been praying for an opening to talk with Lucas for a long time, and also Markus and Julius. They have been asking some questions about what I believe and why, but I'm just not sure whether I should be talking with them."

"Actually, Jesus taught, and John the Baptizer prophesied, that Jesus' death was for all people of all nations. I don't doubt that someday we'll be sharing our faith with people all over the world, not just with Jews. I just ... I'm just not sure whether the Jews are ready to hear that. I'm excited about you and Gabriela starting a group for the rest of the Jews in Cana."

"I'm praying for the Holy Spirit to lead me one step at a time. And I want to be ready whenever Lucas is."

"Yes, my dad and I have shared with Gentiles." Then Jordan added sadly, "But they always lost interest when we talked about all the Jewish requirements. I promise, the Holy Spirit will guide you, and I'll be praying for you as you sort it all out."

"Thanks Jordan. You've been a real source of wisdom for me since you've arrived. I'm glad God sent you here."

“Me, too. I thought I would be bored by not being in a foreign land doing evangelism. But I see that He’s at work here, and I want to be a part of this work, too.”

That night after dinner, Orly slipped into the kitchen to talk with his mother. She said she would be free in a few minutes, so Orly hung around and helped Benjamin wash the dishes. Benjamin was whistling while he worked, and together they finished up quickly. Orly apologized for being so busy lately. Benjamin laughed and said, “That’s what happens when you become a married man. No time for hanging out with your men friends!” Orly wanted to remind him that Gabriela wasn’t here yet but decided to let it go. It was true that ever since Benjamin had arrived, he had been busy making his espousal gifts. He promised that they would get together soon. Orly and Mother went to their favorite place behind the garden to talk. They sat on the grass and Orly explained that the espousal went well, but he would tell her all about it on the Sabbath, their normal time to talk. “But tonight, I wanted to tell you some news that will happen tomorrow. Mother, at noon tomorrow, I am purchasing Mr. Abraham’s house. I will have a home to call my own, and I wish that you could join me there!”

Mother was thrilled for him but reminded him that she was a bond-slave. She hoped she could get permission to see it.

“Wait until I get it fixed up. It is not clean or properly maintained. It will take all my evenings to get it ready for Gabriela. When I get it ready, I’ll borrow an oxcart and take you there. I’m sure Mr. Kenan would let me.”

“Don’t you get me in trouble with Master Kenan.”

“I won’t, Mother. You know that. And Mother, I wanted to thank you for the beautiful necklace you gave to Gabriela. She sent you a present, too. I’ll bring it on the Sabbath.”

“Your Abba gave me those pearls. I wanted her to know that I love her even though I haven’t met her.”

“You’ll meet her soon, Mother, and you will love her. Now, you’ve got an early morning tomorrow. Is Benjamin helping you out?”

“Oh, yes. He doesn’t know how to cook, but he’s learning, and he seems happy here. I like having him in the kitchen.”

“That’s good. I’m glad there’s someone you can train to assist you. Let me help you up and I’ll tell you on the Sabbath all about the espousal and my week with Gabriela.”

Orly, Jordan, and Joshua walked to work together, but Mr. Kenan said that he would come in later. Soon the Metal Shop was busy, and noon arrived quickly. The men took their break under the shade tree and Orly anxiously watched for Aari and her husband to arrive. Mr. Kenan presided over the ceremony and Orly handed over the bag of coins that had been agreed upon. Aari’s husband counted out the coins and gave Orly the key. All the men agreed to be witnesses to the transaction.

Orly tried to concentrate on his work but kept having to start over because the iron would grow cold as he daydreamed of all the changes he wanted to make. Finally, Lucas called out to Mr. Kenan.

“Kenan, I think you’d better let this man go before he burns down the place. He needs to check out his house and he’s only got an hour before sundown.”

Mr. Kenan laughed and agreed that it would probably be to his benefit to let Orly go early. But he warned him that this had better not become a habit. “Oh, no, sir. I mean, I would just like to see what I’ve purchased before nightfall.” He was so excited; he ran all the way to the house.

Chapter 16

The house felt strangely quiet and empty. It was dirtier than he remembered, but he knew that he could clean it up and make the necessary repairs. He began to pull weeds around the house and was surprised to find a root cellar under the house that he had not seen before. He opened the door and gasped at the horrible smell. He had to step away to stop the nausea that engulfed him. That would need to be thoroughly cleaned and aired out before it could be of any use. He shut the door quickly. He stepped off an area for his envisioned courtyard and decided where to put the outdoor stone ovens and the two fire pits. He pictured several different arrangements, and ideas were filling his head. He went back indoors to check out the kitchen preparation area. Aari had taken all the food, but there were some serving bowls in the pantry. The one water jar that remained was cracked and Orly would need to replace it. As he checked the sleeping rooms, he was pleasantly surprised that the mats had been left. They were old, but still usable, at least for him. He would buy a new one for Gabriela, but the others seemed good enough. There was a small dining table that would seat six if you didn't mind sitting close. He decided to keep it for just the two of them. He could get Palti to make a larger table for the courtyard. He realized that it was getting close to sundown and quickly took one last look around before walking back to Mr. Kenan's house. He was still an apprentice for one more week. By then, he should be ready to live on his own in his very own house. *How is it possible that God would bless this poor orphaned slave boy with a grand home and property and soon a wife?* He joined Mr. Kenan and Jordan at the ceremonial jars and again thanked Mr. Kenan for giving him time off to check out his property.

Mr. Kenan asked, "Are you still pleased with it?"

"Oh, yes. It really is the perfect size for Gabriela and me." He told Mr. Kenan about the wooded property behind the house that would allow him to expand gradually. Throughout dinner, Mr. Kenan helped Orly decide what jobs he could do himself, and what would be better to hire. He especially encouraged Orly to hire the masonry work to be done by the local mason. Orly agreed and asked where to find the Masonry Shop. He wanted to get everything started as soon as possible which meant during the noon break tomorrow.

Mr. Kenan reminded him that he needed to know what dimensions he wanted before he talked with the mason. Orly replied, "I stepped it off this afternoon, so I have a pretty good estimate. Will that be good enough or do I need to borrow a measuring stick from you?"

"I would think that would be close enough. Are you tearing out the existing courtyard or just adding to it?"

"Oh, I believe it would be better to tear out the old because a lot of the stones are worn, and some are even missing completely. It would be a hazard to walk on."

“You could save yourself some money by removing the old courtyard yourself instead of paying the mason to do it. You would need a good pickaxe, and it would be heavy work, but you’ve got the muscles to do it.”

“True. I’m going to have to make a shovel, too. The root cellar under the house was apparently pretty full and now it’s all totally rotten. That’s got to all be mucked out and I don’t know how to get rid of the smell.”

Mr. Kenan’s voice changed as he firmly said, “Orly, listen to me. Root cellars are very dangerous. You must not take a candle or lamp inside it or even near it until you get it totally cleaned out. That rotten smell will explode and destroy your whole house. I’m very disappointed that Aari didn’t tell you about it. That is very dangerous!”

“Well, I’m not sure she knew it was there. I only found it when I was clearing some weeds away from the house. The door probably hasn’t been opened in years. It was totally hidden. So, I can muck it out, can’t I? But how will I ever get rid of the smell and the danger?”

“After you get the rotten garbage out, then you’ll need to cover it with sand and let the sand absorb the smell. Then, of course, you’ve got to remove the sand and it may take two or three applications before the smell is gone if it’s been there for several years. After that, you can set lamps down there and let them burn off the remaining smells, but you be careful. Hopefully, you can get it clean enough to use again. That will be a nice addition for you, though. Sounds like you’d better get some good sleep tonight. You are going to be one busy man. Don’t let it interfere with your work.”

“Yes sir. I don’t want to ever disappoint you. I apologize again for needing to take off this afternoon. That’s not like me, but I just couldn’t concentrate on my work.”

“It’s okay. Orly, I understand. Purchasing a house is a big step.”

“Thank you, sir. And good night.”

“Orly, I would appreciate your prayers for me as I go to Nazareth tomorrow. I hope to find Nathan and talk with him about an accountant to replace Mr. Abraham, but I also want to visit the Carpentry Shop and see if I can arrange a visit with all my nephews and nieces.”

“I will certainly be praying tomorrow; do you want to pray together right now?”

“That would be nice. I just feel that the Holy Spirit is prompting me to be a better uncle. I have put it off too long.”

Orly prayed with Mr. Kenan and then headed back to his room. Orly was sound asleep before Jordan returned.

At dinner the next night, Orly asked Mr. Kenan if he could make some tools after hours. Mr. Kenan sold him the iron to make a pickaxe and a shovel. While he worked, he was praying about his message for the group on the Sabbath. He felt led to go over again the prophesies of Jesus’ death and resurrection and why He came specifically to die for our sins. He knew that Benjamin and a few other of Mr. Kenan’s servants had not made their decision to accept that Jesus was sent as the Lamb of God. He wanted to make sure that that message was

clear. He committed again to being obedient and not distracted by all the things that life brought his way. Suddenly, he remembered the story that Kobe had taught him about the seeds being choked out by the weeds of this life. *I asked you for one message and you gave me two. You are so good. I asked you for a future and You've given me a wife, a home, a job. Jehovah, You are so good to me. Help me to serve You and love You with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength.* And right there in the Metal Shop floor, Orly fell on his knees and sang a song of praise to God for His many, many blessings.

Orly spent the Sabbath morning with his mother and told her about the espousal. She opened the gift from Gabriela and found two beautifully embroidered handkerchiefs. "They are so beautiful. Too beautiful to use." But Orly noticed that she used one to dab her eyes and then quickly put them in her robe pocket. He told her about his week with Gabriela's family and how comfortable and welcome he felt there. He told her about the house he had purchased and all the work that would be required to get it ready for his bride. Soon it was time to start the group, and Orly shared the message that he felt the Holy Spirit had given him. He told the group he or Jordan would be available to talk at any time if they had questions.

After the group had dispersed and Orly and Mother returned to their spot on the grass, Benjamin came and asked if he could join them. "Certainly!" they both replied.

"I don't want to interfere with your visit."

"Oh, we have a secret meeting place if we need to talk privately. This is a time for visiting with everyone," replied Orly. "How's it going? Is Mother a hard boss?"

"Your mother is a sweetheart of a boss. There's no comparison to Mr. Zeke's cook! And I'm learning so much — at least I think I am."

"You are, Benjamin. You are doing great. Cooking is not something you learn overnight. It takes practice, practice, and more practice," said Mother. "What I like most about having you in the kitchen with me is your good attitude. You want to learn, and you aren't afraid of hard work. You are going to make a fine cook."

"I hope so. I feel guilty for enjoying myself so much. Compared to what I've had in the past, this is a dream job. Thank you so much, Orly, for working it out for me."

"No problem. You deserve it. Mr. Zeke's cook just didn't want your competition. If you learn to cook like Mother, everyone will be fighting for your service when you finish here."

"Thanks, Orly. So, you didn't tell me that you were the spiritual leader."

"Well, I wasn't until Kobe left. I felt certain, even before he left, that God was asking me to lead the group, and He started giving me messages to share with them. I thought that was weird until Kobe announced that God was calling him to do a ministry trip to the East, and suddenly, I was leading the group."

"When did he leave?"

“A month after Passover.” About that time, Jordan plopped down on the other side of Orly’s mother and put his head on her shoulder.

“Feeling homesick, baby?” she asked.

“Not really. I just needed a hug.”

“Benjamin, you met Jordan on the trip. He just started his apprenticeship at the Metal Shop after Passover, and he sometimes teaches or helps me with messages. He and his family traveled with Jesus for three years.”

“When did you decide that He was the Messiah?” asked Benjamin.

“I don’t think any of us really realized it until after the resurrection. I mean, we all knew He was God in the flesh, but we thought He came just as a political Savior. We didn’t make the connection that He would be sacrificed as God’s payment for sin. That came as a shock to us even though He had told us over and over that whole last year exactly what was going to happen.”

“You mean he knew he was going to die?”

“He not only knew He was going to die, but He described it to us in detail months before it happened. Every time He told us, He also told us that He would rise again in three days, but we never understood it until it happened. We couldn’t believe that He would be killed, and so we just didn’t hear that He would conquer death and come back to life. I guess we didn’t think it was possible for the Son of God to die.”

“Yeah, it was a shock to me, too. I was listening to him teach at the temple as much as I could, and I was beginning to believe that he might be the Messiah to save us from Rome. But then the crucifixion just threw me,” admitted Benjamin.

“It threw a lot of followers!” Jordan agreed.

“I was in Jerusalem and had just met you when that all happened. It was a scary time,” remembered Orly.

“My family and I were in hiding because we felt the Pharisees would kill all of Jesus’ followers. My dad stayed with the apostles, but the rest of us camped out in a friend’s back courtyard. I was pretty young, but I remember how scared I was that they would kill my dad,” shared Jordan. “Then Jesus came back to life and man, what a celebration. I say that, but in actuality, a lot of the apostles had a hard time believing it was real. I mean, He was dead — but now He was alive. That just couldn’t happen. But we had seen Him raise other people from the dead, so we knew it was possible. Man, it was an emotional rollercoaster.”

“How old were you?” asked Benjamin.

“Uh, I was ten, yeah, I had just turned ten about a month earlier.”

“I hate to break this up, but Benjamin and I need to serve dinner,” Mother said.

“Oh, the Sabbath is almost over, I’ll help,” said Orly as he helped Mother to her feet. Orly, Jordan, Benjamin, and Mother all walked into the kitchen. They began carrying trays to the dining room and setting out trays in the kitchen for the servants. Orly and Jordan said their

goodbyes and joined Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada in the dining room. Now the new week could begin.

On Sunday morning, Mr. Kenan sent the men on to work saying that he had other business to take care of. The previous Thursday he had visited with Rebecca, his niece, and she and Nathan had agreed to host a family gathering.

Around noon, he informed Vada of the planned trip, and she was thrilled with the surprise. When it was time to leave, Kenan helped Vada up into the wagon where Omri and Enoch had arranged mats, blankets, and pillows to make the journey as comfortable as possible. When they arrived in Nazareth, the ladies helped Omri and Enoch unload the cart that was filled with food. Rebecca thanked Uncle Kenan for helping her with the meal since there would be so many to feed. "Well, I think I invited myself, so it was only right to help." Kenan and Vada sat in the courtyard and visited with the children and various family members. They greeted the men as they arrived from work. At sundown, the men went to the ceremonial washing pots.

After dinner, Enoch and Omri cleaned the courtyard and kitchen and retrieved the dishes they had brought. Mary's family visited in the living area. Soon the women began gathering up their children and saying goodnight. Nathan invited the men to join him on the rooftop but left Rebecca to visit with Aunt Vada.

"So where is Josie these days? I thought he would be here," asked Uncle Kenan.

"Oh, you haven't heard, have you?" said Jude. "He met some guys from Antioch, and they took off about six months ago. His plan was to start a Carpentry Shop there. We told him we needed him here, but he's restless and wants to see the world."

"I guess he's got to find his own way," said Uncle Kenan. "So, the Carpentry Shop is doing good?"

"Too good. We need to hire more carpenters. Nazareth has really been growing lately and we've got our hands full," said Simeon.

"Next time I'm in Jerusalem, I'll ask around. There's a lot of people trying to get out of Jerusalem because of all the tension with the Romans. I might at least find you some apprentices. Speaking of needing help, my accountant, Mr. Abraham, died a week ago and I'm having to do the records. Nathan, if you know of anyone looking for an accounting position, let me know."

"Uncle Kenan, I might know of someone. I've just finished training an apprentice, but I haven't placed him yet. He's young, but well-trained, if I do say so myself," volunteered Nathan.

"I don't mind young! I'm getting too old to deal with all the changes the tax collectors are putting on us. If he's interested, send him over and I'll take a look. How's business for you, Nathan?" asked Uncle Kenan.

"Going well. I like being my own boss."

The conversation continued to be about business and work, but soon changed to the future of Israel and what was happening in Jerusalem. Mr. Kenan was sad that he never felt prompted to mention

Jesus, but instead encouraged the men to talk about whatever was on their minds. He wanted this encounter with Mary's family to be more positive than his last one, where they had all ended up in prison because of their cousins being followers of Jesus.

Omri came upstairs and whispered to Kenan that Vada needed to go home. She was getting really tired. Kenan told the men that he needed to get Vada home and they all thanked him for forcing them to get together. There were hugs all around and promises to get together more often. The men began to move downstairs to say goodnight. They all had to work tomorrow. Kenan and Omri helped Vada to the oxcart and Rebecca helped her to get comfortable. Kenan never intended to stay so late and just didn't think about it being too much for her. He hugged Rebecca goodnight and thanked her for hosting the group. Enoch drove the oxen very slowly and carefully back to the house and Kenan held Vada tightly so that she wasn't jostled any more than necessary.

Mrs. Vada was unable to come to the breakfast table the next morning. Mr. Kenan explained that they had been visiting family in Nazareth and she had overdone it. Mr. Kenan asked Orly to stay and talk with him and sent Jordan on to the shop with Joshua.

When Orly tried to express his gratitude for all that both Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada had done for him, Mr. Kenan stopped him and said that he was equally grateful to Orly for something he had never expressed. "Orly," he said, "when you shared that you had accepted Jesus as your Messiah, that was what made me ready to do the same. So," he said, "my gratitude to you is even greater because it will last for all eternity."

"But if it were not for your saving my life and my mother's life, I could not have encouraged you to meet my Messiah."

"Okay. I believe we have some business to discuss. First of all, I need to declare that you have completed your apprenticeship with me, and I want you to know that you have exceeded all my expectations, although I never doubted that you would. I will give you a certificate of completion with my highest recommendation. But I also hope that you will accept my offer of a job at the Metal Shop to become a full-time blacksmith. It is my expectation that when Lucas is no longer able, you will take over as steward of the shop. But I know that as a follower of Jesus, you will not commit to things that are in the future."

"Yes, sir. But I do have a request."

"What's that?"

"I was wondering if I could possibly take an hour off before sunset each Friday so that I would have time to prepare a home for Gabriela, and later to spend time preparing for the Sabbath together."

"That would require that I decrease the offer I just made you."

"Yes, sir, I would expect that. I just feel that I need some daylight hours to maintain my home on a regular basis."

"That sounds fair to me. Will you accept the job as my blacksmith, working from one hour after sunrise until sunset except on Fridays?"

On Fridays you will take off at the eleventh hour at this new rate of pay.”

“Yes, sir, I will, and with gratitude. You have always been so generous to me, and I do appreciate it,” said Orly. They shook hands and Orly said he needed to get to the shop.

Mr. Kenan surprised him and said, “No, I think you have some moving out to do and I always give my apprentices the day off before they start as employees. I’ll expect you at the shop bright and early tomorrow morning. And Orly, we’re going to miss you. Why don’t you plan on spending each Sabbath day over here to visit your mother and friends and lead the group? Then plan to stay for the post-Sabbath meal so that we can visit before you return to your home. Mrs. Vada and I will look forward to that.”

“Thank you, sir. That sounds like a wonderful plan — at least until Gabriela joins me.”

“Then she will be welcome, too.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Enjoy your free day. I know you will be busy.”

Orly stopped by the kitchen and kissed his mother on the cheek. He promised to see her early on the Sabbath as usual and was out the door before she could cry. He stopped by his room and grabbed his extra robe and his travel bag. He put the three little quartz rocks in the bag and left the blanket. He needed to go to the market and get another one, and he had a list in his head of things he needed for his first night. He stopped by the Carpentry Shop to see if his pickaxe and shovel were ready. He had shaped the iron, but they needed handles put on them. Palti had them ready, so he carried them and his travel bag to the house. Then he was off to the market to stock his kitchen. His first stop was to buy some additional bags. He then filled them with the staples that he would need to make bread and to make quick meals after work. He didn’t want to have to go to the market every day. He knew that he would need to pick up fresh vegetables and fruit at least twice a week. He also purchased a blanket. He wondered if he should purchase one for Gabriela but decided to wait and let her decide what she wanted.

When he arrived home, he started scrubbing the kitchen and making sure that everything was dry before he put his food away. He ate some plums and decided to tackle the sleeping room first in the heat of the day and then work outside when it was cooler. Suddenly, he realized that this would be his best chance to work in the root cellar during the daylight hours and he remembered Mr. Kenan’s warning not to take a lamp anywhere close. He grabbed his shovel and began mucking out the horrible smelling debris in the root cellar. He couldn’t find any buckets or pots to put the mess in, so ran back to the market to purchase a large bucket to carry it into the wooded area behind the house. So, the pattern began: shovel, shovel, shovel, dump, shovel, shovel, shovel, dump. Before the sun began to set, he had the cellar completely emptied of rotten vegetables.

He was pleased to find that there was plenty of sand along the stream. He would save that for another day and since he had spent the day doing such an odiferous job, he removed his robe and took a quick bath in the stream. The pool was only about waist deep but was perfect since Orly didn't know how to swim. It was pleasantly cool, but not cold. He thought about Gabriela coming here to wash her beautiful hair and he wished that day would hurry. But right now, he needed to go and fix his dinner.

He had planned to get so much more done today but decided that he was pleased with what he had accomplished and needed to be grateful. He fixed a simple meal and headed to the sleeping room with a lamp that Aari had left there for him. He had forgotten he would need to purchase oil, though, so he wasn't able to work very long before the house was totally dark.

God is so wise. He knew that I would work all night if I didn't run out of oil, and I need to be fresh for my first day of work tomorrow as a real blacksmith. You know me so well and I praise You. With that he crawled onto his mat, pulled his new blanket and pillow into a good position, and the next thing he knew, it was one hour before sunrise. He got up and went out to the courtyard to pray. *What a beautiful place God has given me. Help me to use it wisely for Your kingdom.*

Orly was able to force himself to pay full attention to his work, but at the noon break, he ran to the Mercantile Store and purchased another lamp and two large containers of oil. He asked for them to be delivered and then hastened back to the shop. He was sad to miss the time of visiting that always happened during the break, but it was his only time to shop for the things he needed.

Just as the men were headed back into the shop for the afternoon work, a young man hesitantly joined the group. Mr. Kenan called out, "Levi, what brings you here? I hope all is well in Nazareth!"

"Yes, sir, everything is fine. How is Aunt Vada?"

"She's doing fine — just got a little overtired. A few days of rest and she'll be good as new. It was so good to be together as a family. We must do it again soon. So, what brings you to Cana?"

"You said you were looking for an accountant and I would like to speak with you about the job."

"Nathan didn't tell me it was you or I would have said yes right on the spot!"

"Thank you, sir, but I would still like to hear what the job entails and what the hours and pay would be," said Levi politely.

"Of course! Let's go into my office."

When Levi heard that he would not only be the accountant, but also the purchasing agent, he became more excited about the job. While he enjoyed accounting, he often became tired of being cooped up in an office all day. Mr. Kenan explained that his men took a noonday break under the trees, and he would be welcome to join them. I currently have four blacksmiths and one apprentice. I'm hoping to expand but haven't been able to find workers. I've got plenty of work and I fear that Lucas will be retiring soon. Now, do you have any

problem working with Gentiles? Most of my men are not Jewish, and I would want you to feel comfortable here.”

“No, sir. Many of my dad’s clients are Gentile, so I am accustomed to working with them.”

“Levi, think about it carefully. Will you be uncomfortable working for me since I believe that Jesus is the Messiah?”

“No, sir. I respect you and your right to believe something different from what I’ve been taught.”

“You will need to work from one hour after sunrise until the eleventh hour each day. That will allow you plenty of time to walk to Nazareth before sundown. Do you need time to think about my offer?”

“No, sir. It sounds like a really good arrangement to me. If I decide to move to Cana, can my hours be increased?”

“Certainly.”

“And may I ask one more question?”

“Always. I hope you’ll feel comfortable asking anything.”

“What should I call you? I don’t want to be disrespectful. But I don’t want special privileges because I’m your nephew.”

“We all know each other here. We are like a family. But everyone knows that you will get no special treatment. You may call me Uncle Kenan if you feel more comfortable. I don’t think anyone will mind.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“When will you be ready to start?”

“How about first thing tomorrow, if it’s all right with you.”

“I’ll look forward to it. I hate doing accounting!” replied Mr. Kenan.

As they walked out into the shop, Mr. Kenan announced to everyone that Levi would be their new accountant starting tomorrow morning. Everyone welcomed him then returned to their work. Levi was grateful that his office would be separate from the shop because the noise was deafening.

That night Orly decided to focus on getting bread prepared for the Sabbath meal since he wanted to use his extra hour of daylight on Friday to put sand in the root cellar to try to remediate the smells. He knew that a pan of bread with some onions and cucumbers would be a good dinner for him and would allow him to work right up until the Sabbath began. The bread baked very unevenly because the oven was in such disrepair. But bread was bread, and Orly added the oven to his list of things to do. He had wanted to expand it to two ovens anyway, but maybe sooner would be better than later.

Mr. Kenan spent Friday showing Levi the records and his system of keeping up with the supplies needed to keep the shop running. Levi was indeed well trained and knowledgeable. He quickly grasped the system Mr. Abraham had used and made some suggestions for improvement.

On Friday, Orly put away his tools an hour early and quietly slipped out of the shop. Orly ran home as quickly as possible and grabbed his large pot and his shovel and headed to the stream. There he shoveled and dumped sand into the root cellar hoping to get the smell out. He was only half done when he realized that the sun was

setting, and he was so glad that he had already prepared his Sabbath meal. Orly washed in the stream, gathered his tools, and returned to the house. He put together a simple meal and added some almonds and raisins. He lit his Sabbath candle and prayed a prayer of blessing over Gabriela, his mother, and Mr. Kenan's and Mr. Simon's families. While eating his dinner, he began to finalize his message for the group. All week he had been thinking about the parable of the seeds and felt that that would be the message. As he crawled onto his mat, he asked God to show him a way to care for his mother as she was getting older. He wanted to purchase her freedom. He knew it wasn't possible, but God is a miracle worker, so he asked anyway.

After his time of prayer and breakfast the next morning, he started walking to Mr. Kenan's house to spend time with his mother. She scolded him for not going to synagogue and he promised to go next week. Right now, he wanted to tell her all about the house. She listened eagerly and made some suggestions. She warned him to not get overtired with all the work, and he, as expected, told her that it wasn't work when he was doing it for Gabriela. She smiled and remembered her husband who had been with her for such a short time. He was always doing things to please her. It was good to hear Orly wanting to please his beloved.

Benjamin joined them after a while and Orly noted that he, too, had not attended synagogue. *Maybe he is seeing the difference between Jesus followers and the religion of the Jews.*

Mr. Kenan welcomed the group and Jordan led them in some worship Psalms. Orly talked about how easy it was to get distracted by life and forget the most important things. He shared the parable of the seeds that Kobe had taught him. Then he asked the group what the important things were and let the group interact with him. Together, they came up with three top priorities for a Jesus follower: to love others the way Jesus loved them; to be obedient to whatever or wherever the Holy Spirit led them; and finally, to share the New Way with others. It was not his typical teaching style, but later Jordan commented that it reminded him of the way Jesus would interact with the crowd and force them to do the thinking. He liked it that Orly was so comfortable leading without pushing or preaching at the people. Orly thanked Jordan for his feedback, but said he was just being obedient to what the Holy Spirit was telling him to do.

The afternoon passed quickly as he and Mother sat on the lawn and visited with various people from the group. Orly ate the post-Sabbath meal with Mr. Kenan, Mrs. Vada, and Jordan. He caught them up on the progress at the house. He warned Mr. Kenan that he needed to run to the market during the noon break on Sunday but would make up any time if he was late getting back. Mr. Kenan realized that there wasn't really any other time for him to shop and suggested that he might want to hire a servant. Orly felt that he should wait and see what Gabriela wanted to do and would try to figure out how to make it all fit until she arrived. Mr. Kenan suggested that he talk with Mr. Hiram at the Mercantile Store and see if he knew of a

person who would like to work for just a few hours a day. They could run errands for Orly without him having to provide housing. Orly had never heard of a part-time servant and thought that might be very useful. He agreed to talk with Mr. Hiram.

After work he rushed home to make bread for the coming week. His days were full and running over! He was so tired when he got home that he made a simple unleavened biscuit instead of the usual rounds of bread. He just wanted to sleep.

On Monday at noon, he talked with Mr. Hiram at the Mercantile Store and explained what he needed in a part-time servant. Mr. Hiram said that his daughter, Chaya, was twelve but was not married. He stated that she could go to the market for him, and she knew how to make bread and churn butter. But Mr. Hiram stated that he didn't want her to be alone with a man. Orly assured him that he would be at work and would simply leave her the money to purchase whatever he needed. They agreed that she would make one pan of Sabbath bread each Friday and make a churn of butter on Mondays. She would go to the market each day and purchase a selection of whatever fruits and vegetables were in season. They agreed on a price and Mr. Hiram agreed to be the go-between so that they would never meet.

The next day at noon, Orly ran back to the market and purchased a churn. When he arrived home after work, he found the most delightful mixture of vegetables and fruit lying in the kitchen preparation area. He remembered that he needed to repair the outside oven and started on that immediately after dinner by lamplight. Each morning he left out a coin, and each evening fresh vegetables and fruit appeared. What a life! On Friday when he arrived home early, he found freshly baked bread ready for his Sabbath meal.

Life fell into a predictable rhythm for Orly. He worked at the Metal Shop, cooked whatever was available for dinner, worked on the house, and took the Sabbath for rest and group time. Orly was counting off the days until Passover and it was approaching quickly. The mason had installed the courtyard floor and Palti had made him a large table for the courtyard and twelve benches for guests.

It was only one week before they needed to leave for Passover when Orly declared that the house was finished. As he was visiting with Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada at their usual post-Sabbath meal, he asked Mr. Kenan if he could show Mrs. Vada and his mother the house he had prepared for Gabriela. He boldly asked if he could take off work and prepare a meal for them in his new home. Mr. Kenan thought it would be a wonderful idea and Mrs. Vada agreed that she would love to see it. Orly suggested that Wednesday would be best and he should bring the two ladies over before the eleventh hour so that they could see it in the daylight.

On Sunday, Orly went to the Mercantile Store during his noon break to tell Mr. Hiram that he would not need Chaya's help starting on Wednesday. Mr. Hiram announced that the timing was perfect because Chaya had just become espoused.

By Wednesday, Orly had his dinner planned and went to the market early to get everything fresh. He purchased some wine for the celebration. He began cooking his mother's special fish sauce over the fire pit. He caught some fish at the stream, made fresh bread, and prepared a plate of sliced vegetables. The bread was just coming out of the oven when Mr. Kenan arrived with the ladies. Orly quickly went to greet his guests. Mother was already crying as she walked around the property and saw the beautiful courtyard and woods behind the house. Orly reminded her that this was where she had been baptized. That brought more tears as she remembered. Orly proudly showed everyone the root cellar and outside ovens and fire pits. Then he took them inside to see the house. Mother felt that Gabriela would be thrilled. He seated his guests in the back courtyard and started bringing out the dishes. Omri and Enoch helped Orly, then joined the guests at the table. Orly assured them that they would always be welcome as fellow followers of Jesus.

He asked Mr. Kenan to pray a prayer of blessing over the house and they all stood as he praised God for blessing Orly's life up to this point. He also prayed for God's blessings on Gabriela. In just about a month, they would be receiving guests together in this wonderful place.

The meal was superbly prepared, and everyone agreed that the time Orly spent in the kitchen with his mother had certainly paid off. His mother repeatedly thanked Mr. Kenan for allowing her to see where her son was living and what he had accomplished. She was so proud but knew that without Mr. Kenan's help none of this would have been possible. It was a wonderful time. But soon after dinner, Mr. Kenan announced that he didn't want to get Mrs. Vada overtired. Orly hugged his mother and helped her into the oxcart. Now she had seen his home. Soon she would meet his bride.

Orly began to clean up the kitchen and thought of the thousands of meals that his mother had cooked for him. Now, he had finally cooked one for her and in his own home. His heart was overflowing with gratitude. As he washed the dishes, he sang Psalms of praise to Jehovah.

Chapter 17

On Monday morning, Mr. Kenan, Enoch, Omri, Orly, Jordan, Joshua, and two new outdoor servants crowded into the oxcart. Benjamin had been offered the ride but declined, saying that he had no interest in returning to Jerusalem. Orly was excited because he would spend his first Passover with Gabriela's family. Jordan hoped to see his family again if they were able to make the trip from Carthage. The new men quickly caught onto the celebratory mood and were soon laughing and teasing with the others. They were amazed that the free men mingled so comfortably with the slaves. Orly told them it was because Jesus taught that all men were created equal, but that when they arrived at Mr. Kenan's brother's home, they would be treated like slaves because Mr. Zeke was not a follower of Jesus.

On Wednesday just before noon when they arrived at the temple wall in Jerusalem, Enoch slowed the oxcart just enough to let Orly, Jordan, and Joshua jump off. The others would stay at Mr. Zeke's. Last night, Mr. Kenan had reminded them to meet him on Tuesday at noon for the temple sacrifice. Orly began his six-mile walk to Bethany. When he was halfway there, he stopped at the well and tried to gather his thoughts. He was so excited. He knew that his heart was ready to hold Gabriela in his arms but reminded himself that he would need to wait until the espousal period was complete. He was glad that tomorrow would be a busy day of preparation for Passover. He could hardly wait to tell her all about the house that he had bought and prepared for her. He wanted to find out what else he needed to finish before she and her parents arrived. There was so much he wanted to share. *Then why are you sitting here? Let's get going!* Orly jumped up and started to leave but felt something holding him back. He sat back down and began to pray. *Father, I feel danger, but I don't know what it is. I feel afraid and that is not usual for me. What am I afraid of? What should I be doing? What is this feeling of dread?* He sat and prayed for Kobe, for Joshua and Jordan, for Mary and all those who would be gathered in her home, for James and John and their household, for Philip and his family. He prayed for himself and wondered if he would encounter Roman soldiers on this road. The feeling of dread left, and he again felt excited to see Gabriela.

He resumed his journey and didn't encounter any problems. He went straight to the Mercantile Store and was told that Mr. Simon was at home. When he arrived, he found her younger brothers watching for him. They loudly announced his arrival and Gabriela came running to greet him. Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah brought juice out to the courtyard, and they sat together and tried to catch up on all the news.

Orly asked Mr. Simon if it would be okay to discuss the date of the wedding in front of Gabriela, or if that should be done privately between them. Mr. Simon assured him that they were all eager to make plans. "Well, my suggestion is that we marry on Wednesday Iyar

fourth. I was hoping that your family could arrive and celebrate the Sabbath with us, then we could spend some days letting Gabriela move her things into the house and resting from your journey. Mr. Kenan said that the wedding would be three days ending on the following Sabbath. Would that work for your family?"

"I've checked and several people have told me that I need to allow five or six days to walk from Jerusalem to Cana. If we planned to leave on Sunday, Nisan twenty-four, then we could probably make it for the Sabbath, and if not, we would arrive on Sunday, Iyar the first. Then we would plan to start back home the following Sunday. That sounds like a good plan. I'll run it by Lazarus. They want to travel with us. Gabriela's brothers are still undecided whether they want to come and bring their families, or whether they will come alone, or not at all. We'll find out tomorrow night."

"Wow. We have a date set. Let me tell you about the house that God provided." He began to tell them about his renovations. Gabriela assured him that she had made enough blankets, and he should not purchase any additional things. She asked Orly about the necessary dishes and serving bowls and he assured her that he had taken care of equipping the kitchen since those things would be very heavy to bring all the way from Bethany. He explained that even though Cana was small, Capernaum was only a day's journey. There were plenty of shops there.

He tried to describe the peacefulness of the stream and the wooded area behind the house. He asked again if Mr. Simon and all his guests would be comfortable camping outside during the visit or whether he should build a shelter for them. They assured him that they would be fine camping outdoors.

Gabriela and Mrs. Keturah went inside to finish the dinner preparations and left Orly to talk with Mr. Simon. Mr. Simon assured Orly that his family enjoyed camping outdoors and would want to be all together. Orly explained that there was a wonderful grassy area behind the house and close to the stream. He insisted that he would provide meals for them while they were visiting and of course, Mr. Kenan would take care of the wedding menu. Mr. Simon asked if there would be a place to restock for his trip home, and Orly assured him that he could get everything he needed at the local market. They discussed what he would need to pack for the trip to Cana.

After a simple dinner together, Gabriela and Orly were allowed to take a walk with the younger boys around the town of Bethany. Orly got up early for his prayer time and was surprised to learn that this was not preparation day for the Seder. He had forgotten that Judeans celebrated a day later than Galileans. He felt a little guilty for not being in Jerusalem to help Mary prepare for her Seder as he had the past two years. But he knew that she would understand. Gabriela and Orly spent the day together with her little brothers. They hiked the trail behind Miss Mary's house again and just enjoyed time together.

On Friday morning, Lazarus, Miss Martha, and Miss Mary joined them for the sacrificing of the lamb. Mr. Simon painted his doorposts

with the blood and then helped Lazarus do the same at his house. Orly helped with the preparation of the lamb and turning the spit. Gabriela was cooking the unleavened bread in the outside oven, so they could at least see each other. When Mr. Simon or Lazarus relieved him, he offered to help in the kitchen, but got shooed out. It felt strange to not be cooking. He sat and talked with the men about their most recent ministry trip. He was thrilled to learn that the groups in Hebron and Beersheba were growing. They asked about his group in Cana, and he shared how much Jordan had added to the group.

Late in the afternoon, Gabriela's two older brothers, Adam and Amram, brought their families over to celebrate. Everyone gathered in the outside courtyard for the Seder meal and the Sabbath. After the lighting of the Sabbath candles, Mr. Simon said a prayer of blessing over each person present, then led the Seder. He, too, injected Jesus' teachings into the traditional Seder and reminded the group that this was the night that Jesus was crucified. The group sang some Psalms together and then dispersed. Orly said goodnight to Gabriela and went to his blanket in Lazarus' back yard. Once again, he felt that strange foreboding and began to pray for everyone he could think of that might be in danger. Finally, he was able to fall asleep.

The Sabbath was a quiet day of visiting with Lazarus and his sisters and Mr. Simon's family. Mr. Simon reported that he had given his older sons the date for the wedding, and they would let Orly know in a few days who would be attending. Orly asked if they would be providing food at Mary's tonight since it was the Sabbath. "No," said Miss Martha, "we agreed to help with the meal tomorrow night. That will give us some time to cook, and she will still have a houseful of guests."

Orly insisted on helping with the cooking and the five of them cooked all day. They had quite a wagon load of food to pull to Jerusalem. Orly did most of the wagon pulling, and the twins helped push it. Everyone was excited, anticipating seeing their friends and fellow followers. But the closer they got to Mary's house, the greater the fear grew inside of Orly. Finally, he spoke to Mr. Simon and asked him if he felt any hesitation in going to Mary's tonight. Mr. Simon said, "No, but if you do, then let's take precautions. Why don't the rest of you wait here while I go and check things out. There's been so much persecution lately, I wouldn't put it past the Sanhedrin to make trouble for Mary." Soon, Mr. Simon returned to the group looking pale. He said that he didn't know what had happened, but her house was totally dark and quiet. He and Orly and Lazarus debated what they should do. Orly suggested that it might not be safe to enter the olive garden either, but that he knew a place where some might have escaped. They agreed to check there. Orly led the group to Kobe's special hiding place where they found Joshua standing guard near the entrance.

Joshua reported that the hiding place was almost full of hungry campers. "There was a raid at Mary's house after the Sabbath last night. Jordan grabbed Mary and physically carried her to safety while other men blocked the guards and provided them time to escape. I

was captured, but they released all the slaves. Jordan brought Mary here and ran to the olive garden to get his parents. They had left early because Sarah was sick. Then Jordan and his dad went back to the olive garden and invited as many families as they could to come here. Then we three have been guarding the entrance, but since you come bearing food, I think you are welcome to enter!" Everyone was extremely grateful for the food. Jordan, Philip, and Mary prayed with them before they started back. Mary called for a young man to lead them out of town via back roads. They were grateful for his help. The group traveled silently and without a lantern. Their guide knew the tiny trails that led to Bethany. They thanked him and prayed for his safe return.

Now Orly understood the premonition the Holy Spirit had been giving him and was so grateful that Jordan was able to get Mary out safely. He wondered how many were arrested or killed and his heart was heavy with grief. He wondered whether this would be his last trip to Jerusalem. Everyone was physically and emotionally exhausted. They said a quick goodnight.

Both Adam and Amram stopped by during breakfast to make sure that they had returned safely. They had heard that Mary's house was raided and the olive garden had come under attack again. They didn't know the extent of the damage but had heard that many had been arrested for following the New Way. They let Orly know that both of them would be traveling to Cana for the wedding, but they were not bringing their families. It would be too hard of a trip for such young children. Orly assured them that all were welcome.

Monday was a day of rest. Orly felt guilty enjoying his time with Gabriela when he knew that many were grieving. He prayed that God would allow him to get out of Jerusalem safely and that Gabriela's family would be able to travel safely next week. Orly would have preferred to spend more time with Gabriela, but he was also eager to get to Jerusalem and find out what was going on. He hoped that the hiding place had not been found. After breakfast on Tuesday, he said goodbye to the family and once again Gabriela was allowed to walk with him to the pine grove at the edge of town. Orly prayed a prayer of blessing and safety for her and her family and promised to watch for her every day until she arrived. He told her how much he wished he could journey with her and show her all the beautiful things along the way. She reminded him that they would have a lifetime to share with each other. He kissed her cheek and then ran, but suddenly he turned back and waved. Her heart pounded with the anticipation of seeing him and soon being his wife. He ran all the way to the well before stopping for a breath. He did not want to leave her, but he had no choice.

He arrived in Jerusalem in plenty of time to check the retreat area. It was completely empty except for Jordan and Joshua. They sat and talked until it was time to go to the temple to offer their sacrifices. Over fifty people had been arrested at Mary's, but they couldn't find any charges against them since they were simply celebrating

Passover. They had all been released unharmed. Orly and Jordan suspected the real intent was to capture Mary. The attack on the olive garden had happened late in the night and about twenty men had been arrested and were still in jail for preaching about Jesus. No one was sure who was missing since so many were in hiding.

The three men met Mr. Kenan at the temple gate, and he was tremendously relieved that they were safe. They promised to tell him later about their ordeal but didn't want to talk in public. Mr. Kenan agreed, and they entered the temple gates. Mr. Kenan and Orly bought a lamb to offer, then Mr. Kenan bought turtledoves for all his servants and Jordan, his apprentice.

Orly had looked forward to being able to offer a lamb, but his heart was troubled. Instead of it reminding him of Jesus' sacrifice for him, it reminded him of the men who had been arrested for telling people the good news. His tears this year were because Jerusalem had become such a terrible place for the followers of Jesus. Mr. Kenan started to lead the men to the olive garden after the sacrifice, but then decided that it might not be a good idea. Instead, he just reminded them to meet him one hour after sunrise tomorrow at the corner of the temple wall. Orly informed Mr. Kenan that the wedding date that he had suggested was agreeable and there would be nine guests besides Gabriela coming from Bethany.

"It will pass quickly as I intend to keep you very busy until they arrive. Then I will give you two weeks off work while your visitors are here. You can decide when you want to take those days."

"Thank you, sir. I'll let you know what days I'll be taking off."

"See you tomorrow bright and early. Be sure and get your breakfast before I pick you up."

"Yes, sir."

The men went to the market and picked up some additional oil since they were running low, then headed back to their special retreat. Everything seemed secure. They ate their dinner and used the last few minutes of daylight to clean the retreat area so that no one could tell that there had been over fifty people hiding there. Orly wanted to check on Mary, but Jordan insisted that he not endanger himself or her. So, Orly settled down by telling the men the plans for the wedding and counting the days until Gabriela and her family would arrive. They discussed when he should take off the twelve days Mr. Kenan had allowed him to miss work. Finally, he was able to get some sleep but woke earlier than usual for his prayer time. He was eager to get home.

The men ate their remaining food and packed their blankets, then walked to meet Mr. Kenan at the temple wall. Soon they saw Enoch approaching and he slowed enough for them to jump onboard. Everyone squeezed tighter to fit. With the oxen on a wider and downhill road, there was too much bouncing around to talk.

They stopped for dinner in time to fish and Mr. Kenan was eager to hear what had happened while Jordan and Joshua were in Jerusalem. He had been so worried when he had heard that Mary's place and the olive garden had been attacked. He knew those were

the two places where he expected Jordan and Joshua to be. Joshua began to tell him all the details and emphasized that Jordan was the hero who had carried Mary to safety.

"Where did you take her?" asked Mr. Kenan.

"Last year Orly showed us a special hiding place that Kobe knew about. It's a really nice camping area inside Jerusalem, but it's very secluded. So, I took her there. Then I went back and got my family out of the olive garden as well as six or seven other families that were camping nearby. We had plenty of water but no food, and none of us wanted to go out on Sunday. We just stayed there and tried to keep the children quiet. Then Orly showed up with Mr. Simon and Lazarus bearing gifts of food," said Jordan.

"Orly stayed with us last night and here we are all safe and sound. God provided everything we needed just at the right time," declared Joshua.

Jordan added, "But I'm not sure how safe Mary is. She insisted that she would continue to lead her group regardless of the danger."

"And there were at least twenty men who were arrested in the olive garden that night. They were targeted for preaching about Jesus. There are a lot of hurting families left behind. We don't know who is hiding and who was arrested. The apostles were organizing food for the prisoners, so I'm sure they know. I'm very glad to be out of there and want Mr. Simon to get Gabriela out as soon as possible."

Mr. Kenan reported no change with Zeke. "He's very dissatisfied with the Sanhedrin and other Jewish leaders, but he's not ready to talk about Jesus."

"What about Seth? How is he doing?" asked Orly.

"He's doing good, but he still says that he doesn't feel safe and is considering moving to Cana. I wish he would. Vada would love to watch her grandchildren grow up, but Seth has three businesses there and his home. I know it's hard to make such a big change."

"Orly, I forgot to tell you, Mary wanted you to know that the Apostles Bartholomew and Thomas left about a month ago headed to India. They were taking four other men with them. And the Apostle James the son of Alpheus has gone up into Syria with a group," reported Jordan.

"Wow, the New Way is really being spread out. I don't even know where India is!"

"Apparently, it's due east and probably a lot farther than where Kobe's group was headed. But they were starting out by going farther south than Judea and then traveling by boat to India. They met some men who begged them to come and teach them about Jesus. I think that Thomas was also taking his son Daniel," continued Jordan.

"Cool," replied Orly. But deep inside he felt confused. *Why do I have such a desire to build a safe home and family with Gabriela while my friends are risking their lives to obey Jesus? Is my faith too small? I don't want to travel the world. I want to be home with my wife and children. Is that wrong?* Suddenly he had a very strong leading to share the gospel with his Gentile friends. He wondered when that

would happen. He remembered that Lucas had asked if he had time to answer his questions, and then he had gotten so busy with repairing the house, he hadn't followed up on it. *Holy Spirit lead me. I need some prayer time, I don't feel certain of anything right now.* Maybe things would be clearer when he got home.

They arrived safely back at Mr. Kenan's on Friday morning and Mr. Kenan invited Orly to return for Sabbath dinner. He accepted the offer knowing that he could really use one of Mother's home-cooked meals. He needed to go to the market and get ready for a new week. He returned to Mr. Kenan's just before sundown and washed with the men. He relaxed as Mrs. Vada lit the Sabbath candles and Mr. Kenan said a prayer of blessing over his family and guests. Orly quickly kissed his mother and told her he would visit with her later than usual tomorrow since he needed some extra prayer time to prepare for the group.

He got home after dark and lit a lamp. He wasn't ready for sleep and felt a need to pray for those sharing the gospel all over the world. *I forgot to ask Mr. Kenan about James and John. I didn't even ask if the family gathering had happened and whether there was any progress with the extended family.* He knew that he needed to prepare a message for tomorrow, but his mind just wouldn't cooperate.

On Sabbath morning, he felt certain that he should talk with Jordan and see if the Holy Spirit had given him a message. He ate a quick breakfast and walked to Mr. Kenan's house. There was a lot of talking and laughter in the courtyard and Orly slipped into the kitchen to see if his mother knew what was happening. She was just finishing putting away the Sabbath breakfast and told Orly that Jordan's parents and little sister had shown up unexpectedly just a few minutes ago. They had had such a busy time in Jerusalem and didn't really get any time to visit with Jordan. They hoped to spend the day with him before returning to Carthage. They had camped nearby last night and surprised Jordan during breakfast.

Orly didn't want to disturb them and decided to return home, but the Holy Spirit nudged him to stay. Everyone greeted him and Orly quietly asked Jordan if he would like to invite his dad to share a message with the group. Jordan expressed that he was hoping that Orly would let him. He wanted the group to meet his dad and be encouraged by him. "Perfect!" said Orly.

He headed back home and sat in his own courtyard. He still needed to sort out his feelings about whether God was calling him to foreign evangelism, or calling him to build a strong, safe home for Gabriela. Since the wedding would be in two weeks, he decided it would be important to get that settled. As he prayed, he felt an incredible peace that the Holy Spirit was leading him one step at a time and that he was right where he needed to be. *Okay, I just needed to be sure. I don't ever want to displease You.* He poured himself some juice and realized that Gabriela and her family would be leaving Bethany tomorrow. *She is leaving early in the morning and every step she takes will bring her closer to me. Oh, my. Am I ready?* He quickly

walked throughout the house and straightened a few things here and there, and then remembered that it was the Sabbath and he needed to be at Mr. Kenan's to visit with his mother and prepare for group. It was certainly a good thing that Jordan and Philip were teaching the group because he was in no shape to handle it. His mind was whirling, and he wasn't sure he could even work this week. He hadn't been this excited since he met Gabriela two years ago. The Holy Spirit had led him step by step and he had refused to allow his mind to think about the waiting. Now, the waiting was unbearable. He wondered what she was doing and then reminded himself that he needed to be on his way to Mr. Kenan's.

Mr. Kenan welcomed the group and introduced Jordan but allowed Jordan to introduce his special guests. The Apostle Philip spoke very simply about the great sacrifice that Jesus made to come to earth and to die such a terrible death to pay for our sins. "No sacrifice goes unnoticed by Jesus. He asks us to love each other, and sometimes that's a huge sacrifice!" Everyone laughed and agreed.

He seemed to be talking right to Orly as he said, "Sometimes Jesus calls us to work hard at our jobs, or our parenting, or our cooking, or cleaning. Sometimes that is the sacrifice that He requires. For my family, He has asked us to give up the comfort of a home and just travel wherever He leads us. For the past three years we've served him in North Africa. Wherever God leads you, He will give you peace and love and joy if you are being obedient. Obedience is the key." Orly stood and reminded the group that he and Jordan and the Apostle Philip would be available for questions afterward. He led the group in prayer with a special blessing on Philip and his family as they returned to Carthage.

Orly asked where Philip was camping and suggested that he move his family to his property after Sabbath ended. They were welcome to stay a few days if they liked and he would provide their breakfast at sunrise. They agreed but said they had to be on the road tomorrow. Mr. Kenan had Ruth pack a basket of food for their post-Sabbath meal so that Jordan and his family could be alone. Mr. Kenan encouraged Jordan to camp with his family and not to worry about work until his parents were ready to leave.

On Sunday morning, Orly served Philip and his family breakfast in his courtyard. Then they all walked with him and Orly to the Metal Shop and met their fellow workers. Mr. Kenan told the workers what a privilege it was to have the Apostle Philip visit his humble Metal Shop. Philip assured Mr. Kenan that he was just a proud dad who wanted to meet his son's friends. He shook hands with each of the workers and learned their names.

Jordan walked outside to say goodbye to his family. It was hard, but he assured them that this was the fastest year of his life, and he expected next year to go even faster. Soon he would be able to join them on the mission field and provide them with income. This would allow them to go into new areas around Carthage — or wherever the

Holy Spirit led them. After quick hugs, they began their trek to Antioch and Jordan returned to his bench.

Mr. Kenan called Jordan into his office and announced his second year of apprenticeship had begun. Jordan asked if there were any new requirements, and Mr. Kenan assured him that he was right on track. He was free to ask for help, but otherwise, he would be on his own with whatever projects came in. This would give him a one-year trial to make sure he knew how to do everything that might be needed. “And,” Mr. Kenan said, “you will be paid per job, so let me show you our record keeping system.”

During the noon break, Orly told the crew that Gabriela and her family should have left Bethany this morning and every step was bringing her closer. He told Mr. Kenan that he would like to work half a day on Thursday then take off in case they arrived earlier than expected. “Oh, no! I need to go to the market because Chaya is not working for me anymore. Oh, Mr. Kenan, I’m sorry. I forgot. I promise I’ll work late tonight. I ... I just forgot.”

“Go quickly, Orly. I understand. But yes, you must finish up your time this evening.”

Orly got up and started toward the market as all the guys laughed about his preoccupation. He quickly returned to work and the men laughed as he rushed to his workspace and tripped over the yoke he had been working on earlier. “Slow down, Orly, or you won’t make it to the wedding!”

Chapter 18

Mr. Kenan had encouraged Orly to work until Gabriela's family arrived so that he would have more time off afterward, but Orly wanted to take off at noon on Thursday because that was the earliest that they could possibly arrive. At noon when the men took their break, Orly said goodbye and promised to see them at his wedding on Wednesday.

Orly went to the market. He made a fresh pan of bread. He walked down by the stream to make sure the camping area was ready. He finished the dinner preparations and continued to straighten the house. But by the tenth hour, he was ready to explode. He had nothing left to do and decided he would walk to meet them. He was certain that they were getting close, and he started walking but ended up running once he got out of town. He ran until he came to the well where the road to Nazareth turned off. He sat down and caught his breath but decided to continue walking a little farther just in case they might be coming, but his hopes were beginning to be diminished. He ran until the sun was beginning to set and decided he had better turn back. They had probably already made camp for the night. It seemed to be a much longer walk home, but at least he had burned off some energy. He would need to eat dinner all alone again tonight and that made him sad. Maybe tomorrow they would arrive, but Mr. Simon had said that they would take it slow and might not even arrive until Sunday. How he hoped they wouldn't be that slow. He ate some of the bread and cheese that he had prepared for dinner and packed away the rest. Now, there was nothing left to do but wait. He prayed for their safety and then crawled into his blanket wondering where they were and how much longer it would take. He had traveled from Jerusalem many times now, but he had never walked it. He had no idea how long it would take and couldn't imagine how tiring it would be. He prayed especially for Miss Martha and Miss Mary because they were the two oldest travelers. He hoped that nothing had gone wrong on their trip. But he knew better than to let his mind go there. He began to sing Psalms of praise. Soon morning had arrived, and it was time to get up and pray again. He sat on his courtyard bench and watched the sun rise. How he wished he knew where Gabriela was, but he tried to keep reminding himself that God knew and that was enough. He would take care of the details.

Today, he needed to prepare the Sabbath meals and make enough bread for ten guests and himself. He hoped this food wasn't wasted. But first he went to the market to get fresh cream to churn some butter and purchased all the fresh ingredients. He spent the morning preparing the produce but would wait to cook it after they arrived. He was certain they would arrive today. He could feel it. The bread was baked, and the butter was churned and stored in the root cellar. There was really nothing else left to do. Orly wanted to walk

down to the stream but was afraid he would miss their arrival. So, he decided once again to go to meet the travelers.

This time he decided he would just leisurely walk. It would give him time to prepare himself for the coming busy week and he would be fresh to prepare dinner. He started off slowly, but his feet refused to be reasonable. The farther he went, the faster he ran. Where the road turned to Nazareth, he sat down at the well to catch his breath and cool off. Just as he stood up, he noticed a group approaching in the far distance. He began to run again. The reunion was so sweet. Everyone cleared out of the way so that he could give Gabriela a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Tears rolled down his face at the sight of her safe and sound. Then everyone began talking at once. Orly assured them that they only lacked about half an hour, and they began to walk as they talked. Orly held Gabriela's hand and led them into Cana. He stopped at the Metal Shop only long enough to let Mr. Kenan know that they had arrived. They continued to the house — the house that Orly had spent months preparing. He hoped that Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah would be pleased. But most of all, he wanted to know what Gabriela thought. He was not disappointed. He led them around to the back courtyard where there were plenty of benches for everyone to sit. He ran down to the root cellar and brought up some fruit juice that he had prepared for them. He invited everyone to come inside and see the house he had prepared for Gabriela. But Mrs. Keturah intervened and said it should be Gabriela who got to see it first. Normally, the bride would have had the privilege of preparing it with her betrothed. Today, she would see it for the first time. Orly pointed to the trail that led into the woods and told them that their camping area was just behind those trees if anyone wanted to take a nap before the Sabbath meal. They took the donkey and headed for the camping area which wasn't far. Orly reminded them that Sabbath dinner would be ready at sundown. They agreed to be back by then.

Orly took Gabriela's hand and led her into the house. She was so pleased with everything that he had prepared. She loved the living area and small table. He showed her the two sleeping rooms and the rooftop. Orly took Gabriela outside and showed her the fire pits and ovens. As he led her into the root cellar, he said he needed to get started on the Sabbath dinner. Gabriela watched as he gathered the things he needed, and then helped him carry them up to the preparation area. He assured her there were lots of things that he wanted to do to make things easier for her, but he wanted her to have the final say. She assured him that it was perfect just the way it was, but it would be fun to work on the house together. She told him that she had brought plenty of blankets, pillows, dish cloths, and towels. She had been busy making as many things as she felt she could bring, and she would continue to make things as they decided together what they needed. It was fun to work side by side to prepare the meal. She proclaimed that this preparation area was the nicest she had ever seen and exclaimed over each detail.

When her family returned, they put everyone to work moving the trays out to the courtyard. Miss Martha was asked to light the Sabbath candle and Mr. Simon said the prayer of blessing and included a prayer of thanksgiving for their safe and uneventful trip. How good it felt to recline at the table and eat in a leisurely fashion. After dinner, Gabriela and Orly showed everyone the house and asked if their camping area was adequate. Mr. Simon assured Orly it was perfect. The twins were excited because the stream was only cool — not freezing.

“Yes, mountain streams have a way of being cold, but our little stream is just the right temperature for taking baths and washing clothes. It’s also where Kobe and I baptized the followers of Jesus from Mr. Kenan’s group.” The family sat around and talked for a while after dinner, then they discussed who was going to synagogue in the morning and who might need to rest. It was decided that Miss Mary and Miss Martha would probably rest, and they offered to watch the boys if they wanted to stay with them. The twins looked at their abba and received his permission. Orly handed the men two lanterns and reminded them that breakfast would be ready soon after sunrise. He hated saying goodnight to Gabriela, but he could tell that she was exhausted. He was glad that she was on his property and was safe. Now, he could sleep soundly.

Orly woke early for his time of prayer. He was glad that he had asked Jordan to be in charge of Mr. Kenan’s group. His mind was too scattered to think clearly, and his time of prayer was short because he needed to set out the breakfast. He set out a large bowl of olives, several smaller bowls of olive oil, over a dozen rounds of bread, and fresh apricots. Orly had everything laid out when Gabriela’s family arrived. Everyone commented on the pleasure of eating breakfast while sitting down instead of having to walk and eat at the same time. Instead of sounding exhausted, now they were beginning to share the stories of the fun they had together as a family on the trip. They told Orly about the fishing competitions and how Gabriela had caught the largest fish. They left the twins with the older ladies and the others walked to the synagogue.

Gabriela and her mother went upstairs and were greeted by the women. Orly led the men into the sanctuary on the main floor. They sat on the floor and leaned against the back wall. Several men greeted them. When the ruler of the synagogue arrived, he asked Orly to introduce his guests. Orly stood and said, “I am getting married this week. This is my bride’s abba, Mr. Simon from Bethany. He was once a leper, but Jesus made him completely well. These are two of his sons, Adam and Amram. This is a dear friend, Lazarus, also from Bethany. Jesus raised him from the dead after he had been in the tomb for four days. They, like me, are all followers of Jesus.” Orly was shocked by what had just come out of his mouth and hoped they would not be run out of town or start a riot. He sat down quickly and waited for the ruler of the synagogue to respond. There was a buzz going around, and Orly was uncertain what the ruler would say or do.

Mr. Simon and Lazarus did not seem alarmed or surprised. The ruler asked if the men would like to share their story, and both agreed. They walked to the front and sat on the stools that were provided for guest teachers. Mr. Simon asked for the scroll of Isaiah and rolled it open to Isaiah 35:5-6. He read,

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

Mr. Simon shared, "Jesus came to the leper's camp where I was staying. I had been away from my family for three years, and my wife was left with five small children to raise alone. Jesus came and simply touched me, and I was made whole. He didn't just stop the leprosy, He re-created my hands, my feet, my face, and all the places that the leprosy had destroyed. I was able to return home and I have followed Jesus ever since."

He then handed the scroll to Lazarus who rolled back to Isaiah 26:19. He read,

Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; ... and the earth shall cast forth the dead.

Then Lazarus said, "I became very sick and died. I felt that I had fallen asleep, and no time had passed when Jesus called for me to come out of the grave, but it had been four days. They removed my grave clothes, and I was given the gift of life again. You will note that the Scripture indicates that the earth will give birth to many departed spirits. A few months after He raised me from the dead, Jesus died as the Lamb of God to pay for your sins and mine. On the day He was crucified, many people were resurrected in the city of Jerusalem. Today we testify before you that Jesus also was raised from the dead three days after His crucifixion. Both we and our families saw and ate with Jesus after His death. We entertained Him in our home and when He left to return to Heaven forty days after His resurrection, He commanded us to go and tell everyone that He had died in their place. He is the Messiah foretold by Scripture. It is this Jesus that we serve and encourage you to investigate."

The ruler said the prayer of blessing and dismissed the people, then he came to Lazarus and Simon and asked them if they would teach again. They told him that they were only in town for the week and next Sabbath. But they agreed to speak to the people again next week. They suggested that Orly would be able to continue to teach them about Jesus after that. Mr. Kenan and Jordan had joined the group of men. Ruler Jedidiah said that he was the one who would be performing the wedding on Wednesday at Mr. Kenan's house. He hoped he would be able to visit with them more at that time.

Orly was in shock that the message had been so well received. He wondered why he hadn't felt led to talk with the ruler before. Now, he and Gabriela would be busier than ever if he was allowed to teach at the synagogue on Sabbath mornings. He was excited and couldn't wait to join the ladies and hear Gabriela's reaction. As he expected, she was elated. Everyone walked to Mr. Kenan's home except Orly and Gabriela. They returned to get Miss Mary, Miss Martha, and the twins and walk with them to Mr. Kenan's house. The twins were assured that there would be other children for them to play with. Orly was looking forward to introducing Gabriela to his mother, but right now his head was spinning with possibilities for sharing the New Way with the whole town of Cana. He had thought that opening their home to Jews who were interested would cause some conflict with the synagogue ruler. Instead, it looked like he would have the opportunity to share with the entire Jewish community of Cana at the synagogue. How good God was and what perfect timing. He needed to focus on Gabriela now and he realized that he had not heard her question. "I'm sorry, Gabriela, I was still thinking about the possibilities for teaching at the synagogue. I know you were speaking, but I wasn't listening. I'm so sorry."

"That's okay, I understand. I was just asking if we would be coming back here for post-Sabbath dinner or whether we would eat at Mr. Kenan's."

"We have been invited to stay for dinner with them and then we will come home. After that, I promise, we'll have a few days to unload your things and get you all settled. I'll do the cooking and let your mother, Miss Martha, and Miss Mary help you get everything just the way you want it. This is your home. You will have complete freedom to rearrange anything you like. I'll be your humble servant to build whatever you need or find someone who can."

"You treat her like a queen," said Jared.

"Yes, that's because she is my queen and I want to make her happy," replied Orly as he kissed her hand. "Someday you two will take brides and I hope that you will treat them like queens. Jesus taught that we are all equal in his kingdom and he hated it when women were treated unfairly or cruelly."

"Yes, He did!" agreed Miss Mary.

Orly looked for his mother under the tree where they always sat in the back yard, but she was not there. He found her seated in the courtyard visiting with Gabriela's family. He was pleased that Mr. Kenan had allowed that. *How much Mr. Kenan has changed in this past year.* "There you are," Mother said, "and this must be your lovely bride." She embraced Gabriela, assured her of her love, and welcomed her to the family. Orly introduced her to Mr. Kenan and to Mrs. Vada who both made her feel very welcome. They told her their only son lived in Jerusalem, so they had never had the privilege of having a daughter nearby. Gabriela assured them that she would enjoy being a part of their extended family. They sat in the courtyard until Jordan announced that it was time for the group to gather. The

men quickly rearranged the benches for the group. Their little group of thirty now had grown to forty overnight and it was a tight fit. Mr. Simon noted that the servants intermingled with the free men, and he was pleased.

Mr. Kenan asked Orly to come and introduce all his special guests. He introduced each one and they were welcomed to the group. He could tell that the group was eager to get acquainted with Gabriela, but right now, he wanted her all to himself. He was surprised by those feelings. He squeezed her hand before she took her seat with the other women. Jordan led them in some Psalms of worship and then surprised Orly by asking Mr. Simon and Mr. Lazarus to come and share with the group. Orly thought Jordan would give the message, but apparently, he had asked the men to share whatever was on their hearts. They shared essentially the same message that they had shared at the synagogue but added that they would be available all afternoon to answer questions if anyone wanted to talk or pray with them. After the group, Orly's mother automatically headed to the grass to sit under the tree with the other servants. Miss Martha, Miss Mary, Mrs. Keturah, Orly, and Gabriela followed her. The other men continued to receive questions up on the courtyard, but Orly couldn't bear to be away from Gabriela. He sat and listened to the women get acquainted. Orly's mother seemed totally comfortable with Gabriela's mother and her friends. They were busy discussing the menu plans for the wedding, and Miss Martha and Miss Mary volunteered to help. Mother assured them that she had an entire staff that would assist her, and they should just relax and enjoy these special days with Gabriela.

Mr. Simon called Gabriela and Orly over to where he was talking with Mr. Kenan. He asked Gabriela if she still wanted to travel to Capernaum to invite Yanis and Jenay to the wedding. She asked if there would be time, since they needed to get her things moved into the house. Mr. Simon said that Mr. Kenan had volunteered to supply an oxcart so they could easily go and return in one day. He asked Orly if there was any shopping he needed to do in Capernaum. Orly remembered that he had wanted to get a new mat for Gabriela and also a loom and whatever else she might need. So, it was agreed that Enoch would pick them up tomorrow morning one hour after sunrise and they would travel to Capernaum. It was only sixteen miles and would take the oxen about two hours to travel that distance. Gabriela and Orly promised to think about what they needed from the market.

After the post-Sabbath meal at Mr. Kenan's, Orly and Gabriela led her family back to Orly's. They knew that Mr. Kenan's household and Orly's mother would be in full wedding mode for the next three days, and Orly was looking forward to not having any responsibilities except to make Gabriela and her family happy.

Orly, Gabriela, Mrs. Keturah, and Miss Martha went through each room and discussed things that they might need. Other than getting Gabriela a mat to sleep on and a loom to weave cloth, they felt that everything was in readiness. After her parents had walked down to the campground and left Gabriela and Orly alone for a few minutes,

Gabriela asked Orly if she could ask him a favor. "Of course. I will give you anything up to half my kingdom," he teasingly replied.

"Orly, I know you probably haven't noticed it, but the two mats in the guest room are really worn out and they don't smell great. I don't know what your finances are like, but if possible, and reasonable, I would like to purchase new ones."

"Of course. This is your house and I want you to be happy. We are not rich, but we are not hurting for money right now. I would like to start saving up for an oxcart and ox so that I can take you home for a visit next year, but right now it is more important that we get the house just the way you want it. Now I have a question for you."

"Okay."

"What about my mat? Does it stink?" asked Orly.

"Well, I wouldn't necessarily say that it stinks, but I've smelt better," replied Gabriela trying not to offend him.

"Okay, then it's settled, we'll be looking for four new mats tomorrow. Then we can entertain guests without worrying about the smell. These mats came with the house and are probably twenty years old. And who knows when they were last cleaned. Is there anything else besides the loom that we need to purchase? We can always add things along the way."

"No, I think you've done an amazing job getting it all ready. I hope we can find Yanis and Jenay and invite them to the wedding. They were looking to buy a goat farm near Capernaum. If we go to Mr. Zebedee's home, he will know where to find them. I hope that won't be too much trouble," said Gabriela.

"It should be fine, and we will still be able to return by dinner time," said Orly.

"I've got to get to sleep since we have such a big day tomorrow and then Monday, can we unload the wagon and get my things moved in?"

"Sounds like a good plan. Breakfast will be ready at sunrise," said Orly as he walked her down the trail to the camping area.

At breakfast, Miss Martha, Miss Mary, and Lazarus informed Orly that they would not be traveling to Capernaum. They would leave the shopping up to the family and take a day of rest since they were still tired from the hike. The twins asked if they could stay with them. They didn't like the sound of shopping — although they were tempted to try out the oxcart. Gabriela, her two older brothers and her parents waited with Orly for Enoch to arrive. He had brought mats and blankets for the back of the wagon to help with the bumps. He invited Mr. Simon to ride up front with him, but he declined, saying he wanted to be with Gabriela. Adam climbed up on the driver's bench with Enoch to get a bird's eye view of their surroundings. The men helped Gabriela and her mother into the wagon, and then they jumped on board and waved goodbye to those who were staying home.

Orly remembered his first ride in an oxcart, and he was grateful that Enoch was taking it fairly slow. Even so, everyone seemed to enjoy the breeze blowing their hair and traveling so fast. After an hour,

Enoch stopped at a well and they got drinks and stretched their legs while Enoch watered the oxen at a trough. Amram traded places with Adam and sat up front with Enoch. Both men were impressed with how fast the oxen could travel. Enoch told everyone to hold on and he would show them the top speed. The ladies weren't sure they wanted to go any faster, but both were giggling and screaming with delight when Enoch encouraged the oxen to pick up the pace. Orly was pleased that Gabriela was enjoying herself and was not afraid. This family was a lot of fun. Soon Enoch slowed the oxen to their regular pace and announced that they were approaching Capernaum. He yelled back to Orly and asked if he wanted to shop first or go to Mr. Zebedee's home. Orly consulted Gabriela and they decided to shop first. Enoch waved that he understood and drove to the market area. Orly, Gabriela, and her mother went inside a booth that sold mats, but the other men walked around the market. When they had picked out the mats, they asked where to find someone selling looms. It wasn't far away and after they had loaded the new mats, Enoch led the oxen to the Textile Booth. There Orly felt totally lost as Mrs. Keturah and Gabriela looked over the selection of looms. They finally agreed that she wanted a large outdoor loom and a smaller loom that she could hold in her lap. They asked Orly if thread and yarn were available at the market in Cana or if they would need to also purchase a spinning wheel. He had no idea. But the gentleman selling her the looms assured her that Cana had a good selection of yarns and threads. So, they agreed to just purchase the two looms. The shop owner helped Orly get them into the oxcart and tie them to the side wall of the cart. Orly walked with the women around the market area to see a few more of the booths. When they found the men, everyone was ready to go. Mr. Simon had purchased a bag of pomegranates and Adam and Amram had picked out beautiful hair combs for their wives to say thank you for letting them come. Mr. Simon had asked some of the shop owners if they knew Yanis, but no one recognized the name. Everyone loaded back into the cart and Enoch drove to Mr. Zebedee's house. Orly remembered walking there with Kobe and suddenly felt overwhelmed with sadness that Kobe would not be at his wedding. He quickly prayed for Kobe's safety and success in planting the seeds that Jesus was the Messiah.

When they entered the drive to Mr. Zebedee's house, servants welcomed them. Salome received them and offered them juice. They enjoyed her hospitality and told her they were trying to find Jenay to invite them to Gabriela's and Orly's wedding. Salome was thrilled to learn that Gabriela would be living so close to Jenay. She explained to Enoch where to find their new little farm. She was sure that they would be home and would be eager to see Gabriela and her family even if they couldn't come to the wedding.

Enoch had no trouble following Salome's directions, and they soon arrived at a tiny little house with a large barn and goats everywhere. Jenay was baking bread but came running when she realized that Gabriela and her family were there. They had been best

friends since Jesus' return to Heaven. She sent Adam and Amram to the barn to look for Yanis and ask him to come visit. They all sat in the courtyard and Orly kept an eye on the bread so the girls could talk. When Yanis arrived, Jenay introduced him to the group and explained that Gabriela and Orly would be married on Wednesday. Yanis said that he really hoped they could attend, but it all depended on whether the new man he had hired to help him with the goats thought he could handle them alone for a few days. He assured Gabriela that he would try to get Jenay there for the special day. If he couldn't come, she might talk her Grandmother Salome into coming.

Yanis apologized but said that he had to return to the barn as he had too much work to do. Orly whispered to Gabriela that he wanted to go and talk with him. Gabriela nodded and she and her family stayed and visited with Jenay. When Yanis saw Orly, he apologized again for being so busy. "I will try to bring Jenay for at least Wednesday. But it will take us a day to travel and another day to travel back, and I'm not comfortable leaving my entire investment in the hands of a man that I only hired last week."

"I understand," said Orly.

Yanis continued, "I thought that I wanted to be a farmer, but I think I'm in the wrong line of work. I mean, I love caring for the animals, but it's just overwhelming. I never have time to breathe. It's constant. I don't even get a Sabbath and that's really bad. Jenay goes without me to the synagogue. I'm so tired, I decided that even though I couldn't really afford it, I hired Ezekiel. It seems that even though he's a hard worker, there's just more work to be done."

Orly put his hand on Yanis' shoulder. "I've heard nothing but great things about you, and how you followed Jesus faithfully for three years. I'm a friend of Kobe's and he talked about you all the time. I don't know you well, but may I ask you a question?"

"You just did."

"Man, you do remind me of Kobe. The last time I was in Capernaum I was saying goodbye to Kobe. It's really hard to be here today."

"Yeah, I think that's bothering me, too. I mean, here I am raising goats while other followers are out spreading the New Way. I feel like I'm off track."

"That's what I was going to ask you. Are you certain that this is where the Holy Spirit is leading you? Are you being completely obedient to everything that you've heard?"

"I think I've been too busy to check lately. Maybe I will take that walk with Jenay to Cana, and just spend some time thinking this thing through. Jenay has been so patient with me. But it's true, the joy is gone. Something has got to change."

"Why don't you walk in on Tuesday and camp out with Gabriela's family at my place? You two will be welcome for dinner that night and breakfast Wednesday morning. Then I'm going to marry the most wonderful woman in the world. Maybe the walk would give you time to think. Are you sure that Ezekiel can't handle the goats?"

“I’ll talk to him. If he needs more help, I’ll try to hire someone. I think I need this trip to Cana more than I need to worry about raising goats! Thanks, Orly.”

“Anytime. Maybe the Holy Spirit will lead you and Jenay to Cana to help me with the groups there. I’m feeling a little overwhelmed myself. I’m a full-time blacksmith and I already lead one group. Now the Holy Spirit is opening up the possibility of starting two more groups. I haven’t told Gabriela about the third one yet. I wonder if I have time to even do a regular job.”

“Yeah, I know the feeling.”

“I need to get back to Gabriela and we need to start home. I hope to see you on Tuesday afternoon.”

“Thanks, Orly. We’ll plan to be there.”

As Orly walked back to the group, he announced that visiting time was over and they needed to head back toward Cana. Adam laughed and said, “Well, that depends on how fast Enoch is going to drive that oxcart!” Everyone laughed.

They said their farewells to Jenay, and Gabriela promised to visit again soon if they weren’t able to come for the wedding. The men helped the women into the cart and started the journey home. They should arrive about an hour before sunset and Orly would need to start dinner. He didn’t want to have his guests go hungry.

When they arrived home, Miss Mary and Miss Martha had already started dinner and shooed him out of the kitchen. Orly was glad that they felt comfortable in his home. Now, tomorrow, he could help Gabriela unload the things she had brought. Since they didn’t need his help in the kitchen, he decided to replace the old mats with the new ones they had bought today. He carried the mats outside and stored them in the root cellar.

Orly walked down toward the camping place and Mr. Simon called him over to look at the wagon. “I’m afraid the uphill walk is going to be too much for the women. Everyone walked coming here, but I want the women to ride home if we can make room. What do you think of adding a board across the back so we don’t lose someone on those steep hills going home?”

“Well, sir, it’s awfully nice to be able to jump on and off the wagon, but since it’s the women, I think a back to lean on would help them travel better. But then, how would they get in and out?” questioned Orly. “Let’s go to the Carpenter’s Shop tomorrow and see what my friend Palti can do.”

“Sounds like a plan. Orly, I’m really proud of the way you treat my daughter. And you’ve been very kind to us. I couldn’t be prouder of you.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ve spent all my life wanting a home and family to care for.”

On Monday morning, Orly and her older brothers carried in all the boxes that Gabriela had packed for the house. They set them in the living area, and she was excited to finally be able to unpack. Her

mother, Miss Martha, and Miss Mary were eager to help her get settled.

Mr. Simon, Orly, and the two older sons walked, while Jabet and Jared rode in the cart. They were not impressed with the slow and very bumpy ride. Orly led them to the Carpenter's Shop and introduced Mr. Simon and his sons. He told Palti what he had in mind for the little wagon and Palti knew exactly what was needed. Orly asked him if he could do it before Friday. Palti replied, "If you don't mind waiting, I can do it right now. It won't take me but just a few minutes and these boys can have their ride home." The men stood around and visited while they watched Palti hammer some wood in place so that the back gate would simply slide in and out as needed. Mr. Simon paid him, and they headed to the market. Since Mr. Simon wanted to leave early Sunday, there would be no time to make purchases for the trip. They purchased olive oil, olives, pickled fish, nuts, and dried fruit that would provide them with supplements for any fishing they did. Then, they would only need to make fresh bread once the Sabbath ended. With all the plans in place, they returned to Orly's house and unloaded the wagon into the cellar. They found the ladies happily transforming Orly's house into a home, and Lazarus taking a nap.

On Tuesday morning, Gabriela showed Orly and her dad where she wanted the loom to be installed. It would be near the ovens so that she could weave while she cooked. That afternoon, they were sitting around the courtyard watching the boys playing when Orly thought he heard visitors. He went around the front and found Yanis and Jenay tentatively calling for them. Orly led them to the back courtyard and heard Jenay and Gabriela screaming with delight. He was happy that Yanis had taken time off to please not only Jenay, but Gabriela. It would make her wedding day more special to have her best friend present. They had brought their blankets and planned to camp with Gabriela's family.

Miss Martha and Miss Mary had already planned a light dinner for everyone to eat around the campfire. Afterward, they sang songs of worship and just enjoyed being together. It was hard for Orly to leave, but he knew that he needed to get his rest. While everyone else began stretching out on their blankets, he slowly walked back to the house alone.

Chapter 19

On Wednesday, after breakfast, the women stayed at the house while the men bathed in the stream. Orly put on his best robe and began the wait. Later the men stayed at the house to allow the women time to bathe and dress at the campground. Orly had kept busy all morning, but now he didn't have anything to do but wait. He asked Yanis to take a walk with him. They walked through the little town of Cana and got better acquainted.

Orly learned that Yanis was feeling led to start a group in Capernaum but couldn't figure out what to do with the goats. He told Orly that these three days away would be a good trial to see if Ezekiel, his hired man, could handle the goats and let him focus more on ministry. Orly assured him that God had good plans for him. The two returned to Orly's house about noon and Orly served some juice and fruit to the men.

The wedding was scheduled to begin at the ninth hour, so there was nothing he could do but wait and wait some more. The other men laughed at him for pacing the floor and he begged them to find something to entertain him. Abram instead told him that this was nothing compared to waiting for his wife to give birth. All the men agreed. Orly just groaned. "You guys are no help at all!" He wanted to go outside and play with the little boys, but he was afraid he would get his clean robe dirty. Finally, he saw the women walking toward the house. He thought his heart would explode. He checked the sky and discovered that it was finally time for them to start their walk to Mr. Kenan's house.

Orly took Gabriela's hand and led the procession. Ruler Jedidiah was already there, and Orly's mother was seated in the courtyard. Orly gave her a hug. The Metal Shop had closed at noon, so all of Orly's friends from the shop were present for the ceremony — both Jew and Gentile. He had also invited a few other friends, and Mr. Kenan's servants were there.

When they had all gathered, the wedding ceremony began. Ruler Jedidiah smiled at them and said, "Orly and Gabriela, shall we begin? Since I wasn't the one who arranged the espousal, I need to know who represented you."

Orly responded, "Mr. Kenan represented me as my boss since my mother couldn't travel to Bethany. And Gabriela's parents represented her. You have met Mr. Simon, and this is Mrs. Keturah."

"Very good." Then he turned and asked, "Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah, has Orly fulfilled all of his obligations and promises made to you and your daughter concerning this marriage?"

Mr. Simon answered, "Yes, above and beyond what was expected of him."

"Good. And Mr. Kenan, has Gabriela fulfilled all of her obligations and promises made to you and Orly concerning this marriage?"

“Yes, she has. We and Orly’s mother, Ruth, are very pleased to welcome her to our family.”

“Orly, do you have a home, and can you provide and care for Gabriela as your wife?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then it is my privilege to state that the wedding may commence!”

Mr. Kenan’s staff quickly returned to their preparations for the wedding feast which would happen at sundown. Orly noted that Yanis seemed comfortable and made friends easily. That would be important if God was calling him to lead a group in Capernaum.

Orly’s mother continued to enjoy visiting with the guests. Orly had expected her to rush back to work in the kitchen. Instead, the guests were served juice and rounds of bread with goat cheese. Orly noticed that it was a new flavoring and wondered if Benjamin was doing some experimenting in the kitchen.

Ruler Jedidiah enjoyed visiting with Mr. Simon and Lazarus. He had specific questions about their healing and being raised from the dead, but he also had more general questions about who Jesus was and why he had died. He also wanted to know more about the rumors that Jesus had risen from the dead. They assured him that they were not rumors.

Orly and Gabriela were in a world all their own. They walked around the garden and Orly told Gabriela more about Hosea and how he wished he could see him now. She replied that she felt that Hosea could see all that was happening even though he was in Heaven. Orly had never thought about that and wondered.

Mrs. Vada had not seen Jenay since she was a toddler. Jenay seemed to enjoy catching her great-aunt up on family news. Chaya and her betrothed, Helam, introduced themselves to Orly and Gabriela. Orly explained to Gabriela that he had never met Chaya, but she had helped him out so much while he was trying to get the house ready before they arrived. The two ladies immediately made friends and started talking about where to find the best deals at the market. Chaya offered to help Gabriela with anything she needed. She introduced Gabriela to her abba, Mr. Hiram. “My dad owns the Mercantile Store. He’s also the one everyone comes to for help. He knows where to find just about everything. You’ll want to get to know him.”

“You don’t know how good that makes me feel. My abba owns the Mercantile Store in Bethany near Jerusalem — and everyone comes to him for help!”

Nathan and his wife Rebecca, Mr. Kenan’s niece, were there from Nazareth. They were invited because they were Levi’s parents. Levi was the new accountant at the Metal Shop. Orly remembered that Kobe had been in prison with Nathan during Mrs. Mary’s funeral. He made a mental note to be sure to talk with Nathan, but right now, his attention was on greeting all his guests. Rebecca quickly joined Mrs. Vada and Jenay.

Orly wanted to stay with Gabriela, but she was being pulled one way, and he another. Orly wanted to speak with the ruler of the synagogue, and he wanted to talk with Nathan, but he was supposed to be hosting everyone and decided now was not a good time for deep discussions. He greeted Palti, the owner of the Carpentry Shop, and met his wife and children. By dinner time almost sixty guests had assembled.

The men lined up behind Mr. Kenan and Orly for the ceremonial washing, and Orly once again remembered filling those pots as a slave boy for Seth's wedding. How he wished Jesus would show up and bless his wedding day. Mr. Kenan led Orly to the head table with Mr. Simon, Lazarus, Jordan, and himself. Gabriela was seated at a separate table with her mother, Miss Martha, Miss Mary, Orly's mother, and Mrs. Vada.

The meal was expertly prepared, and the guests were invited to fill their plates and enjoy the wine. The hired musicians began to play and soon the crowd filled the courtyard with dancing and singing the traditional wedding songs. Round and round they danced, and everyone seemed to be having a wonderful time. Orly was thoroughly enjoying the wedding music, dancing, and festivities, but something deep inside told him that it was time to claim his bride. He found Gabriela encircled with new friends and whispered in her ear. She nodded and left the group. Orly led her into the room that Mr. Kenan's staff had prepared for them.

Orly took her into his arms for the first time and quoted the verses from the Song of Solomon which told of his love for her and his desire to make her his wife. Gabriela responded with statements of her love and how it had grown over these past months. Then Orly prayed asking God to bless their marriage and make their home a place of ministry. Then he took her as his wife. They were filled with wonder and amazement at God's wonderful plan for them to be one flesh. They just wanted to be still and quiet together before they rejoined the party. They knew that once they left that quiet little sanctuary, they would be inundated with responsibilities as the bride and groom. So, they stayed in the room and hid in the stillness and holiness of the moment.

They could hear the music and dancing going on outside and knew that they should join the festivities. They finally emerged feeling content and fulfilled. Late into the night they danced and sang and ate and drank and celebrated. Sometimes they were together side by side, but at others, they were in different groups, but they both felt a oneness that didn't require them to be physically together. God had joined their hearts. *I am a married man. I am complete. I have never felt this happy. Thank You, Jesus, for my bride!*

When Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah were ready to return to their campsite, they entered the wedding chamber and removed the wedding cloth. This Jewish tradition was evidence that the marriage had been consummated and was legal proof that their daughter was a virgin on her wedding day. Mr. Simon carefully folded it and slipped it

into his robe. Then he and Mrs. Keturah, the twins, Lazarus, and his two sisters all walked back to the camping area at Orly's house. Orly and Gabriela were still celebrating and would spend the night in their special room at Mr. Kenan's house. Gabriela's two older brothers were enjoying the party and promised to be quiet when they returned to the camping grounds in the wee hours of the morning.

For two more days, the party would start at breakfast and continue late into the night. Soon after breakfast on Thursday morning, Jenay and Yanis said their goodbyes and apologized for not being able to stay longer. Gabriela hugged her and promised to be praying for them both. Orly promised to continue praying for Yanis as he sought to know God's will. And they agreed to visit soon.

Friends and family came and went just like festival days. Mr. Kenan allowed his servants to participate and limited their workload to just the essentials so that everyone could spend some time celebrating. Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, all were welcome at the wedding celebration.

Late on Friday afternoon, Orly noticed that his Gentile friends began to say their goodbyes before the Sabbath began. The musicians took their leave since they would be unable to carry their instruments after sunset. Mother helped Benjamin and her staff set out more trays of food just before the sun set on Friday afternoon.

Mrs. Vada lit the Sabbath candles and Mr. Kenan led in the Sabbath prayer. Everyone joined in singing the Psalms and then the Sabbath meal was enjoyed. They continued to sit in the courtyard and watched the children play, but there was a completeness that perfectly matched Orly and Gabriela's mood. Everyone thanked Mr. Kenan for a wonderful wedding and gradually families began leaving. As Orly and Gabriela thanked Mother and Benjamin for all the wonderful food, Benjamin whispered to Orly that he had delivered a basket filled with fresh bread to his house earlier today. "You'll need it for Sabbath breakfast tomorrow. Consider it my wedding gift." Orly gave Benjamin a big hug and thanked him for being so thoughtful. "I remember several times that you rescued me with food, so I'm just returning the favor. I figure you haven't thought that far ahead."

"No, I haven't. Thank you so much. That would be embarrassing to not be able to serve breakfast tomorrow for my guests! Thank you, my friend."

They walked together with their family and friends and promised to see them at breakfast on the Sabbath. Tonight would be their first night in their new home.

Orly woke early and went to the courtyard to pray. He had missed this special time and wanted to get it re-established. He would have preferred to walk into the woods but didn't want to disturb the campers. As he prayed and thanked God for his wife and for the wonderful wedding, he began to hear Gabriela stirring in the kitchen. He didn't want his bride to be alone, so he cut short his prayer time and joined her setting out the olive oil and olives and the bread that

Benjamin had provided. He had also set out some pomegranates last night from the root cellar, and they were perfectly ripe for breakfast.

Soon the campers joined them, and everyone was commenting on how special the wedding was and how much they had enjoyed their time getting to know Mr. Kenan, Mrs. Vada, and Orly's mother, Ruth.

Orly suddenly remembered that they needed to get to the synagogue on time because Mr. Simon and Lazarus were speaking. He hurried everyone out the door and toward the synagogue. Orly was eager to hear how Mr. Simon and Lazarus would point the people to Jesus as Messiah. The women and the twins went into the balcony, while the men took their places on the main floor. Last week Lazarus and Mr. Simon had shared about the miracles Jesus had worked in their lives. This week they shared more prophecies about Jesus being the Son of God. They explained that God had promised to provide Adam and Eve a payment for their sin and that Jesus was the Lamb of God sacrificed in their place. They told how the sacrificial system was just a picture that foretold the coming of the Messiah. Now, it was up to each individual to turn to Jesus as his or her Messiah and allow Him to pay for their sins.

Orly felt such an overpowering urge to teach this group about Jesus and how they could accept him. The intensity of his desire surprised him. He knew that before he started back to work on Thursday, he had to make time to talk with Ruler Jedidiah. He felt certain that he should be teaching a group either at the synagogue or at their home. He would talk with Gabriela about it soon.

After synagogue, Orly and Jordan stayed with Mr. Simon and Lazarus to help answer questions from the people who had heard this message for the first time. Everyone else walked back to Mr. Kenan's to spend the Sabbath.

When Orly and the other men finally arrived at Mr. Kenan's house, it was time for the group to start. Mr. Kenan introduced Jordan who led in some singing and then, instead of introducing Mr. Simon and Lazarus, he simply began to talk with the group about the significance of the changes that Jesus had made in the group. He talked about Ruth, who was a bond-slave, being honored as the groom's mother. He talked about the significance of the slaves and the free men mingling. Even though the slaves had lots of work to do, they were welcomed to dance and sing the nights away. He talked about the Gentiles who were invited to celebrate the wedding with them and how food was shared with all. He repeated John the Baptizer's statement that Jesus was the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the whole world. Jordan shared that everywhere he traveled with Jesus, Jesus broke down the social walls that separated people, and He taught His followers to love people no matter who they were — male or female, Jew or Gentile, follower or not. Jesus' command was for us to love people the way we are loved by Him. Jordan thanked Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada for providing a place where Jesus would be pleased to visit and participate. "I think that Jesus would have said,

‘Well done, good and faithful followers!’” Then he led in prayer and the group was dismissed.

Orly and Gabriela sat under the shade tree with Orly’s mother and visited. Gabriela’s mother came and asked Gabriela if she would take a walk with her. Gabriela looked at Orly and he nodded. He was thrilled that she asked his permission, but that was a role he would have to think about. He didn’t want Gabriela to ever feel like a slave. He wanted her to be free, but he loved that she asked.

Gabriela and her mother walked around the garden and Gabriela led her to the trail that went behind the garden and into the woods. Gabriela found the grassy area that Orly had shown her, and she shared with her mother that this was Orly and his mother’s secret place to meet and talk. Both sat and enjoyed the peace and quiet; they knew that this was going to be a hard goodbye. Keturah finally asked, “Gabriela, are you happy?”

“Oh, Mother, happier than I’ve ever been. I mean, I love you and Abba, and I’ll miss you terribly, and my brothers, but I feel that this is what I was created for. I want to be by Orly’s side. I know that God will use us as a team to reach many, many followers for Jesus. Mother, I’m very happy. I just wish we lived closer. I know I will miss you and Miss Martha.”

“She has taught you well. It’s just so hard. I am so happy for you. Has Orly said when he will bring you back to Bethany to visit?”

“No, he hasn’t said, but he did say that he was saving up money for an oxcart so that he could take me home for visits. But I don’t know when that will be. I know that he goes with Mr. Kenan’s men three times a year. I don’t know whether I will be invited or not — probably not. It would be awkward to be the only woman with the group. But maybe that will change, too. Who knows?”

“He’s a good man. He will bring you to visit as soon as he can afford it.”

“Thank you, Mother, for trusting him. I trust him to do what is best. I love you, Mother. I love you so much, but this is what God designed me to do. I am so excited about my future with Orly. I mustn’t look backward; I just want to look forward.”

“Then let’s get back to the group and enjoy this Sabbath. I know your abba wants to speak with you also.”

As she helped her mother to her feet, Gabriela fell into her arms, and they hugged for a long time. Mother wiped the tears from Gabriela’s face and kissed her forehead and prayed a prayer of blessing over her. They walked slowly back to Mr. Kenan’s yard.

Gabriela had only sat down with Orly for a short time when Mr. Simon came and asked Orly if he could borrow Gabriela for a short walk. Again, Orly agreed, and realized that they were saying their private goodbyes. He knew this must be hard on Gabriela and he squeezed her hand and whispered in her ear. “Take as long as you like. We will have a lifetime together.” Gabriela smiled radiantly and joined her abba. She led him behind the garden to the same grassy spot.

Mr. Simon sighed deeply, and Gabriela said, "I know, Abba. I know."

Mr. Simon hugged her and told her, "You have been my precious baby girl and now you are a woman and a wife. You'll soon be a mother, I pray. I just hate it that you are so far away. Orly is a good man and I have no doubt that God has placed you right where He wants you to be."

"Thank you, Abba, for being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guiding you."

"My prayer is that you and Orly will make a great team serving our Lord together. I can see ways that you can not only support Orly, but that you can have your own ministry here beside him. I believe the ruler of the synagogue is going to allow a group to begin either at the synagogue or at your home. I can see a very fruitful ministry for you here."

"I do, too."

"Daughter, it will be important for you to support Orly in all that God calls him to do. Your mother has allowed me to go into dangerous and distant territory. Her sacrifice has been as great as mine. I know your mother has been a good example to you."

"That would be harder than serving beside Orly. I don't ever want to be away from him, but I understand, and I know that God will give me strength if that is His direction. Abba, you know that I will be obedient."

"I'm so proud of you." Then Mr. Simon stood and took Gabriela in his arms and prayed his prayer of blessing over her. Once again, the tears flowed freely. *After Jesus healed me of my leprosy, she was the first one who greeted me. And every day when I arrived home from the shop, she always ran to meet me. No, I mustn't think about missing her. I know that God has good plans for her here. I mustn't think about her not being there when I get home.*

They walked back to the yard, wiping their faces, and feeling sad, but trying to put on the expected smiles. But when Gabriela saw Orly waiting for her, she relaxed, and the smile became genuine. *Thank You, Father, for this man, my husband.*

When Mr. Simon rejoined the group, the talk turned to the preparations that needed to be made for the trip home. Miss Martha was fretting about when she would have time to go to the market and if maybe they should delay their departure until things could be taken care of. Mr. Simon and Orly smiled and assured her that everything was under control. "Benjamin and Mother and their staff will start baking bread just as soon as the Sabbath has ended, and we can bake a couple of batches if you want to help me tonight. But Mr. Simon has already purchased all the other needed supplies. I think you'll be pleased with our selection. Your traveling food is ready."

Mr. Simon added, "I'll need you boys to help me get the wagon packed and the sacks loaded. All the food is stored in Orly's root cellar, so while they make bread, we'll get everything else ready."

Mother Ruth exclaimed, "Oh, I just noticed that the sun is getting low. Let's set out the trays now and let everyone eat before the Sabbath ends. Then we can all get busy. It's not that we want you to leave, but we want you to know you are family now. We love you and want to send you off properly."

"I think Miss Martha and I can make two batches of bread tonight, so take that much off your list," said Orly.

"Okay, you've got two ovens so you can make a batch apiece."

"Should I send someone over tonight or wait until morning?" asked Mother.

"Morning will be fine. We'll try to get off at sunrise and eat along the way," said Mr. Simon.

Mr. Kenan added, "Or you could stop and have breakfast with us before you start."

"And if we keep staying, we'll never get home! You have been so kind to us. It makes us know that Gabriela will be well cared for here."

Hugs were given all around and Orly and Gabriela led the group back to Orly's house. Miss Martha headed for the kitchen to start a batch of bread. Gabriela asked Orly if she should help him in the kitchen or go help her abba. Orly stopped and faced her. "Gabriela, you are not my slave. You are my wife, my equal, my partner. Don't ever be afraid to do what you want to do. Would you prefer to make a batch of bread with Miss Martha, or would you prefer to be with your abba and brothers getting the wagon ready? It's your choice."

"Oh, Orly, thank you. I really want to go be with Abba and my brothers right now. Do you mind making the bread with Miss Martha?"

"I don't mind at all. I set aside a box of fruits and vegetables in the root cellar. Have your brothers put it in the wagon with the things your dad bought, but don't forget it."

"Orly, you are so good to my parents. Thank you."

"I love you. I know this is hard. Now, go. I need to get bread started."

Gabriela ran to help her abba and brothers get the food stuff loaded into packs for the donkey. They reserved as much space in the wagon as possible for the ladies to ride. Miss Martha already had her batch of bread rising when Orly started his batch. They worked together and enjoyed talking about Gabriela's childhood. He thanked Miss Martha for teaching Gabriela so many things that she would need to know to run this home. Miss Martha responded that it was God's way of providing her a daughter to love.

It was late in the night when they were finally able to put the bread in the ovens. Then Orly walked Miss Martha to the camping area so that she could sleep. He would watch both ovens and take care of the bread. When Orly returned from the camping area, he checked to make sure the bread was baking evenly and then took a lantern to the root cellar and pulled out the old mats that he had stored there. He was glad that Mr. Simon had left the wagon near his courtyard. He didn't want to disturb the sleepers. They had put all the donkey's packs in the back of the wagon, so Orly began to unload

them carefully and quietly. When he got the wagon unloaded, he placed the mats in the bottom. Three fit the bottom exactly, and since there were three ladies, it was perfect. Then he began to cut the other mat into three pieces to make pillows for the ladies' backs. He ran to check the bread and was surprised that it was ready to be removed from the oven. *Oh, that was close! If I had burned the bread, I would be up all night!*

He quickly removed the bread and set it indoors to cool. He would pack it in the morning. He returned to the wagon and quickly loaded all the donkey's packs. It would be a fun surprise for everyone in the morning, and he hoped it would make the journey a little easier for the ladies.

The night was short and once again his prayer time was interrupted, but he took his lamp out to greet them as they arrived from the camping area. Gabriela brought out the bread that Orly and Miss Martha had prepared. She had wrapped it in cloth to keep it fresher. The other women were gathering up the blankets at the campground and would join them shortly. A servant from Mr. Kenan's arrived with four large sacks of bread. Mr. Simon hitched the donkey to the little wagon, and they began loading the packs on the donkey.

Miss Martha and Gabriela got the bowls prepared with olives and olive oil and set out a round of bread for each one. They would eat as they walked. The ladies had just arrived with the blankets when someone discovered the mats at the bottom of the wagon. Everyone thanked Orly for his thoughtful gift and Gabriela thought her heart would burst with pride. The ladies had planned to walk for a while, but instead decided to try out the cushioned ride. After a couple of tries, it was decided that two ladies would face forward while the other faced backward. Gabriela and Orly handed them their breakfast bowls and each of the men and boys took theirs. Orly and Gabriela walked with them to the edge of town.

Orly and Gabriela stopped and waved to her family. They knew that today was the real beginning of their life together. Separating from her family was the hard part. Orly hoped that he could provide a place to fill her heart. Hand in hand they returned to their home and began to prepare their own breakfast bowls. They decided to sit in the back courtyard and enjoy looking over the woods in the back. Today was theirs. All theirs. They would talk and dream and plan and do everything together.

Chapter 20

As they sat in the courtyard and talked about the future, Orly told Gabriela of his desire to teach the synagogue how to become followers of Jesus. They agreed he should talk with Ruler Jedidiah. Orly also shared with Gabriela his desire to invite Lucas, Markus, and Julius to their home to learn about Jesus. He told her about his conversations with them and together they wondered how the Holy Spirit would lead them. Orly asked Gabriela if she would be afraid to share with Gentiles and she replied, "No. I think it's what Jesus commanded us to do. But we must be careful that it doesn't interfere with reaching the group of Jews at the synagogue. We don't want to run ahead of the Holy Spirit." Orly and Gabriela talked about the time that he felt he needed to spend in prayer and how it had been disrupted recently. She agreed that it was vitally important and encouraged him to continue to take that one hour before sunrise for his time alone with God. She would get up at sunrise and they could eat breakfast together before he left for work. So many little details to work out. But they were looking forward to each new day together.

They walked around the property and Orly talked about his dream of adding housing in the wooded area so that they could invite another couple to come and help them with the work. Since she felt strongly against hiring slaves, he was thinking about finding another couple from Jerusalem who could help with the ministry and assist Gabriela with the housework in exchange for free housing. They discussed where they might build this house and again promised to pray about it. Right now, Gabriela just wanted it to be the two of them, but she acknowledged that she might need help at a later point if the ministry grew and their family grew at the same time. Orly pointed out that even though there was no shared land, essentially Miss Martha and her family had helped raise Gabriela. Gabriela conceded that her mother would often have been overwhelmed without their help. And Lazarus had certainly been a partner to her abba spiritually. Maybe having another couple nearby would not be such a bad idea. Of course, her first thought went to Yanis and Jenay, but when she shared it with Orly, he shook his head. "God has plans for Yanis in Capernaum."

"Jenay said essentially the same thing. Their marriage is a little rough right now. But she said the walk here was a good time for them to talk and discuss some things. When are you going to talk with Ruler Jedidiah?"

"If it's all right with you, I was thinking I would see if he was available tomorrow afternoon. We could spend the morning together, and then I could go to the synagogue and see if he is available. He teaches Hebrew School each morning."

So, on Monday afternoon, after Orly and Gabriela had spent the morning walking around the property and sitting at the stream, Orly

gave her a quick kiss and headed to the synagogue. Orly found Ruler Jedidiah looking at some scrolls and he had to fight the urge to run. *I don't even know how to read, and here I am offering to teach. What a strange situation.* Ruler Jedidiah invited him in and set aside the scrolls. He thanked Orly for stopping by and said that he had not wanted to disturb him and his new wife, but he really wanted to talk.

That's a good beginning! "How can I help you?" asked Orly.

"Orly, I've talked with Simon and Lazarus and they both assured me you were the right person to teach the synagogue more about Jesus. Many have indicated that they want to learn, and quite frankly, so do I. But it's an interesting position because I'm an elected official. I have to be sure that this is what everyone wants."

"So, you are not a priest?" asked Orly.

"No, I am not. I trained as a scribe because I wanted to teach the Scripture. I started the Hebrew School here. Because we don't have a priest in town, the people elected me to be their ruler. That's different from a priest because I'm not from the tribe of Levi. I take it that you didn't attend Hebrew School?"

"No, sir. I was sold as a slave before I started school and was never allowed to attend. Mr. Kenan bought my mother and me when I was five. When I became free, I became his apprentice, and now I work as a blacksmith at the Metal Shop."

"I'm impressed. That's quite a progression. And I understand that you lead the group that meets at Mr. Kenan's house?"

"Yes, sir. I've been leading it for about a year now. My friend, Kobe, started the group about three years ago, and that's where I learned more about Jesus and decided to become a follower."

"So, these men recommend that you teach in my synagogue even though you've never attended Hebrew School and you've only followed Jesus for less than three years. I don't understand. I've studied the Jewish Scripture all my life."

"I understand your concern. But I assure you, I will only teach what the Holy Spirit tells me. I know that you don't understand that. May I try to explain?"

"Certainly. I want to understand!" replied Ruler Jedidiah.

"I believe that Jesus is the Messiah. He came to earth as a human and lived here as an example of how we are to live. As that example, He was designed the same way we are. He had a physical body and a self or inner man. Now, you and I have a physical body and an inner man. Do you follow me so far?"

"Yes, I understand the concept of the inner man. It is like the conscience or will — maybe the invisible man that controls the physical."

"Exactly. Well, Jesus had both of those. Then inside of those two layers, we all have an inner core. Our inner core is empty, but Jesus' core was filled with God's Spirit. He was the one who directed Jesus while He was on earth. He told Him things, showed Him things, and told Him what was going to happen in the future. Jesus Himself said

over and over that it was not Him accomplishing the miracles, it was His Father, Jehovah.”

Ruler Jedidiah was listening intently and seemed very interested, so Orly continued. “But Jesus didn’t come just to be our example. He came to die as the Lamb of God for our sins and put us in a right relationship with God. God sent Jesus to be our Messiah, and when we acknowledge that, then God fills our inner core with the same Holy Spirit that Jesus had. It will take time for you and your people to grasp all of that and what it means, but that’s the good news that Jesus asked us to share with everyone.”

“Orly, you are right, I’m feeling a little confused right now, but it makes sense. Yet it is different from anything I’ve ever heard,” said Ruler Jedidiah. “Let’s back up to my original question and see if I understand what you are saying. When you accepted Jesus as your Messiah, then God’s Spirit filled your inner core. Am I hearing that right?”

“Yes, sir, you are. And that’s why Kobe trusted me to take over the group and lead them because it’s not me leading them. I’m just trying to be obedient to what the Holy Spirit tells me to teach.”

“That’s incredible!” declared Ruler Jedidiah. “So, how does the Holy Spirit speak to you?”

“Well, sometimes I hear Him speak audibly, especially if I’m alone or in prayer. But most of the time, he just places an idea in my mind, and I’ve learned to recognize His voice. Sometimes I pray and pray and pray and don’t get any answers, and then all of a sudden, I just know the answer and I can’t say how. He just gives me wisdom that I know is not from me. If you’ve got the time, I’ll share an example with you,” said Orly.

“I’ve got another appointment this afternoon, but I think we still have time. This is so interesting.”

“Well, before Kobe left — actually before he even knew he was leaving — he was the leader of the group at Mr. Kenan’s. He left for a ministry trip last year. But before all that, the Holy Spirit kept giving me messages that I wanted to share with the group. But of course, Kobe was the leader, so I kept my mouth shut. Every time the Holy Spirit gave me a message, Kobe would share the exact same message. That gave me a lot of confidence that it’s not me making up the messages, it’s the Holy Spirit. At the time, I had no idea that I would become the leader of the group.”

“That’s amazing. There is certainly something different about you and Mr. Kenan and your friends from Bethany. I was amazed when I was at Mr. Kenan’s for the wedding. It was such a peaceful feeling that encircled me there. I know I want to explore it.”

Orly knew that their time was short, and he felt the Holy Spirit prompting him to be bold. “Ruler Jedidiah, would you prefer that I teach you privately about Jesus being the Messiah and what He desires for every person, or would you rather that I teach at the synagogue so that everyone hears it at the same time?”

“Orly, I certainly want to know more. Let’s go week by week. I want you to teach this Sabbath at the synagogue. If that is well received, then after Shavuot, we’ll talk again. Is that all right with you?”

“It would be a privilege to share with everyone, but if you have any specific questions, I want to be available to you.”

“I can’t think of any questions right now and I do have to run. I’m circumcising a new baby this afternoon and need to get some preparations made,” said Ruler Jedidiah.

“Then, I’ll see you on the Sabbath. Shalom.”

“Thanks, Orly, I’ll look forward to it. Shalom.”

Orly’s heart was thrilled to get to speak this Sabbath. He ran all the way back to Gabriela to tell her the news. Together they rejoiced that a new opportunity to share was available, and they agreed to just wait and see where the Holy Spirit led them after that.

“Gabriela, I don’t want to leave you when I go back to work on Thursday. I keep feeling that I should have secured a couple to help you with the work so you wouldn’t be here alone,” said Orly.

“Silly. Of course, I’ll be alone at the beginning. I’m not used to having servants around. I love the idea of taking care of this beautiful house and preparing your meals. I’ll spend some time at the well and the market and I’ll make friends. I’ll soon have a group of girlfriends, and we’ll visit in each other’s homes. It will be good. I promise I won’t be alone all the time. And soon, there will be a little one to care for and I’ll be too busy to miss you!”

“I want you to miss me!”

“Then I guess you’d better go back to work on Thursday so I can miss you! It looks like we’re going to be busy with the groups. Hopefully, you’ll be teaching at the synagogue on Sabbath mornings and then leading the group at Mr. Kenan’s in the afternoon. Then didn’t you say that Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada invited us to stay afterward for the post-Sabbath meal? Goodness, we’re going to have busy Sabbaths every week. That will help me not to be homesick. Tomorrow, can we walk into town again and you show me the market and the Mercantile Store? I’m not sure where to find things.”

“Sure. Also, I’ve been taking you to the well, but you can also get water from the stream. It’s a lot closer and deep enough if you don’t mind getting your feet wet.”

“Let’s get dinner started. You said you wanted to catch some fish. Shall we eat down at the stream, or do you want to eat here?”

“Let’s have a picnic down by the stream, if that’s not too much trouble for you.”

“You go on and catch us some fish. I’ll be down there in a few minutes with the bread and onions. Can you carry the skillet? Is there anything else that you want?”

“You just bring the rolls and onions and a blanket. I want to teach you how we cook fish when we’re traveling to Jerusalem. It’s really easy and tastes great.”

Gabriela took her time getting things prepared. She had made the bread earlier while Orly was out, so she packed some rounds, and she

sliced an onion. She realized that she didn't have any idea how many rounds of bread Orly would eat or how much onion to prepare. She didn't want to waste Orly's hard-earned money. And that made her remember that she needed to ask what the budget was for food and household supplies. She would be responsible for that. She needed to know so they wouldn't go hungry. She assumed that he made a good salary but didn't know how much he saved for other things. *My goodness, I don't know a lot about him.* Then she realized that she had been daydreaming and needed to join Orly at the stream.

By the time she arrived, Orly had the fire going and had caught plenty of fish. He was finishing up cleaning them and showed her how to put her fish on a stick and roast it over the fire. It was a little tricky since the outside of the fish had to be burned just a little to keep it from falling apart as it cooked. But she quickly mastered his technique and soon they were eating a delicious meal. How satisfying to be eating fish from their own property.

On Tuesday morning, Orly finally got back to his early morning prayer time without interruption. After breakfast and a trip to the well, they went to the market and then the Mercantile Store. As they walked home, Gabriela asked him how much money she should plan to spend at the market and for home supplies. "I left Chaya four leptons a day to spend at the market, but I took care of all the other supplies. Do you think one denarius a week would cover what we need? If you need more, just let me know. I'm trying to save enough money to build a second house on the property so that we can have help, but I also wanted to build a small barn to keep a couple of goats and the ox." Gabriela was especially excited about the goats, and assured Orly that she knew how to milk and care for them, and then they would have fresh milk, cheese, and butter. Now Orly knew to work on the barn first. When they arrived home, Orly squeezed some fruit juice, and they made plans for their final day of time off. That afternoon Orly stepped off the area to be cleared for the barn and spent a couple of hours clearing trees. They would use the trees for the log barn and for firewood. Once he got the land cleared and the logs prepared, he would hire Palti to help him.

On Wednesday, he and Gabriela rearranged the root cellar so that she could find everything she needed and be able to reach it without needing Orly's help. That afternoon, he chopped for another couple of hours and was about two-thirds finished when Gabriela walked down to watch.

Orly told her about having an extra hour of daylight on Fridays to do this kind of project and she was elated. Her abba had always been available to help whenever her mother needed him, but Orly would be at the Metal Shop from morning until sunset. There would be no days off except for the Sabbath, and they couldn't do projects then. That would require some adjusting for Gabriela. "Of course, I can do most things by lamp light. But you'll have some long days to fill while I'm working."

"I'll be working, too, silly. There's plenty to do around here to keep me busy. Do you think I'll just sit around and sleep all day?"

"No. But I don't want you to get tired of me being gone and run away."

"Never! But I do dread you starting to work tomorrow because I'll miss you."

"Good. But it's only a half day, and I'll be home early on Friday. Maybe that will make it easier."

"I'll be fine!" declared Gabriela.

Thursday morning after breakfast, Orly chopped down a couple more trees, but decided he wanted to spend the rest of his morning with Gabriela before he left for work. He caught her sorting and rearranging the preparation area and quickly helped her move things from the top shelves so that she could reach them. They ate some apricots and lingered over them until Orly announced that it was time. It was hard leaving her, but he was eager to get back to work.



As Orly turned the corner and approached the Metal Shop, he stopped dead in his tracks. Gone was the Metal Shop sign and when he walked in the door, his work bench was gone, too. Instead, the entire front of the shop was empty, and he recognized Palti building a wall right where Markus and Julius usually worked. "Hey, where is everybody and what's going on?" yelled Orly.

"Surprise!" Everyone yelled as they pulled Orly through the door that Palti had just built and into the back room. What had been the back half of the shop was now opened to the warehouse and all the work benches were scattered around the giant room.

"What is going on?" Orly demanded. "I'm gone for two weeks, and I've lost my job?"

"Of course not! Here's your workbench and anvil." Markus led him to the back of the warehouse.

"What's going on? When did this happen?"

Everyone was talking at once, but finally Orly sorted out that Seth had arrived in town on Monday, and all this had happened just this week. They had decided not to bother Orly since he was home with Gabriela and knew he would be coming in at noon today.

"Seth has moved here, and he's combining his Sword and Knife Shop with Mr. Kenan's Metal Shop," explained Julius.

"He brought two of his men and they're working back here with us. The front space will be to sell his swords and knives and the offices for him and Mr. Kenan and Levi."

"Okay, I think I understand. Seth is moving his business here, but where is Lucas?"

"Lucas is off this week to move because Seth bought his house. And we need to get busy. I'm really behind," said Jordan. "Mr. Kenan

is home visiting with Joelle and the grandchildren but said he would be in later to check on progress, so we had better get to work.”

Orly asked where he should start, and Jordan showed him all the orders that he had. Orly just took the first one and started heating the iron that he would need. His mind was in a jumble. *Was everything okay in Jerusalem? Why did Seth move out without warning, or did Mr. Kenan know about this at Passover and just didn't mention it?* As he worked, he realized that whoever had designed the new work area had done a good job. The noisiest blacksmiths were at the back and could get more outside air. Yet, the iron that they all needed was easily accessible in the center of the room. *But where is Seth?* He was able to finish several projects before Mr. Kenan arrived and called for him to come outside.

“It's too noisy to talk in there. Were you surprised?” asked Mr. Kenan.

“Yeah, I thought I had forgotten where the shop was! The guys said that Seth has moved here. Is everything okay in Jerusalem?”

“It's awfully dangerous for the home groups, but Seth's group decided all together that they were ready to spread out and share the good news. The Apostle Andrew took a group of single men to the north into unknown territory. The Apostle Matthew took a group of families to Cyprus. And Seth and Joelle decided to come here and surprised us on Monday. Things have happened so fast. I called Palti, and he and Seth started designing a new shop arrangement. Seth bought Lucas' house, so he needed to take off. Basically, everything is a mess. We just got all the work benches set up yesterday, and Palti is still working to get the front of the shop built the way Seth wants it. It will be his Sword and Knife Shop. The Metal Shop will be back here.”

“Wow. That's a lot of changes in one week. How are you handling everything?” inquired Orly.

“I think I'm fine. You know Vada is thrilled to have the grandchildren home. We're all squeezed into the house and I'm going back home now. Seth and Enoch have returned to Jerusalem to get another load, so pray for their safety.”

“Lucas isn't retiring, is he?”

“Oh, no. They are just moving in with his son. He'll be back to work on Sunday. At least, I hope. I'm glad you are back, Orly. I just feel better when you or Lucas are here. I need you to be in charge.”

“You should have let me know you needed me. Gabriela would have understood.”

“No, a promise is a promise. I knew you would be back today and that's just fine. Now, keep the men working, and we'll talk later.”

“Yes, sir.” As Orly headed back to his station, he stopped and greeted the new men. Appius and Titus were both Romans and a little hesitant around Orly. Orly understood and simply welcomed them and headed back to work. He felt the Holy Spirit tell him that they would be included in the group he would start at his home for Gentiles. Orly just smiled to himself and started hammering. *Man, it feels good to be back at work!*

When the sun began to get low, he called out to the rest of the men to start finishing up, and by the time the sun touched the horizon, everyone was ready to call it a day. Just as soon as his area was cleaned, Orly left without staying to visit with the group that always stood around talking for a few minutes before heading home. “Shalom!” Orly called as he ran, and the men laughed at his eagerness. He knew they understood.

Gabriela had dinner on the table for the two of them when he arrived. Everything looked so good, and he was starving. She served him and refilled his water cup. He caught her up on all the new happenings. Later they sat in the back courtyard, and he heard all about her afternoon. *What a good life!* After she retired, he went to the rooftop to pray.

Friday morning after his prayer time and breakfast, he headed to the shop. He was especially looking forward to the noon break when he could talk with the new men. He and Jordan talked about the plan for the group and Orly remembered that he was supposed to speak at the synagogue this week. He asked Jordan if he would mind teaching the group at Mr. Kenan’s for one more week, then he promised he would find a better system so that he could cover both groups. He had been so focused on what to teach at the synagogue, he had let Mr. Kenan’s group slip from his mind. Jordan assured Orly that he would be happy to prepare for the group.

“Thanks. Life has certainly been crazy these past few weeks. It’s made it easier knowing that I could just turn it all over to you. Oh, and what about Pentecost? Is Mr. Kenan taking a group to Shavuot?”

“I don’t think so. Seth has both his oxcarts in Jerusalem, so we would have to walk. Do you want to go?”

“I want to be there for Pentecost. But there’s so much danger and it’s such a long way for just one special day. And I don’t want to leave Gabriela. Let’s join the other men, I don’t want this shop to go segregated.” Orly and Jordan walked over to where Julius and Markus were sitting with Appius and Titus. Julius and Markus began to talk about how much fun they and their families had at Orly’s wedding. Appius and Titus seemed surprised.

“I thought Jews didn’t associate with Romans,” said Titus.

“Well, that’s a long story, but the short version is that most of the Jews at this shop are followers of Jesus, and Jesus did things a little differently from the traditional Jews.”

Titus asked, “So you are part of the New Way?”

“Yes,” said Jordan and Orly with surprise.

“Have you heard about it?” asked Orly.

“Only good things. I mean, I’ve heard about how they take care of the poor and needy. That’s about all I’ve heard,” replied Appius.

“We’re Romans and we worship our own gods,” Titus said firmly.

“Yep. And we can still be friends,” responded Orly. “So, have you two found housing?”

“We’re staying with Markus right now. But we’re looking.”

“Have you asked Mr. Hiram at the Mercantile Store? He’s helped a couple of us find housing.”

“I thought we would talk with him on our day off,” said Titus who seemed to be the older of the two.

“Do you mean Saturday?” asked Orly. “That’s our Sabbath and Mr. Hiram’s shop will be closed. Why don’t you go talk to him right now, and I’ll let Mr. Kenan know that I authorized it. You have to find housing, but hurry back to work. Does that sound right, Markus?”

“Sure. I can’t authorize it, but Orly can. So, go. It’s just down this street and then take a left. You’ll see it. Tell him you work for Mr. Kenan, and he’ll help you as much as he can.”

“Thanks!” said Titus and Appius as they quickly got up and ran toward the Mercantile Store.

“Let’s get back to work,” Orly called out. By midafternoon, Palti had completed the wall separating the working area from the offices and store front. Now he wanted to start building display shelves in the store front. He called Orly to ask what was needed. Orly had no idea but decided to take a chance with Titus. He explained Palti’s question, and Titus seemed happy to be able to help. He drew a sketch on the floor of what Seth’s shop had looked like in Jerusalem. Palti felt he could finish this afternoon. Orly thanked Titus and sent him back to work.

At the eleventh hour, Orly headed home to chop down trees. As he walked home, he chided himself for letting Mr. Kenan’s group slip his mind. He had been focusing on the synagogue message. He knew he had to find a better time to study and pray and prepare the messages, but that would mean more time away from Gabriela. He was torn. When he arrived home, Gabriela met him with some fresh juice. He thanked her and drank it hurriedly. He knew she wanted him to sit in the courtyard and relax with her for a few minutes, but he knew how precious that one daylight hour was. He grabbed his ax and headed for the woods. Gabriela tagged along behind him and watched him work for a while. Then she declared it was time for her to start dinner and returned to the house. He promised to be there soon. He only lacked a couple more trees when he realized he would have to hurry to beat the sunset. He ran to put the axe away and wash up for the Sabbath meal — their first alone in their own home. Gabriela lit the candles and Orly asked Jehovah to bless their home and Gabriela. He then prayed a blessing over her family who might be home again or might still be on the road. He prayed for their safety. They quietly ate their meal and Orly realized that Gabriela was missing her family. He wished there was some way that he could assure her of their safety. But in actuality, they wouldn’t know anything about them until the next time they were in Bethany. It was a big adjustment for her.

Orly asked her if she wanted to tell him about some special Sabbaths that she remembered, or if she wanted to change the subject. She smiled at his thoughtfulness and agreed that her mind was on her family. She said she didn’t really miss them as much as she just wished she knew that they were home and safe. Orly agreed.

He helped her clear the table, but they would save washing the dishes until Sabbath was over. He thanked her for the Sabbath meal and reminded her that she wouldn't have to cook for him again until Sunday breakfast. She assured him that she loved cooking for him. And together they spent their first Sabbath evening just getting better acquainted and making plans for the future. After Gabriela had gone to sleep, Orly went to the roof and prayed for a while longer. He wanted tomorrow's message to be perfect. He finally went to sleep but woke early for his prayer time on Sabbath morning. He walked into the woods to put the finishing touches on his message. He prayed again that he would be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. That was all he knew to do.

Gabriela had the Sabbath bread, a bowl of olive oil, and some olives set out on the table when he returned. They ate in silence, both thinking about those who would hear the good news this morning. She and Orly walked hand in hand toward the synagogue. Gabriela joined a group of women that she had met at the well and went upstairs while Orly entered the main room with the men. The synagogue seemed fuller than usual, and Orly had to fight feelings of inadequacy as he looked around the room.

Soon Ruler Jedidiah stood and began the meeting. Orly listened as they discussed who was walking to Jerusalem for Shavuot. They sang some Psalms of praise and Ruler Jedidiah reminded the people that they had heard Simon and Lazarus from Bethany for the past two weeks. Because there were so many questions about their teaching, he had asked Orly to come and try to answer some of those questions.

Detour. Apparently, I'm not sharing my message, but simply answering questions. Okay. Let's see where this leads! Even though it was not what he expected, he felt certain that the Holy Spirit was guiding him. He moved to the stool that was available beside Ruler Jedidiah and invited the men to ask questions. It seemed that everyone in the room stood, but they were orderly and polite and waited their turn. The first question was, "Is Jesus alive or dead?"

Orly responded, "Jesus died as the Lamb of God. He was crucified and some of you witnessed that crucifixion four years ago. But after three days, Jesus rose from the dead and came to life. Forty days later He returned to Heaven to be with His Father, but He sent the Holy Spirit to guide His followers. He promised that He would return soon as the conquering King of the whole world. So, He is definitely alive and living in Heaven at this time. But we look forward to Him returning to earth soon.

"Now, a fascinating thing to me is that for over a year before His death, He warned His followers. He described His death, burial, and resurrection, and arranged to meet them in Capernaum afterward. But they didn't really understand it until it happened. Does that answer your question?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Next question?"

"Why do you personally believe He is the Messiah?"

“Personally? Okay. How many of you attended Mr. Kenan’s son Seth’s wedding?” Most hands were raised. Orly continued, “I was only nine years old and a little slave boy who belonged to Mr. Kenan. Jesus was at that wedding, and He told a group of us to fill the ceremonial washing jars — all six of them — with water from the well. Then, Jesus told my supervisor, Hosea, to take a cup to Ruler Jedidiah. Hosea was certain that he was going to be severely punished for serving the ruler water. But Ruler Jedidiah, what happened?”

“That was the best wine I had ever tasted, and I remember telling Mr. Kenan so.”

“Most people didn’t know where that wine came from, but I did, and so did my fellow servants. I decided right then that I wanted to find out more about Jesus. It took me several years, but I kept searching until I found people who could explain it to me. Now, I want to be available to explain it to others. I would like the privilege of teaching you what I have learned. And I want to encourage you to keep seeking until you know and understand the truth.”

Ruler Jedidiah asked the men if they wanted to hear more from Orly after Shavuot or would they rather meet with him personally. There was no hesitation as they agreed that they all wanted to hear more.

Orly tried not to be disappointed with the morning. He knew that he had to release the timing to the Holy Spirit and let Him lead step by step. If he rushed, it could be disastrous. He needed to be patient. Afterward Orly stood around and talked with several of the men. He nodded at Gabriela as she joined the group from Mr. Kenan’s and left with the other women. He answered a few more questions and then Ruler Jedidiah reminded the men that they had agreed to let Orly teach. He stated that it wasn’t fair if everyone couldn’t hear the answers. The men agreed and stopped their questions. Orly wasn’t sure how he felt about that since they were so eager to get answers. But he needed to submit to Ruler Jedidiah.

Orly joined the group at Mr. Kenan’s and plopped down beside Gabriela to visit his mother. He felt more exhausted than after working all day and was glad that Jordan was going to lead the group. Orly and Gabriela learned that Seth and Enoch had left on Wednesday to get more of his work supplies and some more items from the house in Jerusalem. They would need to stay until Seth sold his home. Many stopped by to greet Orly and Gabriela. They mentioned how much they enjoyed meeting Gabriela’s parents and rather than making her sad, it made her feel happy that her parents had made such a positive impression. Orly was proud of her because he knew that she was trying not to think about them. Soon, Jordan indicated that it was time for the group meeting, and everyone moved to the courtyard.

Gabriela sat with Mother Ruth and some of the other kitchen slaves, while Orly joined the men on the other side of the aisle. When Mr. Kenan welcomed the group, he announced that he would not be traveling to Shavuot. Anyone who wanted to go would need to walk because Seth had both of his oxcarts in Jerusalem. He then

announced that all were welcome to come on Friday morning so that they could celebrate Pentecost together. The celebration would begin at the fourth hour and would end after the Sabbath meal.

Jordan led the group to sing some Psalms and then began to teach about Jesus saying, "Come unto me, ye who are weary and weighted down and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Orly remembered that he had taught about these words after Hosea had died and his mind wandered to that day. But suddenly he was all ears. Jordan was saying, "Sometimes when we are feeling the weariest, it's because we are right in the center of God's will, and we are being poured out in ministry. But there are other times when we are weary because we are resisting what the Holy Spirit is telling us to do. We are weary because we are busy waging war against the Holy Spirit's direction."

I think Jordan is preaching directly at me. Father, I'm off track. You are going to have to show me how to use my time, where I need to be, and what I'm supposed to do. I want to be completely obedient. I don't want to blame Gabriela, but I'm just not getting enough time to pray and prepare by spending my evenings with her. I know You've called me to marriage and a home, but I need to know how to best use my time. I don't want Gabriela to be unhappy in our marriage. I want to find the right solution, and I know that begins with me seeking You. He was so deep in thought that he almost missed Jordan calling on him to pray a prayer of blessing over the group. He rose quickly and walked to the front.

Gabriela went with the ladies to visit under the shade tree with Mother Ruth. He knew that she didn't mind his staying and talking with the men who gathered around to ask questions. When everyone seemed to be settled, Orly asked Jordan if he would take a walk with him.

The two men walked in silence to the grassy area. They stretched out in the grass and Orly told Jordan, "Man, you were spot on with that sermon. The Holy Spirit is using you to minister to me each time I hear you teach."

"Thanks, Orly. I love teaching. But I am getting restless to be reaching new people groups. In less than a year I'll join my parents and their ministry in Carthage."

"I'll really miss you, but I wouldn't want you to stay if the Holy Spirit is leading you away," agreed Orly.

"Did you have a question?"

"Yeah, I guess the sermon just sorta' brought it to a head. I don't know how I'm supposed to juggle work and marriage and two groups, and I feel God is leading me to start a third. I feel that I'm not getting enough time for prayer and preparation for the messages. And I don't know what to do; I'm just feeling overwhelmed. I don't guess that's a question. It's just the way I'm feeling. I don't want Gabriela to be unhappy, but I've got to have more prayer time and more preparation time. I can't afford to quit work. I need to support my family, but I don't know what to do. I guess I just need your prayers."

“Well, I’m single and have no experience, but I hear you, and I promise you my prayers. I know you’ve asked Mr. Kenan for an hour off on Fridays, maybe you could ask for the whole afternoon off or something. Would that give you more time?”

“More time, less money. But it might work,” mused Orly.

“Orly, I was just thinking about my parent’s marriage. After dinner every night, my mother and dad have a special table where they work together. They outline sermons, plan ministry trips, discuss priorities, discuss who needs ministry, and pray together. They are a complete team. I don’t know Gabriela that well, but I know that she’s serious about following Jesus. Instead of spending more time away from her, could you maybe include her? Could you spend that time together accomplishing more than you could by yourself? Maybe that’s why God brought her here for you. You told me that you wanted your home to be like Mary’s. Then you’re going to have to let Gabriela carry some of the spiritual load, too.”

“Jordan, I think you just hit the nail on the head. You’ll make a great husband someday. I can’t wait to talk with Gabriela about it. Come on, let’s get back to the house. The Sabbath is almost over, and I’ve spent very little time with my mother.”

Orly pulled Jordan up to his feet and they walked back to Mr. Kenan’s yard. Mother was already setting out post-Sabbath trays and Orly and Gabriela helped her set up the kitchen for the servants.

After dinner, Orly and Gabriela walked home in silence. “Are you upset about my deserting you?”

“I wish you had told me that you were going to talk with Jordan. You just disappeared and it took me a while to figure out who else was missing. But I guess, deep down, I wasn’t mad. I trust you to be busy doing ministry, and I try not to get selfish. I promised my abba I wouldn’t be possessive of your time. So, I just focused on enjoying visiting with Mother Ruth and meeting the other members of the group. Everyone is so welcoming here.”

“You are a wise woman. Actually, Jordan and I were talking about you.”

“Now that’s scary. What’s going on, Orly?” Suddenly Gabriela sounded scared.

“Let me get a lamp lit and we can sit in the living room and talk for a while. You need to know that the sermon really hit me hard today. Going back to work, leading two groups, and trying to prepare messages when I would rather spend time with you is overwhelming. I was just feeling stretched too thin. Then I talked with Jordan, and he told me the example that his parents set for him.” Orly shared his thoughts and added, “Gabriela, that’s what I want for us. I can’t do this alone. I need you. I need your input. And that way I don’t take time away from you to pray and study. I don’t want you to hate my ministry. I want it to be our ministry.”

“Oh, Orly, I want that, too. I don’t know how I can help, but you are welcome to study while I sew or something, even if I can’t help.

We can still be together. Your ministry — our ministry — shouldn't pull us apart."

"Let's get some rest tonight, but tomorrow night, right after dinner, let's talk about plans for the groups and where God is leading you in this ministry. Now, I still want to have my early morning prayer time alone with God. But after dinner, we'll pray together as a team and work together. Does that sound right to you?"

"It would be my privilege."

Chapter 21

At dinner that night, Gabriela announced, “Well, you are the talk of the town!”

Orly looked horrified. “What are you saying? What have I done?” he demanded.

“This morning at the well, you were all the women and girls could talk about. And the girls wanted to know if you were married.”

Thankfully, Chaya rescued me and introduced me as your wife.”

“But why? What have I done? I don’t want you to be hurt.”

“Oh, silly, I was just teasing. I’m not hurt. They all heard you speak at the synagogue, and I am so proud to be your wife.”

“I thought I had done something wrong. I haven’t, have I?”

“No. I shouldn’t tease you. But when you are asked to speak at the synagogue, that’s a big deal. I didn’t think about it making you feel uncomfortable.”

“I guess I forgot that the women and children were even there.”

“You can’t see them from the front, can you?”

“No.”

“Well, they were listening, and they were impressed. But now I’ve made you nervous and I didn’t intend that at all. I’m so proud of you.”

“But you must know that I don’t care what anyone else thinks of me — just you and God.”

“I know. And that’s why I love you. I’m sorry I teased. I guess I felt pride that I was married to such an important man. Will you forgive me?”

“Of course. But let’s not get sidetracked by what others think or we’ll never accomplish what God wants of us.” So instead of beginning their week by studying together and planning messages, they spent the evening in repentance and prayer for each other to stay focused on God’s plans and not their own and to not be distracted by other people’s likes or dislikes. It was a somber time of dedicating themselves to God’s ministry.

Each night Orly and Gabriela sat down together after dinner and prayed to determine God’s direction. They talked about what the people at the synagogue needed to hear first. Gabriela didn’t want Ruler Jedidiah to feel left out and suggested that they ask him to read passages from The Law and The Prophets concerning the Messiah. They also discussed what Mr. Kenan’s group needed to hear. Most of them were already followers. They always had a few new people and there were still two or three, including Benjamin, who had not made up their minds. Essentially, it was becoming a fairly mature group. They struggled to remember some of the lessons that Jesus taught his disciples, and they talked about inviting Jordan to teach Mr. Kenan’s group every other week so that they could learn as much as possible about Jesus before he left in the spring. They spent time dreaming of starting a group in their home to minister to the Gentile workers from

the shop. Orly was so grateful that he no longer felt overwhelmed with time constraints, but instead felt that each portion of his day was being used exactly as God intended. This special time drew them into a closer bond than either one of them could have imagined.

Orly asked Palti to come and build the small barn. Palti had a couple of other projects in front of him but would let him know when he was ready to start. Orly needed to finish clearing and then trimming the trees into logs next week.

Mr. Kenan allowed all his Jewish employees, apprentices, and servants to celebrate Shavuot and be off work on Friday and Sunday. He invited, but did not require, them to come to his house to celebrate Pentecost together on Friday. The Metal Shop would remain open, and Lucas would be in charge as usual.

Orly and Gabriela had been invited to Mr. Kenan's house for breakfast early Friday morning to help plan the day. Mrs. Vada welcomed Gabriela to the courtyard table and Orly went inside. Joelle and the children joined the ladies, and they were served a breakfast soup made of oats and fruit and almonds.

Orly was surprised to find Joshua seated at the table with Jordan and Mr. Kenan. He greeted them, and Mr. Kenan explained that he wanted to outline the day and get their input on how best to celebrate Pentecost since he, himself, had never participated. He had only heard about it. While they enjoyed their breakfast, Mr. Kenan outlined his plans and asked the other men to help him fill it in. "I was thinking that we would start out gathered in the courtyard like our regular group time. Then I will share what Shavuot means and the way we have always celebrated it. Then I was wondering if you, Jordan, would talk about the first Pentecost and what happened that day and why we as followers of Jesus celebrate it. Would you be willing to do that?"

"Sure. How much time do you want me to take?"

"I'll let you be the judge of that depending on the group's interest, but I was thinking that would take most of the morning. They won't arrive until the fourth hour, and we've got a feast planned for around noon. Then during the feast, we would ask the group to move to the grass and sit in families. Then sometime after that, I wanted Orly to explain how the followers of Jesus celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem now. And then I thought Joshua would enjoy talking about some of his experiences with the celebration. It's okay to just allow free time for everyone to visit, and I would like us to do some singing —whatever you men want to do. I want the day to be fun, and as similar to the Jerusalem Pentecost as possible. What do you guys think?" ended Mr. Kenan.

All three agreed that it sounded great. Then they began to talk and plan together. Jordan had a question, "Mr. Kenan, and Orly, would it be appropriate for me to ask Gabriela to talk about seeing the ascension of Jesus? I mean, I want to start with the last Seder when Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. Then I'll briefly cover the crucifixion — not go into any details, of course — but then no one has

heard about His return to Heaven. Would you two be okay if I asked Gabriela to share?"

"I'm fine with it," said Orly, "but it's up to Mr. Kenan and Gabriela."

"Sure, Jordan, I would like to hear about it," said Mr. Kenan.

Orly walked out to where the women were visiting and asked Gabriela to join him inside. As they walked, he told her that Jordan had a favor to ask, and he wanted her to know she was completely free to do whatever she wanted to do. She thanked him and followed him into the room. All the men greeted her, and Mr. Kenan explained that they were planning the Shavuot celebration. Then Jordan said, "Gabriela, I'm being tasked with setting the stage for the first Pentecost, and I want to start with the last Seder when Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. I thought this would be the ideal time for you to share what you saw on the day Jesus ascended back to Heaven."

"Oh, my. I wasn't expecting that." Her eyes sought out Orly and he nodded that it was okay with him and silently encouraged her. "Sure. If that's the way the Holy Spirit is leading you, I would be happy to share. I think it's important, and it was really special to me. I'll be glad to share."

Gabriela returned to the courtyard and sat down with Mrs. Vada and Joelle. They could tell that she was upset and waited for her to explain what was going on. Finally, she said quietly, "I've been asked to speak this morning to the group about what I saw when Jesus went back to Heaven. I've never spoken to a group of men."

Joelle quickly assured her, "Remember that Jesus asked the women to tell the apostles what they had seen after He rose from the dead. And several of our groups in Jerusalem are led by women. Don't be afraid. I want to hear about it! So, just look at me and share it with me. You'll do fine."

"I'm just shaking all over. I need to think about what I'll say."

"Remember the Holy Spirit will guide you."

"Thanks, Joelle."

"I spoke to the group after Hosea's death. I surprised myself by feeling quite comfortable. It felt really good to speak up!" said Mrs. Vada. Both of the younger women laughed and agreed that it would certainly be different.

"Please excuse me. I think I'll take a walk and get my thoughts together. Thank you for the words of encouragement. Oh, and Orly approved."

"Good! That's important." Gabriela walked to the little grassy area in the woods and began to pray for direction.

"Where's Gabriela," Orly asked as the men came out to join the women in the courtyard.

"She said she needed to take a walk to get her thoughts together."

"Thanks, I know where to find her." Orly headed to his special place to pray. They sat together for a few minutes, and he told Gabriela how proud he was that she was his partner in ministry. He said that Jordan's mother quite often taught beside his dad and

assured her that she would do fine. He suggested that she look at him and act like she was just talking to him and telling him the story. She laughed and said she would be cross-eyed if she kept one eye on Joelle and one eye on him because that is what she had suggested. They laughed together then Orly pulled her up to her feet and into his arms. "Together, we will serve our Lord. Together," whispered Orly.

By the fourth hour the group was all assembled on the benches. Orly noticed that Rebecca and Nathan, Levi's parents, had joined them, too. Mr. Kenan welcomed the group and began. "Shavuot, or the Feast of First Fruits, was described in Jewish Scripture as being fifty days after Passover and should include no laborious work." Everyone cheered for that. "It was a time of prayer for a good harvest. It was required that the Jewish men would bring a sacrifice of their first fruits to the temple. For three days, the sacrifices and the feasting continued. It was a happy time, and I remember even as a young boy going with my abba to celebrate. Today, as followers of Jesus, its meaning has grown. I've asked Jordan and Gabriela to explain the background for the celebration of Pentecost. That's the name of the first day of Shavuot because it is always fifty days after Passover. Jordan, come and tell us about why we celebrate today." Gabriela's attention was distracted by Mother Ruth and Benjamin joining the group. *Oh my, what will Mother Ruth think?*

Jordan came to the front of the courtyard. "While I was too young to be there, my dad and the other apostles have told me that on the night Jesus shared His last Seder meal with the apostles, He told them in detail about his upcoming ordeal. He told them He would be arrested that very night. But He also told them He would send His Holy Spirit to dwell inside of them. The Apostles knew that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, but they never imagined this could happen to them. He was crucified the next day, and for three days the apostles and other followers hid in fear. But on Sunday, Jesus came back to life. For forty days, Jesus appeared to many of his followers and taught His apostles many things. He had a new body that wasn't governed by earthly rules. He could come and go through locked doors, and He would appear and disappear at will. He was definitely alive. I know, because He ate and drank with us, and I could touch Him and hug Him just like I did before He was crucified. He told the apostles to meet Him in Capernaum and they all traveled there. Jesus met them and spent a morning with them, eating breakfast on the beach. Then He told them to meet Him in Jerusalem and He disappeared again. Now, I'm going to turn it over to Gabriela, and let her continue the story because she was an eyewitness to this part."

Gabriela timidly stepped to the front of the group, took a deep breath, and addressed them as if she had done this all her life. She felt the Holy Spirit guiding her as she told her story. The crowd was eager to hear, but also fascinated that Mr. Kenan was allowing a woman to speak to the group.

Gabriela looked at Orly and then at Joelle while she spoke. "As many of you know, I was raised in Bethany which is very close to

Jerusalem — closer than Nazareth is to here. We lived a few houses down from our best friends, Mr. Lazarus, Miss Mary, and Miss Martha. You met them at the wedding. One afternoon, after Jesus' crucifixion, messengers came and asked if His apostles could spend the night. The Apostle James had his family with him and since Jonathan and Jenay were close to my age, his family spent the night at our house. We played together while the women visited. Jesus had taken the apostles into the mountains to be alone. The next day — it was a Wednesday — I asked my mother if I could take Jonathan and Jenay, and my two little brothers for a picnic up a mountain trail behind Miss Martha's house. The mothers all agreed and we five set out. We played in the stream for a while and then hiked up the mountain. It was about noon when my little brothers yelled for us to hide. We quickly scrambled into the bushes, and I tried to find out what they had seen. I suspected they were just trying to scare us. They were only four years old and were quite a handful. They pointed to a grassy area ahead where Jesus was teaching His apostles. The boys knew that we shouldn't disturb them. We stayed hidden in the bushes trying to decide if we should turn around and go home, or just stay on the trail and walk past them. They were standing really close to the trail, so we didn't know what to do. We couldn't hear what Jesus was saying to the apostles, but it looked like He was blessing each one. He was laying His hands on them and speaking to each one individually. Then while we watched, Jesus just rose up into the sky like He was floating. His hands were stretched out toward the apostles like He was still blessing them. We just kept watching until we couldn't see Him anymore. He got tinier and tinier as He went higher and higher. Then He disappeared into some clouds. When I looked back at the apostles, there were two men dressed in the brightest white robes you've ever seen. They were talking to the apostles. Then those two men disappeared, and the apostles fell on their knees and started worshipping and singing Psalms of praise. We still didn't know what to do but were too surprised to move. The apostles started singing Psalm 150, and Jared, that's my little brother, jumped out of his hiding place and ran toward the apostles. Of course, Jabet followed, and I knew that I was going to get in big trouble for disturbing the men, so I chased them. Jonathan and Jenay chased me because they didn't want me to get in trouble. And we all ended up together in that grassy area. The apostles weren't mad at us at all. They took our hands and started dancing with us and singing Psalm 150 over and over. We danced and sang until we were hoarse and then sat and ate our snacks together. It was an incredible experience that I will never forget."

Jordan began to lead the crowd to sing Psalm 150 together,

"Praise the LORD,
Praise God in his sanctuary;
Praise him in his mighty heavens.
Praise him for his acts of power;

Praise him for his surpassing greatness.
Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
Praise him with the harp and lyre,
Praise him with timbrel and dancing,
Praise him with the strings and pipe,
Praise him with the clash of cymbals,
Praise him with resounding cymbals.
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.”

Orly and Joshua led everyone to get up and sing and dance and celebrate. They danced through the yard and sang the Psalm over and over. They dropped to the grass exhausted.

Mr. Kenan announced that there was food for all, and they could feast and move to the grassy areas to sit in groups. He quickly met with Jordan, Orly, and Joshua to rearrange the lineup for the afternoon. They would start with Jordan and then Orly. But Mr. Kenan warned Joshua that he had to be finished before sundown because of the Sabbath. Orly told Gabriela how proud he was of her. They sat together on the blanket with Jordan. Mother Ruth and Benjamin had designed a table that was loaded with fruits and raw vegetables; rounds of bread from rye, wheat, and barley, major crops in Galilee; and surrounded by lots of butter and goat cheese.

Mother Ruth praised Gabriela for having the courage to share her story. “How exciting to be one of the last people to see Jesus alive on this earth!” Gabriela had never thought of it that way, and she thanked God for her new mother-in-law.

As the families began to finish their feast, Jordan stood and spoke. “I was only ten when Jesus was crucified. When Jesus ascended into Heaven the day that Gabriela just shared with us — thank you Gabriela — He told the apostles to go into Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come. They didn’t know when that would happen. They worshipped and prayed together in the upper room and at the temple. Ten days later, on the first day of Shavuot, they were praying together with a lot of other followers. I was there with my mother and sister. Suddenly, there was a sound like a really strong wind, and we were frightened and ran to our parents. The wind was blowing inside the house and then flames of fire landed on the heads of the followers. It didn’t seem to burn them or hurt, but they became very, very happy and were filled with energy and excitement. Now, the apostles had thought that only they would receive the Holy Spirit, but all the followers who had accepted Jesus as their Messiah received Him that day. They all ran out into the street and began telling the good news. Jerusalem was filled with visitors who were celebrating Shavuot and thousands heard the good news. One of the interesting things was that every foreigner heard the good news in his or her own language. So, the streets were filled with people preaching and singing and dancing and it was a grand celebration. Peter began to preach right in front of the temple. The streets were packed and about three

thousand accepted Jesus as their Messiah that day. Many of those people traveled back to their homes all over the world and continued to spread the good news. Those that remained in Jerusalem began to start home groups like this one. And that is why we celebrate Pentecost.

“I’m going to ask Orly to come and tell how Pentecost has been celebrated since that special day, but first I want to invite you to stand and stretch your legs and enjoy more of this wonderful food.”

After a few minutes break, Orly asked Jordan to lead the group in singing a Psalm to get them settled down again. Orly shared about the way Pentecost is celebrated today and how the apostles spread out all over Jerusalem’s main roads to preach the good news. “Followers of Jesus watch the crowds and whenever they see someone kneeling to pray, they join them and minister to them however they can. Then usually at sunset, the apostles encourage everyone to visit a home group.” He kept his presentation brief so that Joshua would have plenty of time to tell about his experiences with Pentecost.

Orly thought Joshua would emphasize the attacks and the dangers, but he was surprised and pleased that Joshua told about seeing a fellow slave kneeling in the street and feeling that he should go and see if he had any questions. He shared about getting to pray with him as he asked Jesus to be his Messiah. Joshua ended his message by asking that everyone stand and sing a Psalm with Jordan. “But,” said Joshua, “if there’s anyone here that wants to make Jesus your Messiah, just kneel and someone will come and talk with you about how to do that.”

Jordan led the group in singing a joyful Psalm of worship and the crowd spread out to cover the entire yard. Mr. Kenan looked very, very satisfied and told the men how much he appreciated them, and Gabriela, sharing. He invited everyone to stay and celebrate the Sabbath meal with them, and Ruth and Benjamin headed back into the kitchen to make sure that preparations were going as planned. Orly stuck his head in the kitchen and asked if he was needed but was quickly shooed away and told to sit with his bride. Orly and Gabriela enjoyed sitting together under the shade tree and fellowshiping with the other followers of Jesus. It had been a very happy day. As the sun set, Mrs. Vada lit the Sabbath candles in the courtyard and Mr. Kenan prayed a prayer of blessing over all their guests.

Soon after dinner, Orly and Gabriela walked home hand in hand. It had been a long but special day, and they needed to discuss what Orly would share with the group tomorrow, since it was still Shavuot. Gabriela asked, “Was there anything that was left out today that you need to cover?”

“I don’t think so, but I’m pretty sure that the Holy Spirit gave me a message yesterday morning that I haven’t had time to share with you.” They discussed his planned message and called it a day.

The synagogue was closed because Ruler Jedidiah was in Jerusalem, so they had a leisurely breakfast before heading back to Mr. Kenan’s house. They visited with Mother Ruth and Benjamin and

complimented them on the great job of feeding so many yesterday. “Benjamin is an organizer. He’s really good at knowing what can be prepared ahead of time and assigning certain people to do certain jobs. I would just rather do it all myself — but I’m learning!”

“Hey, I thought you were supposed to be teaching Benjamin, not the other way around!” Orly teased as he hugged his mother.

Since they had some extra time to visit, he invited Benjamin to take a walk with him. As they walked, Orly asked, “How do you like cooking? Is it what you expected?”

“Oh, it’s better than what I expected. And your mother is the greatest. She keeps me on my toes, but she never criticizes me when I mess up. She’s just so different.”

“She’s always been sweet, but since she is letting the Holy Spirit lead her, she seems to be even more encouraging and patient.”

“Maybe so.”

“So, you are just past your one-year mark. Have you thought about what you might want to do?”

“Not really. I’m just focusing on learning from your mother and taking advantage of this sweet opportunity. I think it’s the happiest I’ve been in my life. Of course, I don’t remember much before I became a slave. But it sure beats street life!”

“I’m glad. Did you prepare that breakfast soup? It was delicious and I don’t think it’s one of my mother’s recipes.”

“Yeah. It’s the only thing Mr. Zeke’s cook made that I liked. I didn’t have the recipe, so I just made it up. I’m glad you liked it.”

“Hey, it’s time for group. We’ve got to get back!”

They arrived at the courtyard as Mr. Kenan welcomed the group. He reminded them that it was still Shavuot and led them in a prayer asking for God to bless the work of their hands and thanking Him for all His provisions. Jordan led the group in a Psalm and suddenly, Orly heard the Holy Spirit give him a different message. He began to share very personally with the group. “I have missed sharing with you for this past month. I want to thank Jordan for his excellent teaching. I believe we have all grown from it. As you know, during this past month I have become a husband, taken on some teaching at the synagogue, and am trying to be a good employee of Mr. Kenan’s. That’s a lot. When Jordan shared his message on weariness last week, I knew that God was speaking to me. I talked with Jordan afterward and he shared with me that his parents had discovered a way to keep their marriage alive and fresh and vital. Jordan’s mother and dad work together after dinner every night preparing the sermons, praying together, setting priorities for ministry, and deciding who needs their help the most. I want you to know that that’s the kind of home that Gabriela and I want to establish. This was our first week attempting to work together as co-ministers. The same Holy Spirit that resides inside of me, also resides in her, and she has been most valuable to me. She has much insight to share, and I’m so grateful that God sent her to me. I was so proud of her having the courage to share with you yesterday. Now, this is not the message that she helped me to prepare. The Holy Spirit just

prompted me to say this. But let's remember that God created all men and women to use the talents that He has given them to reach the whole world and teach them the New Way. I realize anew how much I need a wife to remind me of those things that I forget, and to give me a woman's point of view. After all, half of the world is women! I want to say thank you to my mother who has been a great source of encouragement to me. I want to say thank you to Mrs. Vada for encouraging me and stretching me. And now I want to say thank you to Gabriela for being obedient to the Holy Spirit's leading, joining me in daily ministry, and for having the courage to stand and share publicly yesterday."

The group cheered and agreed with Orly.

"Now, let me share just a little bit more from Jesus' life. One time Jesus was teaching, and the apostles were arguing over who was the greatest in the kingdom of God. Jesus took a small child and held him in His arms. He said, 'Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven. And whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.' I want you to know that greatness is not necessarily for those who stand in the front and bring the message. Sometimes greatness is just an encouraging word, a smile, a welcome, a hug, a listening ear. I believe that I'm looking at a bunch of great people in God's kingdom. Go out and be great. Jesus showed His greatness by washing the apostle's feet. How will you show your greatness this week? Let's stand for prayer. Father, I am so humbled that You have sent so many people to help me grow and learn. Thank You for the men and women who have played such a vital part in my development. Help us to love others as You have loved us and therefore fulfill Your command. Bless us as we serve others this week." Orly called Gabriela up to stand beside him and he held her hand tightly as many from the group gathered around them to ask questions or comment on the message.

They visited with Jordan and asked if he would be willing to share a message with the group every other week until he left. They wanted to learn from him but didn't want the group to become dependent on him. Jordan agreed that he would enjoy that very much.

At the post-Sabbath dinner, there was much speculation as to when Seth and Enoch might return. Mr. Kenan felt that they would not leave Jerusalem until after Shavuot, which meant they couldn't possibly leave until Monday, and with heavy loads on the oxen, Thursday would probably be the earliest that Joelle should expect them. He knew that she was worried, but he didn't want her anticipating their arrival when it was probably too early.

Orly was so glad to have the day off on Sunday. He was eager to finish clearing the land for the barn but felt that that would violate Shavuot rules of no laborious work. So instead, he and Gabriela enjoyed the day together. They decided on another fishing picnic and went down by the creek for their evening meal.

Chapter 22

Each day, after Orly left for work, Gabriela walked to the well for water and to catch up on the news. Then she went to the market to get whatever she needed for the day. About noon she would begin her dinner preparations. How she looked forward to being with Orly each evening and sharing their ministry together.

The following Sabbath, Orly greeted Ruler Jedidiah and they exchanged pleasantries about Shavuot. As Orly took a seat with the other men, he began to think. *I wonder how many of the Jewish laws we are supposed to continue to keep. Where is the line? I'm still Jewish, but Jesus came to set us free from the Law. This is not the time or place to be confused. These people are here to ask questions and I mustn't fail them.* As Ruler Jedidiah led them in a Psalm, Orly heard the Holy Spirit very clearly reminding him to rely on Him. Orly relaxed and prayed that God would guide him step-by-step this morning and not let him get off track. By the time Ruler Jedidiah called for Orly to come to the front to answer questions, he felt confident and ready.

Orly walked to the front and said that he hoped they had enjoyed Shavuot and was praying that God would bless all of their harvests whether that was traditional grain, or in whatever line of work Jehovah had placed them. Then he invited questions. Most of the men stood and Orly called on the tallest man in the second row. "I know that you believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but I still don't understand how he did all those miracles. I mean, he has brothers and sisters in Nazareth. Wasn't he just human?"

Orly knew that this was the question that had almost gotten Jesus killed when He spoke about it in the Nazareth synagogue. But Orly felt the Holy Spirit guide him. "Let's deal with the first question first. I believe you want to know how He did the healing, and raising people from the dead, and controlling the storms. Am I correct?"

"Yes."

Orly launched into his explanation. "Jesus was made up of three layers just like we are: His physical body, His inner self, and His core. But unlike us, His core was filled with the Holy Spirit." He explained that Jesus said multiple times that it was not Him doing the miracles. It was God inside of Him accomplishing them.

The men were nodding and agreeing with Orly when he suddenly felt a nudge from the Holy Spirit to stop right there and ask a question of his own. He looked around at the men and asked, "Have any of you actually seen Jesus perform a miracle?" Several of the men stood. Orly called on each one and let them share what they had seen. He felt that the Holy Spirit was at work in their hearts and minds. He needed to leave it there until next Sabbath.

On Tuesday at the noon break, Orly ran to the synagogue. Ruler Jedidiah was thrilled with Orly's interaction with the people on the Sabbath. He stated, "Your style is so similar to Jesus Himself."

"Have you heard Jesus teach?" asked Orly incredulously.

"Of course. He used to teach here when he was on his way to Nazareth to visit his mother. The synagogue in Nazareth wasn't very open to his teachings, so he spoke here four or five times before his mother joined his group. I also heard him teach in Capernaum once. He was an amazing teacher. You have that same quiet, calm demeanor that makes people feel comfortable asking you questions."

"Thank you. I guess since it's the same Holy Spirit guiding us, our styles would be similar. I was surprised that so many had seen Him perform miracles. Now I understand. Ruler Jedidiah, I have to get back to work, but I have a question."

"Yes, Orly, how can I help you?"

"I need to know if I'm supposed to just be available to answer questions, or if I should prepare a message that would help everyone understand things in an organized way. I'm afraid that we are just skipping around, picking and choosing pieces out of Jesus' life. I would like to do more systematic teaching about who Jesus was, why He had to die, and what it means to be a follower of His."

"I hear you. I thought it would be best if we started out by answering pressing questions, but I see the advantage of telling a more complete story of his life. Everyone seems to be so interested. I think I would be comfortable if you just taught as God leads you, and we'll see where that goes. You might still have a question-and-answer time at the end. How does that sound?"

"I'm not opposed to just answering questions, but until Kobe explained things to me and connected all the dots, I didn't realize that Jesus died for me and that I needed to respond to that."

"Let's plan on your doing a bit of both this Sabbath. Will that work for you?"

"Yes, sir. And shalom."

"Shalom."

The week passed quickly, and on Friday Orly was able to finish clearing the trees for the barn he wanted Palti to build. He began trimming off the branches and was almost late for Sabbath dinner. "Something smells wonderful," Orly announced as he came into the house and greeted Gabriela. They were just finishing up their meal when they heard someone at the door.

Enoch assured them that everything was fine. "Master Seth and I arrived home just before sunset, and I asked Master Kenan if I could come and talk with Mrs. Gabriela." Orly invited him in to sit in the living room. Gabriela could tell that he was nervous because while he was Orly's friend, he was still a slave and not accustomed to being invited inside. "Mrs. Gabriela, I came to tell you that as Master Seth and I were approaching Jerusalem, we saw your parents and friends."

"Oh, Enoch, how were they? So, they were close to home? How much more did they lack?" Gabriela blurted out.

Enoch smiled, "I knew that you would be eager to hear all their news, so I pulled the oxcart over and Master Seth was quite agreeable to taking a break. We were only about an hour out of Jerusalem. Everyone was well and the ladies were enjoying riding in the donkey wagon. Your four brothers rode in my oxcart to Jerusalem and then walked home. Your parents and friends were going to spend the Sabbath camping."

"That would have been the week before Shavuot?" asked Gabriela.

"Yes, ma'am."

"So, they made really good time. And everyone was well?"

"Yes, ma'am, and they said to tell you how much they enjoyed the wedding. And I wanted to tell you that your little brothers really liked riding in the oxcart."

"Oh, Enoch. Thank you for bringing me news from home. That makes me feel so much better knowing that they are home and safe."

Enoch seemed pleased with her response, but shyly suggested that he needed to get back to Master Kenan's.

"We'll see you tomorrow, but thanks for letting us know tonight. It means so much to us. You are a good friend," said Orly.

"Shalom."

"Shalom, Enoch," replied Orly and Gabriela together.

"Oh, Orly. That was such a gift from God. I feel so much better knowing that they made it safely."

"I know. Me, too. That was so kind of Enoch to stop and check on them."

"I'm just glad he saw them as fast as he drives that oxcart! Have you got your message finished for the synagogue tomorrow?"

"Yes, I think, unless the Holy Spirit tells me something different before then. I want to go ahead and talk about the circles that we all have and how we can be filled with the Holy Spirit, too. I'm feeling pretty tired. Are you ready for sleep?"

"I'm so happy," said Gabriela as tears streamed down her face.

"Gabriela, what's wrong? Why are you crying?" asked Orly tenderly.

Gabriela burst out in fresh tears, "I don't know, I just am! But I assure you they are happy tears." She wiped her face with her robe and assured Orly that everything was okay. She was just feeling really emotional. Orly blew out the Sabbath candles and the lamps, except for the one they would take to their room.



Orly and Gabriela walked to the synagogue together. People all along the way greeted them. It was a happy feeling to be part of this community, and Gabriela seemed to already know everyone by name. After Ruler Jedidiah had led some Psalms and introduced him, Orly came to the seat beside Ruler Jedidiah and sat down. He began, "Last

week many of you shared about miracles that you had seen Jesus perform, and each one of you mentioned a longing to learn more. I shared with you several weeks ago that after I saw Jesus turn the water into wine, I searched and searched to find out more about Him. Today, I want to talk about how you and I were created. You see, God made us in the same pattern that He made Jesus. We all have bodies. Some prettier than others, some stronger, some shorter, some taller, but we all have physical bodies. Jesus did, too. Then, we all have inner selves. That's the place where we think, pray, wish, and plan, and it's like our 'real' selves. But deep down in the very center of our being, we have a core. Now, I've told you that Jesus was born with His inner core filled with the Holy Spirit. But guess what you and I are born with?"

The men all began to look to one another, but no one knew the answer. One man hazarded a guess, "Sin?"

"Good guess, but no." Orly gave them a few minutes to think about their inner core. Then he told them, "It's empty. Absolutely and completely empty." The crowd loved Orly's way of making them feel comfortable. "Now we don't usually go around talking about feeling empty, yet everyone has this empty core deep inside that is searching for something. Some try to fill it with riches, or power, or work, or play. But if you are honest, you feel that empty spot inside of you that just can't be filled by anything — at least not anything on earth. Jesus told the apostles at His last Seder that He would send the Holy Spirit to fill their empty core. He told them that the Holy Spirit would do several things for them: He would dwell inside them and guide them, He would teach them what they needed to know, He would remind them of what Jesus had taught them, and He would tell them the future. Now think about it. Would you rather have an empty core, or would you prefer to have God's Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you and guiding you through life? Next week, we'll talk about Jesus being the Messiah sent from God."

Orly needed to talk with Ruler Jedidiah afterward, so hung around while the crowd dispersed. Gabriela walked on with the women to Mr. Kenan's house. "Ruler Jedidiah, I was wondering if you could help me with the message next week."

"I will try, but you are doing a great job, and I am certainly learning from you. I think everyone is."

"Thank you. As you know, I don't have access to the Scriptures and yet I would like to use the passage from Isaiah that describes the crucifixion. Do you know which one I mean?"

"I think you are referring to Isaiah 53. That's the one that talks about the Messiah suffering for our sins. I will certainly pull it down and make sure it is ready for you to read. Is there anything else?"

"Ruler Jedidiah, I can't read. I ..., I was hoping that you would read it for the people to hear."

"Oh, I understand. I forgot. You speak like such a well-educated man. I consider you a peer."

“Thank you, sir. But that’s what I’m trying to teach. It’s not me that’s speaking. It’s the Holy Spirit telling me what to say. Sometimes I’m surprised by what comes out. But it’s always what someone needs to hear.”

“Yes, I can see that,” Ruler Jedidiah said thoughtfully. He seemed to be deep in thought. He roused himself and promised Orly that he would read the passage he had requested for next week.

Orly walked quickly toward Mr. Kenan’s and sat down between his mother and Gabriela. They were busy talking with Joelle and Seth and were surrounded by the four children. Orly began to wrestle with Seth’s oldest son, Jonathan, but Mother reminded him that it was the Sabbath, and he should behave himself. So, Orly conceded defeat and let him win. “You are a man. Why do you have to listen to your mother?” demanded Jonathan.

“Because even when you are old and gray, the Scripture says that we are still required to honor our mothers and dads. So, be wise and listen to yours, too!”

“I will,” he yelled as he ran off to find other battles to fight.

“Slow down!” called Joelle, his mother. “It’s the Sabbath!”

“Welcome back, Seth. I hear you bought Lucas’ house.”

“Yeah, it seemed to be the right size for us, and just as soon as he gets it cleared out, we can move right in. He’s kept it in great shape.”

“I actually looked it over for Gabriela and me, and decided it was too big for us. I’m glad it worked for you.”

“So, you don’t think it’s wrong for me to buy a Gentile house?”

“It’s just a house. If you keep the little statues of his Roman gods, now that’s going to be a problem!” said Orly.

Seth laughed and replied, “I promise, that won’t be an issue. Besides I’m sure he will take them with him.”

Joelle grabbed Gabriela’s hand and declared, “We are going to have so much fun. I love having girlfriends around me. Sometimes the children just drive me crazy, and I need friends.”

“I’ll leave you ladies to discuss your child rearing and I’ll go get ready for group,” said Orly as he headed to the courtyard.

Soon Mr. Kenan welcomed everyone and especially welcomed Seth and Enoch back from Jerusalem. Seth shared, “There’s something happening in Jerusalem that might be significant, and I just wanted to share it with the group. Since Passover, there have been no attacks on the home groups. There have been no raids or arrests that we know of. I was able to visit with the Apostles James and John, my cousins, and learned that there has been unprecedented growth in the home groups. They are highly respected by everyone in the city. The Romans call Jesus’ followers the New Way. And New Way groups are springing up all over the city and spreading all over the world. We were able to participate in the Pentecost celebration and felt no fear and saw no problems.”

Jordan led the group in singing Psalms and turned it over to Orly. As Orly spoke, tears ran down his face. “When I was in Jerusalem for

Passover, I feared that it would be my last time because the persecution was so great. Followers were being arrested and many of them, men and women, were sentenced to stoning. Thank you, Seth, for sharing that good news. I hope it continues. We serve a mighty God.

“I shared at synagogue this morning that the Holy Spirit, who resides inside those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, has several jobs. One of them is to tell us what to expect in the future and another one is to remind us of what Jesus taught. I want us to spend a few weeks talking about what Jesus taught about the future. Once Jesus and His apostles visited the temple and were looking at its magnificent structure. Jesus told them that one day it would all be torn down and there would not be a single stone left on top of another. The apostles obviously wanted to know when this would happen. Jesus replied that God alone knew the time, and He would let us know when we needed that information. I want us to think about that phrase this week and ask ourselves this question: Are we fretting about things that we need to leave alone? Are you worried about the future or how something will turn out? Is there something that you need to release to God and let Him do the guiding? I believe I’m talking to myself this morning because I didn’t expect this news from Seth. I wasn’t expecting good news. I had forgotten that God is in charge, and He can do anything. I am so excited that He took what looked like a terrible situation and made it better. That’s incredible. He’s a miracle-working God and we can trust Him with our lives. Let’s close in prayer. Father, we come to You humbled that we are so small and weak, inadequate, and unworthy. Yet, You direct our paths and allow us to share our story with the whole world. Bless us this week as we release to You our concerns and worries and fears. In Jesus’ name I pray.”

After a time of answering questions, Jordan asked Orly if they could talk. Orly remembered to let Gabriela know, and she smiled radiantly as she nodded. “So, you asked me to teach the group every other week,” said Jordan tersely even before they reached the grassy spot.

“Yes,” said Orly. “Is that a problem?”

“No, it’s a question. You said you wanted to start a series about what Jesus taught about the future. I just need to know whether I’m supposed to bow out, or whether you want me to teach different things, or whether you want me to join you. I’m just confused.”

“You mean you can’t read my mind?” asked Orly teasingly.

“No, I can’t. Clue me in.” Jordan said with a distinct trace of frustration in his voice.

“First of all, I apologize. I actually didn’t know that I was going to do that until I was teaching at the synagogue. While I was listing all the things the Holy Spirit would do, I felt it was time to teach this group what Jesus said would happen before He returned. I didn’t even think about it, and I have no idea where I’m headed. I’m not even sure I remember what Jesus taught, so I definitely need your help.”

“Well, I could meet with you and teach you what Jesus taught and let you teach it to the group.”

“I’ve got another idea. Do you mind teaching the group about end times next week? I mean, unless the Holy Spirit is leading you differently.”

“Well, I had planned to teach a series of parables, but we’ve talked before about making sure this group was prepared for Jesus’ return. Let me pray about it. But do you still want me to prepare the message for next week?”

“That part is definite. Yes. I want you to teach the group next week. I wasn’t thinking and don’t want to put you in a box. Let Him lead you to whatever He desires. But then we definitely need to meet if I’m going to teach on this subject. I’ve forgotten more than I learned from Kobe.”

“Sure. Sorry I got upset. I just felt frustrated because I was looking forward to teaching and that’s what I thought you wanted. I’ll be happy to teach next week. And I’ll trust that the Holy Spirit will lead me to the right subject matter. But then let’s get together and decide about the next message.”

“Sounds like a plan. And thanks, Jordan, for letting me know that I offended you. I didn’t do it intentionally.”

“I know, and you are forgiven. I promised Joshua a walk. I don’t know what he’s got on his mind. I’ll catch you at dinner.” Orly was deep in thought wondering how in the world he would be able to teach the group without Jordan. He was younger than Orly, but much, much wiser spiritually. Orly wondered again what it would be like to grow up with both parents serving Jesus. Suddenly, the thought crossed Orly’s mind that he would like to talk with Mr. Kenan about releasing his mother from slavery. He said a quick prayer that God would show him the right time to talk with Mr. Kenan.

When Orly arrived at the shop on Sunday morning, Seth and his men were already unloading an oxcart filled with tools and supplies Seth had brought from Jerusalem. Orly helped Seth carry some heavy boxes to the back warehouse. Lucas called for him to get busy. Orly grinned and turned toward his work bench. *Yes, Jonathan, there’s always a boss or parents or somebody telling you what to do!*

Palti stopped by the shop late on Friday afternoon and said that he would be ready to start on the barn on Sunday if Orly was ready for him. Orly asked if he could meet him today at the eleventh hour to look it over, and he agreed. When Orly checked with Lucas about what project to start since he only had less than a half hour, Lucas asked Orly to walk outside with him. “Orly, I’m really struggling with this new arrangement of living with my son. We’ve only been there a week and I don’t see any way out of it, but I’m just really frustrated. He thinks I’m too old and won’t let me help with anything. He has slaves to do everything, and I just feel useless. They are treating my wife the same way. We’d like to buy a quiet little place for just the two of us and let us take care of ourselves. I was wondering if you would pray for us or

something. I'm miserable and think I've made a terrible mistake. I don't know what to do."

"I'm so sorry, Lucas. I thought this would be ideal for you two, and you seemed so excited to get rid of the big house and all the work that went with it."

"Yes, I am glad to be rid of all that. It was too much. But I wish I had a little place to putter around and feel useful."

"Have you talked with your son about this?"

"I've tried, but he just laughs and tells me to enjoy my old age. He doesn't understand at all."

"Lucas, don't you get some sense of satisfaction from your work?"

"Yes, but I feel that I'm getting too old to do the things I used to do. This work is really heavy and hard on my back. Oh, it's hard growing old. Too old and too young! You know what I'd really like?"

"What?"

"I'd like to split my time so that I work here every morning when I'm fresh and then have a place of my own to grow a garden and take care of a yard. But my son has slaves for all that."

"Lucas, I've got to run, but let me pray about it, and I'll definitely talk with you on Sunday at noon. Or better yet, could you stop by my house after the Sabbath? We always eat dinner with Mr. Kenan, but I could meet you around the second hour of the night. In fact, would your wife like to walk over with you? You would both be welcome, and Gabriela and I would look forward to it."

"Thanks, Orly. I'll plan to see you after your Sabbath, and I will invite Amata."

"Okay, gotta' run." Orly literally ran to Palti's shop. The two men walked to Orly's. Gabriela greeted them with two cups of fruit juice. She had been surprised to see Palti and darted back inside to prepare her another glass of juice. She wondered if she should wait in the courtyard or whether she would be welcome to go and give her input for the barn. She decided to wait in the courtyard. After a few minutes the men returned. Palti said that he had all the information he needed and left after thanking her for the juice.

"Well?" said Gabriela snippily.

"Well, what?" asked Orly innocently.

"Well, when are you going to tell me the plans you made with Palti or am I just going to be left out of everything?" snapped Gabriela.

"Left out? Gabriela, I told you that Palti was going to build us a barn and it would have room for one ox and two goats and a place to store some supplies. The only thing different that Palti suggested today is that we should add a little room in the back to store the oxcart. I told him to go ahead and build it, but we can't afford the oxcart just yet."

"Oh, Orly, I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm so crazy. I just felt left out. I guess I was looking forward to greeting you and sitting in the courtyard together and oh, Orly! The bread! Get the bread out of the oven!"

Orly ran to the oven and pulled out the very crisp Sabbath bread. It wasn't exactly burned, but it was not Gabriela's usual wonderful challah bread. She burst into tears and cried and cried. Orly assured her that it would be fine. But he was worried about what was going on with his wife. They only had a few minutes left before the Sabbath began, and apparently, she hadn't started cooking the vegetables. He quickly helped her by slicing some potatoes thin enough to cook them quickly in the skillet over the open fire outside. By the time he returned, she had sliced some onions and cucumbers and set out the butter and some jelly that she had made. It wasn't their usual Sabbath meal, but it was delicious because it was just the two of them. They discussed the message for the synagogue and Gabriela seemed like her old self. "Gabriela, I talked with Lucas a little bit at work today. He and his wife are really struggling with giving up their house."

"Oh, that's sad. Don't they like not having all that responsibility?"

"Yes, they are glad to be rid of that huge house, but apparently their son won't let them do anything. And Lucas and his wife are missing the things they are accustomed to doing. I mean, he wants to raise a garden, and take care of the grounds. I don't know what his wife likes to do, but they feel totally useless at their son's. I asked Lucas what he would really like, and he said they were talking about buying a small house and cutting back his hours at Mr. Kenan's shop. He would work every morning at the shop, and then come home and putter around the house. What if we hired Lucas to come over and grow a garden and take care of our animals? I don't know what Mrs. Amata likes to do, but maybe she could help you in some way for a couple of hours every afternoon. Then they could go home to their son's for dinner and leave the two of us to be alone. That would be the best of both worlds."

Gabriela pulled away from Orly and said, "This is because I burned the bread, isn't it?"

"No! Gabriela, what's wrong? Why are you so upset? You are doing just fine taking care of us. I talked with Lucas before you overcooked the bread. It had nothing to do with it. But I do think that when you have a little one, and we have a barn of animals to care for, you are going to need some help. It worked out really well to have Chaya helping me for just a few hours a day and I think it will be a help to you. I'm not suggesting this to hurt you. I'm trying to be a good husband and take care of you."

"I'm sorry, Orly. I'm just feeling really emotional, and I'm not thinking straight. Can we take a walk or something. I need some fresh air."

"Sure. Do you want to walk down to the stream?"

"Yes. Can you get a lantern and I'll grab a blanket and we can just sit outside for a while. Maybe that will clear my head."

They sat together for a while, and Gabriela seemed to calm down. Orly said, "Gabriela, I did something that I probably shouldn't have done. Please don't get mad at me. Lucas and I can't really talk at the shop because everyone hears everything. But if we walk outside,

then we're not at our benches, and that's not a good example to the other workers. I invited him over to talk. He's coming tomorrow night, and he might bring his wife. He's going to ask her."

"So you are going to offer him a job tomorrow night."

"No, he asked me to pray for him, and we both know that what he needs to fill that empty feeling is Jesus. But a man also needs to feel useful."

"So, you didn't promise him a job?"

"No, I didn't even mention him working for me. I hadn't even thought about it then. I thought about it as I was walking home and I think it's a good idea, but I don't want to do anything that will displease you."

"But you invited them over."

"Yes, I invited them over without asking you first. I shouldn't have done that, and I apologize. I can't very well cancel now since I don't know where his son lives, but we can meet wherever is most comfortable for you, and that would probably be the courtyard."

"Oh, Orly, we prayed that this house would be used for ministry, and you are welcome to invite anyone at any time. I'm sorry I got upset. Do you want me to prepare something to serve?"

"We'll be just getting back from post-Sabbath dinner and there won't be time. I think we'll just put a bowl of fruit on the table. I don't think that would constitute eating a meal together. I don't know. What do you think?"

Gabriela began to giggle. "We could offer them crispy challah bread with jelly and tell them it's a Jewish thing."

"I'm sure they would love it! I didn't think it was half bad!"

"Well, you ate enough! It must not have been terrible."

Orly was relieved that she was laughing again. "So, should I talk to Lucas and his wife about helping around here for a few hours each day, or not?"

"I guess so, if you think that's best." They started up the trail, and he helped her avoid the logs he had stacked for Palti.

Orly got up early to pray and went over his plans for the synagogue message. He then returned to the house to find Gabriela nibbling on a piece of the crusty bread. She had set out his bowl of olives and oil, but said she was feeling a little queasy.

Orly was eager to get to the synagogue. They both knew that today was critical for the people to connect Jesus to the ancient Jewish Scripture, and Orly wasn't exactly sure how it would all play out.

Ruler Jedidiah welcomed the people to worship, and they sang several Psalms. Orly noticed that the theme of the songs focused on the Messiah. He was pleased that Ruler Jedidiah seemed to understand the importance of this message. Ruler Jedidiah asked the people to stand for the reading of the Holy Scriptures. He read Isaiah 53:

Who hath believed our message? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who *among them* considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke *was due*? And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his seed*, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Ruler Jedidiah indicated that the people could sit down and invited Orly to come. Orly came and sat down on the stool beside Ruler Jedidiah. He felt that the Holy Spirit was working in the hearts of many of the men, so he just sat quietly and didn't say a word. After a few minutes, Orly turned to Ruler Jedidiah and thanked him for reading the Scriptures, then he asked him if he would mind reading it again. Ruler Jedidiah did, but by the time he finished, tears were streaming down his face.

Orly spoke, "It is my belief that Jesus is the Chosen One, the Messiah, the Son of God, sent from Heaven to bear my sins as the Lamb of God. If that is also your belief, you need to simply tell God that you want Jesus to be your Messiah, to pay for your sin, and fill you with His Holy Spirit. It's that easy. If you still have questions, I'll be available, but I'm going to ask that we end today by just allowing some time to pray. I'll be in the back courtyard, and my wife Gabriela is going to join me there. If you have questions, we will be available. Otherwise, please spend some time in prayer before you leave."

As Orly left the room, he saw Ruler Jedidiah fall to his knees and begin to pray. When Orly reached the courtyard, he, too, fell on his knees and began to pray that the seeds planted would bear fruit. Gabriela joined him and together they stood to receive the people. But no one came to ask questions. Orly finally peeked in the back door and saw that the men were still in prayer, but instead of repentance and sorrow, their faces were glowing with joy. Orly told Gabriela what he saw, and they began to sing Psalm 150 together. Soon they heard the people inside singing, too.

Orly squeezed Gabriela's hand and said, "Let's go." So, they left and joined Mother Ruth on the grass at Mr. Kenan's house. She was surprised that they had arrived before the others. "I thought you were speaking at the synagogue this morning."

"No," said Orly, "the Holy Spirit was." Then he explained to her what had happened.

"So, the whole synagogue has become followers of Jesus?"

"I don't know, Mother. We'll just have to wait and see. I stepped out of the room to answer questions and I don't know what happened inside. I'm sure Jordan and Mr. Kenan will have some news when they arrive. But I didn't see any need to wait around. No one seemed to have questions, so we left."

"Well, it wasn't any of your business, was it?" said Mother wisely.

"No, it really wasn't," replied Orly.

"And all because one man was obedient to come here and tell us. Oh, I miss Kobe," sighed Mother.

"Me, too," agreed Orly. "Wouldn't he be excited?" Orly changed the subject. "Has your workload been a little easier this week?"

Mother nodded. "Oh, yes. Master Seth and Mrs. Joelle moved out and I miss the children. It has been very quiet this week."

"Well, it won't be quiet long; I hear the group coming now."

Jordan and Joshua came over to Orly and plopped down beside him. Seth and Joelle joined them with the children. Mr. Kenan went inside the house to find Mrs. Vada and soon the place was humming with people.

Everyone was talking at once, and Orly knew that the Holy Spirit was warning him not to take credit for something that he didn't accomplish. "I planted the seed, but it was the Holy Spirit who was at work — not me. So, tell me, what happened after I left? Gabriela and I waited for quite a while and no one came out to ask questions, so we left."

Jordan began, "When you asked us to spend time in prayer, it looked to me like every man in the room was doing so."

Joelle added, "The women, too. Everyone was praying and trying to keep the babies quiet."

"I kept checking to see if anyone needed help or had questions," said Jordan. "It was incredible. It was like the room was just filled with the Holy Spirit. It was almost like the first Pentecost; except I didn't see any flames and the room wasn't filled with wind. It was just a strange peace and incredible joy. You could see it on the men's faces. There was so much joy. It was incredible. I wish you had seen it, Orly."

"I felt the Holy Spirit was asking me to leave so that I didn't take credit for it and so no one else could say that I caused it."

"Yeah, I guess that would be tempting."

Orly felt a tug at his arm and turned to see what Gabriela wanted. "Orly," she whispered, "Do you think your mother would have some fruit or something? I'm starving, since I didn't eat breakfast."

"Sure. Mother, do you have some fruit in the kitchen? We were so excited we didn't eat much breakfast this morning."

"You know where the fruit is. Does anyone else want anything?"

"Yeah." Jordan got up and walked with Orly to the kitchen. They were talking about the group and soon returned with several apricots.

Gabriela thanked Orly and Mother Ruth. After finishing one, she reached over and took another one from Orly's stash. "Sorry, but I'm just starving after all that excitement." Mother Ruth's eyebrows lifted, and she exchanged looks with Joelle. Joelle just smiled and nodded.

As the group gathered, they were still talking about what had happened at synagogue this morning. Mr. Kenan told Orly how proud he was of his obedience to lead at the synagogue and asked him if he wanted to say anything. Suddenly, Orly knew what he needed to say and moved to the front. "Mr. Kenan, I probably should ask you first, but since it affects the whole group, maybe we could just talk about it here. If indeed the whole synagogue has accepted Jesus as their Messiah, there will be a lot of people to baptize. I was just prompted by the Holy Spirit to ask if we could cancel this meeting two weeks from today, since most of you are part of the synagogue. We will have the baptism at the stream behind our house and I will need help. I was thinking maybe we could meet at the synagogue for some time of worship, and then walk from there to our place. Gabriela and I will provide some snacks afterwards, and then we'll call it a day instead of coming back here for group. Would that work for everyone?"

Mr. Kenan looked around the group and saw nothing but eagerness to help and to participate. "I think that's a great idea, Orly. We will meet next week, but the following week we will join the synagogue for their baptism at Orly's. Is that okay with everyone?"

"Thanks for all your help and support and words of encouragement," said Orly.

Jordan did a great job as he explained Jesus' teachings concerning the future and His return. Afterward Orly and Jordan decided they didn't feel led to spend any more time talking about

Jesus' teachings on the future, but rather to talk about the here and now, especially with the baptism coming up.

Orly thanked Jordan again for helping him to understand Jesus' teachings. He was sure that there were a lot of areas he just didn't understand yet, and he would have no one to ask after Jordan left. Jordan replied, "Hey, I'm glad I can be here. But I promise, you can rely on the Holy Spirit to teach you once I'm gone. Jesus sent Him so that we wouldn't need anyone else. He is sufficient and will guide you perfectly — better than I can!"

"Thanks, Jordan, you've been a real blessing to me," said Orly.

"Hey, I'm not gone yet! Don't rush me!"

"Jordan are you okay to help me with the baptism in two weeks? And what do you think about you and me and maybe Mr. Kenan and Joshua doing the baptizing?"

"I'm good with that but pray about it and see if the Holy Spirit guides you to anyone else. You are talking about a lot of people!"

"I need to get back to Gabriela and Mother. We'll talk later."

Chapter 23

After dinner, Orly and Gabriela said their goodbyes and headed home. They wanted to have time to set out some fruit and straighten the living room before Lucas and Mrs. Amata arrived. Orly ran down to the root cellar to get the fruit and when he returned, he found Gabriela asleep on the living room cushion. He was concerned that Gabriela seemed so tired, but it made him even more determined to hire some help. When they heard someone at the door, Gabriela woke up and apologized for her nap. Orly assured her it was fine, but he asked, “Are you up to having visitors?”

“Sure,” she said rubbing her eyes and trying to get awake. Orly went to the door and greeted Lucas and Mrs. Amata. He invited them inside and Lucas hesitated. “Are you sure?”

“Certainly, you are always welcome in our home,” declared Orly.

Mrs. Amata seemed a little shy, but soon Gabriela had her talking about her boys. They had raised six sons and now they were all married and settled. They were now living with their oldest and she declared, “He’s driving us both crazy! He thinks we are too old to do anything. I’m getting old because all he’ll let me do is sit around and get stiff and lazy.”

“Well, I know that I need to slow down at the shop. I’m getting too old to be doing all that lifting and hammering. But I think I complained a little too much about it, because now I’m considered an invalid.”

“Well, an invalid you are not! You’ve still got a lot of good work in you.”

“You said you might have some ideas. We would love to hear them.”

“Well, first of all, this is just an idea. I was thinking that you could work at the shop for six or eight hours a day. If you quit at the noon break, you could go home and rest, get your wife and the two of you come over here and work for a couple of hours every afternoon.”

“Wow! That’s not what I was thinking. But it sounds good so far. What would we do?”

“Well, that depends on what you want to do. I’ve been thinking that I could probably pay you to putter around and do all those things that I don’t have time to do. Gabriela wants to get a couple of goats that will need to be milked each evening. I want to get an ox and I don’t know how much care it will need. Then, you mentioned raising a garden, which Gabriela and I would both love, and there’s always weeds that need pulling. I think you could easily find enough to do. But the absolute requirement would be that you treat it like it was your own property. I wouldn’t give you a chore list. I would just pay you to manage my property. Of course, I’d like to be consulted before you do anything major, but you could treat it as if it were your own, plant what you want to grow — as long as you want to grow some cucumbers. How does that sound?”

“Wonderful! Like a dream come true. Then we could go back to my son’s and put my feet up and enjoy an evening of rest.”

“Exactly. Now, Mrs. Amata, what kind of things would you be able to help Gabriela with?” asked Orly.

“Well, anything she wants. I don’t know anything about Jewish cooking, but I’m willing to learn. And I see that you have outgrown your robe.” She pointed to the ripped place over Orly’s shoulder. “I love to weave and sew. I was a seamstress and had my own shop for years.”

“Yeah, I ripped it the other day and Gabriela hasn’t had time to get it fixed.”

“Well, there’s no fixing a growing man. You are what, sixteen?”

“Yes, ma’am”

“You are still growing and you’ll need a totally new robe. That one won’t stretch over your new muscles. I can either do the weaving and sewing or teach you how to do it,” suggested Mrs. Amata as she looked at Gabriela. “And then there will soon be a little one to sew for. Do you have a loom? I’m sure we can find plenty of things to do together. A woman never has enough hands to get everything done.”

“Orly, let us talk this over and I’ll let you know in a few days.

When would you like for us to start?”

“Well, we don’t have the goats yet, and we don’t have an ox yet, but you could go ahead and start anytime you want and get the garden prepared and planted. It’s really up to you.”

“I’ll let you know later. I want to be certain that I’m ready to cut back my hours at the shop. I don’t want to make another mistake. Good night and thanks for the offer.”

“Good night, and may God bless you.” It came out of Orly’s mouth before he thought, but Lucas seemed to be okay with it.

He asked Gabriela what she thought, and she sleepily said, “She reminds me of Miss Martha. I just hope I can keep up with her!”

“We’ll talk in the morning. Let’s get you some sleep.”



The next morning, the men were inundated with work and there was no time for visiting. At noon, Lucas asked Orly when he was getting his goats for Gabriela. He told him over Sukkot. Lucas nodded but didn’t say anything more.

On Tuesday, Orly took his break time to go and talk with Ruler Jedidiah. Orly quickly explained to him his plans for the baptism service in two weeks. “I totally trust that you have been sent from God to guide us, and I’m willing to let you lead.”

“Thank you, sir, but remember, you, too, have a responsibility before God to lead these people. So, I want us to work together to make sure we both stay on track,” said Orly.

“That sounds great. I will look forward to hearing all about baptism this Sabbath. Is there anything I can help you with?”

“Not that I know of. The message will be focused on obedience to Jesus’ commands, if that helps you pick out the music. Now, I’ve got to get back to work. Shalom!”

“Shalom, my friend, shalom.”

Orly ran back to the shop and arrived just as the other men were getting started on their projects. He nodded at Lucas and Lucas mouthed, “Good.” Orly was glad he would not need to work late because Gabriela had been so emotionally fragile lately. He felt that something was bothering her and assumed that it was homesickness. He had a surprise up his sleeve that he thought would cheer her up. But he would have to wait and see when the time was right to bring it up. Tonight, they had to prepare a message on baptism and start thinking about how to feed the crowd that would attend in less than two weeks.

Gabriela seemed more like herself, and Orly noticed that she ate a good dinner. He felt that that was a good sign that she was not sick, even though she had refused to eat breakfast again these past two mornings. Orly told her about his meeting with Ruler Jedidiah and together they discussed what they knew about Jesus’ command for baptism. They decided to consult Jordan. Gabriela wanted to invite him over to dinner, so they got distracted planning the meal. They were debating whether Gabriela should cook something or whether he might enjoy cooking fish by the stream. They decided on the picnic since Jordan got good meals all the time at Mr. Kenan’s house. Orly could build the bonfire on Thursday morning before he left for work. Gabriela would catch and prepare the fish and light the bonfire so that they would be ready to roast the fish at sundown. Then they could sit around the fire and talk about baptism. Orly promised to invite him during the noon break tomorrow.

Mid-afternoon on Thursday, Gabriela sliced some onions and packed them in a box with rounds of bread. She packed the fishing line and the knife she would need to clean the fish. She grabbed three blankets and took the flint that was sitting by the oven. She looked around and felt that she had everything that she needed. It was fun to be outside. Orly had built a large bonfire that she would light later. She sat on the bank and started fishing. After a couple of hours, the net that she kept in the water contained more than was needed. She threw the last fish back into the stream and saw that the sun was getting low. The men would be arriving in a few minutes, and she wanted to have the fish ready to roast over the open fire. She set the plate of onions beside the bread on a blanket and started the bonfire. She took her knife and started to clean the fish. But something was wrong. As she tried to remove the entrails, she felt the smell would overpower her. She wondered if the fish were spoiled. She felt faint and knew she had to get away from that smell. All she could do was run into the woods and vomit. And that’s the way Orly and Jordan found her — doubled over in the woods crying and gagging and apologizing for not having dinner ready.

Orly assured her that Jordan would check on the fish, but he was more concerned about her. Orly sat with Gabriela and comforted her. In a few minutes, Jordan reported that the fish smelled just fine to him and that he had them cleaned and ready to cook. Orly gently asked, "Do you want to join us at the bonfire, or do I need to help you to the house?" She assured him that she could walk to the house by herself, and she certainly wasn't hungry. She apologized for not being able to stay. She lay down on a cushion in the living room and was quickly asleep. When she woke up, Orly still wasn't back, and the house was totally dark. She got up and lit a lamp and realized that she had not taken a lantern down to the campsite. She was feeling much better and decided to walk down and join the men. She lit the lantern and walked back down the trail. The men were glad to see her and quickly gathered up the box of supplies that needed to be brought to the house. They put out the campfire and walked up the trail together. Jordan declined her invitation to stay awhile and visit. She was secretly glad, because now she was starving. Orly helped her prepare a plate of bread and goat cheese and added some raisins and almonds to her plate. They sat at the little table, and she ate while Orly told her what he had learned about baptism. Orly was watching her closely and wondering what he would do if she were sick. He asked her to go and talk with his mother tomorrow and see what she thought. She agreed that something was wrong and maybe Mother Ruth would know what to do about it.

On Friday, after going to the well and the market, Gabriela walked to Mr. Kenan's and quietly slipped into the kitchen. Mother Ruth and Benjamin were busy preparing the Sabbath meal. She asked Mother Ruth if she had time to talk. Mother Ruth gave Benjamin some instructions before she took Gabriela's arm and led her back outside. "Let's walk to the prayer place. I know Orly has told you about our secret place. But it's not so secret anymore. Everyone should be busy this time of day, so, I think it will be private. I know this is important or you wouldn't have come. Just help me to get settled on the grass and then we'll talk."

Gabriela felt like giggling, because Mother Ruth had done nothing but talk since they left the kitchen. "Now, what's going on that you need my help? Are you and Orly doing okay?"

"Yes, Mother Ruth. Orly is great. I just haven't been feeling well lately and I promised Orly I would come and talk with you. I've been skipping a lot of breakfasts because my stomach just feels queasy and then last night, I was trying to clean some fish, and I just couldn't. I ran into the woods and vomited. I felt so sick to my stomach. I let the guys do their cookout and I went into the house and took a nap. When I woke up, everything was fine and I ate a good dinner — not fish, but bread and cheese and raisins. Then this morning, I couldn't eat breakfast again. It just seems to come and go, and in between, I'm fine. I don't understand. Orly thought you might know what is wrong."

"Have you noticed any other changes?" asked Mother Ruth gently.

“Well, I have been falling asleep at strange times during the day. I seem to need naps and I’m really tired. And I must admit, I’ve been a little snappy with Orly lately. I’ve been praying about that and asking God to help me. I have no idea why I would speak so meanly to him. He’s so good to me.”

“Well, I assure you, it’s not anything to worry about. You should probably talk to Mrs. Joelle since she’s done it four times and a lot more recently than I have,” said Mother Ruth.

“Joelle has had this, too?”

“Yes, Gabriela. You are carrying my grandchild, and it does all kinds of crazy things to your body.”

Gabriela’s eyes were wide with surprise. Mother Ruth’s eyes were filled with happy tears. “Are you sure?” asked Gabriela.

“I’ve lived a long time and women know these things. You need to talk with other women who are carrying babies or have recently given birth so you will know what to expect.”

“Oh, Mother Ruth, should I tell Orly or wait?”

“That’s entirely up to you. But I assure you, he will be the happiest man alive when you tell him. And he’ll quit worrying about you being sick.”

“Oh, Mother Ruth, thank you. I’ve got to get home and cook our Sabbath meal. Maybe I’ll tell him tonight.”

“Help me up, child, before you go running off.”

“Of course. I’m just so excited. I’m carrying Orly’s baby.” She pressed on her abdomen and said, “but I don’t feel anything. When will I be able to see it?”

“It takes time, and you’ll have to be patient, especially with the first one; maybe in a couple more months.”

“Oh, Mother Ruth, thank you. Orly is going to be so excited. I can’t wait for him to get home.” Gabriela walked back home with her eyes twinkling and her face glowing. *I’m carrying Orly’s baby. I’m going to be a mother. Oh, I wish I could tell my mother and Miss Martha.*

She started preparing the potato recipe that Orly loved, and then realized that it was much too early. She walked around the house in a daze. She thought about visiting Joelle, but didn’t really want anyone to know before Orly. Then she realized that she needed to get the Sabbath bread prepared. *How addlepatated I feel. My whole world has changed. I’m going to be a mother!*

Orly arrived home an hour before sunset and began pulling some weeds around the courtyard. He could hear Gabriela singing as she worked to prepare the Sabbath meal. He was glad that she was happy. He decided to join her in the kitchen. “I talked with Lucas after work, and he said that they would like to start work the week after Sukkot. Are you sure that will be okay with you?”

“Oh, that’s coming up soon, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Mr. Kenan usually goes to visit his brother Zeke. I think this year it’s just him and Seth going. Last year, I got to spend the week at your house. Do you remember?”

“It was such a special week. Our espousal service and then getting you for a whole week. Of course, I had to share you with the whole family. I married you thinking I would get you all to myself all the time and look at us! Seems like we are always busy.”

“Well, the good news is that I’ll have the days of Sukkot off work even though I don’t go to Jerusalem.”

“You’re off work? For the whole eight days?” Gabriela was so excited.

“Yep. Do you think you could stand me that much?”

“Oh, Orly, that’s wonderful. Oh! Oh! Run out to the oven and get the potatoes and the bread before you burn it again.”

“Hey, I wasn’t the one who burned it!” But he ran quickly to check on the bread. It still lacked a few minutes, and he sat by the oven and waited.

When he brought the bread and potato dish and sat them on the table, Gabriela had everything ready for their Sabbath meal. She lit the Sabbath candles and Orly prayed a prayer of blessing over the two of them and their families. As they sat down to eat, Gabriela couldn’t keep the news from him any longer. “You know, your Sabbath blessing is going to have to get a little longer soon.”

“Why’s that? Is there someone I forgot. Oh, I forgot to pray for Kobe. You are right. I should pray for Kobe.”

“I wasn’t thinking of Kobe. I was thinking about the blessing over your new son or daughter.”

“Gabriela. Don’t tease me. Really? How do you know? When?”

Orly left his seat and knelt beside Gabriela. He began to pray for the little one growing inside of her. She told him about talking with Mother Ruth and what she had said. She promised him that she would talk to Joelle on the Sabbath and find out more about what to expect and when the baby would arrive. Joelle would know. Orly just sat shaking his head and praising God. “This is all I have ever wanted, and God has heard my cry for a home, a wife and now a child. Praise be to God.”

Gabriela was thrilled that he was so pleased. He thanked her for the meal and was finally able to eat heartily. “What do I need to do to take care of you? What is my part? I want to do what abbas are supposed to do, but I don’t know what that is.”

“Maybe you should talk with Seth. He would know. But I don’t want everyone to know. I want it to just be our secret until I’m showing.”

What a happy Sabbath celebration they had. They cleared the table and sat and talked about what Jordan had taught him about baptism. But the topic kept being interrupted by baby questions. “What if I start talking about the baby in the middle of my message tomorrow?” mused Orly. They both giggled together and just enjoyed the evening that passed very quickly.

On Sabbath morning, Gabriela had Orly’s breakfast set out when he came back from his prayer time. She was once again nibbling on bread. They headed to the synagogue together and were joined by

crowds of friends. They were amazed at the way they were being accepted and welcomed by everyone, and the synagogue was more crowded than usual.

Ruler Jedidiah greeted them as Gabriela headed up the stairs and Orly joined the other men on the main floor. It seemed that Ruler Jedidiah was more enthusiastic with the singing and Orly wondered if it was his own feelings about being an abba that made everything more beautiful and exciting or whether indeed the Holy Spirit was already at work in the people. Either way, it was an enthusiastic gathering, and everyone seemed to be eager to hear his message. Orly prayed again that he would not be distracted by the people's approval or disapproval but would only say what the Holy Spirit led him to say.

Orly greeted the people and explained, "Today we will be looking at a command that Jesus taught just before He left to return to Heaven. He commanded the apostles and all future followers to spread out to all the nations of the world to make disciples, baptizing, and teaching them what He had taught. Then Jesus promised that He would be present with them to the end of this world. Many of you have chosen to ask Him to be your Messiah. Today I want to talk with you about baptism. Some of you are familiar with the baptism that is required for a Gentile to become a Jew. Most of you are familiar with John the Baptizer's baptism of repentance. But Jesus was talking about a different baptism. You asked Jesus to be your Messiah and allowed Him to pay for your sins through His death on the cross. Then the Holy Spirit came in and began to direct your life — guiding you, warning you, reminding you, and empowering you. Baptism is simply a picture of this. First there is the death to self, represented by putting your head under water. Then when you raise your head up out of the water, you are picturing the resurrection of Jesus and the beginning of the Holy Spirit being in control of your life. So, baptism is a picture to others of the decision you have made. It is also a commitment to be obedient to do what the Holy Spirit asks you to do.

"Next week, we will meet here as usual for some time of worship. Then we will walk together to my property where there is a stream. Before you are baptized you will be asked two questions: Have you asked Jesus to be your Messiah? And have you felt the leading of the Holy Spirit inside of you? If you can answer yes to both of those questions, you are ready to be baptized. If you aren't sure or still have some questions, Gabriela and I will be available after we close today. Ruler Jedidiah, will you lead us in a prayer of blessing?"

Orly was so tempted to ask for a show of hands to know how many to expect to baptize, but he was hearing the Holy Spirit warn him to be careful because this was not his accomplishment; it was the work of Jehovah God.



He and Gabriela sat and visited with Mother Ruth. They whispered to her that they were not quite ready to tell everyone their news, and she agreed to keep it a secret. Orly taught the same message to Mr. Kenan's group and then opened it up for questions. He was surprised when Seth asked if he and Joelle could be baptized next week. They had accepted Jesus as their Messiah almost a year ago but had never been baptized. Orly assured them that they would be welcome.

As Orly was walking over to join the group that was gathered around Gabriela and Mother, Benjamin came up behind Orly and asked if they could take a walk.

"Sure," said Orly, "just let me tell Gabriela."

They had only walked a short distance from the house when Benjamin burst out with, "I don't get it! You are finally a free man. You know what that means. Why do you go around telling people how great it is to become a slave?"

"Whoa, slow down. What are you talking about?" said Orly, trying to sort out the question.

"This Holy Spirit stuff. You act like it's the greatest thing to have somebody tell you what to do. I don't ever want anyone to tell me what to do. I'm going to be free, and I think that's the most wonderful thing in the world. Yet, you go around preaching that we need somebody to boss us around. I don't get it." By that time, they had reached the grassy area and Benjamin had already sat down with his arms crossed. He was definitely serious and definitely mad.

Orly wasn't quite sure where to start unraveling it and wished Jordan was here to help. He asked the Holy Spirit to guide him carefully. "I think I understand your question. You want to know why I don't desire to be totally and completely free?"

"Yes. Why do you go around telling people that they need another master to obey?"

"Okay. Give me a few minutes to gather my thoughts because I want to be totally honest and open with you."

"Thanks. But there's no good answer. It's just wrong and you need to stop it!" declared Benjamin.

"First of all, are you really wanting an answer and are you willing to listen to what I have to say, or did you just want to let me know how you are feeling? Either way is okay. I just need to know."

That stopped Benjamin and caused him to think. Both men sat in the grass and stared at the trees surrounding them. After what seemed like forever, Benjamin quietly agreed to listen.

"Benjamin, when I first met you, you took me up a hill to look at the temple. You said that you liked being up there because you felt close to God. I think that yearning to be close to God is what I call our empty core. We were created with a desire to know God better and to understand what He wants of us. We are Jews. We know that God is our Lord and Master. We desire to be His servants. It's so deep inside of us. And when we become aware of it, we search and search trying to find something to satisfy this desire to know God better." Orly

stopped and just sat quietly with Benjamin. He didn't feel the need to speak further.

"I've got to get back to work. I'm still a slave, remember?" said Benjamin tersely.

"Sure, I'll help you get the trays set out." The two men walked silently back to the group, but Orly could tell that Benjamin was deep in thought.

During the post-Sabbath dinner, Mr. Kenan asked Gabriela and Orly if he could help by providing the bread for the baptism service. He asked how many they were expecting, and Orly told him that he had no idea. "Why don't you ask Ruler Jedidiah if he can give you a better estimate and then we'll provide Sabbath bread for everyone."

"Thanks, Mr. Kenan. I was going to ask you for time off work to bake bread all day on Friday."

"Well, I guess I'm protecting my shop! Is there anything else we can do to help?"

"Not that I know of. We were just planning on serving bread and goat cheese and maybe set out some fruit and water. Gabriela can pick that all up at the market, and I can fill water jars on Friday afternoon. Oh, we might need to borrow some extra water jars. It will be the Sabbath, so I can't refill them."

"I'll send them over on Friday and have Enoch fill them for you. I think there will be a lot more people there than you are anticipating," said Mr. Kenan.

"I really appreciate your help. Thanks." The conversation turned to other things and soon it was time to head home.



Orly met with Ruler Jedidiah on Tuesday at noon and asked how many he expected to attend the baptism. He said he expected well over a hundred, but he wasn't sure how many others. Then Orly asked, "How many do you think will want to be baptized?"

"Oh," said Ruler Jedidiah, "I thought that's what you were asking. I think there will be around a hundred and fifty — maybe more."

Orly's jaw dropped. He had not expected that. He had hoped for maybe twenty.

"You look surprised. Is that going to be a problem?"

"No, no. I'm just shocked. I'm going to have to figure out how to baptize that many."

"Well, I could be wrong. But I know that I'm ready to be baptized and I think just about the whole synagogue is, too."

When Orly returned to work, he stopped by Mr. Kenan's office and told him it would probably be closer to two hundred people attending. Mr. Kenan just nodded, "That's what I was expecting. I'll take care of the bread and send the water jars. Are you sure you've got the rest under control?"

“Well, there’s one more thing. Would you be willing to help with the baptism?”

“Of course, what do you need?”

“I need you to help with the baptizing. I mean, would you be willing to actually baptize some of the people?”

“I don’t think I’m qualified to do that.”

“No one is. Only the Holy Spirit can do it, but He needs helpers to assist Him. I plan to ask Jordan and maybe Joshua to help, too. Pray about it and let me know soon, okay?”

“Sure. I’ll let you know tomorrow. Now, get back to work.”

“Yes, sir!” said Orly with a huge smile on his face.

Lucas indicated that Orly was late and Orly agreed to work an extra half hour. He didn’t tell Lucas that he had been talking with Mr. Kenan. And he knew that Gabriela was prepared for him to be late on Tuesdays because she knew the agreement that if he spent too much time with Ruler Jedidiah, he would have to make it up.

Gabriela and Orly talked about how much goat cheese she should purchase and decided that since grapes were in season, they would be the cheapest and easiest to serve. They agreed that Orly should talk with Jordan and Joshua about helping with the baptism, but then Gabriela suggested, “Why don’t you baptize Ruler Jedidiah first and then let him help. I think that would be really special.”

“That’s a great idea. I’ll talk with Jordan and Joshua tomorrow after work, and Mr. Kenan said he would give me his answer tomorrow, too. Let’s just spend some time in prayer thanking God for this harvest. This is so much bigger than anything I expected.”

On Wednesday, Jordan, Joshua, and Mr. Kenan agreed to help with the baptism. Gabriela walked to the market and arranged for the delivery of goat cheese and grapes on Friday morning. On Friday afternoon, Orly arrived home early as usual and helped Gabriela prepare the courtyard. Enoch brought thirty additional water jars and helped Orly get them all filled. Later he brought the bread. Orly and Gabriela couldn’t imagine needing that much but were so grateful for the help. Enoch helped them to pile it on the table and the preparation area and put the rest on cloths on the living room floor. It seemed they were surrounded by bread.

They ate a simple meal of goat cheese, Sabbath bread, and grapes since there wasn’t room to prepare anything else. Orly loved the sense of joy that filled Gabriela and permeated the whole house.

How fun it is to do things with her in ministry.

The synagogue was packed. Ruler Jedidiah led the group in Psalms of praise and then Orly reminded the crowd that baptism was simply a way to show outwardly what had already happened internally. He went over the procedure in detail. He then called Mr. Kenan, Jordan, Joshua, and Ruler Jedidiah to the front. “We only have room for two people to be baptizing at a time. The other three will be watching to see when you need a replacement. After eight or ten baptisms, you will need a break because it gets tiring.”

Orly turned and addressed the people. "For those of you who are ready for baptism, you will just need to form a line and we'll get to you as soon as possible. I will baptize Ruler Jedidiah first."

As they walked together toward the stream, Ruler Jedidiah asked Orly if he was sure that it would be okay for him to baptize others when he was just a brand-new follower. Orly assured him that it was not him doing the baptism, it was the Holy Spirit. "Besides, you need to be the leader and example to your people." Ruler Jedidiah seemed excited and pleased with Orly's answer.

Orly led the people around the back courtyard and down the trail to the stream. When he looked back, the people were still coming and filling the grassy area. Jordan and Joshua were helping to get the people lined up by the stream's bank. When they felt that everyone had arrived, Orly stepped into the stream and walked out until the water was about waist deep. He motioned for Ruler Jedidiah to come into the water. The crowd grew hushed as they watched their ruler be baptized. He sent Ruler Jedidiah back to the bank to watch the other baptisms for a while and motioned for Jordan to come and begin baptizing also. They took turns calling people from the line. When a husband and wife wanted to be baptized together, the husband would be baptized first and then he would stay in the water while the wife was baptized. It was a special time. When Orly grew tired, he motioned for Joshua to come and take his place. He stayed and assisted Joshua for the first baptism, then waded to the shore to take a rest. It seemed that the line kept growing. Gabriela asked him when she should plan to uncover the food and he said that he had asked Jordan to lead them in some Psalms and that would be the signal to get everything ready. Several of Seth's and Mr. Kenan's kitchen slaves were ready to help her. He was happy that she wasn't having to do everything by herself. She stood in the back of the group close to the trail so that she could exit quickly at the end. Orly noticed that Mr. Kenan was baptizing instead of Jordan. Still the line didn't seem to be getting any shorter. When Joshua tired, he called for Ruler Jedidiah. Orly watched Joshua, a slave, instruct Ruler Jedidiah and assist him with the first couple. The look of awe on the ruler's face was incredible as he baptized his first Jesus follower. Watching that and watching Mr. Kenan and Joshua baptize others made Orly's heart overflow with praise. Soon Mr. Kenan called for Orly to replace him. And the cycle began again. Orly wished he had asked someone to keep a count of all the people who were baptized, but once again he felt that little check that reminded him that it was really none of his business. This was the Holy Spirit at work.

They had cycled through several times before Orly noticed that the line was down to only about ten people remaining. He made sure Jordan was ready to start leading the music. After they had sung the Psalms together, Orly invited them to stay and enjoy some light refreshments that Mr. Kenan had helped him and Gabriela to provide. The courtyard was packed, and people were sitting all over the yard. Children were laughing and playing, and parents were reminding them

to not run or be noisy on the Sabbath. *Soon I'll be teaching my son to behave on the Sabbath.* Orly smiled and then sneaked into the kitchen and carried out some more bread and cheese and grapes to replenish the ones on the courtyard tables. There were plenty of people helping, but it gave him an excuse to grab a roll and some cheese without having to stand in line. Gabriela caught him and threatened to make him put it back. He quickly shoved it in his mouth, and she giggled. "Behave yourself. We have guests."

"And I'm starving!" declared Orly. Then he went back into the kitchen and asked one of the helpers to prepare a special tray for the four men who had helped him with the baptism. He carried that tray out in the yard where the four other helpers were seated exhausted in the sunshine. They greeted him with much appreciation. Orly went back and grabbed a water jar and cups and carried them back to the men. Everyone was commenting that they had never had such a special day. Mr. Kenan said, "I thought it was special to be baptized, but to baptize a new follower was just incredible. Who baptized Seth and Joelle?"

Jordan said that he did. Ruler Jedidiah asked what was next. "We go home and get some rest."

"I thought you weren't supposed to work on the Sabbath!" Jordan teased.

"No, I mean, now that we've accepted Jesus as Messiah and been baptized. What's the next step?" repeated Ruler Jedidiah.

Orly reminded him that the rest of Jesus' command included discipling the new followers. And that meant walking beside them and teaching them to be obedient to whatever the Holy Spirit said. Jordan added, "And teaching them to be careful to listen to the Holy Spirit and not Satan or self. There's still a lot more teaching to do. Your leadership will be key to their growing and becoming all that God has planned for this group."

Once the men had enjoyed their snack and recuperated, they began moving among the crowds, answering questions, and speaking words of encouragement. The people began leaving as the Sabbath came to an end and by the time it was dark, just about everyone was gone except Mr. Kenan's group and Ruler Jedidiah. Orly invited everyone to enjoy the post-Sabbath meal with them. They sat together in sweet fellowship. But soon Ruler Jedidiah announced that he needed to get home since he would begin walking to Jerusalem tomorrow morning bright and early. He reminded Orly that the synagogue would be closed for the next three weeks but asked him to plan to speak the following Sabbath. Orly agreed. He wasn't sure when Ruler Jedidiah would feel ready to begin teaching. He would have to wait and see.

On Sunday, as Orly left for work, he reminded Gabriela that he would help with the cleanup after he got home, and not to overdo it. She promised she would be careful but felt that she could get it done. She needed to go to the well and market, then she would start cleaning up all the debris left around by two hundred guests. She took

her water jar and started off. Going to the well was always fun because she would catch up on all the news. This morning was extra special as she listened to the women talk about being baptized. Gabriela filled her jar and found Chaya. She had been baptized with her espoused husband and was glowing with joy. "What time do you want help?" Chaya asked.

"What do you mean?" asked Gabriela, feeling confused.

"I mean, I'm coming over to help you clean up. What time do you want me to come? Yes, I'm inviting myself over," declared Chaya.

"Oh, Chaya, that would be so nice. I've got to go to the market first before I start."

"I need to go to the market, too. So, let's meet there and then we'll tackle."

So, Gabriela took her water jar home and grabbed her coins and bags and headed to the market. She didn't need much because she decided to put off churning butter until tomorrow. She just bought some vegetables and fruit for tonight's meal, then the two of them headed back to the house. When they arrived, Joelle was in the courtyard. She had already picked up some broken pottery from a dropped water jar and had made a pile of smashed grapes.

"Joelle, how sweet of you. Do you know my friend, Chaya? She's offered to help me clean up."

"Is three a crowd?" asked Joelle.

"Oh, no! Three just makes it even more fun. You were both baptized yesterday, was that special?"

The young women chatted for the next several hours as they worked to clean the courtyard and the grassy areas. By midafternoon they were all done, and they sat in the courtyard and drank some fruit juice and ate leftover bread and cheese.

"Well, since I have my two closest friends here, I can't resist telling. Can you guess my news? I have been incredibly tired lately, I can't eat my breakfast, but the rest of the day I eat like an ox. And I'm quickly outgrowing my robe."

"Oh, Gabriela, congratulations!" exclaimed Chaya.

"Well, I knew before you did. Do you remember that Sabbath that you asked Orly to get you some apricots because you were starving and had missed breakfast? I suspected it then. Congratulations, little sister. Let me know if you have any questions."

"I don't know how to figure when the baby will arrive. Can you help me with that?" The girls decided the baby would probably arrive before winter. "Is there anything I shouldn't be doing or eating?"

"Nope. Not until the last couple of weeks, then you'll need to be a little more careful not to lift heavy things that could cause you to have the baby too early. But until then, you can do anything you feel like doing. You may need some extra naps, but you'll do just fine. Chaya, do you know the midwife in town?" asked Joelle.

Chaya giggled and said, "Yes, it's my mother, Sabra. She'll take great care of you."

"When should I talk with her?" asked Gabriela

“Not until you are beginning to show. But if you have any questions, just stop by anytime.”

“When will that be?”

“With a first pregnancy, it’s not for a while — I’d say another couple of months,” replied Chaya. “I think we need to let you get dinner started or maybe take a little nap before Orly gets home.”

“Thank you two so much. It’s been such a fun day. We should get together more often.”

Joelle and Chaya walked out together, and Gabriela headed to the cushion. And that’s where Orly found her when he slipped in the door after work. He tried to quietly chop the vegetables, but Gabriela woke up and was startled to find that he was home. The sun was already down. He assured her that it was fine, and he didn’t mind cooking the vegetables at all. He took the skillet out to the fire, and she began setting the leftover bread and fruit on the table. By the time he returned, she had the water cups filled and the table set. They enjoyed a wonderful dinner for two.

Orly fussed about her overdoing, but she told him about Chaya and Joelle’s help. She had so enjoyed the day and she assured him that the ladies agreed that other than getting some extra rest and drinking plenty of goat milk, she didn’t need to do anything differently until the last few weeks. He was excited to learn that the baby would arrive by winter. “It seems perfect for you to be carrying new life at the same time as the synagogue has experienced new life,” said Orly. They sat and talked about the baptism and what the future held as Cana’s Jews learned the truth about Jesus being the Messiah.

The End (Or Only the Beginning?)