

THE NEW WAY SERIES

③

Growing the Love

in

Cana of Galilee

Dale Weatherford

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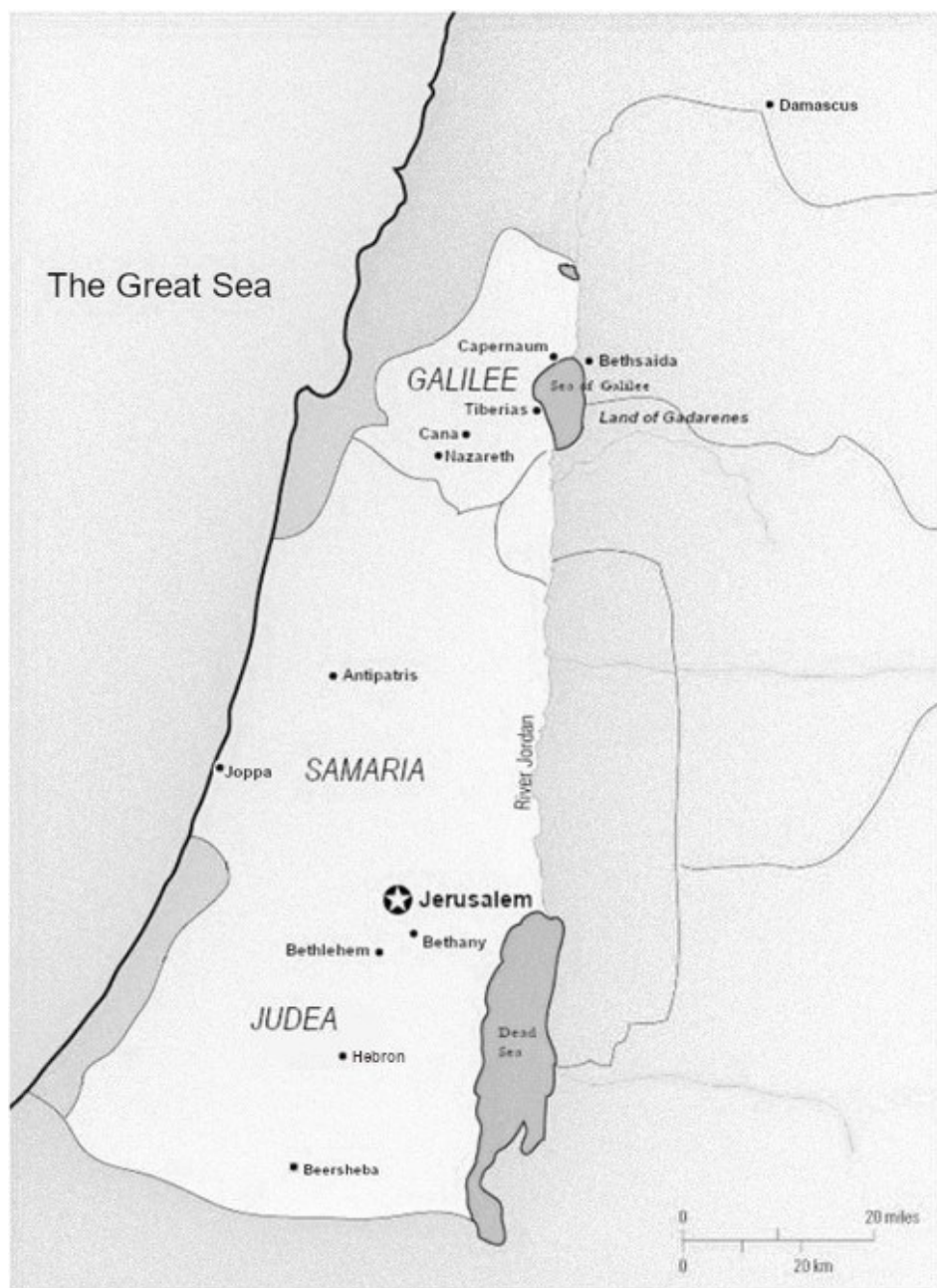
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Special thanks to my husband for all his patience in getting this Series ready for publication. He is not only the technical genius behind the production of these books, but he's my editor, cheerleader, and sounding board. These books would never have 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 #3

Growing the Love in Cana of Galilee

In *Growing the Love in Cana of Galilee (The New Way Series #3)* I continued to imagine the citizens of Cana as they experienced the amazing changes brought about by God's love. Their own love for people becomes more and more like the love that Jesus showed for all people. Watch as Orly and Gabriela's love grows and deepens for each other and for everyone around them. Imagine with me how this small group of followers of Jesus begin to be noticed by their co-workers and friends as people who love others regardless of their status, race, or beliefs. Maybe, like me, you'll ask: Is my love growing?

Dale Weatherford

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Chapter 1

Mr. Kenan asked Orly and Gabriela if there was anything they wanted to send to her parents or any news for them since he and Seth were headed to Jerusalem for Sukkot. She said just to send her love. Orly told him to tell them about the synagogue baptism if he saw them, and that he planned to bring Gabriela home for a visit for Passover. "I'll visit with your folks sometime while I'm in Jerusalem, and I'll bring you news from home." Gabriela expressed her gratitude. On Wednesday, Mr. Kenan; his grown son, Seth; and two servants left to visit his brother, Zeke, in Jerusalem for Sukkot.

When Orly got home from work on Friday, Gabriela was busy preparing Sabbath dinner. He was able to slip down to the cellar and put together the travel bags. He filled them with raisins, almonds, and goat cheese. He hid the travel bags and joined Gabriela in the kitchen. She asked him to fill a water jar since they wouldn't be able to fill it on the Sabbath. He took two and ran down to the stream. She lit the Sabbath candles, and he prayed a prayer of blessing over her and the baby, and for Mr. Kenan's and Seth's safety as they visited in Jerusalem.

As they sat down to eat, Orly said, "Gabriela, I have a surprise for you, and I can't wait to tell you about it."

"Oh, I love surprises. Tell me! Tell me!"

"I thought that we would walk to Capernaum on Sunday and visit with Yanis and Jenay."

"Oh, Orly. That would be wonderful! I may need to rest along the way, but we could do it. I know we could. Oh, that would be such fun. And I could tell Jenay about the baby. I wonder if she's carrying Yanis' baby yet." Gabriela happily chattered all evening and Orly was glad that he had made her happy. Jenay and Gabriela had been best friends ever since they had both watched Jesus ascend into Heaven forty days after his death. Jenay's dad was the Apostle James. Jenay and Yanis had traveled with Jesus and Orly looked up to Yanis because of it. Now the two couples only lived sixteen miles apart and hadn't seen each other since Orly and Gabriela's wedding almost four months ago. It would take them the entire day to walk it.

"We can rest tomorrow morning because the synagogue is closed, but we can go to Mr. Kenan's for the Sabbath whenever you wish."

On Sabbath morning, they enjoyed a leisurely breakfast and walked down to the stream. By midmorning, they were ready to go to Mr. Kenan's and visit Orly's mother, Ruth, who was a bond slave to Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada. They discussed telling everyone about the baby but decided that wouldn't be fair to Mr. Kenan since he was in Jerusalem. Gabriela had warned Joelle not to tell since she and Orly wanted to do it. Gabriela realized that it would not be long before everyone would know anyway. Her robe was feeling snug all over.

Jordan called everyone together for their group time and began with singing. Jordan, the Apostle Philip's son, had been helping Orly with Mr. Kenan's group ever since he had come to apprentice as a blacksmith. Orly said, "We had such a great celebration last week. Thank you all for helping Gabriela with the food, helping with the crowd, and those of you who helped with the baptizing itself. Wasn't it great fun?" The group all agreed. "I have no idea how many people were baptized, but I suspect it was over a hundred."

"Closer to two hundred," said someone in the group.

"I don't know, but God's harvest was incredible, and I for one was glad to get to experience it with you. This morning, I want us to look at one of the questions that was asked each person who desired baptism: 'Have you felt the Holy Spirit guiding you?' I got to thinking about ways the Holy Spirit has guided me since the day I accepted Jesus as my Messiah. I can quickly name some of the biggies. God led me to lead this group and God led me to Gabriela. I also remember one time in Jerusalem when I was approaching Mary's house, and the Holy Spirit told me not to go. Later I found out that the house had been raided. Man, I'm glad that I was listening and obeyed. Then I think about all the times He tells me to be quiet or to say something different from what I had planned." Orly stopped and looked around at the faces watching him. Tears started running down his cheeks and he tried to express what he was thinking. "I agree with the apostles, and with Kobe, that all the persecution, pain, or even death, would not be enough to make me want to give up this intimacy that I feel with God. To know that God is living inside of me and guiding me is the greatest thing I can imagine. For the rest of our time together, I want you to share what Jesus is doing and saying in your life." For almost an hour, men and women told about ways that the Holy Spirit had directed them, protected them, or changed the direction of their lives. Finally, Orly called on Jordan to lead them in a song, and he assured the group that they would do this again soon so that all would have a chance to share. When Jordan began Psalm 150, everyone began to sing and dance like they had on the day they celebrated Pentecost, and Orly knew that the Holy Spirit had led him yet again. By the end of the song, the group was scattered all over the yard. Orly raised his voice in a prayer of praise for Jehovah's great plan not only to forgive their sins, but to send the Holy Spirit to live inside them.

Mrs. Vada asked Ruth if they could just all eat together in the courtyard instead of moving indoors to two separate rooms. Several of the men helped the kitchen crew carry the trays to the courtyard, and everyone continued visiting while they sat outdoors and enjoyed the summer weather. When Mother began carrying the empty trays inside, Orly offered to help. Mother insisted he take Gabriela home, "She looks like she could sleep standing up. Take care of your wife. That's your priority now."

"Yes, Ma'am," he said as he kissed his mother's cheek. "We'll be gone next Sabbath, but I'll see you the next week. I love you."

“You be careful!” called Mother, who knew about their upcoming trip.

Gabriela went straight to her blanket, but Orly stayed up to bake a small batch of bread for their trip. While the bread rose, he retrieved their travel bags from the cellar. It was only a one day walk and they could buy more at the market for the return trip. He sat outside and prayed as the bread baked.

When Gabriela woke at sunrise, she found that Orly had already filled a round of bread with goat cheese for her. He collected their two blankets and put them in a pack on his back. He grabbed a bowl of olive oil and olives and a round of bread for himself and they walked out of town munching on their breakfast. They laughed and teased and just enjoyed being together with no responsibilities. Orly told her about his first trip to Jerusalem and how strange it felt to have no work assigned. They stopped at every well along the route and rested for as long as Gabriela wanted. Because they were not expected, they had no schedule. They could spend the night along the route if necessary. By sunset, they reached Yanis’ farm, but he and Jenay were not to be found. They decided to rest in the yard for a few minutes, and then they would head to Mr. Zebedee’s. Jenay’s grandparents, Zebedee and Salome, would know where they were. Gabriela was exhausted, so he suggested that they just eat a picnic in the yard and wait for Yanis and Jenay to return home. Orly laid out the blankets and they sat and ate the meal that Orly had packed for them. Before he had finished eating, Gabriela was fast asleep. Yanis and Jenay had not returned, and Orly wondered if they had gone to Jerusalem for Sukkot. They would walk to Mr. Zebedee’s tomorrow and find out. Until then, he could use a good night’s sleep, too.

The next thing they knew, they were blinded by a lantern in their faces. Mr. Ezekiel, Yanis’ hired man, was trying to figure out who they were and why they were there. Orly jumped to his feet and explained what had happened.

“Yanis and Mrs. Jenay are spending the next few nights at Zebedee’s because her dad is visiting,” replied Mr. Ezekiel.

“Is it okay if we stay here a few more minutes and eat some breakfast before we walk over to Mr. Zebedee’s?” asked Orly.

“Certainly. They’ll be glad to see you. Do you know the way?”

“Yes, sir, and thank you.” They ate what was remaining in their food bag, packed their blankets, and were soon on their way again.

They heard noise coming from the courtyard, so went around back and announced their arrival. Jenay was the first to realize who they were and ran to greet Gabriela. Soon Orly was being introduced all around. *What a loving and gracious family.* The Apostles James and John had traveled down from Jerusalem. They recognized Orly and welcomed him heartily. Jonas and Jaden and their families were spread out all over the yard. They admitted that since Zebedee was their boss, they took off anytime their brothers could visit. Orly felt surrounded by love. James and John had preached in Tiberius on the Sabbath. On Sunday morning, they had surprised Salome and

Zebedee who had let the other family members know. They had come as soon as they could to visit. Orly was eager to hear the news from Jerusalem, and Gabriela and Jenay moved closer to Grandmother Salome to catch up on girl-talk. Gabriela had been close to Jenay's parents but didn't really know her grandmother. She immediately felt loved and surrounded by God's presence. Mrs. Salome was Mr. Kenan's sister, and sister to Mrs. Mary, the mother of Jesus. She insisted that Gabriela just call her Grandmother like all the others. "Speaking of children, that robe is getting a little snug on you. Jenay and I were looking at some of my old robes the other day, but Jenay is too tall for them. I think they might fit you." Suddenly the girls were being led into the nicest house Gabriela had ever seen. Grandmother went to her room to rest and let the girls visit. Servants showed her five robes of all different colors. Jenay encouraged her to take them. She agreed to try on the blue one to see if it would be the right size. She pulled off her robe and heard Jenay gasp. "Yes, my secret is out. How did Grandmother know?"

"She just knows these things. She knew even before I knew."

"Oh, Jenay, are you with child, too?"

"Yes, but I've only known for a week. I haven't even told Yanis yet. I'm waiting for the perfect time. Grandmother wanted me to have her birthing robes, but they are all too short. Now, she's offering them to you, and you should take them."

"Honestly, I need a new robe and look at this — it fits perfectly. But I wouldn't have a place to store the others, and I really don't need all of them."

"So, you'll take the blue one?"

"Oh, it's so beautiful and soft. I'm not sure I can get my housework done in such a robe, but I could save it for Sabbaths."

"What other color do you want? I really think you could use two, then you will have an extra if you tear that one or get it dirty."

Together they picked out a white one that wasn't as ornate. How fun it was to be back with Jenay giggling together. She asked Jenay if she should wear the blue one now.

"Honestly, your old robe is too tight, and you need to wear one of the new ones. Which one do you want to wear?"

"I'll wear the blue one," said Gabriela as she slipped it back over her head.

"Have you felt the baby move yet?" And the girls were off and comparing notes. They sat and talked all afternoon while the men visited in the courtyard.

When they were called to dinner, Gabriela was excited to show Orly her new robe. His reaction was not what she expected, and she could tell he was unhappy with her. She wanted to cry but was surrounded by people and now wasn't the time to make a scene. She forced her smile and got through the meal. It was so good to hear the stories of James' and John's visits with other groups around the region. She knew that Orly was upset with her, but she wasn't sure

why. *I wish we could go home. I wish we had never come. I'm going to explode from this tension.*

"Orly," Gabriela whispered, "I think we should leave."

"How do you suggest that we do that?" whispered Orly back.

"I don't know, I just don't want you mad at me," whispered Gabriela.

"I'm going to stay and visit with the men, you and Jenay can do as you please," whispered Orly tersely. He went out the door and started up the stairs when he realized the Holy Spirit was not pleased. He called for Yanis.

"Yanis, I need to be honest with you. My wife and I are in a disagreement and would like to get it settled. Would it be okay if we went back to your place to spend the night? We have our blankets and actually, we spent the night there last night. You have a very comfortable yard. I think Gabriela is just tired and needs to call it a night."

"Certainly. You would be welcome to stay here, but I certainly understand if you need privacy. You won't get that here and our place is available."

"Gabriela and I need to talk. How about if we give you time to visit with your family and we plan to join you about noon tomorrow?"

When he returned to the living room, he found Gabriela and Jenay hugging and crying. Orly noticed that she was wearing her old robe and the new one was nowhere in sight. *Maybe I misjudged the situation. Maybe the girls were just playing dress-up. I don't know.* But he called, "Come, Gabriela. You need your rest." Gabriela obediently rose and followed him from the room. She didn't know whether to say goodbye to Jenay but didn't want to risk doing the wrong thing. So, she just followed Orly out the front door and down the steps. *Our first fight and it had to be in front of my best friend and her whole family. Great! What a vacation.*

They walked in silence all the way back to Yanis and Jenay's home. Orly lit a lamp in the courtyard, and they sat down on the benches staring at each other. "May I at least know why you brought me all the way here just to humiliate me?" asked Gabriela.

"I could ask you the same question," taunted Orly.

"I didn't bring you here," countered Gabriela.

"Well, you certainly humiliated me in front of my friends," retorted Orly.

"How? What did I do? I know it has something to do with the robe, but I thought you would be pleased. I thought you would think it was pretty. I did. How did that humiliate you?"

"So, everyone thinks that I can't provide beautiful things for my own wife. You think that makes me feel good that you chose to wear one of their robes? Whose was it anyway? I know Yanis can't afford a robe like that for Jenay. But I can. If you wanted a fancy robe, why didn't you tell me? I would have gotten you one."

"So that's what this is all about? You are mad because I wore a robe that you didn't provide for me," said Gabriela quietly.

Tears began to flow down her cheeks and all the fight was gone. She didn't want to fight. She wanted to take him in her arms and assure him that he was providing everything that she needed and more. But all she could do was sit and cry. She began to pray silently for wisdom to know what to say and what to do.

"Yes, and I'm still mad. But I think I'm madder at myself for not noticing that you needed a new robe. We talked about me needing one, but I don't care about things like that. I should have known that it was important to you. I'm sorry I didn't notice. But you should have told me. I'm stupid. You have to tell me these things."

"Orly, this has nothing to do with me needing a new robe. Yes, my robe is getting tight, and I was going to ask Mrs. Amata to help me make a new one when we got home. I don't care about fancy clothes. If you think I do, you've got things really messed up. I would like to tell you what happened, but only if you are willing to listen."

"I'm listening," said Orly crossly.

"No, you are not ready to listen. Stay mad if you want to, I'm going to sleep." And she got up and moved toward the bag to get her blanket.

Orly caught her in his arms and held her close to him. "I'm sorry. We've never fought before, and I don't want it to ever happen again. How do we get out of this?"

"Well, I think being willing to listen to my side of the story before you jump to conclusions would be a good start. Assuring me of your love and trust would be another good place to start. Maybe apologizing for being prideful would be a good step. But until you are willing to listen with ears of love, then I'm stuck with an angry husband."

"I'm sorry, Gabriela. I would like to hear your side of the story and why you were wearing somebody else's robe. I guess it was pride and I'm sorry. But I can provide for you, and I want to."

"I know you can. But that's not what this is about. You need to listen and trust me to make wise decisions."

"Okay, will you please tell me why you were not wearing your own robe?"

"I would need to give you some background," said Gabriela.

"Okay," said Orly gently.

"When Jenay and I started talking with Grandmother Salome, she immediately determined that I was with child. I didn't tell her. She said she had five birthing robes to give me. Grandmother Salome had saved these robes for her granddaughters — well, you know how old John is and he's the youngest. She's saved them for a long time and Jenay is the youngest granddaughter. But Jenay is too tall; all the girls are much taller than their grandmother. She offered them to me. I consider that to be an incredible honor and privilege, but I told Jenay that I couldn't do housework in such fancy robes. Jenay suggested that instead of refusing them outright, which would hurt Grandmother Salome's feelings, that I accept a couple of the more practical ones and save them for special occasions. I thought you would be proud to

see your wife so elegantly dressed and never thought about it offending your male pride. I never intended to hurt you. Passing on birthing robes is just something that mothers and grandmothers do. I felt so honored to be wearing her robes. She is such a special lady. Then I saw the look on your face. And now I just want to go home.”

“Oh, Gabriela, I am so sorry. You are right. It was a prideful thing and I need to repent. How do I make it right to you?”

“I just feel that we’ve ruined our reputation in front of people that I love and look up to. I don’t think I can ever go back.”

“Shush. We are going to get a good night’s rest and we are going back tomorrow. I will personally thank Mrs. Salome for her gift to you, and I will publicly apologize to everyone present. You know that I look up to Jenay’s family, too. I was the one who humiliated us, and I will apologize to you first and then to the whole family.”

“Oh, Orly, really? You would do that?” asked Gabriela.

“Of course. Every man there will understand, and I know they will forgive me. So, first of all, I apologize to you for being filled with male pride. I’m human and make mistakes, but it’s just because I love you so much and want to provide everything you need.”

“But you do. And yes, I forgive you.” Orly carried Gabriela to her blanket and kissed away all her tears.

Orly and Gabriela both woke early the next morning knowing that Mr. Ezekiel and the children would return before dawn to start work. The market was just beginning to open and they found a grassy area and settled down for a picnic breakfast. They tucked the rest into their travel bags for the trip home. The fight was over, and they were back to their usual selves, but deep down they were both dreading what would happen when they rejoined the family. They wandered around looking at some of the shops and decided there wasn’t really anything that they needed.

They returned to Mr. Zebedee’s house and went straight to the courtyard to join the family there. Orly stood before them all and said, “Please congratulate us. We have now been espoused for a whole year and last night was our first major disagreement. We have discussed it. It was all my fault. I have apologized and my apology has been accepted. I believe that this marriage and my beautiful wife are gifts from God. Now I need to apologize to you for missing time with your wonderful family. And Mrs. Salome, I want to thank you for passing down your very special robes to my wife. You guessed our secret that she is carrying my child and needed those special, extra-large, but extra short robes. Thank you.”

“You are very welcome, but to you, it’s Grandmother Salome. You are a wise man. I should have reminded her to ask you first. But it’s my privilege to share these special robes with Gabriela. May God bless your marriage and your future little one.”

Everyone whistled and cheered, and finally Orly and Gabriela could relax and enjoy the visit. Jenay retrieved the two robes and handed them to Orly to pack in the travel bag. Gabriela wore her own robe for the remainder of the visit. And what a sweet visit it was.

At dinner, James asked how the group at Uncle Kenan's was going. "You are leading that group, aren't you, Orly?"

"Yes, I felt God calling me to lead the group before Kobe or I knew that he was leaving. We have been so blessed to have Jordan, Philip's son, working with us for almost two years. It will be really hard when he leaves at Passover. He plans to rejoin his folks in Carthage. We have approximately thirty followers in the group. Jordan and I take turns teaching them and share the leadership. They are becoming quite a mature group, but it's limited to your uncle's employees and staff and family, so I think it's going deep instead of spreading out."

Orly wasn't sure whether to say anything about the synagogue. He had been reminded so often by the Holy Spirit that it wasn't his work; he didn't want to take any undue credit. But Gabriela intervened. "Orly, tell them what you and their uncle did two weeks ago."

Orly thought for a few minutes about how to start. In the meantime, everyone was encouraging him to tell. "I have been teaching at the synagogue and two weeks ago, Mr. Kenan and three other men helped me baptize just about the whole synagogue."

"There were close to two-hundred people baptized. No one really kept a count. We can hardly wait to get back and start discipling," added Gabriela.

John quietly said, "I remember Ruler Jedidiah. We went to Cana several times with Jesus, and he always let Jesus speak. How is he doing with this?"

"Well, I baptized him first and then later in the day, he helped me baptize others. He said it was the happiest day of his life."

"Orly, that's amazing. God is certainly using you there. Have you had any problems from anyone in the town?" asked James.

"No, but that was just last week, and this week the synagogue was closed for Sukkot travel."

"Remind me, how close is Cana to Nazareth?" asked James.

"About six miles."

"I pray that there will be no problems, but remember, you've got support if you need it. I think we'll plan to stop by after our visit to Damascus and on our way to Antioch, if that's all right with you," said John.

"We'd love to have you, and you would be welcome to speak at both the synagogue and at Mr. Kenan's," said Orly.

"I think we'll add Cana to our list. When we hear about the Holy Spirit moving in such a powerful way, we want to join in and help in any way we can."

"Mr. Kenan has gotten Mrs. Mary's family together a couple of times since her death. Oh, I just realized, you probably have not heard that Josie has moved to Antioch to start a Carpentry Shop there."

"That's good to know. We'll certainly look him up when we reach Antioch. Jonathan, Jenay's twin brother, is leading a group there. That family tie may be just what he needs right now. Thanks, Orly."

“No problem. And we’ll look forward to your visit. I know you’ll probably want to stay with Mr. Kenan and Mrs. Vada, but we have a guest room that you are welcome to use anytime you are in the area.”

“And then you are headed home to your lovely wives, right?” asked Salome.

“No, Mother, we need to check on some groups along the coast of Samaria, but I guess that is technically headed home. It will just take us another month to get there,” answered James.

“I thought Peter was covering Samaria,” said Zebedee.

“Well, we haven’t heard anything recently, so we just wanted to check on him before we return to Jerusalem.”

Orly noticed that Gabriela was having a hard time staying awake and they started to say their goodbyes. Zebedee insisted that they stay just a few minutes longer and let him pray for them before they left. So, everyone gathered while Zebedee prayed for God’s blessings. He prayed for boldness to share the good news. He prayed for Orly and Gabriela, for Yanis and Jenay, for James and John, his nephews Peter and Andrew, and others sharing the gospel in faraway places. Orly and Gabriela said their goodnights. Orly assured Yanis that there would be no hurry tomorrow. They would spend the day and one more night with him and Jenay, but then they needed to start home on Thursday.



It was only a few minutes after sunrise when Yanis and Jenay arrived bearing boxes filled with breakfast that Grandmother Salome had sent. She knew Jenay would not be prepared to serve her guests. Jenay’s dad and uncle had left before sunrise. Yanis and Jenay welcomed Orly and Gabriela into their tiny home, and they sat on mats on the floor to eat breakfast. Orly went to the barn with Yanis and watched him care for the goats. He told Yanis that he had just built a small barn so that Gabriela could have some goats to milk. Yanis made some suggestions on what Orly should look for and suggested he go to a local farm instead of the market in Cana to purchase them.

“Can you teach me how to milk them and anything else I need to know?”

“Sure. Mr. Ezekiel and his crew have already milked this morning, but Jenay and I will milk before sundown. We will need to deliver that milk. Mr. Ezekiel has been taking care of it while we were gone, but tonight it’s our turn.”

“Yanis, you seem more relaxed. Have you found that peace you were looking for?”

“Yes, I’m getting there. Thank you for taking time to talk with me — at your wedding no less! Jenay and I had a really good talk on that trip. It was just what our marriage needed. And as you’ve heard, I’ve started leading the group at Zebedee’s. They are paying me a small salary. It means that I can hire workers to keep the farm going, and

our marriage is settling down. So, since you asked me, may I ask you a question?"

"You just did." replied Orly.

"Man, I miss Kobe."

"Yeah, me too. Have you heard anything from him or Simon's group?"

"Nope, nothing. He's been gone two years, and I thought we would have heard something by now."

"Me, too. But you were going to ask me a question."

"Yes," said Yanis still thinking about Kobe. "Oh, I remember. You sound like an overly busy man. How are you keeping everything balanced?"

"Well, first I asked Mr. Kenan for an hour off early on Fridays so that I could do outdoor work in the daylight. Then, next week, my boss from work is cutting back his hours as a blacksmith. He's still in good health — just can't do the heavy stuff. He and his wife are going to work a couple of hours every afternoon. He'll manage the grounds and do the evening milking. And she is going to help Gabriela with sewing and housework. I figure when the baby arrives, Gabriela will need even more help. But probably the best thing we've done is set up our evenings after dinner to pray, study, and prepare messages together. Jordan told me that's the way his parents do it. I was trying to spend time with Gabriela and keep her happy, but then spend enough time to pray and prepare, and it just wasn't working. Now, we work together each evening. It's amazing how the Holy Spirit uses her to teach me."

"Wow. I never thought about including Jenay. I mean, she traveled with Jesus, too. There's probably so much she could add to my messages. And you are right, I spend very little time with her. I'm usually off studying or praying. I could share that time with her."

"It's made Gabriela and me closer than I ever thought possible."

"Oh, here come the ladies now. It must be milking time," said Yanis.

Yanis, Jenay, and Gabriela began milking the goats. Yanis showed Orly the basics and he discovered that it was a lot harder than he thought. But he finally was able to help. With the four of them working together, they soon had all the goats milked and the jars in the trailer completely full. Yanis suggested that the girls enjoy their visit and he and Orly would make the deliveries. Jenay and Gabriela headed back to the house with a jar of milk for dinner.

Yanis pulled the trailer and Orly pushed while they made their deliveries. The men walked home enjoying their growing friendship and greeted their wives who had dinner waiting. "We need to be on the road early in the morning. I'd like to get back to Cana before dark." Gabriela was already asleep on her blanket, so the men decided to call it a night.

Chapter 2

On Thursday, Orly had his prayer time and then woke Gabriela just before dawn. They noticed a lamp was on in the house, so they knocked and began saying their goodbyes. Jenay had packed them some oil and bread to eat as they walked. Both women were crying and wishing each other well. They knew that they would both be mothers before they saw each other again. How they wished they lived closer. Yanis placed his hands on Orly and Gabriela's heads and prayed a prayer of blessing over them for safe travels. One last hug and they were on their way.

After they had finished breakfast, Gabriela asked, "Have you thought about what you want to name our baby?"

"I thought I would like to name him Hosea, or maybe Kobe," said Orly thoughtfully.

"And if it's a girl?"

"Oh, I haven't thought that far. But when are we going to tell the group?"

"I think we should wait until the first Sabbath that Mr. Kenan returns from Sukkot." Gabriela suggested.

Late in the afternoon, they were getting close to home. He and Gabriela quickly put together some dinner and wearily headed to their mats. How good it felt to be home.

After breakfast, they went to the market to get supplies. Gabriela stocked up while she had Orly to help her carry things. She also bought fresh vegetables and fruit. They took their things home and then walked to Mr. Kenan's to let Mother Ruth know that they were safely back. They enjoyed settling back into the routine and looked forward to Lucas and Amata beginning to help them on Monday.

They enjoyed the Sabbath gathering at Mr. Kenan's and their leisurely visit with Mother Ruth.

Orly was off work on Sunday for the last day of Sukkot. Since he had wanted to start building an oxcart, he spent part of the day chopping down more trees and splitting them into usable lumber. The boards were rough and Palti would have to smooth them, but it would save some money if he could at least provide the lumber.

Monday he returned to the Metal Shop and realized how much he missed being with Gabriela. On Tuesday, Orly asked Lucas if he had changed his mind about working for him. Lucas replied, "I thought I told you I would begin working for you after Sukkot. Oh, that wasn't the right wording, was it? I still can't keep all these Jewish holidays straight, but I guess if you are back at work, then Sukkot is over. What I meant is that I'm supposed to be working full time this week and Mr. Kenan will announce the change when he gets home next week."

"That's great. I'm looking forward to getting your help at my place. Is there any chance that your wife could start this week? Gabriela was looking forward to it, and she could use the help."

“I’ll ask her and send her over to talk with Gabriela tomorrow. She’ll either start work or let her know that she can’t until next Sunday.”

Gabriela was delighted. “Oh, Orly, if Mrs. Amata can start tomorrow, then we can start your robe, and mine. This one is feeling tight all over,” exclaimed Gabriela.

When Orly got home from work on Wednesday, he discovered that Gabriela and Mrs. Amata had walked to the market and picked out enough thread for her a new birthing robe and for him two new work robes. Gabriela apologized for using up all her allowance to purchase the thread. He assured her it was fine and approved of the thread that she had selected. He refilled her bowl of coins and showed her where he kept an emergency supply down in the root cellar if she needed more. He asked if she had enjoyed having Mrs. Amata helping.

“Yes, I enjoyed her being here very much. She’s such a nice lady. She is full of energy, and I had to work to keep up with her. Miss Martha taught me to weave kitchen cloths, but she made all our clothes. Mrs. Amata showed me that robes are simply made up of kitchen cloths all sewn together. We will start weaving tomorrow. She said we would start on my robe first since I need room to move around and yours is already ripped.”

Orly was full of news about work, but eventually Gabriela asked him if it would be okay to use a coin to go and talk with Chaya’s mother, the midwife. Orly suddenly was concerned.

“Mrs. Amata felt that it’s a little soon to be so big. She thought it would be a good idea to talk with Mrs. Sabra just to make sure that everything is okay. I told her I would talk with you because I don’t want to waste your money.”

“I’ve told you to use whatever you need. I want to take good care of you. Yes, go talk with Mrs. Sabra tomorrow. It will help both of us to not worry.”

Gabriela asked what Orly had prepared for the synagogue message next week. He said that he was feeling that he should essentially give them an opportunity to express what the Holy Spirit was saying in their lives; similar to what they had done with Mr. Kenan’s group last time. Gabriela wondered if maybe he should discuss some warnings about discerning the difference between hearing the Holy Spirit and hearing Satan or even self. He agreed to give it more thought. They also discussed what Orly was planning for the group at Mr. Kenan’s. He assured her that he had been praying, but wasn’t hearing anything. He was just trusting at this point. They prayed together and called it a night.

Gabriela went to the well and visited the girls there for a while. Everyone agreed that she was showing much earlier than normal. Some suspected it was because Orly was such a big man. Others openly mentioned that maybe she was farther along than she thought. Chaya defended her and reminded them that she wasn’t even in town before the wedding week. Gabriela was shocked that they would accuse her of such things, but talking at the well had always had its

advantages and disadvantages. She took her water jar home and then headed to the market to get fresh fruits and vegetables for their dinner. She hated to spend Orly's money, but she really wanted to talk with the midwife. She tucked the coin in her robe pocket and went to visit Mrs. Sabra. She was as kind and helpful as her husband and daughter. She insisted that everyone called her Sabra and Gabriela felt comfortable talking with her. She listened to her concerns and questions and told her that a new robe would be the best solution — then no one else would need to know how big or small she was, and it wouldn't be the topic of discussion at the well. But as far as her opinion, she felt it was too early to determine whether she was just unusually big, or whether she was carrying twins. "Twins!" exclaimed Gabriela. "I never thought of that. I have twin brothers and I remember my mother talking about feeling huge. Oh my."

"Well, it's too early to know. So, you'll just have to wait. Some women get bigger faster and some slower. But I would like to see you again in a couple of months. She encouraged her to drink lots of milk and get plenty of fruits and vegetables. She mentioned that she would probably benefit from eating some goat liver to help with the fatigue. Gabriela thanked her and paid her the coin. She decided she didn't want to go home and walked to Mr. Kenan's house instead. She stuck her head in the kitchen door and Benjamin greeted her. He said that Ruth was baking some bread in the outside oven, so Gabriela walked around the side of the house and found Mother Ruth sitting alone in the grass waiting for her bread to bake. Talking with Mother Ruth was just what she needed. They agreed that mentioning twins to Orly might get his hopes up too much. They decided to keep it their secret until Sabra could confirm it. Gabriela hurried home, realizing that Mrs. Amata would be arriving soon.

Mrs. Amata looked over the outside loom and said there was only one problem. "What's wrong?" asked Gabriela.

"Goats. Didn't you say that you wanted Lucas to get you some goats? Once we get the loom threaded, it may take us several days to complete a project. I'm afraid the goats will think that fabric is a nice dessert." Mrs. Amata put her hands on her hips and walked around the loom. "Lucas will need to build a frame so we can move it into the house. Where would you want it?"

"We could put it in the guest room. We have never had guests, so I think that would be okay," said Gabriela.

"He would just need some lumber. In the meantime, let's get started on your small loom. Have you made anything on it, yet?"

"No," said Gabriela. "I tried to load it and couldn't figure it out."

"That's why I'm here to help. You are ahead of the game by at least knowing the basics of weaving. Now, let's go see this small loom of yours." They went inside together. "Okay, so your small loom will only make a strip of fabric about two handbreadths wide. We could make your entire robe with the small loom, but you would have a lot more pieces to sew together. I'll get you started on making a hood and then I need to look at my measurements and see how much of the

robe we can do on the small loom. Tomorrow, I will bring my own lap loom and we can both work on the smaller pieces until Lucas gets the frame made.”

Amata showed her how to load the thread on the loom, and after several tries, Gabriela had that part mastered. “Now you are ready to start weaving,” said Mrs. Amata. “Do you need help getting started, or is it coming back to you?”

“I think I remember, but please watch me to be sure.”

Amata reminded her to keep her thread straight and even. “You don’t want your fabric to be all twisty and lumpy. You don’t want it too tight or too loose. You just pull it through the strands of the warp. In front of the first one and behind the second one. See, you remember,” said Mrs. Amata encouragingly.

Mrs. Amata looked at the birthing robe again and stated that using only the small looms, they would need about thirty pieces of fabric to make Gabriela’s new robe. “Oh, my. That’s a lot of robe! Will I really need that much?”

“Unfortunately, you will! But it will happen gradually, but that last month when you are at your largest, you’ll have to be careful not to lose your balance. You’ll be front-heavy and topple over if you aren’t careful!” The ladies laughed together and once again Gabriela thanked God for bringing her Mrs. Amata.

She decided to rest after Mrs. Amata left. She just needed a short nap before Orly arrived home. When he arrived, he found her sound asleep on the living room cushion. He quickly prepared the vegetables and was just starting out to cook them when Gabriela woke up. She apologized and he assured her that he loved taking care of her. He said he would be right back and cooked the skillet of vegetables over the fire. By the time he returned, she had the table ready with sliced bread and fresh butter. She told him about her busy day and that Sabra said that a new robe would cover up her size and for them not to worry. “Some girls just get bigger faster than others. She wants to check me again in two months and she says everything is normal.”

“That’s a relief,” said Orly. “And how was your time with Mrs. Amata?”

She told him about needing to move the large loom indoors if they were getting goats. “Mrs. Amata said that Lucas could build a frame for it and put it in the guest room.”

“Have Lucas check in the cellar to see if there is enough wood for the frame. There was some leftover wood from the shelves. If that’s not enough, tell him to purchase what he needs at Palti’s, and I’ll pay him on Monday.” Orly told her about his day, and they began discussing the message for Mr. Kenan’s group.

On Friday, Gabriela finished her morning chores quickly and got some weaving done before Mrs. Amata arrived. She would need to stop in a little bit to finish the Sabbath meal.

Mrs. Amata reported that Lucas would build the frame on Sunday, and they began to weave on their small looms. Gabriela felt slow and clumsy beside Mrs. Amata. Mrs. Amata just laughed and told her

stories of making clothes for many, many people before she closed her business several years ago. She had had a long illness and Lucas had encouraged her to sell the shop. "I miss it because it brings me so much pleasure, and it's my way of showing love to that person."

Gabriela didn't even think as she added, "Miss Martha, the lady who taught me to weave, says that with every stitch she prays for the person who will be wearing the garment."

Miss Amata looked at her with a sad look but didn't say anything.

Gabriela immediately realized her mistake and said, "Oh, Mrs. Amata, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. I know that you are Roman, and I don't want that to be a problem. You just remind me of Miss Martha and I miss her so much. I'm glad that you've come to help me."

Miss Amata smiled and said, "I was not offended, child. I was just thinking how sweet that thought was. Your beliefs do not offend me, or I wouldn't be here. I love being with you. Your home seems to be filled with a special love. You have welcomed me and made an old lady feel useful again."

Gabriela put down her own loom. "I've got to run down to the cellar and get some potatoes and onions. I want to make a potato dish that Orly likes, but it needs to cook for a while. I'll be right back."

Gabriela took a deep breath as she stood in the cool cellar. *Thank you, Father, for bringing Mrs. Amata to me. Please give me wisdom to know how to lead her to You without pushing.*

She quickly prepared the dish and put it over the fire. Gabriela had just resumed her weaving when Orly arrived. She had forgotten that he came home early on Fridays. She poured him a glass of juice and offered one to Mrs. Amata who refused. Orly said he would be chopping down more trees and kissed her nose as he headed out the door. The ladies wove in silence for a while and Gabriela realized that the sun was getting low. She handed Mrs. Amata a coin and thanked her for her help. "I'll see you both on Sunday."

Gabriela saw Orly walking up the trail to the house and realized that once again, she wasn't prepared. She called for him to check on the potatoes and quickly set out the butter and some plum jam she had made. She ran out to get the bread and then sat down at the table feeling that she had just run a marathon.

Orly laughed at her sighing and asked her to light the Sabbath candles. She jumped up and quickly lit the candles and listened as Orly blessed her and the expected baby and their families. They returned to the table, and he told her the news from the Metal Shop. "Mr. Kenan apparently arrived home last night, and we have two new blacksmith apprentices. They are both slaves, and looked scared to death."

Gabriela shivered and said she knew that Mr. Kenan would be a wonderful boss, but it still bothered her. "I know. But he saved my life and I'm grateful. How much did you and Mrs. Amata get done on the robe?" So, they began to talk of other things and enjoyed their Sabbath evening.

Chapter 3

The synagogue was still closed for Sukkot travelers, so they had some extra time to relax and just be together. Gabriela changed into her special blue robe and they walked hand in hand to Mr. Kenan's.

They visited with Mother Ruth and Benjamin for a while before group. Mr. Kenan came over and sat on the grass and told Orly and Gabriela that he had visited with Mr. Simon and Mrs. Keturah. They said to assure her that they and their neighbors were doing well. They missed her and were very pleased that Orly was planning to bring her home to visit over Passover. He said her little brothers were growing up fast and were much taller than at the wedding. Gabriela thanked him for bringing her news from home. Then he said, "May God bless you as you carry Orly's baby. That's a very special task that God has called women to bear."

"Thank you, Mr. Kenan. I am so happy," replied Gabriela.

Orly waved at Zuri and Oren, the two new slaves that he had met on Friday. He excused himself and went over to visit with them. They immediately jumped to their feet, but he encouraged them to relax. The three of them sat in the grass and Orly told them his story. They were shocked that Orly had once been a slave to Mr. Kenan. They admitted that they had assumed he was Mr. Kenan's son by the way Mr. Kenan spoke about him. Orly laughed and said, "I know it's not pleasant to be a slave under any circumstances, and I know how much I hated it at times, but trust me, you've come to a great place. You'll learn a trade that will help you escape slavery. When is your freedom date?"

Zuri replied, "I'll be free in three years, but Oren here, he's got a long way to go."

"Yeah, I ran away from my last owner and the judge put another ten years on me."

"I'm so sorry. But you are young, and you've got your whole life ahead of you. I'll teach you everything I know about blacksmithing, and I'll be here every Sabbath to teach about a new way of living. Our group is about to start. You are not required to attend, but you might enjoy it. We meet in the courtyard around the ninth hour, and you are welcome. You can sit with me if you like." The two men looked at each other and their curiosity got the best of them. They followed Orly to the courtyard, a place they never expected to be invited. Joshua greeted them and asked if they would like to sit with him. They both sat down and looked around. Orly sat down beside them while Mr. Kenan welcomed the group and Jordan led them in singing some Psalms.

Orly stood at the front of the group and thanked Jordan for covering so that he and Gabriela could take a much-needed break during Sukkot. "We traveled to Capernaum to visit with Yanis and Jenay. We also got to visit with the Apostles James and John. So, I bring you greetings not only from kinfolks in Capernaum who are all

doing well, but also from the apostles in Jerusalem. James and John are on their way to Damascus. They will check on a group from Jerusalem that has moved there to teach the New Way. They plan to return through this part of Galilee and hope to stop and visit with us. I just wanted you to be aware that that could happen in the next couple of weeks. Of course, their schedules are always subject to change. Why?"

Many in the crowd shouted out, "Because they are led by the Holy Spirit."

"That's exactly right. Now this morning, I want to tell you something that Kobe taught me about Jesus. He said that after Jesus was baptized, He heard the Holy Spirit leading Him to go into the wilderness. He stayed there for forty days to pray and prepare for His ministry. Jesus said He had no food or water for forty days and nights, and guess who showed up just when He felt at His lowest?"

"God!" several in the group called out.

"Good answer, but wrong. Satan showed up and began to tempt Jesus. He tempted Him to feel unloved by God. He tempted Him to not trust God to guide Him, and to not be obedient to God's plan. I just want to remind you this afternoon that while we celebrate and rejoice that we have the Holy Spirit guiding us, we also need the Holy Spirit to help us recognize when it is Satan talking and not Him. The Holy Spirit will empower us to endure suffering and persecution. There are hard roads He leads us to take, and there are times when we don't understand what God is doing or why. James and John reminded me that it may not always be smooth sailing. Jesus Himself said that we would continue to have troubles and persecution in this world. There will always be problems and pain that we don't understand. With the Holy Spirit to guide us, He'll show us the way through. And we can rejoice in God's promise to never leave us or forsake us. The Holy Spirit will guide us until we are safely in Jesus' presence in Heaven."

After visiting for a little while, Orly whispered to Gabriela that he was going to walk home and pray for a while but would return for post-Sabbath dinner. He suggested she just relax and visit Mother Ruth and Joelle, and he would return before dinner. She agreed and watched as he walked down the road toward their house. *Father, I love him so much. Please keep him safe.*

Gabriela had just gotten seated again when she noticed a group of people standing in the courtyard. As she watched, she saw servants running to Jordan and realized that it was Jordan's mother and little sister. She got up to see what was going on. Jordan's family ministered in Carthage in Northern Africa and only came to Jerusalem for Passover each year. She knew that something had to be wrong. She listened as Jordan's mother told him that his dad had been put to death by a Roman proconsul. Jordan fell to his knees weeping. His little sister Sarah tried to comfort him. But Jordan made no attempt to stop his wailing. He had been looking forward to rejoining the family at Passover and ministering alongside his dad. His world was rocked. Mr. Kenan and Joshua helped Jordan into the house and invited Basha

and the couple that had traveled with her to come inside. Gabriela asked little Sarah if she wanted to go inside or if she wanted to stay outside with her. Sarah decided to sit outside with Gabriela. They sat under the shade tree.

“Your robe is very pretty and so soft. It makes you look like a queen,” said Sarah emphatically as she stroked the beautiful fabric.

“Well, let me tell you a secret. I’m going to have a baby this winter and someone very special gave me this birthing robe.”

“A baby? That’s good. I love babies,” said Sarah. “Will it be a boy baby or a girl baby?”

“Well, we won’t know until God says it’s time for him or her to be born,” replied Gabriela.

“I think it should be a girl. Girls are more fun than boys,” declared Sarah. “I want to check on my brother.” Gabriela took Sarah inside the house and made sure she found her mother and Jordan. They were talking quietly, and Jordan seemed eager to hug his sister. Gabriela whispered to Mrs. Vada that she was going to meet Orly and let him know.

Tears ran down Gabriela’s face as she walked toward home. She hoped that she could catch him before he started walking back. The sun was getting very close to the horizon. She walked fast but knew that she couldn’t run on the Sabbath. She met Orly just as he was coming out the gate.

“Gabriela, what’s wrong? What’s happened?” He pulled her toward the courtyard. There she told him the little bit that she had heard. Like Jordan, Orly openly grieved. It broke Gabriela’s heart to hear him wail and cry out to God. But she was glad that he was turning to the only One who could help him. They cried together for a while, and then Orly felt that they should go and be with Jordan. “This must be so hard for him. It’s one thing to preach about being ready to give our lives for Jesus, but it’s another thing when it happens to those we love.” They walked back to Mr. Kenan’s.

Everyone had moved out to the courtyard for a light post-Sabbath meal. Mr. Kenan asked Orly if he could take Chado and his wife Arna to their house for the night since he lived so close. Mr. Kenan wanted to keep Jordan’s mother and sister in his only guest room. The travelers were weary and ready to settle somewhere for the night. Orly whispered to Gabriela that they would be hosting Chado and Arna. She readily agreed and they invited the weary couple to walk home with them. Gabriela quickly took a lamp to the guest room and removed the looms and threads she had stored there. Orly placed a water jar and some cups in their room and grabbed a bowl and a towel. Then they left them alone. Orly and Gabriela sat on the rooftop and grieved late into the night.

Orly had his quiet time and then helped her set out a breakfast of olives and oil and bread and fruit. They weren’t sure what their guests were accustomed to eating but hoped that it would be acceptable. Chado and Arna spoke little Aramaic and talking with them was mostly hand signals. But there was still sweet fellowship because they were

followers of Jesus. They had just sat down for breakfast when Orly had to leave for work.

Lucas was relieved when Orly arrived. Joshua had arrived earlier with a message from Mr. Kenan that he and Jordan would not be working due to Jordan's dad's death. Orly explained all he had heard, and Lucas called the men together so that they would all know. "Since Mr. Kenan is not coming in today, I'll make my own announcement," said Lucas. "I will continue to be your morning boss, but Orly has been promoted to afternoon boss and I'll be leaving early. Let's get back to work."

The shop was a little quieter and more somber than usual as they worked. Everyone's mind was on Jordan and his loss. Lucas was working with the two new blacksmith slaves, and they were busy making pancakes.

When the noon break came, Lucas instructed the two slaves to stay indoors and help Joshua with cleaning and sorting the iron. They were shocked to learn that Joshua was a slave since he seemed to be such good friends with the free men. Joshua explained that because Mr. Kenan was a follower of Jesus, every man and woman was treated with respect. "I've never been mistreated by him. I've been punished, but it generally involved missing a meal or being confined to quarters. But he treats me like all his other family." The new slaves were amazed. "Well, except that we're still slaves." Joshua added.

Lucas sat on the grass and enjoyed the break time with the men. He didn't want to miss this special time to catch up on everyone's lives. Orly announced to the men that he and Gabriela were expecting a little one in the winter, and everyone cheered and whistled. Markus said that his son and two grandchildren were visiting from Antipatris. They would be staying a week. He had never met these grandchildren who were five and three and so precious. Orly asked if they were girls or boys and Markus replied, "The older one is a girl and the younger is a boy, but he's bigger than his sister and maybe he'll make a blacksmith. He sure does like to bang on things."

"Get him a hammer!" said Julius.

"No way! He'd tear my house down!" laughed Markus.

Lucas nudged Orly and reminded him and the rest of the men that Orly was the afternoon boss. Orly called the men back to work and wished Lucas a happy afternoon.

Orly had never trained an apprentice, but he remembered his own training and was grateful that Lucas had allowed his muscles time to relax occasionally. So, he took Zuri and Oren outside under the trees and sat talking with them about blacksmithing and what they would be learning. He told them that they were going to go back inside and hammer three pancakes, then they would take another break. The men seemed to appreciate Orly's talking with them and were eager to comply with his requests. While they hammered their pancakes, Orly was able to get some work done on some tools ordered by the Mercantile Store. When Oren and Zuri were finished with their pancakes, he praised them and brought them over to his work bench

to watch for a while. As he shaped the shovels and axes, he explained what he was doing and why. After a while he took them to the iron bins and had them guess the weights of the iron chunks. Orly made it fun as they laughed at each other's mistakes and their guesses became more accurate. "Okay, last round. The man that misses this one has to make an extra pancake this afternoon." Orly handed each of them a chunk of iron that was approximately eight shekels. Both of them guessed it correctly. "Okay, three more pancakes before quitting time." The men groaned as they headed back to their benches. Orly decided to start work on a bent axle. As he carried the wagon axle to his bench, he noticed their admiration of his strength. He heated the axle and began hammering on it to get it straightened. He called out a warning that it was almost quitting time and finished smoothing the axle. He walked over to check on Oren's work and praised him for the smoothness of his pancakes. He told him to leave them on his bench for Lucas to see in the morning. Then he checked Zuri's work and showed him how to smooth out a rough spot that was in one of his. He called Oren over to look and explained that this was not Zuri's fault. If the iron contained pieces of rock or dirt, all the hammering in the world would not smooth it. The only way to deal with it was to reheat it and dig it out, then start over. The men thanked Orly for his help and Orly called quitting time for all. Orly ran home to Gabriela.

Gabriela had had a busy day, and she was excited to tell Orly all about it. She had dinner on the table and fresh goat milk to drink. "I took Chado and Arno back to Mr. Kenan's and visited for a while. I asked Lucas if he could get me a couple of goats to milk and whatever I needed to take care of them. I gave him the silver that you said to give him.

"I'll check with him and see if I owe him more. Did he look at the loom?"

"Yes, he said there was plenty of wood leftover to make a frame. Mrs. Amata and I wove on our little looms outside while I watched the bread. So, tomorrow morning, I've got to get up and milk the goats while you have your quiet time."

"Are you sure you don't want my help?"

"No, I'd rather have you sit down and eat breakfast with me before you leave for work."

"We need to get over to Mr. Kenan's. I'm not sure when we'll get our studying in, but I feel that we need to be with Jordan's family tonight."

"I agree. Help me clear the table and I'll clean up tomorrow morning." They returned to Mr. Kenan's house and found quite a crowd gathered in the courtyard. They told Orly that Ruler Jedidiah had stopped by in the afternoon, and Jordan's mother had been told about the synagogue baptism.

Orly and Gabriela learned that the Apostle Philip had been arrested over a month ago. Basha had notified their group. Chado had insisted that she and Sarah come to his house to sleep in case of further trouble, and Basha agreed only because she didn't want to

worry Chado. Chado and another man from their group had gone to the prison to take Philip his breakfast and to see if there was any news. Instead, they found that Philip had been killed at sunrise. They hurried back to tell Basha and to hide her and Sarah. They were not sure, at that point, who had ordered the killing or why. They had stayed in hiding for five days. By that time, they had learned that the Roman proconsul had ordered Philip's death because the proconsul's wife had become a follower of Jesus. Now, there would possibly be additional persecution for the followers of Jesus. The group in Carthage wanted to get Basha and Sarah as far away as possible and felt that she needed to be with Jordan. The group had collected enough money for four people to travel to Cana. Now, Chado and Arna were eager to return to their home and see what was happening in Carthage.

Mr. Kenan and Orly discussed their plans and Basha translated that they wanted to leave tomorrow as Chado needed to return to work. Mr. Kenan suggested that Enoch could take them in the oxcart and save them a week of walking. Orly offered to send the two mats that Chado and Arna were sleeping on to help pad the wagon. Mr. Kenan expressed that he was extremely grateful for their accompanying Basha and Sarah and keeping them safe. He said he would have an oxcart ready by sunrise to take them to Joppa.

The next morning, Orly walked with them back to Mr. Kenan's on his way to work. Orly and Chado carried the two mats while Arna carried their travel bags. Enoch had the oxcart ready. Mr. Kenan had given Enoch money to purchase some needed supplies after he dropped off his passengers. Joppa was a major seaport and had many inexpensive shops at their market.

Jonah, a kitchen slave, traveled on the front seat with Enoch. Enoch started off slowly so he wouldn't scare his passengers. They were trying to eat their breakfast and had never ridden in an oxcart. Everyone was waving and shouting goodbye. Orly joined Mr. Kenan and the family for breakfast, then he needed to hurry off to work.

After she finished her chores, Gabriela checked on Basha, Jordan, and Sarah. The mood was still somber, and everyone was respectful of Jordan's need to grieve, but things were becoming a little less mournful and closer to normal. Gabriela hugged Sarah and asked if she would like to spend the afternoon with her. She told Sarah that she and Mrs. Amata were sewing a new birthing robe and asked if she knew how to sew. Sarah replied, "No. My mother doesn't have time for that. Could you teach me?"

"Let's check with your mother," said Gabriela. She had not planned on the invitation, but it was out of her mouth before she thought about the busy day she had planned.

Gabriela visited with Jordan, Basha, and Mrs. Vada for a while, then she and Sarah headed home. Of course, the goats came running to greet them and Sarah was enthralled. Gabriela introduced her to Lizzy and Kizzy. Sarah sat on the grass and scratched their ears and

giggled when they gave her goat kisses. “Just don’t let them eat your robe!” reminded Gabriela.

Gabriela went into the house and found a kitchen cloth for Sarah to practice the basics of sewing cloth together. She remembered sewing with Miss Martha. Gabriela grabbed a water jar and walked back outside. She called Sarah to join her as they walked down the trail to the stream. She knew that Sarah would need to wash the dirt off her hands before she began sewing or the cloth would be soiled. Gabriela showed her how to tie her robe up so that she could have her hands free. Sarah washed her hands while Gabriela filled the water pot.

“I can see where your baby is growing,” said Sarah.

“Yes, my robe is getting snug, and you can see it. That’s why I need a new robe to cover it up,” explained Gabriela. She remembered her little brothers were always full of questions.

“Why do you want it covered? Don’t you want the whole world to know that you are having a baby?” asked Sarah.

“Well, it’s considered immodest to show how big your belly is — sorta’ like walking around naked. So, we make special robes that are big enough to cover the bump,” replied Gabriela.

“That’s silly,” said Sarah.

“It may be silly, but I’m very glad that I’ll have a new robe soon, because this one is getting tight and uncomfortable.”

“Oh,” said Sarah. That seemed to satisfy her better.

“A lady named Mrs. Amata is coming to work on my new robe this afternoon. And I’ll be weaving on my loom, and you can be sewing on the project that I have for you.”

As they returned to the house, Mrs. Amata and Lucas arrived. Gabriela introduced both of them to Sarah, and Lucas headed for the barn. “Mrs. Amata, Sarah wants to learn to sew, and I thought she could practice on one of my kitchen cloths while we work on the weaving, but I haven’t gotten her started yet.”

“How old are you, Sarah? You look just about the same age as my granddaughter,” said Mrs. Amata.

“How old is your granddaughter?” replied Sarah.

“She’s almost eight,” answered Mrs. Amata.

“I turned eight last month. So, I’m older.”

“Yes, you are. Have you sewed before?” asked Mrs. Amata.

“No, ma’am,” said Sarah.

Mrs. Amata picked up the kitchen cloth and folded it over. “See, if you sew up these edges, you will have a pillow that’s just your size.” She turned up her own robe and showed Sarah the stitches that were holding it together. “Gabriela and I are weaving cloth, and we’ll stitch it together to make her a new robe.” When Mrs. Amata began weaving very quickly, Sarah watched fascinated. When she was tired of watching, Gabriela gave her the folded kitchen cloth, a needle, and thread, and taught her how to thread her needle. Gabriela showed her how to start the first seam. Sarah caught on fast and began to stitch the two sides together carefully. When Mrs. Amata finished with

another panel of fabric, she pulled it out of the loom to show both girls. Gabriela was properly impressed, since she wasn't even a fourth of the way done with her first panel, but Sarah began to cry.

"What's wrong, Sarah?" said Gabriela as she rushed to comfort her. Then she began to giggle. "Oh, Sarah, you've sewn your robe to the cloth. I'm so sorry. I should have helped you more, but I wanted to weave on my own robe. Well, not literally weave on my own robe." Both girls began giggling again.

Mrs. Amata stopped and looked at the mess in Sarah's lap. She grabbed her scissors and with a couple of snips, she pulled all the threads out. "See, no harm done. At least I hope you didn't stitch your legs together!"

"Oh, no! My legs are just fine," and she began to dance around giggling. "I sewed myself to my pillow! What a mess!"

"Don't lose your needle. You need to start again on your pillow next time. But you've made a great start in learning how not to sew!" said Mrs. Amata.

"Oh Sarah, I just noticed it's getting late. Are you okay to stay and eat dinner with Uncle Orly and me? Then we'll take you home after dinner."

"I'll stay and eat with you and Uncle Orly."

"Do you think your mother will mind?"

"No, she knows where I am. I eat at my friend's house a lot at home. Her mother lets me stay because she knows my mother and abba are busy." Suddenly, tears were running down Sarah's face, and Gabriela took her in her arms and assured her it was okay to cry. She reminded her that her abba was in Heaven with Jesus and that someday she would get to see him again. And he would tell her, "Sarah, don't you sew pillows on your robe!" Soon Sarah was giggling again, and all was well.

Lucas brought in the jars of milk and they left just before Orly arrived. Gabriela put Sarah to work setting the table with plates and bread and butter. She hurried outside to cook the vegetables and when she returned, Orly had heard all about the sewing escapade. He was laughing and telling Sarah, "I want a pillow on my new robe, but I want it on the backside so I can sit on it!" Gabriela just shook her head and told him that they had had a good time together today.

They ate their dinner while they shared their day with each other. Then they walked to Mr. Kenan's with Sarah skipping between them. She was eager to get home and see her mother and brother. The family was still sitting around the dinner table when they arrived, so Sarah was able to tell everyone about her wonderful day. When Sarah said that she was going to learn to sew a pillow so that she could attach it to Uncle Orly's robe, Jordan demanded that he get a pillow, too. There was much laughter at the table when Lucas and Amata arrived to express their condolences and share Jordan's grief. Everyone joined them in the courtyard to visit. Gabriela wondered what Mrs. Amata and Lucas were feeling about all the laughter in the middle of this time of mourning. She hoped to be able to talk with her

soon about Jesus' promise of resurrection and living forever in Heaven. But she knew she must wait until Mrs. Amata was ready.

During breakfast, Jordan asked Mr. Kenan and his mother when it would be appropriate for him to return to work. He didn't want to be disrespectful of his dad but was feeling restless just sitting and doing nothing all day. Basha replied that she was planning for the family to walk to Capernaum to visit with friends there. She and their dad had spent many happy hours with Zebedee and Salome. "I was thinking that if we left right now, we could be there by night and spend Thursday with them and then return on Friday in time for the Sabbath. I appreciate your wonderful hospitality, but I think it would be good for our family to be alone right now."

Jordan, who was used to his mother's constantly changing plans, said it was fine with him. He went to pack his travel bag and was ready in a few minutes. Ruth and Benjamin put together a food bag for the three of them to travel to Capernaum. Soon they were out the door and on their way. Basha had traveled with Jesus all over this part of Galilee. It felt great to be alone with her son and daughter, but oh, how she missed her husband, Philip. It was really the first time she had allowed herself to think about her loss or what her future would look like. She was trusting that God would guide her one step at a time, but she needed to grieve. All day they walked and talked. They cried at times but recalled wonderful memories. Just being outdoors and walking where they had traveled with Jesus was healing. Sarah skipped ahead and picked wildflowers along the road, singing made-up songs of worship, and letting Jordan and Mother talk.

Jordan shared that he had always assumed he would rejoin his parents in Carthage and set up a blacksmith shop and then push deeper and deeper into unknown territory with his dad. Now, he wasn't so sure. He realized that he wasn't really sure of anything regarding his future. His mother admitted that she wasn't either.

"Let's stop and have a snack. I'm feeling tired and I see a well ahead. We've made good time. If I remember right, we are over halfway and it's not even high noon yet."



Gabriela enjoyed the peace and quiet of her home. She decided not to go to Mr. Kenan's today. They would visit this evening and everyone would understand. She caught up on neglected chores and then headed out to the courtyard to eat a snack.

When Lucas and Mrs. Amata arrived, they found her sound asleep on a courtyard bench. Lucas motioned for Mrs. Amata to follow him down the trail and he showed her the lovely stream. They watched the goats play for a few minutes, then Mrs. Amata fussed at him and told him that they should be working. Lucas headed to the barn and carried the large loom up to the courtyard. He set it there so that he

wouldn't wake Gabriela and headed back to the barn. Mrs. Amata went inside and started her weaving. She had just finished another panel when Gabriela woke up from her nap. She heard Lucas chopping firewood and realized that Mrs. Amata was probably already inside. She got up suddenly, and felt her world go black. She screamed as she fell, and Mrs. Amata came running. But Gabriela assured her she was fine, just a little dizzy. "You probably stood up too fast."

"I guess so. I realized that you were here, and I wanted to join you. I did sit and stand up all at the same time, but that has never happened before. I think I fainted."

"Yes, that's pretty common when you are carrying a baby. You are going to have to move more slowly, or you will faint. You just can't jump up and run like you used to."

"Oh, I'm glad you are here. I feel fine now."

"Did you hurt yourself?"

"No, not really. I landed pretty hard on my knees, but they are fine. Please don't tell Orly or he will worry. I'll just have to be more careful."

"Let me call Lucas. He wants to bring in the big loom. Do you want it behind the table or by the front door?"

"Our company is gone, so let's put it in the guest room," said Gabriela. Soon Amata had the large loom loaded with thread and was quickly beginning her first row. Gabriela watched with amazement. The large loom would make a panel of fabric that was eight handbreadths wide. Gabriela wanted to stay and watch but knew that she needed to get Orly's dinner prepared. She went to the kitchen, prepared the vegetable dish, and carried it to the oven. Then she started on her weaving again until Amata and Lucas left.

Gabriela heard Orly coming in and called for him to get the vegetables out of the oven for her. Orly brought in the dish, and they sat down for a quick meal. Gabriela told him about her wonderful, relaxing day, and he was pleased that she had finally had some time to rest. They cleared the table together, when Orly realized that he had not told her the news. "We don't need to go to Mr. Kenan's tonight because Jordan and his family have gone to Capernaum. What a busy week it has been already." They washed the dishes together and then sat down to pray and discuss the messages for the Sabbath. Orly felt that for the synagogue group, he should begin teaching them about Jesus' earthly life and His New Way. He wasn't sure about Mr. Kenan's group. Gabriela reminded him that Jordan had been covering some of Jesus' parables. They discussed the new slaves that were attending the group and wondered if an overview of Jesus' earthly life might be beneficial. Neither one of them knew for sure where the Holy Spirit was leading, so they prayed again, asked for wisdom, and called it a night.

On Thursday, Mrs. Amata and Gabriela continued with the weaving. As they wove, Mrs. Amata asked, "Gabriela, why do you call Lucas, Lucas, but you call me Mrs. Amata? I would like for you to call

me Amata. If anything, you are my boss, and I should call you Mrs. Gabriela.”

“Oh, my goodness, no! I was just taught to call my elders Mr., Mrs., or Miss. But you are right, I don’t know why Orly doesn’t say Mr. Lucas. I guess the men at work just don’t do that. Should I be saying, Mr. Lucas?”

“No, I think you should call me Amata and let me continue to call you Gabriela. Now, what happened to that sweet little girl that was here the other day trying to learn to sew?”

“That was Jordan’s little sister, Sarah, and they have gone to Capernaum for the rest of the week to visit friends. I have no idea whether she really wants to learn or whether she just needed a break from all the sadness,” shared Gabriela.

“She seemed to enjoy herself. I love to see young girls interested in sewing. Would you like help cleaning, or cooking, or something else?”

“Since the mats are out of here, do you mind helping me clean? I didn’t realize it was getting so dusty.” They worked together and got the guest room all cleaned. They heard Lucas coming into the kitchen and Amata sent him to empty their pan of dirty water. The ladies were tired but pleased with their accomplishment. They would get back to their weaving tomorrow, but it felt good to have a clean room to work in.

On Friday, Gabriela was busy getting ready for the Sabbath. She had bread to bake and a Sabbath meal to prepare and Sabbath breakfast to set out. *How happy I am here. God has certainly blessed me.* When Amata arrived, she started weaving while Gabriela continued to work in the kitchen. She was humming a Psalm as she worked. Gabriela sat down and sipped her juice as she watched Amata finish the next to last panel and load the loom for the last one.



“Lucas!” Orly called as he approached the barn. Lucas came from behind the barn to meet him. “Gabriela sent you some juice. You look hot; what are you doing? Can I help?”

“Well, I was splitting some trees to make an ox pasture. If you are going to get an ox, you don’t want to just pen him up in the barn all day, but you can’t let him wander around either. If I build a fence, then you won’t have to stake him. If we attach the fence to the back of the barn, the ox can be indoors or out. Then Gabriela won’t have to deal with him at all. I’ll check on him and water him in the evenings and he’ll be fine the rest of the time.”

“You are doing exactly what I had hoped, only better. Thanks for all your work.”

“Orly, can I ask you something?”

“Sure, anything. What do you need?”

“A lot of things. Amata and I have a lot of questions, I think I told you before that I’d like to know more about your god. Could you meet with us sometime? We are just curious.”

“Gabriela and I have been talking about inviting the whole group over just for that purpose — to answer any questions you have about why we follow Jesus.”

“You mean, invite them here?”

“Sure, like a party. We’d serve dinner and then let you guys ask anything that’s on your mind. Would that be okay, or would you prefer it just be you and Amata? You two are welcome to stay anytime and ask any questions you want.”

“We don’t want to impose.”

“I know, but it’s not an imposition. You two are our friends and you are really helping us out.”

“And you are helping us out! I think it would be fine if you wanted to invite all the guys and their wives. We get together quite often, and we’ve talked a lot about it. We all have questions.”

“Then let’s do it. Let’s go to the house and see when Gabriela wants to host it.”

“No, I’ll let you talk with her alone. But let’s get together soon. My head is filled with questions, and I think you have some of the answers I need.”

“I hope so, Lucas. And we’ll be happy to host it. What night is best for you guys?”

“Well, the group usually gets together after work on Fridays, but I know that’s your Sabbath.”

“But that’s when Jews usually get together for parties, too. So, I suspect we’ll plan it for next Friday after work, but I’ll have to check with Gabriela. I’ll let you know on Sunday. Now what about this fence. How can I help?”

Orly was so excited he had trouble concentrating on helping Lucas. Orly felled a couple more trees and was splitting them into planks when he realized that it was time to quit. Lucas was finished milking the goats and they walked up to the house together. Orly paid Lucas and thanked him and Amata for their help.

As Orly and Gabriela enjoyed their Sabbath meal together, he told her what Lucas had said. Gabriela told him that Amata was also filled with curiosity about their beliefs. They agreed that next week would be perfect and started planning the menu. Gabriela said she would go over the menu with Amata on Sunday. But right now, they needed to finish plans for the synagogue and group messages.

Chapter 4

Orly had his prayer time while Gabriela milked the goats and then they sat in the courtyard to eat their breakfast. Both were still excited about the possibility of talking with the Gentiles and wondered what the Holy Spirit was going to accomplish. They knew that they didn't want to be distracted from discipling and training all the new followers at the synagogue. They walked to the synagogue together and joined many friends along the way. Ruler Jedidiah greeted everyone and led the synagogue in a time of prayer and singing of Psalms. Orly moved to the front. "How good it is to be back together with you. I hope you had a good Sukkot. As I was praying for you this week, I kept remembering my friend Kobe who led me to understand what following Jesus was all about. I heard Kobe talk about lots of miracles that he had seen. When he started teaching what Jesus taught, I thought my mind would explode. His teachings were so different. They were radical. Kobe kept insisting that Jesus' teachings perfectly lined up with The Law and The Prophets. Today I want to begin a series about what Jesus taught His followers. Kobe made me memorize what He called Jesus' blessings. It was one of Jesus' first sermons.

"When we admit that we are weak and need God's help, that's when Jesus helps us. When we are mourning because we don't understand God's ways, that's when Jesus comforts us. When we submit to God in obedience even when we can't comprehend His ways, that's when He directs our paths. When we are thirsty for understanding and seeking Him with all our hearts, that's when we learn the most. When we are merciful to those around us, then Jehovah is merciful toward us. The pure in heart and the peacemakers are blessed, but I want us to focus on this last section. Jesus taught that there were special blessings when people persecute you because of righteousness. Jesus understood that following Him was not going to be easy. It would often be hard, and often dangerous. He knew what was coming for His followers and He encouraged us to be obedient to do whatever the Holy Spirit says."

Orly continued, "Then Jesus began to break down this teaching into very practical things that we should be doing in our daily lives. I believe that this series will challenge you to live and behave differently. We often call it the New Way, but don't forget, it's really the Old Way that God intended from the beginning and is spelled out in Jewish Scripture. Ruler Jedidiah, will you lead us in prayer?"

Jedidiah put his hand on Orly's shoulder and asked Jordan to come forward. "Last Sabbath, Jordan learned that his dad had been killed for sharing the New Way. Jordan's dad was the Apostle Philip, and he was one of Orly's mentors and a good friend. This has been a hard week for both of these young men. I want to pray especially for them and for Jordan's family." Ruler Jedidiah then prayed that God would comfort and sustain them through their grief.

As they walked back to Mr. Kenan's, Orly and Jordan stayed separate from the group and talked privately. Orly asked Jordan how the trip went. "I'm not sure what my relationship with my mother should be now that Dad isn't here. Am I supposed to lead or to follow? It just feels awkward. She's my mother and I respect that, but she's not my ministry partner and I'm not hers. I'm just confused. Pray for me to have wisdom to know what to do."

"I think it will take time to figure things out. I have been praying for you and will continue. I've planned a message for the group today. You'll just have to let me know if you want to speak, or lead the music, or neither. Just let me know, okay?"

"Yeah. I'll let you know in a little bit. I need to pray some more. I thought I was ready to talk about Dad, but that little surprise at the synagogue shook me up. I wasn't expecting that."

"Yeah, you looked like it and I'm sorry. I wanted to honor your dad, but I didn't feel like I could do it justice just yet, so I didn't mention it."

"I'm glad you didn't!"

"Good. Then at least that part was in tune, but I just felt off. Like something was not lined up for the message."

"It's been a rough week. Just let it go and next week will be easier. We all have duds sometimes."

"That bad, huh?"

"Oh, it wasn't that bad, and we have the assurance that the Holy Spirit will take it and use it in someone's heart. So, don't sweat it."

"Thanks."

Orly joined the rest of the group gathered around his mother in the yard. Jordan said that he was going to take a walk. Orly nodded and asked if he wanted company. "Nope. Just me and God."

Orly whispered to Gabriela that he needed to go and pray. He opened the gate surrounding the garden and went inside. Memories of Hosea came flooding back. How many hours he had spent in this garden — weeding, cultivating, planting, and harvesting. He fell on his knees and the smells of the harvest surrounded him. He began to weep and realized he had not taken time to grieve over Philip. In his concern to minister to Jordan, he had ignored his own needs. He grieved the loss of Hosea, his first mentor, and he grieved the loss of Philip, a special friend that God had sent to help during his early attempts to follow Jesus. He thanked God for Philip's impact on his life and poured out his sorrow. Now the healing tears did their work and he felt God's Holy Spirit comforting him. He could see Philip reunited with Jesus and having a great time in Heaven. He knew that Jordan would someday join them and he himself would be there because of Kobe. How he missed Kobe. He prayed that Kobe's ministry was being fruitful and that he was being bold in sharing the good news. Now he felt the Holy Spirit guiding him to ask the group for prayer as he shared the good news with his Gentile friends. He hesitated because he didn't want to upset anyone, and he wanted confirmation that this was the right time to talk about it. The Holy Spirit began to remind Orly of the

many stories of Jesus ministering to Gentiles. *How could I have missed them?* He was eager to share. As he walked out of the garden, he met Jordan. Jordan grabbed his arm and said urgently, "We have to talk!"

"Okay. What's going on?" Jordan was dragging Orly down the trail to their private prayer spot. But it was time for the group to begin.

"Why didn't you tell me that God has called you to minister to the Gentiles?" Jordan demanded.

"What?! I haven't told anyone except Gabriela. How could you know that?"

"Look, we don't have time to totally talk this out, but I need confirmation that God has indeed called you to minister to the Gentiles in Cana. Just a simple yes or no will be fine," said Jordan excitedly.

"Yes. I believe He has."

Jordan whooped with joy. "I'll explain later. We've got to go!"

"Okay," said Orly tentatively, "but are you teaching this morning, or am I?"

"We both are. Come on, let's go!"

Jordan led the group in singing Psalms of praise to God. There was no hesitation and he seemed to be bursting with joy. Then Jordan took a seat on the stool in front and began to share with the group. "As you know, just last Sabbath I received news of my dad's passing into Heaven. It was a rough week of grief and confusion, but as Orly shared at synagogue this morning, it is in those darkest days that God shows up and is very present with us. I feel that the Holy Spirit has spoken, and I'll keep you informed as those plans become more definite.

"We've been talking since Pentecost about Jesus' final teachings to his disciples, but this morning, I want us to focus on His very, very last teaching. He told the apostles that they were to take the good news to all the world. They would begin in Jerusalem and then spread out and reach everyone. Now, if we go all the way back to when God first called Abraham, we see that God promised him that He would bless those who blessed him, and curse whoever cursed him. Then He said all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him. John the Baptizer proclaimed, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' Ponder these two statements and answer me a question. Do you think that Jesus died just for Jews?"

"As I was in prayer a few minutes ago, the Holy Spirit placed this question on my heart, and I had never considered it before. My dad and many of the other apostles have spread out all over the world, but as far as I know they are only preaching to people of Jewish lineage. As I prayed and asked Him if I was being called to preach to Gentiles, I heard very clearly, 'No, but I have called someone else from this group, and he will lead many Gentiles to come to know Jesus.' As you can imagine, it will be a dangerous assignment and yet an exciting breakthrough. This man will need a lot of prayer and need to be surrounded by mature believers who will support and encourage him. I believe that God is calling our group to be that support and

encouragement to someone who is being called to minister to the Gentiles of Cana. Who would be willing to stand and pray for this man?" Several men stood, including Mr. Kenan. Even though they didn't know the name of the man they were praying for, they prayed for his wisdom, courage, clear direction, and leading. Another prayed that many of the Gentiles would accept Jesus as their Messiah. Others prayed that the Jewish leadership would not interfere and that there would be peace. When the prayers were completed, Jordan asked Orly to come and close the service.

Orly knew he was ready to share. He sat on the stool and spoke gently. "Ever since I started work at the Metal Shop, I have been concerned for the Gentiles who worked there. I wondered if Jesus loved them and what would happen to them when they died without knowing Jesus. As I listened to Kobe teach, and when I would go to Jerusalem to hear the apostles preach, I was always impressed by what I heard about Jesus' concern and care for the Gentiles. I couldn't get it out of my mind. I begged God to show me the right direction. For the past two years my Gentile friends have been asking me questions about what I believe and why I do things differently. But as you know, these have been busy years and I could always find an excuse. Since Shavuot, I have not been able to concentrate on my messages. I knew that the Holy Spirit was calling me to talk with them, and I was not being obedient. Yesterday, one of them just point blank asked when I was going to tell them about my God. I agreed to meet with them and answer their questions. I have no idea what God's plans are for the future. All I know is that I feel an incredible peace and joy in being obedient. I want you to know that I didn't tell anyone about this except Gabriela. I did not tell Jordan, God did. I appreciate your prayers and support, and I promise to keep you informed."

Jordan prayed a prayer of blessing over the group. Orly's heart was filled with love and appreciation for these followers who were encouraging him to be obedient even when none of them understood where it would lead. All afternoon, different ones from the group kept stopping by to encourage him and promise their prayers. Many of them shared that they, too, had wondered what their position should be concerning Gentiles. Orly finally whispered to Jordan. "Why don't you come over after dinner this evening and let's talk? I want to know what's going on and it looks like we're not going to have a chance to talk here."

"Sounds good. So, you aren't angry with me?"

"Of course not. I mean, it was a surprise, but it forced me to do the right thing and not hide from those who will encourage and pray for me."

As usual, Orly and Gabriela stayed and enjoyed the post-Sabbath meal with Mr. Kenan's family. Of course, the talk was all about Orly's plans. He simply repeated that Lucas had asked if he would meet with a group that was already getting together on a regular basis and answer their questions. Gabriela added that they had invited them to

come to their courtyard for a kosher meal. They would eat together and then answer questions.

“Should I assume that these are all men from the Metal Shop?” asked Mr. Kenan.

“Yes, and their wives. We’ll also invite Appius and Titus. Thank you for your prayers and support.”

Soon after dinner, Orly and Gabriela walked home. They had just arrived and lit the lamps when Jordan knocked. He was still grinning from ear to ear and was so excited he could hardly sit still.

“Okay, spill it. Something happened today after my synagogue disaster of a message and I want to hear all about it,” said Orly.

Jordan told them that he had gone to their special grassy spot to pray. He had felt God’s presence in a way that he hadn’t in a long time. “It was almost an audible voice. The Holy Spirit very clearly said that I needed to take over the teaching at the synagogue to free you up to reach the Gentiles. Then all of a sudden, I don’t know how, but I saw you meeting with Lucas and the other guys from the shop and their wives, and you were teaching them about following Jesus. Then, Orly, you are not going to believe this, but I saw you teaching about fifty or sixty Gentiles in a courtyard. It was incredible and I got so excited.”

“Oh, man, that’s awesome. Why would God show you my future?” asked Orly.

“Because you can’t do this alone. You need mature followers who are supporting you and praying for you and helping you make decisions. This is no little matter. This could get you killed. You know that, don’t you?”

“Yes. I know. But I also know that if I don’t share with them, nobody else will, and they will die without knowing Jesus. I’m willing to die for that.”

“And I’m willing to help you. But what about the synagogue? Do we just say that I’m going to take over the teaching, or do we let Ruler Jedidiah in on this?”

“Why do you want to take over the teaching at the synagogue?” asked Orly.

“Because that’s what the Holy Spirit said — that I should take over teaching at the synagogue to free you up to work with the Gentiles,” repeated Jordan.

“Okay. But I’m just trying to figure out why I can’t do both.”

“I’m just telling you what I heard,” replied Jordan. “I’m not trying to take your spot.”

“No. I wasn’t thinking that. I was thinking long-term. I mean, you are leaving in six months.”

“Well, I know that I have some confusion about whether the Holy Spirit is calling me to be an evangelist who just plants the seed and then leaves, or whether he wants me to take the seed and learn to cultivate it — the way you and Kobe have done with Mr. Kenan’s group. You’ve planted the seed at the synagogue, and it sprouted. I have this incredible desire to help it grow into a mature group. I think I

can work with Ruler Jedidiah and help him mature, too. And I probably have more free time to do that in the evenings than you do. I don't know about the future, but when the Holy Spirit said I should take the group to free you, I felt an excitement that I've never felt before. I feel that this is God's will for my life — at least for right now.

"I think I'm good with that. I'm just in shock."

"If you are okay with it, do we just tell Ruler Jedidiah that God has called me to teach the synagogue group, or do you think we should tell him what God has called you to do?"

"I think I need to pray some more about it. I meet with Ruler Jedidiah on Tuesdays during our noon break. Why don't you come along? I'll ask Lucas to stick around until we get back and then we'll both have to work late if we take too much time."

"Okay."

"Ruler Jedidiah was very hesitant to let me lead at the beginning. I just want to make sure that he's okay with this change."

"Orly, are you okay with this change? I mean, my taking the synagogue group."

"Yeah," said Orly absently, "No, I mean, I'm totally okay with it. I really enjoyed my time there, but I agree that my focus should be on the Gentile group. It's pretty exciting to think that God would reveal that to you. I'm just surprised by it all. I mean, I had plans for the synagogue group, and Gabriela and I had discussed what they needed to learn, but suddenly, I feel nothing but relief that they are not my responsibility. I guess I feel a little ashamed that I'm so fickle. I thought I wanted to help them grow, and now, I'm more interested in a new group. That doesn't seem right to me. But it does, and I'm okay with it. I'm just trying to figure it out. Are my feelings wrong?"

"I hear you. Are you feeling disloyal because you love somebody new?"

"Yeah. I guess," nodded Orly.

"I think that when God puts a distinct call in your life, he cancels out all the previous calls and lets you focus on the new one."

"So, what are we going to do with Mr. Kenan's group?" asked Orly.

"I think it's becoming a very mature group that will support us in our new endeavors and pray for us, and we'll just keep sharing the leadership. I think they have moved from being a baby group that needs to be spoon fed, to a mature group that is ready for ministry."

"I do feel a change in the group. They seem more like brothers and sisters than new followers who need a shepherd."

"Exactly. For now, let's just keep taking turns. Does that sound right to you?"

"Sure. So, let's talk to Ruler Jedidiah on Tuesday about your taking the synagogue group. I don't know whether I'll tell him what I'm up to or not. Then I'll let you lead the synagogue this Sabbath if it's okay with him, and I'll lead Mr. Kenan's group."

"Sounds like a plan. I need to go and let you two get some sleep. I'll be back to work tomorrow."

“We’ve missed you, and I’m behind.”

They said goodnight and Orly turned to Gabriela. “Are you okay with all of this? You seem awfully quiet.”

“Yes, I’m certainly okay with however the Lord is leading you. I’m just wondering if we are getting ourselves into trouble.”

“Gabriela, you said you were okay with meeting with the Gentiles. You have to be honest with me if it doesn’t feel right to you, or if the Holy Spirit is guiding you differently. Promise?” said Orly tenderly.

“Orly, I’m okay with dying for my Lord Jesus, but our baby? I don’t know. I just never thought about him or her being orphaned like Sarah or worse.”

“Gabriela, I feel that the safest place we can be is right in the center of God’s will. Don’t you feel that God has confirmed that today by telling Jordan about our call to work with the Gentiles?”

“Yes, I guess so. But I’m still processing this. I thought we were just talking about a one-time meeting with Gentile friends, but now it’s turned into a ministry that everyone will hear about. It’s scary to think of our friends turning against us and hating us. I’m admitting to you that I rather like being loved by everyone. I don’t want it to change.”

“I can’t promise it won’t.”

“I know. And I want you to know that I support you in whatever God calls you to do.”

“Us to do. We are in this together — ministry partners. Now, let’s get to sleep before it’s milking time!”

Morning did seem to come early, but Gabriela woke up eager to face the day and all the doubts and worries were gone after a good night’s rest. She thanked God and noticed that Orly seemed eager to get to work, too. He was excited to invite the men over for the Sabbath. She went to the well and to the market. After starting the bread, she sat down and thought about her mother. She had never realized how scared her mother must have been when her dad was spreading the good news in southern Judea. She realized that she had never felt afraid as a child. She prayed that their little one would not ever feel fear. It was good to be obedient, and she was confident that God would provide everything that they needed.

She had just started putting the bread into the baking pans when Amata and Lucas arrived. She greeted them and Amata picked up with her weaving where she had left it on Friday. It was exciting to see the robe finally taking shape. While the bread was rising for the last time, Gabriela said, “Amata, did Lucas tell you that we want all our Gentile friends to come over and have dinner here for the Sabbath?”

“Yes, he did, and I’m very excited. I have so many questions to ask both of you and I know the others do too. Thank you so very much for the invitation.”

“Well, I have some questions for you, too. I only know how to cook kosher food and I was wondering if you would mind being honest with me about whether everyone will like the food.”

“What are you planning on serving?”

“I planned to serve the same fish sauce that was at the wedding, but we’ll serve it over fish, not goat. Then I thought I would make Orly’s favorite potato dish, and of course bread and butter, goat cheese, and plum jam. And I’ll slice some vegetables. And wine, of course. Does that sound right?”

“It sounds like a feast. Would it be all right if Lucas and I provided the wine? We’ve told the group that since we can’t host at our son’s house, we would provide the wine each time, and we did invite ourselves over. Let us help you with that much.”

“Oh, Amata, you don’t have to. We were planning to purchase some, but if you want to, I think that will be fine and will save me a trip to the winery.”

“Yes, I think you will have your hands full.”

“Oh, and do the men and women sit as couples or do they sit at separate tables?”

“Well, we usually sit at separate tables just so we can girl-talk. But seat us wherever you want, and it will be fine,” said Amata reassuringly.

“I was just thinking that it might be better to sit separately since two of the new guys are not married. They might feel uncomfortable sitting with everyone else in couples.”

“You are so thoughtful. Yes, I think that would be perfect.”

Lucas brought in the milk, and they left to go home. Gabriela rushed to the outside oven to throw the bread in to bake. *Now it will be dark before dinner is ready. Will I ever learn to juggle my time better?* But she knew that talking with Amata was important, and Orly had never fussed about her being late. She was grateful for that.

Orly arrived home a little later than usual and said that he had been talking to the Gentile men after work. Everyone seemed excited, and even Appius and Titus had indicated that they would like to come. Orly helped Gabriela finish up dinner, then they spent time in prayer for the meeting with Ruler Jedidiah and for the Gentile group.



On Tuesday at noon, Jordan and Orly met with Ruler Jedidiah. “I hope it’s okay that I brought Jordan with me. I wanted to talk with you about him doing some speaking.”

“I’m thrilled that you came in today, Orly. We haven’t talked in a while, and I’ve got a problem.”

“What’s that?”

“I told you last Sunday that I’m definitely hearing the Holy Spirit speaking to me — but this is strange. I want to know what it means!” said Ruler Jedidiah, obviously upset.

“What’s wrong, Ruler Jedidiah? What did you hear?” said Orly.

“I’m sure that I heard the Holy Spirit say, ‘Release Orly to do the work I’ve called him to do.’ I certainly understand the words, but I

asked God who would lead us. I'm so new to this; I don't think that I'm ready to lead. I wouldn't know where to begin. I thought that you said that God had led you here to teach the people to follow Jesus. I'm just feeling totally confused, and I guess, overwhelmed. Are you leaving us just when we're beginning to figure this out?" questioned Ruler Jedidiah.

"Ruler Jedidiah, I believe that you indeed heard the Holy Spirit speak to you, and He's using you to affirm my new calling. That's why Jordan came with me today. Jordan traveled with Jesus for three years and he's been in the ministry with his dad since then. He is probably one of the finest teachers that I could recommend to you. He can share first-hand what Jesus was like and what He taught. I would like you to consider letting Jordan take my place, so that I'll be free to work with another group."

"Yes, I met Jordan and his mother last week and heard about their ministry in Samaria and in Carthage. It is quite impressive. I would need to see how the people respond to his teaching before I give my approval. But then, who am I to say no when the Holy Spirit has instructed you. And where are you going, Orly? I thought you were settled in Cana."

"Sir, no one who is a follower of Jesus is ever settled anywhere. We have agreed to be obedient wherever He leads us."

"That is true. Oh, my. I knew you were a little off on the Sabbath, but I attributed it to the death of your mentor and friend, Jordan's dad. I never expected you to just walk out."

"I was a little off, as you call it, because God had just revealed my new ministry, and I was shocked, horrified, thrilled, scared to death, and my mind was not really focused on the message. We've got to get back to work, but I was wondering if it would be okay if I introduced Jordan to the synagogue this coming Sabbath and then you two could work together from now on to lead this group. The people at Mr. Kenan's group love it when Jordan teaches. He's been teaching every other week for several months, and I learn from him every time."

"Of course. But you still haven't answered my question, Orly. Where is God calling you?"

"Here in Cana, with our neighbors and friends who are not Jewish." Ruler Jedidiah gasped in horror. Then he licked his lips and swallowed hard. His face was pale, and he sat in silence.

No one spoke. They just sat and let Ruler Jedidiah process the news. After a few minutes tears began to stream down his face. "Orly, I need to tell you. One time Jesus was preaching here in Cana and after synagogue, while He was healing some people, a Roman official came up to Him and asked Him to heal his son who was in Capernaum. Jesus told him to go home because his son was already healed. Jesus didn't care that he was Roman. He just healed him like He was healing the Jews. Yesterday, when God told me to release you to do what He had called you to do, that's the memory that came to mind. Orly, I don't know what God is up to. But I trust that He does. Go with my blessings."

“Thank you, sir. I will be worshipping here at the synagogue as long as I am welcome, and I will introduce the people to Jordan on the Sabbath. Thank you for your words of encouragement and affirmation. And thank you for praying for me and Gabriela as we begin this new work.”

“Shalom,” said Ruler Jedidiah, and the two men ran quickly back to the shop. Lucas told them that they both owed Mr. Kenan half an hour. They agreed to stay late, and Orly asked Lucas to please warn Gabriela that he would be late for dinner.



On Wednesday, Gabriela met Sarah at Mr. Kenan's about the third hour. They walked to the market while Sarah chattered about everything they saw. Gabriela quickly bought the fresh vegetables and fruit that she would need for dinner. She hoped that next year Lucas would have the garden growing and she wouldn't have to buy so many things. She sat on the floor with Sarah and together they worked on the pillow. She reminded Sarah how to fold the cloth in half and then showed her again how to stitch the long seam. She warned her to watch her own robe and not let it become tangled. She needed to run to the root cellar and drain the goat cheese. Sarah was happily stitching and singing when she returned, so Gabriela started churning butter for the week plus enough for the Sabbath night guests. Soon Sarah grew tired of sewing and wanted to help with the churning. Gabriela was glad to have the help. She let Sarah churn for a while and sat back and watched. They talked of many things and Gabriela realized that even though Sarah had been raised in a foreign land with danger all around her, she had been happy in Carthage and missed her friends and home there. Once again Gabriela acknowledged that God would provide for their baby no matter where He sent them. *But I love my home and I hope we can stay here. Not my will, but Thine be done.* When they finished the churning, Gabriela asked Sarah if she wanted to walk down to the stream. The goats joined them on the trail and Sarah ran after them. When Gabriela arrived, she sat in the grass and watched them play. *How heavy I feel today. This baby is really growing again. But at least I'm not sick every morning. Maybe that's why I'm growing.* She chuckled to herself as it seemed she was always hungry.

“Come Sarah. Wash up in the stream. It's about time for Mrs. Amata, and we need to get back to your sewing.” Sarah remembered how to tie up her robe and waded into the stream just far enough to get clean water. She washed her hands and ran back to Gabriela. Amata had already started putting the finishing touches on the robe when Gabriela and Sarah arrived at the house.

“Sarah, let me check your stitching.”

“Yes, ma'am,” said Sarah dutifully. She took her pillow to Mrs. Amata who examined it carefully and praised her work. Gabriela was

pleased that Amata was helping Sarah enjoy sewing. She had always loved sewing with Miss Martha.

“Sarah, do you want to stay for dinner and then walk home with Uncle Orly?”

“I want to work on my pillowcase some more if it’s all right with you. And I would love to stay for dinner.”

“Of course,” said Gabriela as she added a plate to the little table. When Lucas brought in the milk, Mrs. Amata had just finished the last stitch on Gabriela’s new robe.

“Since Orly’s not home yet, I think I have time to change.” The robe gave her a lot more room to move around. She thanked Amata and Sarah declared it beautiful.

“Goodnight, Sarah, and goodnight, Gabriela. We’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Thank you, so much.”

“You are very welcome.”

“Shalom,” said Sarah.

Orly arrived home soon, and Sarah carefully put her pillow, needle, and thread in the guest room. She asked Orly what he thought of Gabriela’s new robe. Orly agreed that the robe was nice, but he thought the lady inside it was nicer. Sarah giggled. Gabriela gave him a kiss and asked if he and Sarah could set the table while she cooked the vegetables and she would be right back. Sarah helped Orly pour the milk into three cups and set the plates on the table. They set out the bread and butter.

“Mrs. Amata is a really fast weaver,” declared Sarah. “She said she was going to make Uncle Orly a robe next.”

“Yes, and then she needs to make things for the baby.” Sarah was delighted with that idea and happily chatted all the way to Mr. Kenan’s.

When they arrived at Mr. Kenan’s house all the lamps were burning and there was some excitement in the slaves’ quarters. The oxcart was parked near the courtyard totally filled with mats that Mr. Kenan had instructed Enoch to purchase while he was in Joppa. The men were carrying them into the servant’s quarters, and everyone was excited. Gabriela led Sarah into the house while Orly grabbed a couple of mats and carried them into the women’s quarters. Then he went to check on Mother and found that she was lying on her mat crying. He sat down beside her, and they laughed in joy together. “This is an answer to my prayers, Mother. I’ve prayed for Mr. Kenan’s heart to be touched by this ever since I became an apprentice and got one myself.”

“Oh, Son, I may never get up again. This is like Heaven.”

“I shouldn’t be in the ladies’ quarters. We were just dropping off Sarah. I’ll see you on the Sabbath.”

He helped carry several more mats and then he and Gabriela started home. His heart was overflowing with gratitude for the changes he was seeing in Mr. Kenan.

On Thursday, Gabriela's day was full. After her trip to the well and the market, she sat down to rest and think about her plans for the Sabbath meal for the Gentiles. *Tomorrow I will need to bake bread and catch the fish. Orly will clean and cook them when he gets home early. Today I need to season the goat cheese. The plum jam and butter are already done. Oh, I forgot the potato dish. I should go ahead and prepare the potatoes and onion for it today. They will keep. Then I will just need to add the goat milk, season it, and cook it tomorrow. What else could I do today to make tomorrow easier? I could chop all the vegetables for the fish sauce, too. I don't see any reason that wouldn't work.* She went down to the root cellar to pull out the two large soup pots, but they were too high for her to reach. *Father, help me figure out another plan so that all of this works and I'm not totally exhausted tomorrow.* As she came up from the cellar, Enoch was knocking on her front door. He was returning the two mats that they had loaned Chado and Arna for the trip. As Enoch was carrying the mats into the guest room, she suddenly realized that God had provided her the help she needed. She asked Enoch if he would mind bringing the two large soup pots up from the cellar. He happily did so and offered to do anything else she needed. As he drove away, Gabriela thanked God for His faithful provision.

She washed and chopped the potatoes and onions and then poured water over them. But now her water jar needed to be filled, so she carried it to the stream. She began to chop more onions and vegetables for the fish sauce. She poured that jar of water over the vegetables but decided to rest a few minutes before making another trip to the stream. It was afternoon before she woke up and realized that she had better get busy. She headed to the cellar with a bowl filled with seasoning for the cheese and took a round of bread so that she could taste it. She heard Lucas and Amata arrive but continued to season the cheese and then wrapped it tightly in tiny rolls with embroidered cloths. She tied it with strings and was pleased with her work. Each guest would have their own personal roll of goat cheese. It was something that Miss Martha had taught her, and she thought Orly would be pleased.

Amata was working on Orly's new robe. Gabriela asked if there was anything she could sew on her small loom. "Not for Orly's robe, but you could start on swaddling cloths. Would you enjoy that?"

"Oh, I would!"

"I thought so. We'll need to get a soft, light yarn for those. And you'll need a new robe for after the baby arrives. We'll need to pick out yarn for those soon, too. Should we go to the market on Sunday?"

"I'll look forward to picking out the yarn."

Chapter 5

Early Friday morning, Orly helped Gabriela by milking the goats for her, filling her water pots down at the stream, and carrying the two heavy soup pots down to the fire pits. He poured the water off the vegetables and got the fire started under the fish sauce. They shared breakfast together and he promised to be home early to clean and cook the fish. Gabriela kept a strict schedule for the day. First, she added the seasoning for the fish sauce. She would need to stir it and cook it all day. She noticed that Orly had poured the water off the potatoes and onions and was afraid that the potatoes would darken, so she poured the goat milk over them to keep them moist and white. She wouldn't need to start cooking it until midafternoon. She was glad that the smell of food didn't seem to bother her anymore. She put her fishing line and hook in a bag with two large nets and headed for the stream. Kizzy and Lizzy ran to meet her, and she scratched their ears and talked with them as they walked toward the stream. The fishing was going well. After about an hour, she hiked back up to the yard and stirred the sauce. Then she returned to the stream. It took her another two hours to catch enough fish for everyone.

Gabriela felt that everything was going exactly as planned and enjoyed her walk back to the house. But then she let out a scream, "KIZZY! LIZZY! STOP IT! GET OUT OF THERE! SHOO! SHOO!" The goats had discovered the pot of potatoes waiting to be cooked. Lizzy was standing balanced on the edge of the pot and was thoroughly enjoying the potatoes and onions soaked in milk. Kizzy was trying to knock Lizzy off so that she could get more. Gabriela took the soup pot off the hook and set it on the ground. Then she dragged it toward the barn and dumped it all out. The goats happily ate the remaining potatoes and onions, and Gabriela couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry. She knew that her perfect schedule had just been ruined, but she also knew that she had plenty of potatoes and onions in the cellar. So, she dragged the pot back to the fire pit. She had to carry water to rinse out the pot before hanging it back on the hook. As she washed the heavy pot and lifted it back on its hook, she felt an unusual pain deep inside her belly. She hoped it would go away and not interfere with her work. She returned to the house. By the time she had finished kneading two batches of bread, the pain seemed to be worse. She went down to the root cellar to get more potatoes and onions. *Father, help me. I need to get this done.* She prepared the potatoes and onions and covered them with water to let them sit until she was ready to cook them. That's when she realized that she had used all the morning goat milk to cover the ruined pot of potatoes. She would need to start the potato dish by midafternoon, and she didn't know whether the goats would let her milk them then or not. But she had to try. She also knew that she had to get off her feet and rest for a few minutes. She was afraid if she sat down, she would fall asleep, so she grabbed

a round of bread and some goat cheese and heaped plum jelly on top. She sat on the cushion and ate her snack. The pain went away again. She decided to see if she could milk the goats because she had to get the potatoes cooking. She called for Kizzy and Lizzy, and they came running. She bribed them with cucumbers and led them into their pen. She kept talking to them in a gentle voice — even though she was telling them what naughty, naughty goats they were — and she begged them to give her enough milk for the potato dish they had ruined. Finally, she felt the milk begin to flow and she sighed in relief.

She punched down the bread and started the potato dish. She had just stretched out on a bench in the courtyard when she heard Lucas and Amata arriving. They were carrying four jugs of wine. “Now, put us to work. What do you need?”

“Well, for starters we need to get the courtyard set up. Amata and I were thinking that we would put the six men at the big table, and we could carry the little table out of the house and put the four women around it. I’m glad you are here to help me think. I didn’t realize how tired I would get, and my brain has gone all fuzzy.”

“Why don’t you rest and let me and Lucas get this courtyard set up,” said Amata.

“I need to go stir the sauce, but there’s a grassy area there. So, I may rest awhile and let you two work on this.”

Orly arrived soon after the eleventh hour and woke her from her nap. She felt refreshed but concerned about the fish sauce. He checked it and assured her that it was fine and tasted great. She teasingly fussed at him but was pleased that he liked her cooking. He headed down to the stream to clean the fish. Gabriela finished putting the last batch of bread into the pans to bake and Amata sliced the fresh vegetables.

Orly roasted the fish and carried them to the courtyard while Lucas locked up the goats. Gabriela was watching the last batch of bread when their first guests arrived. Marcella and Diana arrived together, and Orly, Lucas, and Amata greeted them. Gabriela couldn’t leave her bread, so Orly came to rescue her and let her go meet the ladies. In a few minutes Orly carried the last batch of bread into the kitchen and prepared it for the tables. “How handy your husband is in the kitchen!”

“I wish my husband would help in the kitchen.”

“Orly, are you trying to make us look bad?” called Markus who had just arrived with the other men from the shop.

“Remember, I learned to cook in Mr. Kenan’s kitchen before I apprenticed at the shop. Welcome to my home. Please make yourselves comfortable. We’ve set the men’s table here and we’ll let the women do their talking over there. The sun is almost set. Would you be offended if we lit the Sabbath candles and said a prayer before we begin?”

Everyone agreed it was okay with them, but Lucas added, “We don’t know what we are supposed to do. You’ll have to tell us.”

“Oh, sorry. This is the beginning of our Sabbath, which means day of rest. Gabriela will light the special Sabbath candles and then I will pray a prayer of blessing on the Sabbath and on you, our guests. All you have to do is stand and watch.”

Gabriela lit the Sabbath candles and Orly lifted his hands to bless the group, “Father, I thank You for the gift of the Sabbath, a time to rest from our labors and to remember all Your blessings. Thank You for these good friends who have come to visit. I pray that You will bless our evening together. In Jesus’ name. Please fill your plate. There’s more in the kitchen, so eat heartily! We are so glad you came.” The men grabbed their plates and were happily digging into the dishes. Gabriela refilled all the serving dishes and then invited the ladies to fill their plates. The men were totally comfortable and there was a lot of laughing and talking and joking going on.

But Gabriela was having trouble connecting with these ladies. She was tired and wanted to just eat and go to sleep. All week long she had looked forward to this moment. She had pictured it a million times, but now, she didn’t know what to say. Gabriela found that the more she ate, the better she felt. *Maybe I was just hungry.* She began to enter into the conversation and the girl talk began.

Orly stood and said it was time to move into a circle since he wanted to be able to answer questions for everyone. Orly sat beside Gabriela and took her hand. “Thank you for coming tonight. And thank you, Lucas, for encouraging me to set aside time to answer your questions about Jesus, or whatever else you want to ask us. Gabriela and I are a team. She’s actually been a follower of Jesus for longer than I have, so she knows more than I do about some things.” Everyone laughed nervously.

“I had two choices in what to do tonight. I could give a talk about Jesus, or I could let you ask your questions. I have found that when I have a question, I learn more than when I’m just being fed information. So, what are your questions?”

Everyone looked around expectantly hoping for someone else to start. Finally, Lucas asked, “I’ve always wondered why you Jews are so picky about what you eat, and why you don’t associate with us or come into our homes or let us come into your homes?”

“Okay. That’s a good question. Let me think how to answer it. I was expecting questions about Jesus, but I realize that you will understand Jesus better if I give you some Jewish history. So, I’ll try to summarize. When God, Jehovah God, created the world and the first people, they began to disobey Him almost immediately. Some of the earliest writings in Jewish Scripture record that God said He would send His Son to pay for their disobedience and deal with Satan, the evil one. But as time went along, very few people were worshippers of God. They created their own gods and worshipped all kinds of things. Many of them worshipped His creation: the sun, the moon, the stars, storms, rocks — but didn’t worship or obey Him. Then God picked a man named Abraham and told him that He was going to do something special. He would take this man’s family and make them a great nation

that would bless all the other nations. God told Abraham that He was going to send a Messiah from his family that would rescue the whole world from their disobedience to Him. There was only one catch to this big plan — Abraham and his family had to obey God very, very strictly, and they had to play by His rules. They couldn't be like other nations, and they absolutely couldn't worship any god except Jehovah. Moses is another name you might hear. He wrote down the Law that God set for descendants of Abraham, or Jews. They couldn't eat certain things, drink certain things, wear certain things, touch certain things, and they were to have nothing to do with anyone outside of their family. God told Moses later that that was because He knew that when they became friendly with the people around them, they would start to think and behave and worship like they did. So He insisted that they stay separate in order to prepare a place for the Messiah to be born. But remember, all along, God's plan was that Abraham's family would produce a Messiah that would be for all people everywhere. Okay, let me take a breath and see if you have any questions so far. I don't want this to be a lecture."

"This is fascinating. I'm understanding so far, and you are a great storyteller. Please continue," said Lucas and the others agreed.

"Well, the Jews took those laws and multiplied them. They didn't stay separate from the people around them. They didn't always follow the rules, and they certainly didn't worship Jehovah God alone. God punished the Jews multiple times by allowing them to be conquered and ruled by other nations. God kept promising to send His Messiah, someone who would rescue them from their disloyalty to God. About four hundred years ago, God quit talking. He quit sending prophets because the people wouldn't listen to them. They even killed some that He sent. Leaders of the Jews just started teaching the people whatever they wanted to teach. They focused on the rules instead of worshipping God, and things were pretty bad. The Jewish people didn't know which rules were from God and which ones were made up by the leaders. Essentially, people obeyed the rules they wanted to and skipped the rest. But about thirty-five years ago, a priest from the family of Abraham announced that God had spoken to him and said that He was going to send the Messiah soon. This man's name was Zechariah, and his son was John the Baptizer. You may have heard about him. He went around baptizing people (hence the name) and telling people that he had been sent to warn them that it was time for God to send His Messiah. He asked the people to get ready because it was about to happen. And it did. Six months after John was born, Jesus was born to an earthly mother, but Jehovah was His Father. When Jesus was about thirty years old, He began His public ministry by letting John baptize Him. I met Him for the first time two months after that. Why don't we take a break and then we'll decide whether you want to continue tonight or wait until next week."

Everyone stood and stretched their legs. Gabriela invited them to enjoy more of the food, and some refilled their plates and cups.

Everyone seemed to be eager to hear more and settled down on their benches.

“Okay. I want to at least answer one question tonight. Lucas asked why the Jews have so many rules and stay separate from other people. Have I answered your question?”

“I think so. It makes sense to me,” replied Lucas.

“So, who has another question?”

“I want to hear about your meeting Jesus. What was he like?” said Appius and everyone agreed.

“Well, it happened at Seth’s wedding — your boss. There were a lot more people than Mr. Kenan was planning on, and he ran out of wine. Now, most of you know that I was one of Mr. Kenan’s slaves. At the time, I was only nine years old. Jesus was attending the wedding and when the wine ran out, he told a group of us slaves to fill the ceremonial washing pots with water. We filled them up with one hundred twenty gallons of well water. Then Jesus told my friend Hosea to take a cup of the water to Ruler Jedidiah — the same guy that performed my wedding. When he tasted it, he declared that it was the best wine he had ever tasted. He complimented Mr. Kenan on saving the best for last. I thought he had lost his mind. I knew it was just water. But we served it until the wedding ended and it was definitely wine. It stained red and looked like wine. After everyone had gone home and everything was quiet, I stuck my finger in the bottom of one of those pots and discovered that it was just water — just plain well water. I thought about it and thought about it, but I could never explain it. I decided that when I grew up and was no longer a slave, I would find Jesus and become one of His followers. But I didn’t get the answers to my questions until almost five years later, when our friend Kobe filled in the story. He had traveled with Jesus and taught me how I could follow Him, too.”

Orly looked around and saw nothing but interest in the faces of his guests. Yet, he felt the Holy Spirit nudging him to call it a night. It was near midnight and Gabriela was having a hard time keeping her eyes open. “I have many, many things that I want to share with you about Jesus: what He taught, why He came, and how this story is as much for you as it is for Jews. But it’s near midnight, and we’ve all had a hard week. I suggest that we meet again next week to continue the questions if you are interested.”

“Orly, you have a beautiful camping area down by the stream. Can we meet there next week?” When Orly agreed, Lucas instructed the group. “Everyone bring your own food and a blanket to sit on and we’ll have a picnic. I’ll build a large bonfire if you want to cook anything after you arrive. It’s been a very insightful evening, and I can’t wait to ask more questions. I’ve lived among the Jews all my life, and I’ve never heard this information. It’s been really helpful, and I want to hear more. How about the rest of you?” They all agreed and said their goodnights.

Orly sent Gabriela to get some sleep and Amata and Lucas offered to help clean up. Orly said that they could help carry the trays

into the house so the goats wouldn't get into them, but the dishes couldn't be washed until the Sabbath was over. They said their goodnights and Orly went to the rooftop to praise God and thank Him for a successful beginning. He prayed for the synagogue group to accept Jordan, and then he prayed that he would know what to share with the group at Mr. Kenan's. He crawled into his blanket and was quickly asleep.

Orly milked the goats and helped prepare breakfast. They were still talking about last night, when they both realized it was time to leave for synagogue. Orly spoke, "I have loved teaching you how to accept Jesus as your Messiah. Now God has brought us a man who traveled with Jesus during the three years of his earthly ministry. I want you to welcome Jordan."

Jordan, the giant blacksmith, very gently began to speak to the people about some of his early memories of Jesus. He told them about miracles that he had seen, and he talked about what Jesus was like as a man. He encouraged them to keep learning about Jesus. He told them about the death of his dad and the assurance he felt that he was in Heaven with Jesus at this very moment. He asked them to meet with him in the courtyard if they had any questions. Then he turned the meeting back over to Ruler Jedidiah. Orly knew that the people had already bonded with Jordan, and he felt an amazing peace.

As they walked to Mr. Kenan's, he took Gabriela's hand and thanked her for the wonderful meal she had served last night. She told him how pleased she was with his teaching and that she had never heard it put so simply. He squeezed her hand, and they walked in silence together. As he sat with Mother Ruth in the yard and listened to the conversations happening around him, Orly thought again about the possibility of purchasing his mother's freedom. Maybe he should talk with Mr. Kenan this week. He would pray about it.

As the group began, he shared with them all the affirmations he had received regarding working with the Gentiles. Then he said, "We met with eight Gentiles last night and answered some of their questions. They were eager to meet again next Sabbath evening. I want to make sure that we do this together. The apostles, and especially my friend Mary in Jerusalem, have taught me that we are a body that is dependent on each other. Following Jesus is a great adventure, but no one should go it alone. I need your prayers, and I need to know if you have questions or concerns.

"My message to you is simply this: We are the body of Jesus reaching out into the world. Every person is vitally important, and we each must play our part. Let's commit to praying for each other and surrounding each other with love and encouragement. I don't know what your part will be, but I can tell you this: It feels good to just be here with you this afternoon. I knew that you were praying for me to be bold last night. I want to encourage you to feel vitally important to that work. Now, we also have a little brother who will be teaching at the synagogue. Many of you heard him this morning. Weren't you proud of

him? Be sure and give him an encouraging word and commit to praying for him as he leads that group of new followers.”

Orly visited with the group for a while afterward, but then whispered to Gabriela that he was going to milk the goats and would return shortly. She stayed and visited with Mother Ruth and others. Sarah asked when she could come and finish her pillow. When Gabriela said that Wednesday would work for her, Basha volunteered to bring her over after breakfast and Gabriela was grateful. “Thanks, Basha. I think I overdid it on Friday getting ready for the group. It would really help if you brought Sarah over on Wednesday. Right now, I just don’t feel up to the walk.”

“It’s no problem. Try to get some rest and we’ll see you on Wednesday.”

Orly returned after sunset with fresh milk, and they enjoyed a lovely post-Sabbath meal with the family and guests and then started home. Gabriela asked, “Orly, could we please just leave the dishes until tomorrow. I just want to spend time alone with you. It’s been so long since we’ve talked, just the two of us”

“Of course, my love.” Gabriela snuggled close beside him. “My goodness, there soon won’t be room for me. Who’s that growing in there? A giant? Maybe we should name him Goliath.”

Both woke refreshed and Gabriela milked the goats while Orly had his prayer time. Gabriela took the water jar to the well but skipped the market since she had plenty of leftovers from the party. She would spend the day washing the dishes from the Sabbath. But as she arrived back at the house, Sarah came running out with Basha right behind her. “We wanted to surprise you, but didn’t want to alarm you,” said Basha.

“Oh, that’s fine. I just thought you were coming on Wednesday. I was visiting with my friend Chaya at the well.”

“We are coming on Wednesday, but Orly said that each of us has a vital role to play in this new ministry. Sarah and I are good dish washers, and we felt God leading us to help you. We’ve got most of the dishes finished, but may we continue?”

Basha and Sarah led Gabriela inside and asked where to store certain dishes. They had all the plates and cups washed, and now they were working on the serving dishes. Basha carried several jars of water up from the stream and washed out the cooking pots. Gabriela sat and showed Sarah some of her embroidery and asked her if she wanted to embroider something on her new pillow. “Sarah, I will bring you back on Wednesday to spend time with Gabriela, but right now, we need to let her rest.” She thanked Basha again and they said their goodbyes.

Gabriela made herself a goat cheese and jam sandwich and then stretched out on a bench in the courtyard. That’s where Lucas and Amata found her fast asleep when they arrived. Amata and Gabriela walked to the market and found the thread needed for the swaddling cloths and for Gabriela’s two maternal robes. Orly had told her to buy whatever she needed and promised that he would only put in her cup

what they could easily afford. He also suggested that if there was time, they would both probably need warmer robes to wear in Jerusalem for Passover. "It gets chilly there at night, you know." They looked for a heavier thread but didn't find anything suitable. By the time they returned, Lucas was finished with the milking and ready to head home. Gabriela quickly took a pan of vegetables down to the fire pit and cooked them. They would eat the leftover Sabbath bread with cheese or butter and just have a nice, quiet evening.

The week passed quickly and on Friday, Gabriela met her friend Chaya at the well. Chaya was excited that her wedding would be soon since the new house was complete. Gabriela shared how hard it was to wait for her own wedding, but at least she knew the date ahead of time. For Chaya, it would be a complete surprise.

Gabriela kneaded her Sabbath bread and started cutting vegetables for a thick stew. It would be easy to eat around a campfire. She was excited to see what God would accomplish tonight. Amata sewed the panels of Orly's robe together while Gabriela baked her bread.

She wrapped the bread in cloth and then it seemed everything happened at once. They were suddenly engulfed with hugs and greetings from everyone. The two other women arrived with their boxes of food, the men arrived from work, and the two single men had sacks slung over their shoulders that Gabriela assumed was their dinner. Orly invited everyone into the courtyard to light the Sabbath candles just as the sun sank below the horizon. Orly and Lucas led the way down to the stream. Each couple sat around the fire sharing their dinner while the two single men sat alone. Each couple ate and whispered to each other, not really sharing with the group. She and Orly ate quickly and realized that the others were doing the same. Orly asked if everyone was comfortable sitting on the ground, or if they would prefer to return to the courtyard. Several indicated that it would be easier to hear in the courtyard, so they packed up their boxes and hiked back up to the house. The men arranged the benches, and everyone took their seats. Orly thanked the group for coming and said that they would eventually figure out what worked and what didn't. He suggested that they plan to meet for a shared meal in the courtyard next week. He would let Gabriela and Amata decide how best to do that. "I would like to begin by asking. Does anyone have questions about what we covered last week?"

"I don't mean to be rude, but aren't you breaking your god's rules by meeting with us like this?" asked Markus reluctantly.

"That's not a rude question. It's actually a very good question and I don't know the answer. I do know that Jesus told His followers to take the news to everyone. He didn't really explain how that was supposed to happen. He taught that He had come to fulfill the Law and all the requirements and to set up a new way of living. That's why the Romans in Jerusalem started calling our groups the New Way. You'll learn that Jesus said there's only one law that He requires. That law is for us to love others the way He loves us. I have no idea what that

does to the dietary laws and the rules about not associating with non-Jews. Gabriela and I both feel that God is directing us to share His New Way with you. We are just trying to be obedient.”

“So, you feel that your god is telling you to break his rules?” asked Markus, obviously confused. “How do you know that? Wouldn’t that just bring down god’s wrath on you?”

“We don’t want you and Gabriela to get in trouble for disobeying your god’s rules,” added Lucas.

“Okay, I hear you and understand. I assure you we do not feel that we are breaking God’s rules. We feel that we are being obedient to Him.”

“And that’s my question. How do you know that? How can you say that you know what your god wants you to do?” Titus asked.

“I think you are going to need a little more information about Jesus before this is going to be clear. So, let me continue what we started last week. I gave you a really brief summary of the beginning of the Jews and we ended with Jesus beginning His ministry. Let me ask you a different question. What had you heard about Jesus before Kobe came to the shop?”

“My son in Capernaum told me about Jesus healing a friend of his,” said Lucas.

“When I was living in Jerusalem, I heard about crowds of people lining up to be healed. He apparently healed all kinds of illnesses like leprosy and blindness,” volunteered Titus.

“I heard my parents talking about Jesus raising a man from the dead,” admitted Appius. “They were really curious about Jesus.”

“I don’t think I had heard about Jesus, but I did hear John the Baptizer preach once, and He said that a Messiah was coming. That made me really curious,” said Julius.

“Okay. You need to know that when Jesus started His ministry, He spent most of the first two years teaching and doing miracles. I know a lot of eyewitnesses to these miracles. Gabriela, would you mind sharing the first time you heard about Jesus?”

“Sure. I was only four years old when my abba, that’s the Hebrew word for dad. Anyway, my abba got leprosy and had to leave our family and live outside Bethany with a group of lepers. He couldn’t come home, but he would wave at us every Sabbath afternoon. And I would cry because I missed him so much. He was gone for over three years when one morning, he came home. I was playing in the courtyard when he came and hugged me. His face was totally healed. His fingers and toes were just normal looking. He told us that he had met a man named Jesus and He had made him well. He had gone to the priest and received permission to move back home. Many of you met my dad at the wedding. He’s perfectly healthy and has no scars.”

“Thank you, Gabriela. Some of you also met our friend Lazarus. I’ll let Gabriela tell you his story sometime soon. But he was dead for four days when Jesus brought him back to life. Now, I would love to spend all evening just talking about Jesus’ miracles, but instead I want to focus on the question at hand. Jesus spent the last year of His

ministry preparing his apostles and followers to continue the ministry after He returned to Heaven. One of the major lessons He taught them was that it wasn't Him doing the miracles. It was God inside of Him. He said that when He was born, He got a physical body and a self just like every other human being. Does everybody understand that concept? You have an outer body and an inside self where you keep your thoughts and goals and beliefs. Does that make sense?"

Orly looked into each face, and they nodded that they understood.

"Well, Jesus taught that He had a special place even deeper. He had an inner core that was filled with God's Spirit. He told His followers that it was God's Spirit inside of Him that was guiding Him, telling Him what people were thinking, accomplishing the healings, stopping the storms, and raising the dead. It wasn't Him. It was God that healed Simon, Gabriela's abba; raised Lazarus from the dead; and turned the water into wine at Seth's wedding. Then the very last week of Jesus' life, He told His followers something that amazed them. He said that they were born with an inner core, too. He said that every human being has an inner core. The only problem was that it was empty and lifeless. He said that people had been searching for something to fill that empty core since the first man sinned and separated himself from God. Jesus explained that He had been sent to do that.

"He explained to His followers how to have their inner core filled with God's Spirit. I spent months listening to Kobe teach me about Jesus. But one morning, during Passover in Jerusalem, I invited Jesus to be my Messiah. I immediately felt the Holy Spirit come into me and begin to instruct me and guide me. I have tried to be obedient to Him in every way possible since.

"I know you don't understand it, but I promise you it's real. I hear God speaking to me just about every day through His Spirit. He tells me what to say and where to speak and when not to speak. He told me to start this group. I wish He would give me more details, but He hasn't. It's getting late, and I've covered a lot of territory. I'm afraid you may have more questions than when you arrived. I'm sorry if you are feeling confused. But I promise, we'll plan to meet here next week if you still want to hear more."

"I not only want to hear more, I want to hear it tonight!" said Lucas. "But I know that it is late and there's much to learn. I've never heard of a god that lives inside of humans and helps them with life. That's incredible. But Orly, I think I know the Passover that you are talking about. When you came back to the shop, you were a different man. It's like you were confident and ready to take charge. You changed from a scared slave boy to a man overnight. I didn't know what had happened, but I think I told you then that I wanted to know more about your god. Wow! I didn't even know this was possible, but I definitely want to learn more. How about you guys?"

Everyone agreed. Gabriela said she would prepare the meal and they could just come to listen. Goodnights were said and Gabriela and Orly sat together amazed at God's goodness. Orly said he wanted to

make sure the bonfire was out and would be back soon. Gabriela crawled into her blanket and was sound asleep before he returned.

Orly woke early and spent time in prayer while Gabriela milked the goats. They ate breakfast and headed to the synagogue. Orly tried to enter into worship, but he just kept thinking about next week's teaching.

Jordan led Mr. Kenan's group, but Orly kept thinking about how to keep Gabriela from getting so tired cooking for the Gentile group. Once again, he was prompted to talk to Mr. Kenan about purchasing his mother's freedom. He promised himself to do that this week and immediately reprimanded himself for saying that last week. He whispered to Gabriela that he was going to spend some time in prayer before he milked the goats. He asked if she wanted to come or to stay and visit. She encouraged him to go on and she would be fine. After Orly left, she walked up to the courtyard where Joelle and Basha were visiting with Mrs. Vada. After sitting and listening for a while, one of the ladies commented that she looked troubled.

"I am. The Gentile group is doing great. But we don't want to eat their non-kosher food. Last time I tried to prepare a nice meal by myself, and I got some pretty bad pains. Mrs. Amata said I shouldn't push my body that far. Last night, everyone brought their own dinner, but then there wasn't any good sharing and laughing together. We just ate pretty much in silence until Orly started teaching. Don't get me wrong, the teaching went great, and they are so eager to learn. But I'm just trying to figure out the simplest meal possible so that I don't overdo. And I don't want them to feel that they are an imposition."

"Well, I think that you are looking at the solution right here," said Mrs. Vada.

"How so?" asked Gabriela.

"Well, I can't speak for these ladies, but I know that I can send over the Sabbath bread. Ruth and Benjamin are experts at making plenty of that."

"Deborah, my cook, makes delicious dishes and I could just have her make extra and send it over. How many are in your group?" asked Joelle.

"There's ten of us, counting me and Orly. Oh, that would be such a help. I can do the butter and goat cheese since I have all the ingredients for those. It helps if I can do things earlier in the week instead of on Friday."

"It's no problem, I'll just have Deborah make double what she usually makes and send it over."

"Can Sarah and I come over and help you clean up on Sunday mornings?" asked Basha.

Gabriela burst into tears and let the ladies know that she didn't want to ask for help. She felt like such a failure as a wife, but she was scared for the baby after trying to lift the heavy pots and prepare the meal for ten with no help two weeks ago. Everyone assured her that they wanted to help and that she should not be doing all the work by herself.

“We agree with Orly that it is time this group grew in ministry to each other. In Jerusalem, we were always sharing meals and ministering wherever we were needed. I miss that,” said Joelle.

“I told Gabriela last week that the hospitality part was the hardest part for me when we would go into a new area. It’s not my strongest ability and I floundered until I could find partners to help me. Gabriela, you’ve just found your partners and we’re committed to helping you. Now is there anything else you need?”

“Not that I know of. I don’t know how to say thank you. You’ve taken a tremendous burden off of me. A ministry team is just what I need. Thank you!”

Gabriela asked if she would bring Sarah over on Wednesday for a sewing lesson. “Of course! She won’t let me forget and I enjoy the walk.”

Amata finished Orly’s robe on Sunday and left it for him to try on. It was perfect and he wore it to work on Monday. Orly and Gabriela were able to enjoy a quiet start to what they thought would be just a normal week.

Chapter 6

On Wednesday, Basha walked Sarah over, and Gabriela taught her to embroider. She helped her outline a butterfly for her pillowcase. By the time Amata arrived, Sarah had one wing almost finished. Amata praised her careful work, and Sarah beamed with pride. After dinner, they walked Sarah to Mr. Kenan's and discovered that the Apostles James and John had arrived. Orly and Gabriela spent the evening visiting and hearing their news. They planned to stay through the Sabbath, then hike all the way to Antioch to spend time with James' son, Jonathan, and his group. They would preach at various places on their way back to Jerusalem along the Great Sea coast. Orly asked if they could come for dinner tomorrow night to answer some questions and they agreed.

Thursday was a busy day. Gabriela woke up startled that she had fallen asleep on the grass near the firepit. She got up and laughed as she realized Amata was stirring the potato dish. "I was about to wake you up to ask when to start the bread. I saw that you had it made but wasn't sure whether you wanted me to put it in the oven."

Amata started the fire under the oven. "What would I do without you, Amata? And thank you for letting me sleep. We have unexpected company coming for dinner, and I've been rushing around all day. I really needed that nap."

"Well, I didn't make progress on Orly's second robe, but I kept my eyes on the potatoes."

"Oh, thank you," said Gabriela yawning and trying to clear her head. She began to punch down the bread and put it on the pan to bake. Amata asked how she could help to prepare for tomorrow night's group, and Gabriela assured her that she had everything under control. Then she began to giggle and said, "Amata, God is so good. I was asking some ladies what would be the easiest to prepare and they all volunteered to help. So, let's see, Mr. Kenan's staff is providing the bread, Seth's cook is providing the main dish, and Jordan's mother, Basha, and Sarah are helping me with clean-up on Sunday. All I lack is slicing some fresh vegetables while the men set up the tables."

"And we'll bring the wine," said Amata.

"Yes, thank you," said Gabriela. "Now, let's get the table set for tonight."

Lucas brought in the jars of milk just as the men arrived. James and John talked with Lucas and Amata for a few minutes while Gabriela sent Orly to get the potato dish and bread.

As they ate, the men began to ask Orly about what was happening at the synagogue. "I just supposed you heard all that news last night at Mr. Kenan's."

"No. We arrived just minutes before you two. We really haven't had any time to visit, and we spent the day today in Nazareth visiting cousins. But I'm eager to hear how the synagogue and Ruler Jediah

are doing. The last time we talked, you had just baptized almost the whole synagogue,” stated James.

“I think they are doing well. They are learning and growing, and I think that God has provided the best possible teacher for them.”

James and John were taken aback by Orly’s obvious self-pride. Orly continued, “Jordan is leading them now and he’s doing a great job.”

“Whoa! That’s not what we expected. I thought that God had led you there. Did Ruler Jedidiah get upset with you? What happened?”

Orly looked at Gabriela and she nodded to encourage him. “It’s a long story, but I would like for you to hear it so that you can instruct me and guide me.”

“We’ll do the best we can, but only God can guide you,” replied James.

“Soon after Kobe led me to accept Jesus as my Messiah, I asked him about the Gentiles that I work with every day. It’s the only question that I remember Kobe refusing to answer. So, for almost three years, I’ve been hearing the Holy Spirit telling me that I should tell my Gentile friends about Jesus. But I knew it was forbidden, so I tried to ignore it. They have been asking me questions about why we do the things we do. They wanted to know whether Jesus was alive or dead after the crucifixion. They wanted to know what I believed about life after death when Hosea and Mrs. Mary died. They wanted to know why I was so different when I came back from Passover after I had asked Jesus to be my Messiah. I gave them simple answers to try to push them away. I tried to avoid talking with them. I rebuilt this house and started skipping noon breaks. When I was around them, the Holy Spirit was just nagging at me to talk with them about Jesus. Lucas point blank asked me when I was going to tell him about my god. I told him that I had to get the house finished and get Gabriela settled, then we would talk. My heart was so burdened for them, yet I felt I couldn’t obey. After we were married, Gabriela and I began praying about it together.”

“I definitely feel that the Holy Spirit is calling both of us to work with the Gentiles. He is making it very clear.” Gabriela added.

“I refused to admit that I was running from God’s direct orders for me, but I was getting less and less focused on messages for the group at Mr. Kenan’s or the synagogue. Instead of feeling excited about the groups and their growth, I just felt burdened by them. Three weeks ago, Lucas took me aside and told me that he had to get some answers about my god. He said that he was miserable and wanted to know what I knew. I asked him to come over after work on Friday and bring the group. All the Gentile men from the shop and their wives get together after work every Friday. They all had questions, and I knew that God was telling me to say yes. If I refused, He would no longer use me in ministry. I could not stand being disobedient to what seemed to be a direct command from the Holy Spirit, but I was terrified. Gabriela supported me, but we didn’t tell anyone else. I preached at the synagogue the next morning, but it went totally flat. Then something really bizarre happened. Jordan had been praying alone, and just before time for Mr. Kenan’s group he came up to me

and said that he had received a message from God, and he was preaching that afternoon instead of me. I agreed, and Jordan preached on Jesus' commission to you guys about taking the message to the whole world. Then he said something like, 'Up to this point the apostles and followers have been spreading out to the whole world, but they are only telling the good news to the Jews. I believe that the Holy Spirit is calling someone in our group to begin sharing the good news with Gentiles.' I just about fell off my seat! I know Jordan talked to them about what would be needed if that were to happen, and he asked if your Uncle Kenan's group was ready to support and encourage and pray for that man. They agreed and began to pray for that unnamed man who would minister among the Gentiles." Orly began to weep and couldn't continue.

Gabriela told them what happened. "All the people stood to show their support and five or six led in prayer for Orly, only they didn't know it was Orly."

"They were so supportive and eager to see it happen," said Orly. "It was an incredible experience."

"Wow," said James and John together. "So, what's happened since then?"

"Yeah, let's get some juice and take a break," suggested Orly. Everyone got up from the table and moved to the courtyard while Gabriela and Orly poured them cups of plum juice. Orly lit the lamps, and they enjoyed the evening breeze.

"Let's see. Jordan said God was calling him to shepherd the synagogue. We met with Ruler Jedidiah on Tuesday, and I introduced Jordan and said I would like for him to help with the teaching. He told us that he was incredibly relieved to hear that Jordan could teach because he had heard the Holy Spirit say, 'Release Orly to do what I have called him to do.' Then he asked me point blank what God was calling me to do. I felt a strong prompting to be honest with him. I told him that I was going to meet with a group of Gentiles who had some questions about Jesus. I told him I had no idea what would happen or where it would lead. He was shocked, but then he began to weep and told me that he had seen Jesus heal a Roman official's son. Ever since that day, he had been burdened for the Gentiles. I can't believe God would affirm my calling so definitely. But I still have a ton of questions."

"I imagine you do!" said John. "That's quite a story. God is definitely up to something, and I don't know what to say."

"So, what has happened?" asked James again.

"Well, we've met for two weeks and I've begun to answer their questions and introduce them to Jesus. They are so incredibly hungry to hear the Truth."

Gabriela said, "You probably should also hear what is happening to your Uncle Kenan's group. Because Jordan talked to them about how valuable their support and prayer was, and Orly emphasized how we can't enter ministry alone, they have come alongside us. They not only pray for us and encourage us, but this week Mr. Kenan and Seth

are providing the Sabbath meal, and Basha and Sarah will come on Sunday to help me clean up.”

“Does the synagogue know?” asked John.

“Well, a lot of the group from Mr. Kenan’s attend synagogue, but no, we haven’t told anyone except Ruler Jedidiah. Jordan and I felt that they needed to mature a little more before we brought it up. We don’t want to borrow trouble.”

“I am shocked and thrilled at the same time,” said James. “I thought we would hear about great things happening at the synagogue and instead we hear that God is moving in a new and unexpected way. That is always exciting.”

John added, “You indicated that you had some questions. I’m not sure we’ll know the answers, but we’ll try to help you all we can, and we’ll certainly pray with you.”

“I have so many questions. I know that God has guided me and affirmed me every step of the way. But I really don’t know what I believe about eating non-kosher food. Is it okay if we visit in their homes? Am I unclean if I touch them? I felt okay about hiring a Roman couple to help me around the house, because I’ve seen Roman slaves. But I don’t know about having them as friends. I’m just scared. No! I’m terrified. And sometimes I wonder if I’m leading Gabriela off track. That would be worse than death to hurt her. I feel such a terrible responsibility to lead Gabriela, the group, and the synagogue. I’m not afraid of persecution from those who don’t understand. I’m afraid of disobeying God. Can they be baptized? Do they have to be circumcised? Do they need to become Jews first? What does it mean that Jesus’ death made us free from the Law? There are so many questions, and I don’t know the answers,” admitted Orly.

“Orly,” said James kindly, “I don’t think any of us know the answers. But I can assure you of this: Jesus promised to lead us through the Holy Spirit, and to be present with us, and to never, never leave us. I don’t know the answers to any of your questions. But I am convinced that God is at work here. You and Gabriela are being used in a new way to reach a new people group. You will probably encounter a lot of persecution for it, but as long as you are obedient to what the Holy Spirit is saying, then you can’t really go wrong. Pray about the details and let the group help you pray. But be obedient to whatever the Holy Spirit speaks in your heart.”

John added, “I am so thrilled to be with you two and know that God is using you right here in this courtyard to open up doors we have never imagined.”

“We need to go and get some rest. We’ll look forward to hearing what happens tomorrow night and we’ll be praying for you and the group,” said James.

“Oh, would you two speak to Mr. Kenan’s group on Sabbath afternoon? They would love to hear whatever God puts on your heart,” said Orly.

“Sure,” said James and John together.

“Shalom, and may His peace fill your heart and home. May He bless your obedience and fill you both with boldness and courage and strength. In Jesus’ name,” said James.

Orly started to clear the table, but Gabriela insisted that he leave it and let her take care of cleaning up tomorrow. They both needed their rest tonight.

Friday morning Gabriela sent Orly off to work and cleaned up the kitchen. The baby was getting bigger, and she wondered when she would feel him or her move. She poked around on her protruding belly, but she could feel nothing. She did not need to bake Sabbath bread and that felt strange. After a short nap, she took the seasoning and a piece of leftover bread and went down to the cellar to wrap the cheese. When she came back to the house, Amata was already sewing on Orly’s robe. Gabriela sat and wove on the swaddling cloths.

When Orly arrived, he and Lucas carried the little table out to the courtyard for the ladies and then arranged the benches. Enoch brought the bread, and one of Seth’s servants delivered the main dish. Gabriela and Amata set out the plates, cheese, butter, and jam. Gabriela sliced the vegetables while Amata set out the wine and cups. The men and their wives all arrived together. After Orly had welcomed everyone, Gabriela lit the Sabbath candles just as the sun went down and Orly prayed a prayer of blessing on each one. This time he called each person by name.

The men filled their plates, and the laughing and teasing began. The women started filling their own plates. Gabriela was a lot more relaxed tonight, and she was pleased with the vegetable dish that Joelle’s cook had sent. The ladies talked about what Amata was sewing, whether Gabriela had had any more pains, how Marcella’s youngest grandson was learning to walk, and all the other things that ladies talk about. But there was also a hurried feeling that Gabriela noted. No one wanted to linger; they were eager to hear from Orly. The ladies quickly carried their plates to the kitchen and cleaned up the men’s table. Gabriela reminded them that she would save the dishes for Sunday and stated that Jordan’s mother and sister would come to help her wash them. The women returned to the courtyard where the men had moved the benches into a circle.

Lucas didn’t even wait for Orly to begin. He stated, “Okay. Last time you left us hanging after telling us that we all have an empty core. I hope you are going to tell us what it takes to fill it up because I’ve wanted my empty place to be filled ever since I saw the change in you!”

“Do we have to become Jews?” asked Julius.

“Do we have to keep all the Jewish laws?” asked Titus.

“Okay, let me tell you about an encounter that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman. She had the same questions that you do. Jesus told her if she wanted to be filled with His living water, or His Spirit, all she had to do was ask. When Jesus talked with Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, He told him that whoever believes in Jesus would be transformed by a new birth that happens inside. I think what

He was saying is that when you believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God and you ask Him to be your personal Messiah, your inner core gets filled by the Holy Spirit and it comes alive. You are no longer dead inside, you are alive. But let me back up and explain it a little better.

“God is holy. He is so holy that no one who has ever sinned or messed up or been disobedient can be in His presence. We were taught throughout Jewish Scripture that if a human being came in contact with God, he would be destroyed instantly because, hey, we’re men and we’re not holy.”

“Yeah, our gods are like that, too. They set impossible standards and then punish us when we can’t measure up,” agreed Markus.

“It’s a miserable feeling to know that there’s nothing you can do to measure up. But I told you two weeks ago that God promised Abraham to send a Messiah to rescue us. I believe that Jesus is that Messiah. He proved He was the Messiah by healing and performing miracles foretold about Him: where He would be born, where He would be raised, and the miracles He would do. But you know what else? The Scripture very clearly states that His primary purpose in coming to earth was to die and pay for our sins. There’s a complete description of His crucifixion written hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented. And Jesus spent the last year of His life telling His disciples in detail that He was going to be arrested by the Jewish leaders and turned over to the Roman rulers. He told them that He would be scourged and then crucified. He described it in detail. He even told them what night He would be arrested. And then He told them that three days later, He would come back to life and ordered them to meet Him in Capernaum. As you can imagine, the apostles and followers of Jesus were horrified and refused to believe that their Messiah would be killed. I was in Jerusalem when the crucifixion happened. Mr. Kenan and his brother watched it, and said it happened just exactly the way He had described it — down to the tiniest detail. Three days later, we left town to return to Cana. We heard rumors that He was alive, but no one knew for sure. I didn’t know what had happened for two more years. Then Kobe came and told us. He introduced me to people who had seen Jesus alive after the crucifixion. Over a hundred people saw Him and talked with Him, ate with Him, and spent time with Him. One of these nights I’ll ask Gabriela to describe the last time she saw Jesus, just before He returned to Heaven, forty days after His death, burial, and resurrection.

“So tonight, I want to ask you what I can do to help you understand that Jesus was God’s Son, sent to give us an example of this New Way of living, but primarily sent to die for our sins so that we could have God’s Spirit come and live inside of us. Okay, I’m going to hush and let you ask your questions.”

“Let me see if I understand this. Your god is so holy that any sin will separate us from him and cause him to kill us. Yet, he sent his son, Jesus, to die in our place. That doesn’t make sense!” declared Lucas.

“No, it doesn’t. It’s like a judge who orders you to pay a fine, and then takes it out of his own pocket and pays it for you,” answered Orly.

“But why would he do that?” asked Julius quietly.

“Jesus taught that it was because God loves us — all of us — each and every one of us. Did you know that even though Jesus healed hundreds of people, He always did it one at a time, individually? He cares about people. And Jesus said that He came to show us how much God loves us,” said Orly.

“Jesus laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could come alive and be filled with His Spirit. Jesus never mentioned becoming Jewish in order for Him to be your Messiah,” Gabriela quietly added.

“Are you saying that all I have to do is to pray to your god and ask him to let Jesus be my Messiah and that’s all there is to it?”

“Well, yes and no,” said Orly. The group groaned and some indicated that they knew there would be a catch. “Yes, that’s all that you need to do, but no, that’s not all that He does. When you invite Jesus to be your Messiah, you will receive the Holy Spirit who will begin to direct your life. He’ll guide you, bless you, strengthen you, and begin to change you so that you become more and more like Jesus. You’ll learn to love other people the way Jesus loved, and you’ll have the courage to face enemies, or persecution, or whatever is out there. I need to warn you that following Jesus has not been easy at times. A lot of followers have been killed for choosing to follow Jesus. Some have been killed by the Roman government, but most of them have been killed by fellow Jews. Sometimes whole groups have been killed just for worshipping Jesus. Jordan’s dad was killed for telling a Roman official’s wife about Jesus. So, don’t think that it’s something to take lightly. Gabriela and I know that we may be killed for telling you guys, but we still think it’s worth it for you to understand that Jesus came to die for your sins and give you eternal life.”

“But why would Jews kill Jews?” asked Appius.

“Many Jews, primarily those in leadership, have their own definition of what the Messiah should look like. They refuse to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. They killed Him because He claimed to be God’s Son. That was offensive to them since it didn’t fit their beliefs. They are still trying to destroy Jesus’ followers, but Jesus warned us that it would happen. Jesus said that the good news about God’s plan would travel like wildfire — and it has. There are thousands of followers of Jesus scattered all over the world.”

Orly waited patiently for more questions, but it seemed that everyone just wanted to think about what they had heard. Orly suggested that maybe it was time to quit for the night and answer questions again next week.

Lucas asked if he could ask one more question and Orly agreed. “If I wanted to talk to your god, how would I do that? I mean, how do you get his attention? Do I need to bring him a sacrifice or money or something?”

“You guys have heard me talk to God each week as I’ve prayed for Him to bless our Sabbath, but God is your Creator, too. He made you. He knows you. He loves you. All you need to do is talk to Him just like you talk to each other. He’s ready and listening.” Orly explained.

“How could he possibly pay attention to everyone?” asked Markus.

“I don’t know. I know He has angels everywhere, but all I really know is that Jesus taught that anytime we wanted to talk with Him, He was ready to listen.”

“I’ve never heard of a god like that!” said Julius.

“And I’ve never met people like Orly and Gabriela. They are always helping people and sharing what they have and treating people right. I think it must be true that they are filled with this Holy Spirit because they are so caring,” said Mrs. Amata.

“Thank you, Amata. We are just being obedient to what the Holy Spirit tells us to do. It has changed our lives,” responded Gabriela.

“Okay, what’s the plan for next week? Do you want to hear more?” asked Orly.

The consensus was a definite yes. Orly said that they and their friends would provide the meal again and thanked Lucas and Amata for providing the wine. “I think we failed to mention that. Thank you.”

“No problem,” said Lucas. Goodnights were said and Orly and Gabriela carried the serving bowls into the house. They both felt good about what had been covered tonight.



James and John were introduced at synagogue and were genuinely welcomed, but it was Jordan who brought the message. Orly learned later that they had never heard Jordan teach and had insisted that he do so. They encouraged Jordan and told him how proud his dad would have been to hear him teaching so well. Orly and Gabriela walked with Seth and Joelle to Mr. Kenan’s house and thanked them for sending such a wonderful dish. Seth asked how the group was doing and Orly replied that they were genuinely interested. He felt that each one was close to making a decision to follow Jesus as Messiah.

Seth expressed their desire to continue to help with the meal. He suggested that Joelle and Gabriela discuss what would be appropriate and let his cook prepare whatever they needed. Orly thanked him profusely. Gabriela added, “It really helps the conversation when everyone is sharing the food and enjoying it so much.” Seth agreed that they had seen it make a difference at their home group in Jerusalem.

“I like the title, ministry team. I think it fits,” said Joelle.

“We would have a much harder time without your help,” said Gabriela, gasping for breath as she tried to keep up with the others.

“You are really getting big. Have you talked with Sabra again?”

“No, I thought I would talk with her next week or the next. She said to come back in two months.”

Seth and Orly walked ahead and let the women talk. Gabriela was happy to stretch out on the grass and get off her feet. Mother Ruth asked if she had sent enough bread, and Gabriela said it was perfect. Mother Ruth told her, “I keep having this dream of cooking for you and Orly every day. I didn’t think I would ever want to leave my kitchen, but Benjamin is doing a great job and I almost feel useless. It seems a shame to be sitting here when I could be helping you out.”

“Oh, Mother Ruth, Orly has mentioned that that is his desire, too, but a bondsman is permanent. I certainly like your dream, though. I didn’t realize that carrying a baby would be such a lot of work. I’m exhausted all the time.”

“I told her she should see Sabra soon. She might know how to help you get some energy.”

“I keep forgetting to tell you that Sabra said I probably needed to eat goat liver. Do either one of you know how to cook that? I need to learn if it would help.”

“I remember my cook fixing it for me during one of my pregnancies. It was delicious. I’ll ask her if she remembers how to make it. I know it’s complicated to make it kosher, but it’s really good for you and might give you some more energy.”

“Oh, thank you, Joelle. That would be a big help. But let’s not serve goat liver to our guests on the Sabbath.”

“No, I was thinking of a fish and vegetable soup.”

“I’m sure I can send over the bread,” said Mother Ruth.

“That really makes it easier to concentrate on being the hostess when I’m not yawning my head off or worrying about overdoing.”

Orly called the group together and introduced the Apostles James and John. He welcomed them to come and share anything that was on their hearts. They greeted the group and told them how proud they were to finally get to visit. “Kobe told us about starting this group and then Orly has kept us updated. We bring you greetings from our fellow apostles in Jerusalem and scattered around the world. We have just returned from Damascus where we actually heard news of Kobe. A group that was preaching east of town heard that Simon’s team had preached there about a month ago. Everyone was well and they reported great success in leading others to know Jesus as Messiah. They were continuing to press eastward. We also heard a strange report that we’d like to share with you this morning,” began James. “I’ll let John tell you since he was the one who talked with the man.”

“I met a man in Damascus named Ananias. He said that about a year ago, he was sitting at his home praying early one morning. He very clearly heard the Holy Spirit say to get up and go minister to a particular man. The Holy Spirit told him where to find the man, but Ananias told God that he didn’t want to go. You see, this man that he was told to visit was Saul of Tarsus. Saul is the man who had been arresting and killing New Way groups in Jerusalem. I’m sure Orly and Uncle Kenan have kept you informed of the persecution and death of

many of the followers of Jesus. Anyway, God told Ananias to go and minister to Saul because he was ready to listen. Ananias wanted to be obedient, but he prayed again to be sure. He felt strongly that the Holy Spirit said, 'Go! I've chosen this man to proclaim my name to the Gentiles as well as the people of Israel. He will suffer many things for My name.' So, Ananias obediently went as God directed him. When Ananias arrived, Saul told him that a very bright light from Heaven had blinded him. He heard a voice speaking to him from Heaven. The men who were traveling with him heard the voice but said they didn't see anything. The voice said, 'Saul, Saul, why are you fighting against me?' When Saul asked who was speaking, the voice identified Himself as Jesus. Then Jesus told him to go into the city and wait until someone told him what to do next. The men with him led him into Damascus because he was totally blind, and for three days he just sat and fasted and prayed. Ananias placed his hands on Saul and told him that Jesus had sent him to heal his blindness and allow him to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias baptized him and now Saul is preaching in all the synagogues around Damascus, telling them that Jesus is the Messiah. Isn't that amazing? That explains why the followers in Jerusalem have been experiencing a time of peace and incredible growth this past year. And now Jesus is using one of His worst enemies to spread the good news.

"We are pleased to hear that God is using you to spread the New Way in Cana. We have heard about the amazing change at the synagogue and the way you helped Orly with the baptism. And now we are told that you are helping share the message with your Gentile friends. We are very excited and look forward to hearing a great report from you at Passover. Let's stand and we will pray with you for these ministries." John prayed for the synagogue and James prayed for the Gentiles, then John prayed again for a special blessing on them as a supporting group. It was a special time.

As they visited at dinner, James asked how the meeting had gone last night with the Gentiles. Orly replied, "Good. They are certainly listening and asking good questions. I don't want to push them because it's all so very new to them. The Holy Spirit keeps telling me to be patient and let Him do the work. So, I'm trying to be obedient."

"It is very humbling to hear that they are watching our every move. They see that we are different, and they like what they see. It makes me want to be very careful what I say or do in front of them," said Gabriela.

"Yes, you should be careful, but you are also free to be yourself. It's not an act or a religious mask," James responded. "Just be yourself and let them see Jesus living inside of you."

Goodbyes were said and Orly and Gabriela started their walk home. "What a Sabbath! I'm exhausted — but in a good way," said Orly.

"Basha and Sarah promised to come over and help me clean tomorrow, so we can call it a night."

Chapter 7

On Sunday morning, Gabriela asked Orly to bring extra jars of water from the stream. Basha would need them to wash the dishes. Gabriela decided to skip the market and get her bread made early. She wanted to be able to help Amata with the sewing this afternoon and she knew she needed a nap after such a busy Sabbath. She had just set the bread to rise when she heard Basha and Sarah knock. She invited them into the messy kitchen, and they quickly started cleaning up the dishes left over from the Sabbath dinner with the Gentiles. At least there were no pots or baking pans to wash. They visited all morning and got the kitchen and courtyard cleaned. Gabriela had just put the bread in the oven when Orly suddenly appeared behind her. "Orly, what's wrong? Don't startle me like that! I didn't hear you."

"Nothing is wrong. It's time for Chaya's wedding and Mr. Kenan let me take off this week because Helam's family specifically invited us to be there for the wedding. Lucas and Amata will work and take care of the goats each afternoon. I'll watch the bread while you go get ready," volunteered Orly. "We'll need to leave just as soon as this bread is baked. They live out of town north of here, but I think it will take us about an hour to get there. We need to be there by the ninth hour."

"I won't be long, and thanks for watching the bread." Gabriela was excited for Chaya but was feeling exhausted. She needed that nap but knew that there would be no time for it now. She dressed quickly and then went back to join Orly. He had to wake her when the bread was ready, and she was not really rested. But as they walked hand in hand and talked, her excitement for Chaya began to take over. *Our wedding was less than a year ago. What a happy day that was.*

When Helam and Chaya arrived, Ruler Jedidiah officiated the wedding. There was already a crowd ready to celebrate. The music started and Orly and Gabriela joined in the dancing. Soon Gabriela found a bench and began to talk with several other women. A wonderful meal was served, and Gabriela felt better after eating. They stayed for a little while, but then decided they should start home because of the long walk. Each morning Orly and Gabriela walked to the wedding and each night after the wonderful dinner, they sneaked out early because Gabriela was getting more and more exhausted. On Thursday, they waited until midday to go so that Gabriela could get a nap. But then they stayed later than usual because they knew they couldn't return on Friday.

On Friday, she would need to prepare for the Gentile group and catch up on a week's worth of housework. Orly carried water up from the stream and helped her milk the goats and set out breakfast. As they were eating, Orly confessed that he still had no idea what he was supposed to teach the Gentile group. "Maybe it should just be questions and answers," suggested Gabriela.

“Maybe. We’ll see,” agreed Orly.

Amata and Lucas helped her and Orly get the courtyard set up for the group. Seth and Mr. Kenan provided the meal and Lucas had brought the wine. Gabriela set out the Sabbath candles and the men finished arranging the benches. The women were busy visiting when the men arrived. Everyone seemed to enjoy the food, but once again there was a feeling of haste — an eagerness to gather and ask questions. She quickly said a prayer for Orly as they cleared the tables and the men put the benches in a circle.

Then the questions came, all at once, fast and furious. “Why do you ...?” “What do you ...?” “What does ...?” “Would we ...?” It seemed that everyone had questions and they were ready to ask them.

“Okay, that’s a lot of questions and you know I didn’t hear them all. How about we just go around the circle and let each one ask your most pressing question? Then we’ll go around again until we run out of questions, or we run out of time. Does that sound right?”

Everyone agreed and Orly called on Lucas, who was sitting to his right, to begin. “Why do you pray in Jesus’ name?”

“I pray in Jesus’ name because that’s what He told His apostles to do on the night before He was arrested. He said that they should pray to God because He’s the only one who can answer prayer. But Jesus said that we could pray with confidence because we belong to Him.”

“So, you are not praying to Jesus?”

“No. Jesus instructed us to pray to God the Father, Jehovah.”

“Okay, I’m good. You are next, Markus.”

“Well, it may be two questions, but what do you do on the Sabbath, and would we have to keep those same rules?”

“That is two questions. But they are closely related, so let me see if I can take care of them both. We are told in the ancient Scripture that God worked on Creation for six days and then rested the seventh day. But I take my cues primarily from Jesus’ teaching about the Sabbath. He said that God made the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath. You see, the Jewish leaders have taken what God said and added a lot of other stuff to it. They’ve added so much stuff, that the Sabbath has become a hardship instead of a blessing. While Jesus was on earth, He was continually accused of breaking the Sabbath rules, but He always reminded them that He obeyed God’s Law, not theirs. When Jesus said God made the Sabbath for man, He meant that taking a day of rest is good for us. He recommends it. Gabriela and I usually spend the day at Mr. Kenan’s and meet with a group of Jesus’ followers. We sing songs and worship and listen to teachings about Jesus. Jesus taught on the Sabbath. He also healed, which drove the Jewish leaders crazy. And He had no problem helping people on the Sabbath. Jesus didn’t follow the Jew’s traditions and made-up rules. He just obeyed God’s directions to relax and enjoy the day.

“Now, the second part of your question is whether you would be subject to the Jewish Laws. The answer is no. God’s Laws are always for your benefit. For example, when I first started at the Metal Shop,

Lucas taught me how to make round wheels for wagons. Let's pretend that that is one of God's Laws. Okay? Now, what happens if I decide I want to make square wheels for my new oxcart?"

"It won't work."

"Your ox would be overloaded."

"Gabriela would be really upset with you."

"Do you think that God would zap me for making square wheels?" asked Orly.

"You mean, would he get mad and strike you with lightning?" asked Appius.

"What do you think?"

"Well, that's what we've been taught about Jupiter if we disobey his rules."

"Exactly. But that's not the way Jehovah God operates. Jehovah God loves you. If you want to go against His rules, He'll let you. You have freedom to disobey. He only gives you these rules to help you have the best life possible. He knows what is best. It would be stupid to disobey, but a lot of people do. He's more like a Father, and Jesus said that we can call Him abba because He loves us and wants what is best for us. Does that make sense? Does it answer your question?"

"I think so. So, if I became a follower of Jesus, He would show me which rules to keep and which ones to break."

"Jesus didn't come to bring us a bunch of rules. He came to die for our sins and put us in a right relationship with God because we do break the rules. He loves you and wants the best for you."

"Wow."

"Are you settled? Is everyone okay with that answer or do I need to explain more?"

The group seemed to understand, so Orly took the next question.

"Would we need to worship at the synagogue on Sabbaths?" asked Appius. "I don't think the Jews would allow that. But wouldn't we need to worship somewhere?"

"Jesus said that where two or three are gathered together in His name, then He would be present. Remember that a follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit living inside of him or her, so when you are meeting with other followers there is a special bond. Gabriela and I worship together every evening — just the two of us here at home or down by the stream, or when we are taking a walk. It's important that you meet with other followers so that you can learn from each other. It's so much fun to worship together, and if you guys decide to become followers of Jesus, I assume that we'll just continue to meet together for dinner and worship. You would not be required or even allowed to attend the synagogue because you are not Jewish. So does that answer your question?"

"Yes, thanks," said Appius.

"Okay Titus, are you ready with your question, or should we take a break?"

Titus looked nervous and hesitated with his question. Orly reminded him that he couldn't read his mind. "And I promise I won't be offended by any question."

"Okay, we're Romans. We have feast days and celebrations for our gods. We worship a lot of gods. Would we stop doing that? I mean, we're still Romans. I'm not sure how we would just stop celebrating. It would feel really strange."

Everyone agreed that they had wondered about that, too.

Orly felt the Holy Spirit urging him to be courageous and totally bold in his answer. "Do you remember when I told you about God creating the Jewish nation and calling them to be separate? Do you remember why He didn't want them associating with other people?"

"You said he didn't want them to start worshipping their gods."

"Exactly. Jehovah God is the only true God. He is your Creator. He loves you and He wants what is best for you. He doesn't want you to worship any other gods because they are imagined by man, or they are things that God created. He doesn't want you worshipping anything except Him because He loves you."

"So, we shouldn't attend the parties that celebrate Roman gods?"

"If you become a follower of Jesus, you would have to give up all your other gods. You would worship Jehovah God and Him alone."

"I'm confused," said Lucas. "I thought we would worship Jesus."

"Jesus said He was God in the flesh. He was God with skin on. But there's still only one God that appears in three different forms. There's God that stays in Heaven that we call the Father. Then there's God that came to earth that we call Jesus — His earthly name — and there's the Holy Spirit. That's not three separate Gods. That's just one God named Jehovah in three forms. Sorta like I can be a husband, a brother, and a friend all at the same time."

"Whoa. That is confusing. I realize I don't know much about Jehovah God. Could you teach us more about Him?" asked Titus.

"Fair enough. Let's take a break and then we'll tackle that question. Okay?"

Everyone agreed to take a break and stretch their legs. Gabriela whispered to Orly, and he agreed that her plan sounded good. Several refilled their cups and grabbed some extra raisins and nuts to munch on. Orly said, "Gabriela has a suggestion that I think sounds good. Why don't we continue going around and let me hear your questions? Next week we'll talk about Jehovah God, and we'll continue the question thing again after that. Does that sound good?"

"Sure. I didn't mean to bring up such a messy question," said Titus.

"I happen to like messy questions. I would like to take time to pray about it. So, let's table that one until next week. That brings us to Julius, are you going to ask a messy question or a quick and easy one?"

"Well, I hope it's nice and messy just for your sake, but I think you've already answered it tonight, so it's not so pressing," said Julius.

“I was just wondering if we became followers of Jesus, would we have to travel to Jerusalem and celebrate the Jewish festivals?”

“The short answer is no. But just for your information, there are three Jewish festivals that all Jewish men are required to celebrate in the temple at Jerusalem. The first one is Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan. That is the day that Jesus was crucified. So, while you are not Jewish, if you became a follower of Jesus, I would think you would probably want to celebrate Jesus’ death and resurrection. Does that make sense? I always travel to Jerusalem for Passover because I’m Jewish, but my celebration there is primarily to be with older, wiser followers of Jesus, especially the apostles. I learn as much as I can from them during those seven days. Near the end of Passover week, Mr. Kenan takes all of us to the temple and we make a sacrifice to remember that Jesus died for our sins. So, while you probably wouldn’t want to travel to Jerusalem, I would think that we would attempt to design some kind of celebration to commemorate what Jesus did for us and to retell the story.”

Everyone agreed that they understood.

“The second festival is Shavuot. The first day of Shavuot is called Pentecost because it occurs fifty days after Passover. Followers of Jesus have already re-written that holiday so that there is a mass celebration in the streets of Jerusalem to remember the day that the Holy Spirit came to earth to dwell inside Jesus’ followers. This year, the followers in Mr. Kenan’s group celebrated Pentecost at his house. We didn’t travel to Jerusalem. We retold the story of the Holy Spirit arriving and we had a lot of fun doing it.

“Then the third festival listed in Jewish Scripture that required a trip to the temple is called Sukkot and lasts for eight days. The apostles and leaders of the groups in Jerusalem have almost totally quit celebrating Sukkot because the Jewish leaders have turned it into a worship of their leadership and their laws. It was originally supposed to be a call to honor and obey God’s Laws. But since Jesus has fulfilled those Laws, it no longer seems necessary. Most of us just use it as a time to get together with family or friends, and we avoid the temple as much as possible.”

“So, you are saying that we should give up our Roman gods’ celebrations, but we should also not do the Jewish ones and instead create new ones that are about Jesus?”

“That is well put, Julius. That’s exactly what I believe. As followers of Jesus, we will always celebrate and remember His death, burial and resurrection and we will always celebrate and remember when He sent the Holy Spirit to live inside of us. Also, many of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem celebrate with a worship time very early each Sunday morning. They get together, sing a few Psalms, hear a short teaching, and then leave for work. It’s a special time to start the week off right and commemorates his resurrection. Does that answer your question?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“How about you Marcella? Do you have a question that I can help you with?”

“I was just wondering what kosher meant and whether we would need to only eat kosher foods like the Jews.”

“Remember, Jesus came to set us free from the Laws given to Moses. Kosher rules were to prepare us for the Messiah, and He’s already come. So, it is my belief that the kosher laws no longer apply. However, because I’m Jewish and was raised in a kosher household, it’s the food and preparation style that I’m most comfortable with. I feel certain that you would not be required to keep a kosher kitchen. We know that a lot of Jesus’ followers are divided on this, and no one has really come up with a good answer. So, my best response to you is that you don’t have to eat kosher because if you chose to accept Jesus as Messiah, you are becoming a Jesus follower not a Jew.”

“Oh, good! It seems like a lot of extra work. Thank you.”

“Diana, do you have a question? Let’s hear your question and then Amata’s, but I may save the answers for next week if that’s okay.”

“I’m just wondering if I need to change my name?” said Diana quietly.

“Change your name? Why?” asked Orly, feeling confused.

“Because I was named for the goddess Diana. I wouldn’t want to offend Jehovah with my name.”

“I think it depends on how the Holy Spirit leads you, but personally, I don’t believe that your name has anything to do with how much God loves you. He loves you whether you are Roman or Greek or Phoenician or Syrian or Jewish. He’s not offended by our names or our background. He just loves all of His creation. Do you understand?”

“I think so. So, it would be up to me if I wanted to change it.”

“I believe so, unless the Holy Spirit instructs you. Then you should obey,” said Orly. “Does that ease your mind?”

“Yes. I like my name.”

“We all like your name. So, I would plan to keep it unless God says otherwise,” said Orly kindly.

“Okay, Amata, what’s your pressing question?”

“I was just wondering what shalom means. Jordan’s little sister said it to me, and I didn’t know what to do. I asked Lucas and he says that you say it a lot. But we don’t know what it means.”

“Oh, Amata, and everyone else, I apologize. Shalom just simply means ‘peace.’ When we say it, we’re simply saying, ‘Peace on you and yours.’ We use it as hello and as goodbye. And it’s perfectly fine for a non-Jew to use it, too. So tonight, I think it’s time to call it a night. So, I will say, shalom.”

Orly was thoroughly surprised when the whole group responded with, “Shalom.”

Chapter 8

Gabriela milked the goats and set breakfast on the table but then asked Orly if he would go to the synagogue alone. She was just too tired. He agreed and she was still asleep when Orly woke her at midday. It had been such a busy week. After drinking the glass of juice that Orly brought her, she was ready to walk to Mr. Kenan's.

She enjoyed sitting in the grass and visiting with their friends and Mother Ruth. Everyone wanted to hear about the Gentile group and Orly shared that they were full of questions. "One question was why we worship Jesus and Jehovah. It threw me a little and I told them I would be better prepared this coming week. In other words: Help!" said Orly.

"How about a session after work on Wednesday?" asked Jordan.

"Nope. I'm working late at the shop on Wednesday and Thursday. Can you come for dinner after work on Tuesday? Would that be okay, Gabriela?"

When she agreed, Jordan said he would be glad to help them. "But don't forget, you are leading this group next week."

Jordan called the group together and led them in some Psalms. He told them Jesus' parable regarding the servants who were ready for their master's return and the one who wasn't. He reminded them that it didn't matter what the outside looked like. It didn't matter if you did good deeds, or were Jewish, Greek, Roman, Samaritan, or African. It didn't matter if you were healthy or sick, rich or poor, free or slave. The only thing that mattered to God was whether you were in a right relationship with Him. Jordan continued, "God sent Jesus to die for your sins. All you have to do is ask Him to be your Messiah and it's settled. It's done. It's eternally sealed. You are filled with the Holy Spirit and guided for the rest of your life." Jordan asked if there was anyone present who was ready to make that decision, and Levi stood. A few seconds later Rebecca and Nathan stood. Bina, one of the new kitchen slaves, stood. Jordan asked those standing to remain in the courtyard and let someone pray with them and give them further instruction. Jordan began to sing Psalm 150, and everyone joined in singing their special song of praise to God.

Orly told Gabriela that he just needed some quiet time to pray before he milked the goats and returned. She said she would stay and visit with the group. Joelle not only promised to send the main dish over for the Gentile group, but asked if Tuesday afternoon would be a good time to send the goat liver to her. Gabriela began to giggle and said, "I don't think so!" She explained that Jordan was coming over for dinner. They decided that Wednesday would be perfect since Orly would be working late.

During the post-Sabbath dinner, Jordan suggested that Orly teach on baptism next week. The following week they would meet as

usual for worship and then walk to the stream for the baptism service. Everyone agreed.



On Sunday, she went to the market while Basha and Sarah were cleaning the kitchen. When they were done, Basha gave her a hug and called for Sarah. "It's time to go and let Gabriela rest."

"Actually, I was on my way to the Mercantile Store to talk with Sabra, the midwife."

"Then, we'll walk with you that far. Is everything okay?"

"I think so. She's just concerned that I'm awfully big. I think she's going to tell me to cut back on goat cheese sandwiches at night."

Both women laughed as Basha recalled that when she was carrying Jordan, she even got up in the middle of the night to eat. "Don't get between a woman with child and her food!" Gabriela hugged Basha and told Sarah that she would be looking for her on Wednesday to work on her pillow.

Gabriela went around to Sabra's house and knocked. When there was no answer, she went to the Mercantile Store and asked Mr. Hiram where to find his wife. He asked her if it was an emergency and she told him it was not. He stated that his wife needed to rest today after so much excitement last week. "She plans to be available on Tuesday if you can wait until then."

"Oh, I'm sure she needs the rest, and I can wait." She left with a friendly smile but felt disappointed. *I guess I know that Sabra is going to say twins and I want to tell Orly. But now I won't know until Tuesday and I'm being a baby and just want to cry.* And that's where Amata found her when she arrived. Gabriela was sitting in the courtyard, eating a cucumber and goat cheese sandwich with tears streaming down her face. She brightened up when she saw Amata who asked if she felt like walking to the market. As they walked, she told Amata what she suspected and the reason for the tears. Amata agreed that starting to sew baby shawls would be just the thing to cure her sadness, and if it was true, then they would need twice as many.

Gabriela was fascinated with the selection of yarns. Amata pointed her to the very tiniest and lightest weight yarns. She encouraged Gabriela to pick out a couple of skeins to start with. She picked out a light teal blue yarn. Amata suggested a darker blue to weave into the shawl and reminded her that the shawls could be any pattern she wanted. She could make each one different. Gabriela made the purchase, and they carried her yarn home. She couldn't suppress her excitement. This would be satisfying. She needed a change of pace from making the plain swaddling cloths. She couldn't wait to get started, but she had to get Orly's dinner in the oven and the bread finished. So, the shawl would have to wait until tomorrow. Amata was working on Gabriela's maternal robes on the big loom.

Orly and Gabriela enjoyed a quiet evening together. Orly was disappointed that she wasn't able to see Sabra but had no idea how important it was for Gabriela. They discussed plans for the baptism service in two weeks. They decided to just provide jars of water since the group was not accustomed to eating at that time of day. They discussed the message on baptism for Mr. Kenan's group, and they would wait and see what Jordan had to teach them about Jehovah for the Gentile group. Orly looked over the yarn she had bought for the baby shawl and agreed it would be beautiful. He was glad that Amata was keeping Gabriela happy and helping out so much.

On Monday, Gabriela caught some fish for a picnic for just the two of them. Lucas agreed to build a small bonfire and to clean the fish after he milked the goats.

"Are you ready to start the shawls?" asked Amata.

"Sure. I think everything is mostly ready for dinner."

"Okay, let's see. A newborn baby shawl would be about six panels on your little loom, and about twelve handbreadths long. Then you simply stitch them together. So, there's really nothing different, except you have beautiful yarn to work with. You can make designs if you want to, or you can just make this first one very basic. We'll need to make several shawls. It's fun to look forward to the birth, but it's also hard to wait. Making the swaddling cloths and shawls was always my favorite part and it made the waiting easier."

Lucas brought the milk in early and said he was going down to start the bonfire and clean the fish. Gabriela stopped her weaving and gave him a serving bowl for the fish. She asked Amata to bring up a box from the cellar and two onions. They quickly packed the picnic box and went back to their looms.

Orly arrived and carried the picnic box while Gabriela carried the jar of milk. They were giggling about their picnic and enjoying being together. Lately, they had had little time alone. When they were preparing to leave, Gabriela realized that she had forgotten to bring a lantern. He told her to stay by the fire and he would walk to the house and get a lantern. He carefully started up the trail but was soon in pitch darkness. He felt his way up the trail one tree at a time. Finally, he was at the house and lit a lamp in the courtyard. He grabbed a lantern and returned for Gabriela. They put out the fire and left the milk jar. He took their blankets and the box, and they walked back to the house amid much giggling and silliness.

On Tuesday morning, she asked Orly to bring her water from the stream since the milk jar was already there. She needed to go to the market, but quickly picked out what she needed and headed home. She started the potato dish and then sat down at the loom for just a few minutes to work on the baby shawl. When it was midmorning, she walked to Sabra's house and her knock was answered almost immediately. Sabra welcomed her and asked if she had enjoyed the wedding. Sabra complained that Chaya was almost an hour away and she wouldn't see her often. Gabriela reminded her that her mother was

in Bethany, south of Jerusalem. They enjoyed visiting, and then Sabra transitioned to business. “How long has it been since your wedding?”

“Four months.”

“I see. And have you felt any movement at all?”

“No. Not that I know of.”

“I would like to feel that big belly of yours, may I?” asked Sabra gently.

“Of course.”

Sabra pushed, and tapped, and put her ear down to listen. When she lifted her head, she was grinning and told Gabriela that she was definitely carrying twins.

“Oh, Sabra, are you sure? And is it okay that I’m not feeling any movement?”

“Yes, it’s perfectly okay. They are still too small. And I heard two distinct heart beats.”

As they continued to talk, Sabra recommended that she eat goat liver and fish once a week, more if she could. When Gabriela told her that she was craving goat cheese sandwiches, she encouraged her to continue. “Rules will probably change depending on your energy level. Lifting will get harder as the twins get larger. But right now, you need to do as much normal housework as you can without causing discomfort. The stronger you are at the birthing, the safer everyone will be. Walk as much as feels good, but don’t overdo. If anything causes pain, stop immediately and lie down.” She explained that there was danger that she would birth the babies too soon if she didn’t listen to her body and take care of herself. “I need to check you once a month now or sooner if you have any questions. Now, go tell Orly that you need two of everything and I’ll see you next month. Shalom.”

“Shalom,” said Gabriela as she realized that the news that she suspected had been confirmed by Sabra. *It’s true. I am carrying two babies for Orly. Oh, Father, I am doubly blessed.* She decided to walk to Mr. Kenan’s and let Mother Ruth know. *No, I want to tell Orly first. But when? It’s probably his break time at the shop. Do I dare to interrupt and ask him to take a walk with me? But if I don’t, then Jordan will hear the news at the same time, and I want to tell Orly alone.* She decided to be brave and walked to the Metal Shop. She went in the front door and was met by Seth. He immediately wanted to know if everything was okay. Gabriela replied, “I thought Orly would be on his midday break. I needed to ask him a question. But it can wait.”

Mr. Kenan stepped out of his office when he recognized Gabriela’s voice. “Is everything okay?” he asked with deep concern.

“Yes, it’s fine. I’m fine. I just thought Orly would be on break, and I could ask him a question.”

“Wait here, and I’ll call him.” He went into the back room and called for Orly to come to the front. Orly, who was accustomed to being called to help Mr. Kenan, came as quickly as he could, but without alarm. When he saw Gabriela, his face went pale, and he demanded to know what was wrong. “Could we take a little walk and

have some privacy? I promise we won't be gone long," said Gabriela to Mr. Kenan.

"You take as long as you need. We can keep this place going without Orly for a few minutes."

Orly led her out the front door and back to the break area. It was so noisy in the shop he knew they wouldn't be overheard. Gabriela, what's wrong? Is it the baby?"

"Orly, there's nothing wrong with the baby. I just wanted you to be the first to know that you are going to be a double abba. There are two babies. I'm carrying two babies. I hope it's all right that I came here. But I just wanted you to be the first to know."

"Oh, Gabriela, of course it's all right that you came here. You can come here anytime you need me. Two babies, like twins?"

"Yes, twins. We are going to have our hands full with two babies all at once. Are you happy? You just look shocked."

"Of course, I'm happy. So that's why you are so big?"

"Yep. And I'm going to get humongous!"

"Can I tell people now, or do you want to keep it a secret?"

"I'm okay to just tell everybody now. At least it explains why I'm as big as a house!"

"Let's go tell Mr. Kenan and Seth. Come with me. This will be fun!" He gently helped Gabriela off the grass. He was grinning from ear to ear and gave her a quick hug. "Mr. Kenan, Seth, Levi, we want you to be the first to know. I'm going to be an abba twice. We are having twins. Sabra just confirmed it. Isn't that amazing? Isn't God good? I'm so excited." Congratulations were said all around. "Do you mind if I tell the guys? I don't think I can go back to work without telling them." Mr. Kenan laughingly agreed.

Gabriela said that she needed to get home and get dinner started and she would let him do the telling. He wanted her to stay, but she didn't feel comfortable with everyone gawking at her belly in a room full of men. Orly called all the guys together to let them know that Gabriela was carrying twins. They all congratulated him, then Mr. Kenan ordered the men to get back to work. He talked with Orly and asked if he wanted to take the afternoon off. "No, I need the work more than ever. I promise I'll be fine. I've got lots to do and that will settle me down."

"Good — and congratulations!"

"Thanks, Mr. Kenan, and sorry for the interruption."

"Some interruptions are totally worth it," said Mr. Kenan as he headed back to the front.

Gabriela walked home and quietly began kneading the bread. While the bread was rising, Gabriela finished seasoning the potato dish and carried it to the fire pit. She didn't feel any pain and hoped that she would continue to be able to cook for Orly. She was glad he had made her the smaller cookware so that she didn't have to lift the full-sized ones. *There will still be enough potatoes to feed two hungry men and a hungry woman eating for three!* Gabriela laughed out loud. *No wonder I'm always hungry!*

She sat down and ate a goat cheese sandwich. She could hardly wait for Lucas and Amata to arrive. They were thrilled with her news and offered to help in any way they could. "Well, the only help that I need right now is milk for company tonight. Jordan is coming over and he loves the fresh goat milk." Lucas agreed. He told her that he had found an ox for sale that he would be looking at tomorrow afternoon. She showed Amata her start on the baby shawl and Amata was impressed. Gabriela loved making the shawl. It required concentration, and yet it was repetitive enough to allow her to pray. "Amata, this is so fun. But I've got to get dinner on for Orly and Jordan. I can't sit here and play!"

"It does seem like play, doesn't it? I always enjoyed it. I'm glad you enjoy it, too. And soon, we'll need to shop for more yarn!"

Amata asked what she could do to help. "I'll punch down the bread and get it ready to bake. Do you mind going and stirring the potatoes?" Gabriela was trying to think through what she was serving. She took the pan of bread to the outside oven and was sitting watching it when Orly and Jordan arrived. It was perfect timing. They helped her carry everything inside and treated her like a queen. Orly wouldn't even let her pour the milk. She would talk with him later about what she could and couldn't do. She realized that while she had been suspecting twins for the last two months, he was just adjusting to the news.

During dinner, the three began discussing what the Gentiles would need to know about Jehovah God. They talked long into the night and realized that they needed to simplify and keep to what was absolutely necessary. "I think I've got the basic outline. I'll have two more nights to work on it while I make an oxcart."

"Are you starting that this week?" asked Jordan.

"Yeah, I told Mr. Kenan I would work after hours every Wednesday and Thursday until I get it finished. I'm hoping I can finish in a couple of weeks."

"Well, you would get it done a lot faster if I stayed on Thursday afternoon and helped."

"That would be perfect. I'll need help joining the axle."

"I'll plan to bring both of you dinner on Thursday if you are willing to help Orly. I'm calling it a night, gentlemen. Don't stay up too late."

On Wednesday morning, Gabriela discovered that Orly had already milked the goats and two jars of milk were sitting on the table. The table was set for breakfast and there were two water jars already filled in the kitchen. She knew that she needed to talk with Orly about what Sabra had said, but they didn't seem to have time to talk. So, she just thanked him and sat down and enjoyed a quick breakfast with him before he ran out the door. She began to clean up the dishes and plan her day.

Basha brought Sarah over and Gabriela sent her to get her sewing. "Now, I think your butterfly needs another wing, don't you?"

"She needs three more wings," said Sarah matter-of-factly.

“Well, we can only do them one at a time. So, which wing are you going to work on today?” Soon Sarah was busy with her embroidery and Gabriela sat down at the loom to add another row of yarn. When Sarah finished the wing, Gabriela checked her work and declared it perfect. “You are a very fast learner, Sarah. I think your butterfly is beautiful. Now, I need to go to the market. I need you to put your sewing down and go with me.”

“Then can I play with Lizzy and Kizzy?” asked Sarah.

“Yes, you may play while I rest, but I must take Uncle Orly’s dinner to him at the shop, walk you home, and be back here before dark.”

After Gabriela purchased the melon at the market, she also purchased a bag of wool to stuff Sarah’s pillow. Then they headed back to the house. Gabriela took a jar of goat milk to the cellar. “Sarah, I will be working in the cellar making cheese. Stay in the yard so that I can see you.”

“Okay,” said Sarah. She was happily playing with the goats in the yard and telling them how much she missed them. When Gabriela finished starting the cheese, she discovered that Sarah and the goats had disappeared. She suspected that they would be down by the stream, but she knew she couldn’t rest until she knew that Sarah was safe. She walked down the trail and sure enough the goats and Sarah were wading in the water. Sarah had tied up her robe to keep it from getting wet, but with all the splashing and playing, her entire robe was covered with mud. Gabriela called for Sarah and helped her slip her robe off and then instructed her to wash it out carefully and get all the mud off. Sarah wasn’t sure how to do that and Gabriela ended up having to wade out and help her. The water did feel good on her feet, but she knew that she was getting overtired. She told Sarah that they needed to go into the house and let her robe dry on the rooftop before Lucas and Mrs. Amata arrived. Since it was a warm day, it shouldn’t take long to dry. She told Sarah to start another wing for her butterfly but couldn’t keep her eyes open. The next thing she knew, she heard Amata talking as she helped a fully clothed child with her butterfly. When Gabriela started to apologize, Amata assured her that all was well and to get her rest. But Gabriela had to get Orly’s sandwich made. Gabriela began to pack the dinner sack and explained to Amata that she was taking Orly’s dinner to him and then would take Sarah home. She told Sarah to put away her sewing and get ready to go with her. They hurried out the door.

When they arrived at the shop, Orly had just called quitting time as the sun hit the horizon. Jordan asked Sarah if she would like to walk home with him and Joshua, and Sarah agreed. He threw her up on his shoulders and started running. Sarah was giggling hysterically. Since the other men had left quickly, Gabriela had a few minutes alone with Orly before she had to leave. He thanked her for the sandwich but encouraged her to get home before dark. As she walked, she was planning her nice quiet evening when she heard voices in her courtyard. Joelle and Amata were sitting and visiting. Amata reminded

Gabriela that Lucas had purchased an ox and was now milking the goats a little late. And Joelle had brought over the goat liver for her to eat. She had decided to bring it herself so they could visit for a few minutes. Lucas delivered the milk and he and Amata said, “Shalom” to the two ladies.

“Shalom.”

Gabriela and Joelle quickly got the table set, Gabriela poured the goat’s milk, and they sat down for a meal of goat liver together. Joelle’s cook, Deborah, certainly knew how to make it look attractive. Cooked vegetables covered the meat. Gabriela pushed the liver around on her plate but was amazed that Joelle was eating heartily. “It’s good,” said Joelle. “And it’s really good for the babies.” Finally, Gabriela took a tiny bite of the meat and she agreed that it was good. Both ladies finished their plate and Gabriela admitted that she had been afraid of trying it, but really liked it. She told Joelle that Sabra had said that she needed to eat it once a week until the babies were born. She asked if she could come over and learn from her cook how to prepare it. “Well,” said Joelle, “since I need to eat it once a week, too, and it’s a lot of work to prepare, why don’t we just let my cook prepare it once a week and you either come to my house or I’ll come here, and we’ll share it.”

“But why do you need to eat goat liver ... oh, my ... are you?”

“Yes, but nobody else knows except Seth, of course, and my staff.”

“Oh, Joelle, how much fun. Our babies will be practically the same age — just months apart. How fun! But how are you feeling?”

“Pretty good. I’ve had a little queasiness, but not bad. I think this is going to be an easy one. It better be, I don’t have time to be sick.”

There was a knock at the door and Seth arrived to walk Joelle home. He asked if they had enjoyed their special meal but indicated that it sounded gross. Joelle told him that it was very good, and they had enjoyed it very much. Gabriela thanked them for the food and for the visit and congratulated them on their little secret.

She cleared the table, washed the dishes, then sat down at the loom to add more rows to the shawl. She prayed for Orly and for the Gentile group. After a while, she slipped into her blanket and was fast asleep when Orly arrived.

When she woke on Thursday morning, she once again found that Orly had already completed her morning chores. She teased him about spoiling her, but there wasn’t time to talk, so she thanked him and promised to bring enough dinner for him and Jordan tonight.

She spent all morning fishing and preparing a fish and vegetable stew. It simmered over the fire, while she finished the bread. When Lucas and Amata arrived, Gabriela asked him if he would carry the soup to the house. “I’m taking dinner to Orly and Jordan. They are both working on the oxcart tonight and I promised I would bring them dinner.” She and Amata packed a box for the men’s dinner and then Amata declared it too heavy for Gabriela to carry. “Lucas and I will carry the box to the shop on our way home.”

Gabriela sighed deeply and asked Amata if it was okay if she at least walked with them to the shop so that she could see Orly for just a minute. Then she would come straight home before dark. "I'll even let you carry the bags of almonds and raisins," laughed Amata. Gabriela gave Amata a big hug and thanked her for understanding. Amata carried the milk jar, while Lucas carried the heavy box. Gabriela just walked alongside them and said that she was bringing the love.

Orly was surprised to see Lucas and Amata with Gabriela and wanted to know if everything was okay. "Yep, your bride just fixed a bigger feast than she could carry, so we helped her out. You boys be safe tonight. Come get me if you need more help." He and Amata left and Orly walked outside with Gabriela and gave her a tender kiss. "I hate being away from you like this, but you need to get home before dark. So get going. I miss you so much."

"Please be careful."

"I promise. You get some rest. And thanks for the feast!"

"You are welcome." It was already dusk when Gabriela arrived home, but she lit the lamps and settled in for the evening. She had left a bowl of fish stew for herself, but it was cold and not very appealing. She ate some, but then fixed herself a goat cheese and cucumber sandwich. That hit the spot.

She worked at her loom for a while and prayed for Orly and Jordan to be safe. She was already asleep but stirred when Orly came into the room. He told her that they successfully completed the axle. Now all he lacked were the four wheels and that should only take one more night to finish. She assumed he would be working late next Wednesday afternoon and smiled because she remembered Joelle's secret and knew that they would be eating goat liver again.

Chapter 9

Friday was a much quieter day for Gabriela. Once again Orly did all her early morning chores and was quickly out the door. She worked at the loom some and took a long nap. Amata was delighted that Gabriela was rested enough to walk to the market. They looked over the very lightest-weight yarns. Amata also reminded the owner that they needed heavier threads. Gabriela paid for the skeins of yarn that they had selected for the shawls, and threads for more swaddling cloths. She and Amata happily chatted all the way home.

As the group gathered, Gabriela felt that everyone was scattered and not as eager as usual. They lingered longer over the meal, and everyone seemed distracted. Gabriela knew she needed to be praying for Orly.

When the meal was finally over, and everyone had settled into the circle, Orly began, "Last week we left a question that I want to start with tonight. You wanted to know more about Jehovah God. One thing that I want to remind you of before we start is this: You will never know everything about Jehovah God — because then He wouldn't be God. So, there will be a lot of things tonight that I can't explain. Okay?" Again, everyone agreed and the eagerness to learn seemed to be returning. "The simplest way I know to teach this is to start with three O's. First of all, Jehovah God is Omnipotent, all powerful. He controls the storms. He can stop mighty armies. The Scriptures are filled with acts of great power that He performed for the Jews. We've talked about Jesus' power over sickness and even death. Nothing and no one is more powerful than God, not even the evil one, Satan.

"The second O is that Jehovah God is Omniscient. He knows everything. He knows the past, the present, and the future. He knows what is happening everywhere in the world. Jesus taught that He knows even when a little sparrow falls and that He has the hairs on your head numbered. He knows everything. He even knows what you are thinking — and that's scary. He knows me better than I know myself. So, to me, it's incredible that He would die for me. I mean, He knows that I'm not worth it! He died for you, too, no matter what you have done or said or thought. He knows all about you. He also knows the future. He knows what tomorrow will bring and He knows what will happen ten years from now. He knows everything and there's no One who I feel more comfortable leading my life. I talk to Him about big decisions and little ones. He knows better than me. Let's take another breath and see if there are any questions about the first two O's."

"Omnipotent and omniscient, that's good. Many of our Roman gods are one or the other, but I can't think of any that have both attributes," said Markus and the others agreed with him.

"Okay, are you ready for the third one? Can anyone guess what that would be?" Everyone shook their heads and waited for him to continue. "The third O is Omnipresent. God is everywhere all at once.

We are taught by the Scriptures that in the beginning God created the Heavens and Earth. He created everything that exists. That means that Jehovah God existed before anything. He is eternal. He has always been and will always be. He was not born, and He will not die. There is no place that you can go where He is not already there. Many people believe that He is the God of Israel. But that's not true. He is God of the whole world and all the heavens.

"Jesus taught that He, also, was present at Creation and was actually the One who performed what God imagined. We are told in Scripture that the Holy Spirit was the One who hovered over the darkness and caused Creation to happen. Now, from that information, we learn that God didn't just suddenly break into three parts when Jesus came to earth, but it has always been that way. He is Jehovah, the Father God; Jesus, the physical earthly manifestation of God; and the Holy Spirit, who is obviously the spirit form. Does everyone follow me, so far?"

"Are you saying that Jesus was present at Creation even though He was born on this earth as a baby?" asked Titus.

"Yes. Jesus even told the Pharisees that He had talked with Abraham and King David who lived a really long time ago. Jesus taught that if we have seen Him, we've seen the Father. He claimed to be one with the Father. I know that's hard to comprehend." Orly continued, "So, the fact that God is omnipresent means that He is right beside you all the time. There is never a time when He is unavailable, taking a nap, or on vacation. Okay, that's a summary of the three 'O' attributes of God, but I have one more to cover. Do you have any questions up to this point?"

Everyone shook their heads and seemed to be following Orly's every word. "Okay, the final thing I want to cover is something my friend, the Apostle John, reminded me to emphasize. God is love. He created love. He is love. He loves you and He loves me. Everything He does is based on love and what is best for us. Now, I'm not saying, it's always pleasant or fun, but it is for our best because He, by definition, is love. He loves you so much that He came to earth to show you how to live, then died to pay for your sins. He conquered death for you and sent the Holy Spirit to guide you. That's love!" Orly got up from his seat and began to pace. "I believe that it is His love that is drawing you into wanting to know more about Him. I believe that it is His love that gave me the courage to share with you the things He has taught me. I believe that it is His love that is calling you to accept Him as your Messiah and discover His great love for you. I guess that's all I know to say." Orly suddenly felt totally drained and didn't have a clue how to continue. He slumped down onto his bench and just waited. Finally he asked, "Does anyone have any questions?"

"I guess we don't know what we are supposed to do," said Lucas tentatively.

Suddenly Orly remembered how confused he felt after Kobe had tried to explain that Jesus wanted to be his Messiah. "I'm sorry I didn't make it clear. This is not a group decision. It is between you and God,

Jehovah God. How about if we do it this way. Gabriela is going to go into the house and if any of you women want to ask Jesus to be your Messiah or have questions, then one at a time, go inside and talk with Gabriela. I'm going to take a lantern and head to that grassy spot beside the barn. If any of you guys want to pray with me or have questions, I'll be there. The rest of you enjoy refilling your plates and visiting for as long as you wish."

Orly was filled with a sudden fear that no one would be interested. He was sure that God was at work, and he knew he had been obedient. So, he lit a lantern and left.

As he knelt on the grass to pray, Lucas knelt beside him. Orly helped Lucas pray to Jehovah God and ask Jesus to be his Messiah. Soon the two men were hugging, and Lucas was asking what he should do next. Orly said that the Holy Spirit would guide him, and he should just be obedient. Orly felt tempted to tell him to destroy all his idols, but the Holy Spirit nudged him to be quiet and let Him work.

Just as soon as Lucas rejoined the group, Markus came and once again Orly got to welcome a new follower of Jesus. Julius came next, followed by Appius and then Titus. When Titus rejoined the group, Orly couldn't get up. He just stayed on his knees crying before the Lord and praising Him for using him even when he was too tired, unprepared, and certainly unworthy to be used. Orly was reminded that it was not his work, but God's. He finally got up and walked to the courtyard. Gabriela and the three women were talking, their faces radiant with joy. Orly knew these baby followers would need to be taught much, but they had taken that first step and he was eager to begin the journey with them. His mind was racing toward baptizing them and teaching them how to follow Jesus.

It was past midnight before everyone went home. They helped Orly and Gabriela clear the courtyard and then left, still talking about what they were thinking and feeling deep inside. Orly and Gabriela shared with each other the joy of leading their friends to follow Jesus. They knew that morning would come quickly.

When Gabriela woke, Orly had already filled the water jar, milked the goats, and was setting breakfast on the table. They quickly got ready for synagogue and listened as Jordan taught. Afterward Orly asked Ruler Jedidiah if he could talk with him for a few minutes. "Yes, Orly, how can I help you?"

Orly began to weep as he told him, "All eight of the men and women asked Jesus to be their Messiah last night."

"Do you mean the Gentiles?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I prayed with five men and Gabriela prayed with three women. We are certain that they received the Holy Spirit and were filled with so much joy. I just wanted you to know."

"What happens next?" asked Ruler Jedidiah.

"Well, I know I need to baptize them and disciple them, but I have no idea what God has in mind. We'll just take it one step at a time. I do know that they do not want to attend the synagogue or become Jews.

They will be followers of Jesus, but I'm not sure what that will look like."

"God will guide you, I'm sure of that. He's been guiding me, and Jordan is encouraging me to begin sharing messages with the synagogue again. I'm learning so much from Jordan, but I'm not sure I'm ready."

"And God will guide you, my friend. I knew when He was ready for me to start teaching. I could not have stopped it, even if I wanted to! You'll know," Orly assured him as he joined Gabriela to walk together to Mr. Kenan's.

They greeted Mother and the others, but it was time for group. Orly reminded the group that this week he would be speaking about the meaning of baptism, but that next week, after enjoying some time of worship, they would walk to the stream and have a baptism for those who were ready to follow Jesus. "For those of you who may not have heard, this has been a tremendous week for me and Gabriela as we learned that she is carrying twins. But," continued Orly, "as great as that news is, it is not the best news that we have received this week." He had the group's full attention. "As you know, last week four of our friends from this group decided to become followers of Jesus. And last night, eight Gentiles accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Thank you for your prayers, your support, your encouragement, your food, and for all the ways you help Gabriela and me minister to them."

They sang a Psalm and then Orly taught them about baptism.



Orly and Gabriela visited with Mother Ruth until it was time for Orly to milk the goats. Gabriela fell asleep in the grass and Orly woke her and encouraged her to eat something. She apologized for falling asleep, but everyone understood. As they walked home, she told him that Joelle would be bringing goat liver again on Wednesday while he finished the oxcart.

"Then I may work late every Wednesday," he teased. She assured him that it was very good. She finally had time to tell him what Sabra had said about her continuing to do her chores until she couldn't. She wanted to stay as strong as she could for as long as possible. He suggested that since he liked to pray down by the stream, he saw no reason that he shouldn't bring the water jars with him whether she was with child or not. She agreed that that was reasonable, and they continued to talk and giggle and plan together. Orly tucked her into her blanket and told her he was going to the roof to pray for a while.

But his heart was not focused on prayer, his heart was scared. How will I take care of Gabriela when she can't be on her feet or can't lift anything? How will I take care of her? Amata will help, but that is only for a few hours. That's why the Holy Spirit has been saying that I need to purchase Mother's freedom. She could help Gabriela. That

would be perfect. But then he realized he should talk with Gabriela first. *Gabriela is the one who was resistant to having anyone in the house except the two of us. How would she feel about having Mother here all the time? How do I feel about having Mother here all the time?* So, he went back to his knees to ask for affirmation and direction. He realized it wasn't a little decision. Finally, he crawled into his blanket and fell into an exhausted sleep.

On Sunday morning he took the jars down to the stream and enjoyed his prayer time. When he returned to the house, Gabriela had milked the goats and together they set out breakfast. He decided to talk with her tonight about his mother moving in to help. He met Basha and Sarah as he was on his way out. He thanked them for their faithful help and wished them a good day.

Basha and Gabriela washed the dishes together and let Sarah play outside with Kizzy and Lizzy. Basha told Gabriela that she and Sarah were going to Capernaum today and would be gone for a while. Basha shared, "I'm just praying more and more about what I'm supposed to be doing in the future."

"I thought you would return to Carthage with Jordan," said Gabriela.

"I'm just not sure. I think God has something different planned for Jordan, and I'm certain that Sarah and I could not return there alone."

"I'm sorry, Basha. I didn't realize that plans had changed. I'll be praying for you and for Jordan to know God's direction."

"Thanks. But don't be sorry. It's always been an adventure following Jesus, and I expect it always will be. He's got good plans. And right now, I think I hear Enoch. I don't know when we'll be back. I'm not even sure why I am going. I just felt the Holy Spirit saying I needed to go there to think. Come, Sarah, Enoch is waiting for us."

"Shalom, and thank you so much," said Gabriela.

"Shalom," said Sarah and Basha.

After dinner, Orly and Gabriela began to discuss plans for the groups. The baptism for Mr. Kenan's group this Sabbath would be fairly simple. But what would the baptism service for the Gentiles look like? Then Orly brought up the matter that had been on his heart for months. "Gabriela, ever since I bought this house, I've thought about the possibility of someday moving my mother here and taking care of her in her old age. I felt that she would never leave Mr. Kenan's while she was healthy because of her promise to him. But now Benjamin is doing so well there. I guess what I want to know is whether you would be comfortable having my mother living with us. We need to discuss it and I really want you to be completely honest."

"Just a couple of Sabbaths ago, she said that she felt bad sitting around in the kitchen supervising Benjamin when he didn't need supervising. She said that she would rather move over here and help me."

"She said that?"

"Yes. I was surprised and told her that I would love that, too. And I would. But isn't the bondslave commitment permanent?"

"That's what I don't know. But the first question we have to decide is whether we want her here, and whether you are willing to share in her care as she gets older."

"Of course, Orly. I love Mother Ruth," said Gabriela.

"I know you love her, but she can be bossy at times, and this is your house. I don't want her to interfere with our marriage or our parenting. Do you understand?"

"Are you worried about that?" asked Gabriela.

"I don't know. I thought if you didn't want her around all the time, we could build her a house in the woods so that she could just help out when you need her. She could go home in the evenings when we want to be alone."

"Orly, I understand. But in about four months, we'll never be alone again. And actually, we might come near getting to sneak away and take a walk or go to the rooftop if Mother Ruth was here to listen for the babies."

"But it wouldn't be like Amata just coming for two hours. It would be all day, every day, all day long," insisted Orly.

"I think that would be wonderful. I would love to have her here. But I don't know if Mr. Kenan can release her."

"I don't either. But I'll talk with him tomorrow if you are sure it's all right with you."

"Orly, I think it would be wonderful. I so look forward to Amata coming every day. I think it would be lovely to have Mother Ruth here."

"If we decide later that it's too much, we can build her a house on the property."

"Okay. But by then, we'll have a busy, busy household and need her more than ever. Oh, I hope you don't think that I want her as a slave. I love her and would enjoy having her here."

"Let's get some sleep and let me talk with Mr. Kenan tomorrow at work," said Orly.

Orly arrived early for work on Sunday morning, and told Lucas that he needed to talk with Mr. Kenan whenever he came in. Soon after Orly got started, Mr. Kenan came back to check on the apprentices. When he was finished, Lucas sent him over to check on Orly. Orly asked if they could talk in private. They walked up to Mr. Kenan's office and exchanged greetings. "Mr. Kenan, I want you to know that this is not a sudden decision."

"Oh, Orly, don't tell me that you are leaving me. I'm already dreading Jordan leaving. But I do want you to be obedient to God's leading," said Mr. Kenan.

"No, sir. I mean, I do feel God leading me to talk with you, but it's not about leaving."

"Okay, let's hear it."

"Well, as I said, this is not a sudden decision. It's been in my heart since I was a little boy, but for the past year, since I finished my house, I feel that the Holy Spirit is asking me to talk with you about my mother. I would like to purchase her freedom."

"Orly, I don't think that's possible. But I understand."

“I know that you will do the best thing and I trust you because you’ve always been kind and more than generous with me. But it’s a dream that I have, and the Holy Spirit said that I should talk with you. Gabriela and I could really use her help right now, but it’s more than that. We are committed to caring for her in her old age and allowing her to slow down and be a grandmother. She has trained Benjamin and you would not be left in a bind. I just want you to consider it.”

“Orly, this comes as a surprise to me. I meant it when I promised to care for your mother until her death. Please give me some time to consider what can be done. I’m thinking that I could probably loan her to you while you and Gabriela have such needs, but I don’t think I can release her or sell her to you. That’s just part of being a bonds slave.”

“I understand. I’ll get back to work,” said Orly, obviously disappointed.

“Don’t give up yet. I said I would look into it, and I will.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Later that morning, Mr. Kenan called Seth into his office and shut the door. He confided in him and together the men discussed it. Seth suggested that Mr. Kenan talk with Ruler Jedidiah. But Seth also suggested that his dad make sure that Benjamin was willing to accept the position.

Mr. Kenan took the noon break with his men and Orly reminded him that he would be working late again on Wednesday to finish the oxcart. He told Mr. Kenan that he hoped to deliver it to Palti on Thursday at his noon break. “Take Joshua with you since that’s going to be pretty heavy for one man to pull.”

“Thank you, sir. I could use his help.” Lucas and Mr. Kenan both headed home, and Orly called time for the men to get back to work.

Gabriela had his dinner ready and reported that Sarah would not be coming on Wednesday. It looked like a normal week except for Orly working late on Wednesday, and they enjoyed spending the evening in prayer and preparation. This week he would talk with the Gentile group about baptism and he would lead the baptism service for Mr. Kenan’s group. They discussed whether baptism would be any different for the Gentile group and agreed that it wouldn’t.



After breakfast on Monday morning, Mr. Kenan stuck his head into the kitchen and told Benjamin that he would like to see him in his office. Mr. Kenan invited Benjamin to take a seat. “Benjamin, I have been very impressed with your work, and Ruth tells me that you have learned everything that she has to teach you. You have far surpassed my expectations and I want you to know that.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Now, your apprenticeship is not complete until the week after Passover, but I need to make a decision that is dependent on your future plans. Have you thought about what that might be?”

“Well, I certainly love cooking and I would like to secure a position as a cook if that is possible.”

“Oh, I’m sure it will be possible. My major question is whether you are happy in Cana, or eager to return to Jerusalem, or somewhere else?”

“I’m happy in Cana, but I don’t see many opportunities here. I may need to look in Capernaum or somewhere else in order to find a household that needs a full-time cook.”

“So, if I offered you the job as head of my kitchen, you would take it?” asked Mr. Kenan.

“Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir. I mean, I could never replace Ruth. She would be heart broken and I couldn’t do that to her. But if the job were available, I would take it, sir.”

“Benjamin, none of this is finalized and I don’t know what will happen. You must not share any of this with Ruth. You may simply tell her that I was asking about your plans for the future.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Return to your work and thank you for your information.”

“Yes, sir.” Benjamin returned to the kitchen and told Ruth that Mr. Kenan wanted to know whether he was happy and what his future plans were. He told her honestly that he had said that he didn’t have any. They both got busy.

Mr. Kenan decided to talk with Ruler Jedidiah before talking with Ruth. He wanted to know if it was even possible to release her to Orly. He pictured her sitting on a cushion in Orly’s living room, holding her grandbabies, and being cared for by a loving family. At noon, Kenan walked over to speak with Ruler Jedidiah. “Good afternoon, Kenan. I hope that all is well for you and yours.”

“Yes. Thank you. I just have a question that I think you may be able to answer.”

“I certainly will if I can. But if this is about the Gentile followers, I’m not sure I can help.”

“It’s exciting to be included on something brand new; but no, that’s not my question. Several years ago, I entered into a bondslave agreement with Orly’s mother, Ruth. Now, Orly has asked that I grant her freedom. Orly promises to assume all responsibilities for her. I’ve always believed that the bondslave agreement was permanent and could not be broken by either party. I really think that she deserves to be with Orly and live out her old age surrounded by her family instead of as a slave until the day she dies.”

“That’s a very interesting question. I believe that if you had asked me a year ago, I would have said there was no way to break what the Law clearly says is permanent. But I am learning that Jesus came to fulfill the Law and replace it with love. Now, I do know that you can ‘loan’ her to Orly so that she lives with him, but she remains your slave and your responsibility. I’ve seen that done. But that’s not what you are asking, right?”

“Right. Orly and I both would like to see her completely free.”

“Since Rome sets the rules concerning slaves, I believe that the only way you can break that relationship would be to take it to a Roman judge. I don’t recommend the judge in Nazareth. He is totally controlled by the priest there, and I think he would force you to abide by the Jewish Law. I think you would probably want to talk with the judge in Capernaum. He really doesn’t seem to care about Jewish Law. I believe you might get a favorable ruling from him. But you would need to take both Orly and his mother with you so that the judge can make sure that everyone understands all the implications. Yes, I think that would be your best option.”

“Thank you for your help, Ruler Jedidiah. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

So, Monday midafternoon, a servant called Ruth to Master Kenan’s office. “Ruth, I need your approval on a decision before I go any further.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I want to give you time to think about it.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Ruth submissively.

“Ruth, you have been so faithful to me and helped me and Vada out in so many ways. You are the best cook that I’ve ever had. You have loved my family, never complained, and have kept my kitchen running smoothly. God has indeed blessed me. But Orly and I have a dream. We are dreaming of your freedom.”

“But the bondsman relationship is permanent,” gasped Ruth feeling more confused than ever.

“Yes, according to Jewish Law. But Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law and set us free to love instead. Orly came to me yesterday and asked me to consider letting you go free so that he and Gabriela could care for you and allow you to just be a grandmother. But a judge in Capernaum will determine if this can happen. First, I need to know if this is something that you want me to pursue.”

“But I love taking care of you and Mrs. Vada and your family. And what would happen to my kitchen?”

“Only you can decide if or when you are ready to give that up. It is your kitchen for as long as you desire to be here. You have done an excellent job training Benjamin, and Orly and Gabriela really need you right now. So, whether you choose to leave as a free woman or not, I will probably assign you to help Orly and Gabriela until she is feeling stronger. They desire you to be free. And that is my desire for you, too. Take some time to think about it and let me know. We will need to travel to Capernaum to talk with a judge if you decide you want to make this transition. But please understand that I can’t promise you how he will rule.”

“I would like time to pray about it, and may I speak to Gabriela before I make my final decision?”

“Certainly. Please take the rest of today and tomorrow morning off before you return to your work at noon tomorrow. I’ll let Benjamin know that you have business to attend to. And I’ll ask Enoch to drive you to Orly’s at sunrise tomorrow.”

“Thank you, sir.”



Ruth walked slowly down the trail behind the barn. She was in shock. *How can this be? I am strong and healthy. Have I displeased Master Kenan?* She sat in the grassy area where she and Orly used to come to talk. She remembered the night she had tried to tell him about her decision to become a bondslave. *It was the only decision I had. I really had no other choice. I was so worried about what would happen to Orly, and now look at him. You have blessed him tremendously. Oh, Father, I want this, but I'm afraid. I don't want to be a burden to Orly and Gabriela, but it would be so sweet to serve them. No, not to serve them, to serve You as a free woman and a grandmother. Oh, Father, that is more than anything I could ever imagine. You have carried me through all these years without a husband, and now, how can I say no to Your plan for me? Is this Your plan? Help me to know for sure.* As Ruth sat in the grass and looked up at the beautiful clouds overhead, she was filled with an incredible peace. She began to imagine being at Orly's house. She decided she would rather skip dinner than face the questions from her staff. She headed back to the slave quarters. There she found a plate sitting on her mat. *You are my provider, and You are good.* She ate her meal slowly and continued to ponder whether Benjamin was really ready to take on all the responsibilities without her. She decided that he was.

The next morning, she woke an hour before sunrise as usual and headed to the kitchen automatically. Then she remembered and waited under the tree. When Enoch came out of the kitchen, he saw her and assured her it would only take a few minutes to hitch the oxcart and they would be on their way. They arrived at Orly's house just after sunrise. She knocked timidly on the door and Gabriela welcomed her. She hugged her and began to set another plate on the table all the while trying to figure out what was going on. Orly had told her that he had talked with Mr. Kenan but had heard nothing. *Was this a visit, or was it happening? Was Mother Ruth moving in today?* Gabriela kept assuring her that she was welcome and asked if she would like fresh goat milk or water with her breakfast. “Orly will be in shortly. He's having his prayer time down by the stream.”

When Orly arrived and brought in the water jars, he was surprised to see his mother seated at the breakfast table talking with Gabriela. Mother Ruth rose and hugged him. She began to weep and asked him if this was really what he — what they — wanted. Both of them assured her that it was. She kept shaking her head in disbelief. Orly had to leave for work and gave Gabriela a hug and kiss, and kissed Mother on the cheek. “Mother, I want you to do whatever you want to do, but Gabriela and I would love to see you free — totally free, but under our care. Gabriela will show you around. I've got to get to work.”

“Mother Ruth, I am so pleased that you are willing to do this. I know it's a big step. I know I need you right now, but I think that later

you will need us, and we will be such good friends. Let me show you your room. Right now, it's filled with sewing stuff. We'll probably need to add a room when the babies are older, but for now, this will be your room." Mother Ruth saw the piles of sewing things, but she also saw the mats in the corner. Gabriela showed her the first completed baby shawl. Mother Ruth asked if she could help her with the dishes and Gabriela spoke honestly, "Mother Ruth, I don't know whether you have come to visit, or whether you are moving in today. I need to know so that I can plan our time together."

"I'm sorry. I just needed to know how you felt about all of this before I make my decision," said Mother Ruth.

"Oh, Mother Ruth, how could you doubt that I would want you here? Orly and I have dreamed of finding a way to set you free, but we didn't know how. Orly talked to Mr. Kenan, but we haven't heard anything from him. I was in hopes that your arrival meant it was settled!" Mother Ruth caught her up on the process involved.

Gabriela said, "We respect your choice. We can hire help. But we love you, and don't want you to remain a slave. We want you to be free!"

"Let's get these dishes washed and then could you walk me back to Mr. Kenan's."

"Certainly," said Gabriela. Mother Ruth washed and Gabriela dried and put away the bowls and cups.

"I will probably be very comfortable helping in the kitchen, but Gabriela, you need to know that I've never been off of Mr. Kenan's property except when he brought me here to see this house before you married and then for the baptism. I don't know anything about Cana, or the market, or the well. You will have to teach me so many things."

"And we'll have fun doing it together. I am so excited. Are you ready to walk back now or would you like to meet our goats or walk down to the stream?"

"Choices. You see, I have had very little practice making choices. But right now, my heart says I want to return to Mr. Kenan's as soon as possible and tell him to plan a trip to Capernaum. Won't that be exciting!"

"Exciting and wonderful. Orly and I have been praying for this to happen. But we will have to abide by whatever the judge decides."

"I'm nervous about working with my staff and not telling them anything. They will have a lot of questions when I get back. Mr. Kenan gave me yesterday afternoon and this morning off work and that's never happened. I'm sure they will be curious."

"Yes, I'm sure they will be. I'll be praying for you until this is settled. But inside, I just feel that it will be perfect. God provides everything we need just when we need it." Mother Ruth hugged Gabriela and felt at peace about her decision.

When they arrived at Mr. Kenan's, Gabriela needed to catch her breath and sat down in the courtyard for a few minutes. Mother Ruth asked if it would be okay if she went inside to talk with Mr. Kenan.

Gabriela assured her she would be fine. One of the servants brought Gabriela a cup of juice and a few minutes later, Mrs. Vada arrived to sit and talk.

Chapter 10

Gabriela decided that a nap was the best plan for the early afternoon and woke when Lucas and Amata arrived. Both ladies began their weaving. Gabriela started the second baby shawl and used both a bright green yarn and a pale green to make a plaid pattern in the warp. Amata nodded approvingly. When Gabriela started the first row of weaving with the paler green yarn, she told Amata about the possibility of Orly's mother moving in with them. "I will be sad to no longer be needed."

"Oh, Amata, Mother Ruth will need some new robes, too. So, I think there will always be a need for you. You'll just have one more to sew for. And soon I will have two babies who will be constantly growing. I will always need your help."

When Lucas brought in the milk, he said he was very pleased with the new little ox. It would take several more tries before he was ready to plow a garden because he needed to teach him the commands, but the ox seemed to be willing to learn and not fighting him. They left and Gabriela started preparing the vegetables for Orly's dinner. She was just finishing when Orly arrived. He asked about his mother's visit. Gabriela explained Mr. Kenan's plans and that his mother had made the decision to try. Gabriela showed him all the sewing that they had stacked in the guest room. "Do you think Palti could build some shelves along this wall so that we could use this for both Mother Ruth's room and for sewing projects?"

"Why don't you ask your handyman husband? I will build some basic shelves for you. I built all the ones in the cellar. Isn't that the same thing you are wanting?"

"Yes, that's exactly what we need here. Just some basic storage shelves to keep the sewing together and away from the babies. You are incredibly talented," gushed Gabriela.

"No, just in love with the woman carrying my child, I mean, children. Wow! I'm amazed every time I say that." Orly reminded her that he would be working late tomorrow night. They prayed together for the judge, for Mother Ruth, for the Gentile group, and for those being baptized this Sabbath.

The next morning Mr. Kenan called Orly into the office. He explained that he needed to take both him and his mother to see the judge in Capernaum, but he would like to visit with Salome and Zebedee for at least one night. He was wondering when Orly would be able to go.

"I'll go whenever you think is best, sir." replied Orly automatically.

"Yes, but I'm asking when it is best for you and Gabriela?"

"We assumed you would want to wait until after the Sabbath. I mean, honestly, I need to finish this oxcart and get it to Palti so he can get started on it. I just thought you would want to wait until after the

Sabbath so that there would be no problem if there was a delay with the judge.”

“Okay, let’s plan to go on Monday. Judges are always busy on Sunday because it’s the first day of the week. I just wanted to know how big of a hurry you were in. I could drop everything and go today if you wish.”

“Thank you, sir, but I think next week will be soon enough.”

“Then Monday it is.”

“Yes, sir. I can’t thank you enough for at least giving this a try.”

“We’ll just have to pray that the judge agrees. Now, get back to work.”

“Yes, sir.”

By late afternoon, Gabriela left Amata sewing and headed for Orly’s shop. She knew now to come to the back door and wave to him. He stepped outside and gave her a quick hug. She handed him his dinner and told him that Joelle was bringing goat liver for her, so she needed to hurry home. “Be careful,” she called as she left.

“You be careful!” he called back.

She already had the table set and the goat milk poured when Joelle arrived with the hot dinner. Once again, they enjoyed the visit, but Gabriela knew that she needed to be careful not to talk about Mother Ruth’s move. She tried to focus on baby talk. Joelle and Seth were planning to keep their secret until she was showing. They chatted awhile and then Seth arrived to walk Joelle home. Gabriela thanked them both for the dinner. The girls hugged and wished each other a happy night.

The next morning, Orly announced that he had finished the oxcart and was very pleased with it. He and Joshua would take it over to Palti’s during his noon break. “I’ll have Palti deliver some lumber today for Mother’s room. Would it be okay if we had a fish cookout tonight. Is that too much trouble?”

“No, it would be perfect. And I’ll pack a lantern!”

“Oh, we’ll be going to Capernaum on Monday and won’t return until Tuesday evening.”

Gabriela started a batch of cheese, cleaned up breakfast dishes, and then packed up the supplies she needed to go fishing. She was sitting on the bank daydreaming when she felt a tiny movement in her belly. It wasn’t a pain. It was just the feeling that something was alive inside of her. She pushed on her belly and felt it again. She began to sing praises to God and worship Him, the giver of life. She could hardly wait for Orly to come home and tell him. She wanted to dance and sing, but instead just sat perfectly still and waited to see if it would happen again. After no action for a while, she decided to continue fishing. When she leaned over to put a fish in the net, it happened again. It almost felt like a tickle on the inside, and she giggled to think of her babies tickling her and laughing. They were alive and she was so thrilled to be carrying Orly’s twins. When she had caught enough fish for the two of them, she left the fish in the net and decided to ask

Lucas to build them a bonfire. When she returned to the house, there was a pile of lumber in the courtyard.

She took a short nap, and when she woke up, she felt the same movement happening again. She was disappointed that she couldn't see it or feel it on the outside. But it was life, and she was thrilled. She gathered the box and some onions from the cellar and carefully skirted the lumber to get into the house. Lucas helped Amata into the house and asked what was going on. Gabriela told him about the shelves that Orly was going to build for the sewing room. Gabriela asked him if he would have time to build a bonfire for them to cook a few fish down by the stream.

Gabriela sat at her loom and Amata was standing and weaving panels for Gabriela's robe. Suddenly, Gabriela giggled, and Amata looked up from her weaving. "What?" she asked.

"Oh, Amata, the babies have been tickling me all day. It's just a little tiny flutter. Not anything like I expected. It's so tiny and precious. But I feel life inside of me and I'm so happy," shared Gabriela.

"That's a very special time. And no one in the whole world can feel it except you. It's your first bonding with the babies. I believe that Jehovah God planned it that way so that mothers would fall in love with their babies and take extra good care of them. When are you supposed to see Sabra again?"

"In two weeks," said Gabriela. "We need to get this room cleaned out for Orly before I lose track of time. Let's just stack everything on the living room cushions." Amata began by dragging out the two mats while Gabriela carried out the pile of threads and yarns. They made several trips and got the room totally cleared except for the big loom.

Lucas brought the milk into the house but asked if he should carry one jar down to the stream since he was going down anyway to light the bonfire. "And if you'll find me a bowl, I'll get those fish cleaned and ready to cook."

She finished slicing the onion and placed everything in the box. She asked Amata to get the lantern from the cellar while she packed the blankets. Lucas and Amata headed home just as Orly arrived and was looking over the lumber. They felt like two little children on holiday as they headed for the stream. When they arrived, they found that Lucas had set the bowl of cleaned fish beside two sticks. All they had to do was throw down their blanket, unpack the box, and begin roasting their fish. Gabriela laughed as Orly told her about him and Joshua pulling the oxcart frame down the main street to Palti's Carpenter's Shop. Then, Gabriela told Orly about the special flutters that she was feeling inside. He was so excited and wanted to feel it, too. Even though he put his ear on her belly, he couldn't hear anything. "I'm sorry. I hope you are happy that I can feel them moving and know that they are alive."

"I am happy, but I agree, it seems like other women talk about the babies kicking as if it were a real kick. I guess not. But yes, I am thrilled." They enjoyed their dinner, then Orly reminded her that he

needed to get started building. They lit the lantern and walked back to the house.

Orly showed Gabriela what he had in mind for the guest room. Since it had been designed for two people, he suggested that they make it two separate rooms. Mother Ruth's room would have a door and a place for her mat and blanket, while the other smaller portion would be open to the living room but be filled with shelves and storage for the sewing supplies. Gabriela agreed that would be perfect. She sat and wove on the new shawl while Orly hammered and nailed. She was surprised how quickly it was completed. He decided to save the shelves for tomorrow.

Friday afternoon, Lucas and Orly finished the shelves and Gabriela reminded Orly that he needed to fill all the water jars for Mr. Kenan's group who would be coming for the baptism service tomorrow. And they needed to set up the courtyard for tonight. Everyone had arrived and was ready when Gabriela lit the Sabbath candles. When they gathered after dinner, Orly asked if they would like to learn a song of praise to Jehovah God. He and Gabriela began to teach them to sing Psalm 150. Everyone seemed to enjoy learning it. Then Orly asked them if they had heard the Holy Spirit guiding them this week. Each one wanted to share, so, they took turns. Some were confident that they had heard His voice, others were more tentative. "Do you think it might have been the Holy Spirit who was speaking when I felt bad after lying to my son?"

"Yes," said Orly. "The Holy Spirit speaks in many ways. Sometimes He speaks in a voice that we hear inside our heads; sometimes He speaks to our emotions or feelings, and we just feel that we should do something or say something. He communicates in as many ways as we do — probably more."

"Then I've probably heard Him more than I thought. I just feel a Presence with me all the time."

"Maybe this is too intimate to share; I hope Gabriela will forgive me. But this week Gabriela began feeling the babies move inside of her. She can't really explain to me what it feels like, but to her, there's no question what she's feeling. She knows it is the babies. But there's really no way to describe it," explained Orly.

"I forgive you. I've never really thought about it, but it's a great example of feeling the Holy Spirit inside. When He speaks, I know His voice, but there are times when He is not speaking, but I still know He's there. I can feel Him somehow and know that He is with me," said Gabriela.

"Tonight, we need to talk about obedience to Jesus' command to be baptized." Orly explained what Jesus said, how Kobe had baptized him, how he had baptized the Jewish followers, and closed by telling them that they were welcome to be baptized in the pool of his stream next week. "I'll arrange for Jordan to cover Mr. Kenan's group, and Gabriela and I will plan on you coming after noon on the Sabbath instead of our regular time. Then, Gabriela and I will serve you a post-Sabbath meal and we'll enjoy time together."

“I have a question,” said Markus.

“Okay, let’s hear it,” replied Orly.

“I thought you said that it was a public declaration of our decision to make Jesus our Messiah.”

“Yes, it is,” said Orly gently reassuring him that he had it right.

“Well, may I invite my son and his wife to come and see it?” said Markus. Everyone else joined in.

“I want to invite the other women from the well to bring their families to see it,” said Marcella.

“I definitely want to bring my sons and their families,” said Lucas.

Orly looked at Gabriela and they both began laughing.

“What’s so funny?” asked Lucas. “Are we doing something wrong?”

“No! You are doing it exactly right! We are just amazed that this group is continually running ahead of our expectations. We are not leading this group — you guys are leading us!”

“We are so pleased that the Holy Spirit is already leading you to share the truth with others. This is exactly what Jesus commanded,” added Gabriela.

“Why don’t we set the time for the baptism at the seventh hour? I think that will be the warmest part of the day. Then Gabriela and I will provide snacks for afterward, and Mr. Kenan’s group will probably help us with that. You guys invite as many people as you wish to attend your baptism, and they can stay and ask questions afterward.”

“Can we close tonight by singing Psalm 150 again? Maybe we could sing that after everyone has been baptized next week?” suggested Diana.

“Certainly!” said Orly with a grin that wouldn’t stop.

After everyone had gone, Orly and Gabriela fell on their knees in the living room and praised the God who was at work in the hearts and minds of Gentiles in Cana.

As they worshipped at synagogue the next morning, they were surprised to hear Jordan teaching about Jesus’ command to take the good news to the whole world. He was teaching the truth that God intended from the beginning for Gentiles to become followers of Jesus. Orly was pleased that these new Jewish followers of Jesus seemed to embrace the teaching, and he looked around to see if there was anyone showing resistance.

He and Gabriela walked home to get ready for the baptism service for Mr. Kenan’s group. Gabriela locked the goats in the barn while Orly set out the water jars and cups and brought the trays of fruit up from the cellar. Gabriela waited in the courtyard and Orly walked to Mr. Kenan’s to meet the group.

After Jordan had led the singing, Orly asked if there were any questions about baptism. When he heard none, he suggested that they walk to his house together and baptize those who were ready.

Gabriela joined the group when they arrived at the house and walked down to the stream beside Joelle. They hugged and Gabriela

whispered that she was feeling the babies move. "Isn't it awesome!" exclaimed Joelle.

As Mr. Kenan's group gathered at the stream, Orly looked into the crowd and realized that there were some new faces that he didn't recognize. So he quickly explained, "Baptism is simply a picture of a decision that these four people have made to follow Jesus as their Messiah. Each person will be asked two questions: 'Have you invited Jesus to be your Messiah?' and 'Have you felt the Holy Spirit guiding you?' Today, we are going to start with Bina, so I'm going to ask Jordan to enter the water and lead us in prayer."

Jordan quickly entered the water and prayed for the group. Orly sent Bina into the water. She walked out to Jordan and knelt. He asked her the questions and then baptized her. While Orly was introducing Nathan, Rebecca, and Levi, Mr. Kenan entered the water and joined Jordan. Orly gave them instructions and sent them into the water together. Jordan baptized Nathan, then Mr. Kenan baptized Rebecca. Tears ran freely down his face as he heard her say boldly that she had invited Jesus to be her Messiah. He was so grateful to be able to baptize Jesus' earthly half-sister. How he longed that the entire family would come to recognize Him as their Messiah, too. Jordan then asked Levi the same questions and baptized him before they all walked out of the water together. The group spontaneously started singing Psalm 150, and they worshipped and praised God together. Orly invited everyone to stay and visit. There was fruit and water in the courtyard. Gabriela removed the coverings from the water jars and fruit trays. Many stretched out on the grass to visit and enjoy the fellowship. Gabriela noticed that there was a clump of people gathered around Nathan and Rebecca, but she didn't recognize them. Mr. Kenan was hugging one woman, but the older man seemed quite stand-offish. Orly went to greet them and was introduced to Rebecca's twin sister Ruth and her husband Haggai. Nathan introduced him to his eldest son Elisha, daughter-in-law Dara, and their baby daughter. They had all walked from Nazareth to watch the baptism. Orly invited them up to the courtyard to enjoy some fruit and offered Rebecca a blanket if she was cold. She agreed and Orly went into the house and grabbed a blanket for Rebecca and one for Bina. Ruth and Haggai were introduced to Gabriela, but they refused any refreshment and left quickly.

Levi introduced his older brother Elisha to his friends, and he seemed to be comfortable. Dara took a seat beside Rebecca in the courtyard and nursed the baby. When Ruth and Haggai had gone, Rebecca explained to everyone that she had invited her twin sister Ruth, and she was shocked that they had come. Her husband was a Pharisee and a high official of the synagogue in Nazareth. She looked at her Uncle Kenan and Orly and told them that she sincerely hoped he would not cause them trouble. They both assured her that obedience was often costly, but disobedience was worse. "We are proud of you for sharing the good news. Jesus said that we should spread that news to everyone, even if it causes uncomfortable results

or even death. Don't worry about the results, you have planted seeds that the Holy Spirit will cultivate and grow. Our greatest concern is to be obedient to whatever Jesus tells us."

Dara tugged on her mother-in-law's sleeve and whispered, "I don't understand that part. I mean, Jesus is dead. How can He tell you what to do?" Gabriela decided to leave the two of them alone to talk since Dara seemed very shy. She busied herself with greeting the other guests and talked with Bina to see if she had any questions.

Mr. Kenan called for everyone to prepare to walk back to his house for the post-Sabbath meal. Orly and Gabriela said that they would be a little late since they still needed to milk the goats. Jordan helped Orly clear the courtyard. They carried all the water jars and trays into the house and left them for Gabriela to clean up tomorrow. Jordan noted that there were still dishes everywhere from the Gentile group. While the men cleared the courtyard, Gabriela went to milk the goats. She was singing as she milked and didn't hear Orly enter. As he poured the milk into the jars, Orly asked Gabriela if she could still feel the movements. "Oh, yes, very often. But sometimes they are quiet. I think they must be sleeping." Then she giggled, "At least I hope they sleep sometime!"

"Life everywhere. This is incredible," Orly said. Gabriela told him what she had heard Dara ask Rebecca. "Oh, that's good. That's really good. The seed has been planted."

They walked as quickly as Gabriela could waddle to Mr. Kenan's house and enjoyed the post-Sabbath meal. The group from Nazareth had already eaten and left, but Seth, Joelle, Jordan, Mr. Kenan, and Mrs. Vada were still sitting around the table while the children played under the lantern in the back yard. Orly shared with them what had happened with the Gentile group on Sabbath night. "So, they are going to invite all the Romans in Cana?" asked Jordan.

"It looks that way. How many do you think that would be?" asked Orly.

"Well, if there's approximately two-hundred Jews, I'd say there's probably as many Romans. Looks like you've got yourself another big celebration. Is that this coming Sabbath?" asked Mr. Kenan.

"Yes. I'm going to be out of town with you on Monday and Tuesday, but I will need to take off work on Friday to bake bread all day. Gabriela can make the cheese. But we'll need to borrow water pots from you again. I just don't have enough," said Orly.

"No, don't take off more work. Benjamin can prepare the bread for two hundred people, and you'll have extra just in case. Enoch can bring over and fill the water pots. What else do you need?"

"I think that's it. Gabriela will make several batches of cheese and we'll just serve cheese and bread and butter with fruit."

"I don't mean to interfere, but with my mother and Sarah gone, Gabriela's got quite a mess to clean up tomorrow at her place. I think somebody ought to help her out in the morning," suggested Jordan.

"Oh, no. I can get it done. It will just take me longer," insisted Gabriela.

“How about if I send Ruth? I think she really enjoyed helping you the other day. And she can stay all week and help with the cheese making and butter churning. I’ll let Benjamin know the plan right now.” Mr. Kenan stepped into the kitchen.

“Jordan, for the baptism next week, I will need you to be here to lead this group,” said Orly.

“Of course. But I do hate to miss it.”

“I know. But I really appreciate your work not only here, but at the synagogue. I’ve got a feeling that by the end of the week, everyone in Cana will know that the Gentiles are following Jesus. I don’t know where that’s going to lead. Thank you for your message at the synagogue this morning. I thought it was very timely,” said Orly.

“Thanks, but you know it’s not me. It’s just where the Holy Spirit was leading.”

Seth and Joelle were rounding up their children to head home. Gabriela was so tired she could hardly think, but Orly seemed to want to stay. Gabriela got up, stretched, and moved over to Mrs. Vada. Gabriela told her about feeling the babies move. Soon they were deep into girl talk.

Mr. Kenan had returned, and Orly said he needed to ask him and Jordan a question about the baptism. Orly told them, “I don’t feel comfortable being the only one baptizing. Yet, there is really no strong leader in the Gentile group like I saw with Ruler Jedidiah. I’m wondering what you two think about my asking Seth or Joshua to help me.” They talked about wanting the Gentiles to feel comfortable and not bringing in someone totally unknown to them.

“Orly, I think either one of those men would be okay, but you do realize that you are putting them in serious danger. If we have trouble with Nazareth, I think Joshua would be more able to take the stress than Seth. I mean he’s got a wife and children to think about. But that’s just my opinion. I haven’t prayed about it,” said Jordan.

“Please pray with me about that decision. I would need to talk with one of them before I leave on Monday.”

“We will.”

“And now I’ve got to get Gabriela home, or I’ll have to carry her,” teased Orly.

“I’m fine. Just a little sleepy,” she said as she yawned again.

“Shalom,” said Orly.

“Shalom,” the rest responded.

When Gabriela woke up on Sunday morning, the sun was already up. She rushed to the kitchen to discover Orly and his mother sitting at the breakfast table. Enoch had brought Mother Ruth over and they had decided not to wake Gabriela. Mother had put breakfast on the table while Orly milked the goats. He was quickly out the door.

Gabriela apologized for sleeping late, but Mother Ruth assured her it was just what her body needed after such a busy Sabbath. Gabriela poured herself a cup of milk and began to eat her breakfast as she and Mother Ruth planned the day. Mother Ruth was so happy

to not have to explain her trip to Capernaum to her staff. "Did Orly show you your new room?"

"No, you showed me the other day," replied Mother Ruth.

"Go look at it now. We've rearranged some things."

Mother Ruth came back with tears in her eyes. She had never had a room to call her own. She had shared a room with her siblings growing up, and then shared a room with Orly's dad until his death. She had been in the slave quarters ever since.

Gabriela finished her breakfast and said that she needed to make a batch of cheese in the cellar. Mother Ruth had already started cleaning the kitchen. Gabriela suggested that later they could walk to the market together and decide on something for dinner. Gabriela told her that Amata would arrive around the tenth hour, and they would work on sewing or whatever needed to be done while Lucas would be working outdoors.

"Why don't you plan to sew with Mrs. Amata while I fix dinner?" asked Mother Ruth. "Do you usually make fresh bread on Sundays?"

"Yes, I usually make bread, but I think there is plenty left over, so we can put that off until tomorrow. And yes, that would be great if you want to prepare dinner. We'll go to the market and let you pick out what you want."

When Gabriela returned from the cellar, she found that Mother Ruth was almost finished with the plates. She grabbed a rag and started drying. Working together made it fun and they had the kitchen all put together by noon.

"Do you need to rest awhile before we walk to the market?" asked Gabriela.

"I ..., I ..., I don't know," said Mother Ruth, looking shocked. "No one has asked me that in years. I honestly don't know what I need."

"Well, I need a bite to eat, so I'm going to make a bread and cheese sandwich. Would you like one, too?" inquired Gabriela.

"No, I'm not hungry, but I will sit down with you for a few minutes."

"Good," said Gabriela. "What time did Mr. Kenan want to leave tomorrow morning?"

"Master Kenan said to be ready one hour after sunrise. He hopes the judge will be available before noon, and we can go on to his sister's house to visit. I have met Mrs. Salome and Mr. Zebedee when they have visited him. But it will be exciting to visit their home. I don't know if I will be a free woman or a slave, but I will get to see Capernaum. I haven't seen Capernaum since I was newly married. I grew up in Bethsaida and married there. My husband and I went to Capernaum once and he bought me the necklace that I gave to you."

"Oh, Mother Ruth, that necklace is so special to me. Thank you for telling me the story."

"We were together for almost six years before he passed. He was a good man. But you are finished eating and I'm rambling." They went to the market together, each carrying a basket. Mother Ruth had never been to the market in Cana and enjoyed picking out the vegetables she wanted to cook for dinner, while Gabriela picked out the fruit.

Amata greeted Orly's mother and said that they had met at the wedding. Lucas stuck his head in the door and asked if they needed anything. Mother Ruth watched as Gabriela sat and worked at the lap loom while Amata finished the panels for Gabriela's robe on the big loom. She began working in the kitchen and got her dish ready to cook. She told the other two ladies, "I would love to learn to weave again. I made all of Orly's baby things and all of our clothes until his abba died. I think I could pick it up again if you two need help."

"That would be great. Then we could have three looms going. We haven't even started sewing for baby number two. I'm so slow with making these baby shawls. How many did you say I needed?"

"I usually recommend ten per baby. The more you have, the less frequently you have to wash. Once I finish this robe, I can make them much faster on the big loom."

"But you still need to make heavy robes for our trip to Passover."

"Yes, but until I can find some heavier thread, I'll just have to wait. But don't worry, we've got plenty of time. We also need to start on making four more swaddling cloths and your carrier cloths, you'll need one for each baby," said Amata.

While Mother Ruth carried the covered skillet to the outside oven, Gabriela said, "We've had such fun today just being together. I told her you would make her a new robe, but are you sure you are not getting overloaded with sewing projects?"

"No, I think we are right on target. Now, will Ruth travel with you to Jerusalem? I'm assuming she will, and she would need a heavy robe, too."

"I assume so, but I would have to ask Orly. I'll let you know soon."

Lucas brought the milk to the house, and Mother Ruth took the lid off the vegetable dish to let the breadcrumbs crisp. She waved goodbye to Lucas and Amata. Soon she took the dish into the house. Orly had arrived without her noticing, and he was hugging Gabriela. Both of them laughed and asked if she minded. "No, as long as I get a kiss or hug every now and then, too," she replied.

Orly gave her a kiss on her forehead and helped Gabriela finish setting the table. The three of them enjoyed the delicious meal and sat and talked for a few minutes. "Mother Ruth, usually we just clear the table so that we can work on messages and pray together at the table. This is Orly's and my special time to work together. Why don't you help us clear the table and then you are free to go to your room or up to the rooftop, or out in the courtyard until you are ready for sleep. Let us know if you need anything, but otherwise we'll be planning out the work for this week's groups."

"Okay. So, I get another one of those choices and I'm totally stumped. I haven't decided. Let's get the table cleared first and then I may just go on to sleep. We've got the trip tomorrow and I'm used to going to sleep fairly early."

"Do as you please. Remember, you are welcome here," said Gabriela.

Orly loved the way Gabriela treated his mother. She showed her love and care but didn't feel obligated to entertain her. She seemed to know just the right time to allow her freedom, and when to step in and direct her so she didn't feel uncomfortable. *Oh, I am very, very blessed.*

They prayed together for the judge's ruling, prayed for safe travels to Capernaum, and prayed for the baptism service on the Sabbath. Orly reported that he had talked with Joshua at noon, and he had agreed to help with the baptisms.

Gabriela milked the goats while Orly had his prayer time. When they arrived back at the house, Mother Ruth had already set out breakfast and was waiting for them. They were able to have a leisurely breakfast and help Gabriela get the dishes cleaned before they heard Enoch and Mr. Kenan arrive. Goodbyes were said, and Gabriela found herself alone in a quiet house. She started a second batch of cheese and then worked at the loom for a while. It was so pleasant to feel the babies move as she wove the yarn through the shawl. She didn't feel alone. She had arranged for Joelle to come tonight to share the goat liver since Orly would be away. They would have to decide what to do next week.

Chapter 11

Mr. Kenan joined Enoch on the seat of the oxcart. Ruth had ridden in the oxcart before when Enoch had taken her to Orly's house, but she had never been out on the open road. Orly wasn't sure how his mother would respond to the speed, but she was enjoying every second of it. It took her mind off the judge as she watched fields and trees go flying by as they sped to Capernaum. At times, Enoch would slow and let the oxen rest. Orly was trying to pay attention to how Enoch treated his oxen, so he could learn. After about an hour, they stopped at a well and Orly helped his mother get out and stretch her legs. Enoch watered the oxen and let them graze a little.

Mr. Kenan was talking with Ruth, so Orly began telling Enoch about the new little ox that Lucas was training. He would need to learn to drive before he could take Gabriela and the babies home for Passover. Enoch offered to help in any way he could. After a short break, they resumed their journey. Soon they were seeing the outskirts of Capernaum and Ruth began fidgeting with her hair and robe. Orly assured her that she looked fine and that everything would be okay. "Just relax and enjoy the sights. I remember the first time I saw Capernaum when I walked here with Kobe. I hope we have time to go to the market. It's a lot bigger than Cana's."

Enoch stopped in front of a building and Mr. Kenan jumped off. "This is the place. Let's go see if the judge is available."

Mr. Kenan talked with a man just inside the door and was told to go around back and wait his turn. Mr. Kenan motioned for Orly and Ruth to follow him. There were several people waiting and it looked like it might be a long time. A very bored-looking man was seated in the courtyard with Roman guards on both sides. As each person was called, they would stand before him and state their case. He would either make a ruling or tell them to return at a later time. When Mr. Kenan was called, he walked up to the judge and explained that he desired to break a bondsman agreement and why. The judge told him to stand aside and called Orly forward. The judge asked Orly some questions about his ability to provide for his mother. He told Orly that this was a rare case, and he was proud of him for wanting to care for his mother and purchase her freedom. He asked Orly how much he was willing to pay for such freedom and Orly responded that he would purchase her freedom with thirty shekels if necessary. The judge was pleased with his answer but said that it wouldn't be necessary. He then told Orly to stand by Mr. Kenan. He called Ruth forward and Orly could see that she was trembling. She held her head up high and answered the judge's questions. In a few minutes the judge called Mr. Kenan and Orly to join her and stated, "I hereby grant your freedom. Ruth is a free woman according to the laws of Rome. Kenan, you have no further responsibility for her. Orly, you have full responsibilities as a son according to Roman law. Next!"

Mr. Kenan led them back to the cart and together they told Enoch what had just happened. Ruth and Orly were openly crying and hugging, and Mr. Kenan had tears in his eyes. He directed Enoch to take them to the market. Enoch waited with the cart while the three wandered around. "I think I just lost the best cook I've ever had." Everyone laughed with relief.

Suddenly, Ruth's full attention was taken by a booth filled with beautiful thread and yarn. "Oh, Orly, look at this thread. I've never seen such a selection. Gabriela and Amata were looking for heavy thread to make robes for your trip. They have been unable to find anything heavy enough in Cana."

Mother was already feeling the threads. She held up one and asked if Orly thought Gabriela would like it. Orly shrugged his shoulders and Mother fussed at him. She asked the owner how much she would need to make a robe for herself. He told her probably twenty skeins. Mr. Kenan laughed and said, "Well, Orly, now you will have two women spending your money!" Orly laughed and said he was happy to spend it seeing the joy on her face.

Mother selected four different shades of blue for Gabriela. Then she asked Orly if he liked the green thread. He shook his head and began to look through the thread for himself. He held up a rusty brown. Mother approved and asked the owner how many skeins it would take to make Orly a robe. "Oh my, you are a very large man. Come, let me measure your shoulders." He held up a measuring string and said he thought she would need forty skeins for his robe.

Mother handed the thread to Orly and began to walk away when Orly called her back. "Mother, you'll need a heavy robe, too. We can't travel to Bethany without you helping Gabriela with the babies. Pick out the thread so that Amata can make you a robe. I don't want you freezing to death." Mother tried not to cry as she looked through the beautiful thread. "Do you think this is too fancy?"

"Mother, do you like it? That's all that matters. Nothing is too fancy for my mother." She nodded and picked out five skeins each of four different shades of green. She handed them to Orly as if in shock.

"Now, will the babies need heavy robes, too?"

"No, they will have heavy shawls and blankets."

Orly purchased the eighty skeins of thread. As they walked back toward the oxcart, Mr. Kenan reminded Ruth that she was no longer a servant. She should call him Kenan, and she should address Zebedee and Salome without the titles. He reminded her that she was not a servant to anyone. She nodded that she understood. She had been a free woman until her husband died eleven years ago, unlike Orly who couldn't remember anything but slavery.

It was just after noon when they arrived at Zebedee's home. When they announced the reason for their trip, everyone made Ruth feel very welcome and she felt the love that filled their home. Not only were Basha and Sarah visiting, but also the Apostle Matthew had stopped by for a visit. He had been checking on a home group in the Gadarenes and had felt led to check on Zebedee and Salome. They

were saddened to learn that his wife had passed after a short illness almost a year ago. He reported that both of his children were grown. Joel was married and living on the island of Cyprus preaching as an evangelist, and Janika was married and living south of Jerusalem where she and her husband were ministering in Bethlehem. Orly asked if Yanis and Jenay would be joining them for dinner and was assured they were coming.

Orly asked the Apostle Matthew if they could talk privately. They found a grassy spot to sit and talk. Orly explained how God had called him to minister to his Gentile co-workers. He told him that he would be baptizing eight of them on the Sabbath and that they had invited all their Roman friends. He was estimating that there were approximately two hundred Romans living in Cana and from the sound of things, he thought they had all been invited. Matthew listened with rapt attention and then burst out in laughter. Orly wasn't sure what to think. "Orly, this is incredible! God is using you to do things that we apostles have been afraid to do. We all knew that Jesus wanted us to tell the Gentiles, but we've all been pretending to be too busy telling the Jews. At least, I'll admit that I have been. What kind of opposition are you facing from the local synagogue?" asked Matthew.

"Well, sir, most of the synagogue became followers about a month ago and Jordan is discipling them. They haven't been officially told about the Gentiles being baptized, but they've probably heard by now. I don't expect any problems from them. Ruler Jedidiah became a follower and has been very supportive."

Matthew was amazed at what he was hearing. His heart was filled with love for this young man who was just simply obeying what the Holy Spirit was directing him to do.

"Orly, how can I help you? You have inspired me and challenged me. This is an incredible report."

"I guess my major question is what to do with these Gentile believers. I'm not even supposed to associate with them, let alone be sitting down and eating with them. I don't know whether it's okay for me to baptize them, but that's what the Holy Spirit is telling me to do. I know that they are true followers and that the Holy Spirit is leading them just like He leads me. Some days I just feel totally overwhelmed. I wish Jesus was here so He could tell me what to do next."

"Jesus told us that He would never leave us as orphans to do this on our own. That's why He sent the Holy Spirit. If you are listening to Him, then you are listening to Jesus. He is instructing you and you are obediently following. I know you have questions; we all do. If we knew the answers, we wouldn't need the Holy Spirit to guide us. Keep spending time in prayer and let Him lead you step by step. I have no idea what the future holds for the Gentiles in Cana. But I know that God is up to something there and you are right in the middle of it. Would it be all right with you if I came for the baptism this Sabbath?"

"Oh, I would be honored, sir."

"I would love to see this, and if I remember right, Cana is just about a day's walk from here."

“Yes, sir, or a few hours on an oxcart if you want to ride with us tomorrow,” suggested Orly.

“No, I promised to help Yanis with some things here before I leave, but I think I’ll plan to walk over on Friday. Could I spend the Sabbath with you?”

“Certainly. Seth could probably provide you with a guest room. I can only provide you with a grassy camping area since I’ve just moved Mother into my guest room.”

“That would be fine with me. I actually prefer camping under the stars, unless it’s raining.”

“We’ll look forward to your visit,” said Orly. As they returned to the house, Yanis and Jenay were knocking. Orly yelled, “Oh, go on in. You know you are welcome.” Yanis came running and gave Orly a huge hug. Jenay welcomed him, and he congratulated them both on the upcoming baby.

Jenay asked how Gabriela was doing, and when Orly told her they were expecting twins she screamed with delight. “I knew it. I knew it. She was so big when she was here and I’m not that far behind her.”

“She’s feeling the babies move now and loves it. She’s doing great.”

“Come on in, let’s visit with everyone. So, what brings you to Capernaum?” asked Yanis.

“Mr. Kenan brought my mother and me here to see a judge. He authorized her freedom from being a bond-slave. She will be moving in with us and helping Gabriela.”

“Oh, that’s so good. I’m so happy for all of you.”

“Thanks. This is my mother, Ruth. These are my friends, Yanis and Jenay. You may remember that they came for our wedding.”

“I’m glad to meet you again.” As Jenay leaned over to kiss Grandmother Salome, she patted her belly and asked how she was feeling. Orly walked away as the girl talk began.

Zebedee and Mr. Kenan were discussing business and Matthew, Yanis, and Orly found themselves immersed in men’s talk.

At dinner, Matthew asked Basha if she had heard anything from Carthage and how the group there was doing. She answered that she hadn’t heard anything. She didn’t know whether some followers would travel to Passover, but she planned to be in Jerusalem just in case someone came who could give her a report. “Are you and Jordan still planning to return there when Jordan finishes his apprenticeship?” asked Zebedee.

“I don’t think that’s what God is calling Jordan to do. Right now, he’s leading the synagogue and doing a great job. He wants to shepherd new followers and he would do great work in Carthage, but he does not feel the call anymore.”

“Jordan is teaching at the synagogue? I thought you were leading there, Orly,” said Zebedee.

“The Holy Spirit was calling me to another group and Jordan felt that God was calling him to shepherd the new followers. Ruler

Jedidiah agreed, so Jordan is both discipling the synagogue and preparing Ruler Jedidiah to resume his leadership.”

“So what group are you working with, Orly?” asked Jenay.

“God led me to start a group for Gentiles. We’ve been meeting for over a month and all eight of them want to be baptized this Sabbath. They have all accepted Jesus as their Messiah, and I see evidence of the Holy Spirit speaking in their lives. It’s really incredible.”

There was a noticeable hush at the table. Orly felt the Holy Spirit tell him to be quiet and let them process it. He was reminded that he didn’t need their approval, even though he wanted it so badly. All he needed was God’s clear direction and he had that.

Finally, the Apostle Matthew spoke gently to the group. “It’s the most amazing thing that I’ve heard since Pentecost. I am so excited because Jesus spelled out that we were to take the good news to the whole world. We always knew that He meant everyone, but up to this point, as far as I know, the Holy Spirit has not directed it to happen. I believe, from what Orly has told me, that the Holy Spirit is beginning to work among the Gentiles. I believe it just might be starting in Cana. I’m planning to leave on Friday so I can be there to see it. I don’t want to miss out.”

Salome, Yanis, and Jenay had lots of questions and Orly, Mr. Kenan, and Basha answered as best they could. But Zebedee summed it up when he said, “John the Baptizer said that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for the sins of the whole world. I just never thought about all those Gentiles who need to hear the good news, too.”

Salome suggested that they move to the courtyard and once again the men and women separated to talk. But Orly noticed that Matthew and Basha left the courtyard together and were walking around the yard talking. There was just enough light to tell that they were talking seriously about something.

Soon the discussion turned to where everyone was going to sleep. Matthew announced that he was going back to Yanis’ since they had plans for tomorrow. He walked Jenay home so that Yanis could stay and talk with Orly for a while. A servant showed Ruth to her room, and Orly and Yanis went up on the roof. They both asked at the same time, “So how’s it going?” Then they laughed and Orly insisted that Yanis share first. “You’ve heard most of my news. I want to hear yours,” said Orly.

“Jenay and I are doing really well. She’s such a help. We’re growing very, very close. We thought we would be able to use the synagogue to pull all the followers of Jesus together, but the Jewish leaders squashed that, so we are meeting in homes like in Jerusalem. The only problem is, we don’t have the leadership. So, Jenay and I are teaching three groups right now. I don’t know how long Jenay can keep this up with the baby and all. I keep thinking about setting up a class to train leaders and then each week I would go over the lesson with them and answer questions and let them lead their own groups. That would multiply the leadership. It’s just something I’ve been

thinking about. I don't know yet whether it's from the Holy Spirit or just my own ideas. I want to talk with Matthew about it tomorrow."

"That sounds good. You see, what I didn't tell everyone at the table is that the eight Gentiles who are going to be baptized have already invited all their Gentile friends. We are expecting over a hundred people to watch the baptisms. I told Matthew and asked him how I was supposed to lead that many people without a meeting place. He didn't know. But what if I used your idea? I think it would work for both of us. I could continue to meet with the original eight and teach them a message to share with their own home groups. Oh, this could be good."

The two men sat and talked until well after midnight. They encouraged one another and discussed their dreams for ministry, and how hard it was to not run ahead of God's directions. "You know what I wish the apostles would do to help us out?" said Orly.

"What? I'm sure they would do whatever they could to help."

"I wish they would write down everything that Jesus did and taught. That would help me so much. I mean, I can't read, but I would learn if they would write it down for me. That would be so sweet."

"I'm spending the day with Matthew tomorrow. I'll mention it to him. He promised to spend the day brainstorming leadership questions. I'll be praying especially for you this Sabbath. I wish I could be there, but there's no time to take off."

"I understand. Your support means so much, and your idea just may set off a new explosion of believers like it did in Jerusalem."

"Shalom, my friend."

"Shalom." But Orly wasn't ready for sleep. He began plotting out how this would work. *If I teach these eight every Sabbath night, then they could meet with their own home groups on Sabbath afternoon. We could do joint baptisms and other things together, but primarily each group would have its own leaders with the Holy Spirit leading each one of them. Gabriela and I would just be available for questions.* With those thoughts swirling through his mind, he fell asleep on the roof.

Orly joined the group for breakfast. "I've been meaning to ask, where's Sarah?" asked Orly.

"Salome arranged an overnight playdate with one of her granddaughters. I'm sure she's having a blast," said Basha.

"Great granddaughter," corrected Salome. "How long can you stay, Kenan?"

"We need to be home before dinner tonight. Orly's got work to do tomorrow and we need to get home to our wives. Basha, do you want to ride with us, or are you planning to stay longer? You are more than welcome and there's plenty of room in the oxcart."

"Thanks for the offer, but I think we'll stay a few more days if it's all right with Zebedee and Salome."

"You are welcome to stay as long as you like," said Zebedee.

“I want to take Mother to see the market this morning if that works for everyone. I’m sure we won’t be gone long. Mr. Kenan, what time do you want to start home?” asked Orly.

“We’ll start at the ninth hour, so you’ll have plenty of time,” said Mr. Kenan. Orly and Mother leisurely strolled along the booths and Mother stated that she just felt content and very, very happy. It seemed like a dream.

“Having two babies around may be more work than you bargained for!”

“But they will be happy days. Orly, I can’t thank you enough.”

“You can thank me by enjoying yourself and doing what you want with the rest of your life,” said Orly. “Look at these cradles. I think I forgot to tell Palti that I need two cradles now.” They continued to walk and talk and enjoy the sights. By noon they were headed back to Zebedee’s house and had managed to resist buying a single thing.

At the ninth hour, Enoch arrived at the front door with the oxcart. Goodbyes were said all around, and Salome and Zebedee promised to pray for the new Gentile followers. Enoch drove slowly through Capernaum, but soon he was able to travel at top speed. They stopped at the half-way point to water the oxen, and everyone needed to stretch. Orly had been watching Enoch drive the oxen and had a few questions for him.

Gabriela was sewing with Amata when she heard them arrive. She ran to the door and waved to Mr. Kenan and Enoch as they drove away. She was relieved Orly was home since it was their first time apart. Mother Ruth announced that she was a free woman and Amata joined the celebration. The three ladies were examining the heavy thread she had found. They were thrilled with her selections. They wanted to hear all about her trip and what she had seen. Dinner would just have to wait.

Orly walked out to where Lucas was plowing with the new ox. He asked if he could give it a try. “Only if you can be firm and calm in your directions. He still makes mistakes, and you need to be firm but not scare him. He’s very sensitive to your tone of voice.”

“Okay, let me try.” Orly took the stick that Lucas was holding and stood by the ox’s side. “Come up!” he said. The ox seemed to be confused because it was a different voice than he was used to, but when Orly said it again, the ox began to move forward. Orly gave the ox several commands and the ox responded appropriately.

“What do you think of your little ox?” asked Lucas.

“I think you know how to pick ‘em!” said Orly emphatically. “I wonder when Palti will have the cart ready.”

“We’ll start him with an empty cart and then gradually increase the weight in the cart so that pulling up the mountain will not be hard for him. Just like we started with small hammers for you at the shop,” explained Lucas.

“That makes sense. Thanks, Lucas. I need to get back to Gabriela.”

“And I need to get this fellow back in his pen. Have you named him yet? He needs to get used to his name.”

“Oh, I’ve been calling him Samson. Samson was a strong man in the ancient Scripture,” said Orly.

“Then Samson it will be. Come up, Samson, let’s go to the barn.”

The ladies were still gathered around the table talking when Orly came in and asked what was for dinner. “Oh my, please go stir my potato dish and I’ll get the bread ready. I haven’t even put it in the baking pan. It will be late. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s no problem. You’ve still got plenty of time. Remember, I’m home early and I’m here to help. So, relax.”

“You are so good to me. I missed you. Did you miss me?”

“Yes, but we’ll talk later,” said Orly.

Gabriela smiled as she punched down the bread and began to fill the baking pan. Mother Ruth was still going on about her trip to Capernaum.

She seemed to talk non-stop all through dinner and Orly and Gabriela just smiled. They both realized that she had been forced to be silent as a slave. Now, she was learning to express herself and she delighted in telling Gabriela every detail.

After the table had been cleared, Gabriela told Orly that she needed to make another batch of cheese tonight. She wanted to have plenty for the Sabbath celebration. So Orly grabbed a lamp and went with Gabriela to the cellar. Mother Ruth cleaned the dishes and then went to her room.

Gabriela and Orly started the third batch of cheese and squeezed the other two. They worked quietly together, almost shyly. Orly asked if she had been okay while he was gone. She told him how much she had enjoyed just puttering and getting things ready for the baptism. “The babies are moving about the same and I enjoy feeling them tickle me. I especially feel them when I sit at the loom.” She told him her idea of having four serving bowls filled with cheese, each flavored differently, to spread on the bread. “I churned some butter this morning, but I’m eager to hear about your trip. Were you able to connect with Yanis?”

They settled down in the living room and Orly shared with Gabriela about his talk with Matthew and with Yanis. She felt Yanis’ suggestion of training the eight to be leaders of their own groups was a great idea. Then he remembered, “Oh, I forgot to tell you, Matthew wants to witness the Gentile baptisms and will be staying with us.”

Suddenly, Gabriela was upset. “Orly, you invited him to stay with us? Where are we going to put him? We don’t have any room!”

“Shhh. It’s all settled. I told him he could stay with Seth, but that if he stayed with us, he’d be camping outdoors. He said he preferred camping. The only extra work will be to prepare a nice meal for Sabbath night, and you’ll have Mother here to help you.”

Gabriela apologized for getting upset. Orly knew that Mother had probably already caught her up with Jenay’s pregnancy, but he wanted

to distract her. “Jenay was thrilled when I told her you were carrying twins. She said to tell you hello and that she would be praying for you.”

On Wednesday morning, Gabriela and Mother Ruth decided to walk to the market to purchase some thread for Mother Ruth’s robes. Amata planned on making her new robes that would indicate her status as a free woman, but Mother Ruth said that she wanted to make her own. “I think I can. I just haven’t done anything but cook for so long, I would need some help.”

“Then let’s plan on that. You can also help with weaving the shawls anytime. Amata apparently thinks I need lots of them.”



Mr. Kenan sent word to Benjamin to meet him in his office. This time Benjamin wasn’t as fearful. Mr. Kenan invited Benjamin to take a seat. “Benjamin, I guess the first thing you need to know is that I have let Ruth go.” Mr. Kenan could see the look of horror on Benjamin’s face. “I know that that is a surprise because a bond-slave relationship is for life. Orly wanted to purchase her freedom and we went before a judge on Monday. He allowed me to set her free from her bondage since Orly was willing to care for her as a son. She will be enjoying the rest of her life as a grandmother. Ruler Jedidiah also approved of the transaction.” Benjamin looked relieved. He had been treated badly by owners but had come to believe that Mr. Kenan wouldn’t break a commitment like that.

“Okay, with that settled, I now want to officially declare that you are in charge of my kitchen staff. You have been well trained, and Ruth told me that you are actually better suited to planning ahead and supervising the staff than she was. You will report directly to me.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I need a tentative answer from you as to whether you intend to stay as my head cook after your freedom date so that we can make some plans for the future.”

“I would be honored to be allowed to stay, sir.”

“I was thinking that I would ask Palti to add a room onto my house attached to the kitchen, so that you could live on-site. But then, I realized that as a free man, you might prefer to get away from your work in the evenings and provide your own housing. Do you know your preference? I would need to let Palti know soon. Have you ever seen Jordan’s room? That’s what I was thinking of adding.”

“No, sir. I haven’t.”

“Let’s walk over there now. He should be at work and won’t mind.” Mr. Kenan opened the door to the apprentice room and Benjamin whistled.

“That’s a large room, sir.”

“It’s big enough for two, if you know what I mean,” said Mr. Kenan. “After Passover, you will be a totally free man. You will be paid

weekly. You will have a day off. There are still a lot of details to work out, but what I need to know soon is whether or not to get on Palti's waiting list of projects. Why don't you think about it and get back to me as soon as you have thought it through and decided."

"I will let you know soon, sir, and thank you."

Benjamin's head was spinning. He walked back to the kitchen and the staff gathered around him. They wanted to know if he was okay. He assured them that he was. He asked one of the servants to prepare him some juice. He sat down at the servant's table and tried to process what had just happened. *This is more than anything I have ever dreamed of. You are the God of second chances. Thank You.*

"I have been promoted to chief cook of this kitchen. Ruth has been set free and will live with Orly and Gabriela and just be a grandmother. She is a free woman. You'll see her on the Sabbath, and you can congratulate her then. In the meantime, we need to get back to work. You know your tasks. Let's get busy." Benjamin knocked on Mr. Kenan's door and let him know that he would appreciate a room being attached to the kitchen, but with an outside door so that he could come and go as he pleased. Mr. Kenan acknowledged that he was pleased with Benjamin's choice. He would contact the stone mason and ask Palti to build the room.



As Orly turned the corner to head home, he saw Basha and Matthew talking together quietly. Something made Orly feel strange, as if they didn't want to be seen together. He started to turn away and come in from the back, but Sarah spotted him and cried, "Uncle Orly, I missed you!" She ran into his arms and gave him a hug. He greeted Basha and Matthew and invited Basha to come in to visit, too. She thanked him but declined and said that she needed to get back to Mr. Kenan's. She and Sarah were just showing Matthew the way. Orly thanked her and welcomed Matthew. Orly spotted Gabriela asleep by the fire pit and motioned for Matthew to be quiet. They sneaked into the house and Orly greeted his mother and introduced Amata. Ruth fixed Matthew a cup of juice and welcomed him. The men sat down at the table and were visiting when Mother reminded Orly that he should probably check the bread.

"Sure. Matthew why don't you come with me, and I'll show you your camping area."

"Sounds good." Matthew waited while Orly checked the bread and stirred the soup but didn't wake Gabriela.

As they left, Amata asked Ruth if Matthew was a relative. "No, he's one of Jesus' apostles and he's come because of the baptism tomorrow since he was close by."

"He's an apostle and sleeping on the ground!" She was shocked.

“Yes, he could have stayed at Master Seth’s, I mean, Seth’s guest room, but he preferred to camp out. That’s what they usually do when they are traveling and that’s what they did when they traveled with Jesus. They didn’t stay in fancy homes. They generally slept on the ground and ate fruits and berries and caught fish and were just normal people. In fact, none of them like to be called apostles. He’s just Matthew, a fellow follower of Jesus.”

“That’s amazing. And where does he live?”

“He has a small place in Jerusalem, but since his wife died about a year ago, he’s been traveling all over to encourage other groups of followers. He was in Capernaum, and we visited with him there. He said he wanted to see the baptism before he returned to Jerusalem.”

“I guess I thought the apostles would walk around in gold robes or something — maybe have crowns. I don’t know,” said Amata.

“No, they are nothing like the Jewish leaders. They are just normal men who simply obey the Holy Spirit. Jesus asked them to be servants, and that’s what they are. They travel around and serve others.”

Amata checked the bread, pulled it out and set it on the top of the oven while she stirred the fish stew. She pulled some wood off the fire and left the stew for Orly to carry in. Then she brought the bread into the house. They got the table set for the Sabbath meal and Amata put away her sewing. The men and Gabriela all came in together and said their goodbyes to Amata and Lucas. Gabriela lit the candles and Orly prayed a blessing over each one present. He especially thanked God for letting his mother celebrate her first Sabbath as a free woman in his house.

Over dinner, Matthew asked more questions about the Gentile group and told Orly that he and Yanis had discussed the idea of training leaders to lead home groups. Mother Ruth offered to clear the table and allow the three of them to visit on the rooftop. They walked up the stairs and Matthew asked Gabriela how she was handling having Orly so busy with ministry. “I consider myself to be a part of those ministries. We minister as a team.” Orly explained what Jordan had taught him about his parents’ model.

“Do you preach?” Matthew asked Gabriela.

“No. I just make suggestions as the Holy Spirit leads me, but Orly does the teaching,” answered Gabriela.

“Well, she occasionally shares about seeing the ascension, or about her dad being healed, or about seeing Mary anoint Jesus. But that’s usually just spontaneous when I call on her and put her on the spot,” Orly grinned.

“As I listen to this, I realize that I didn’t allow my wife to fulfill her role in ministry. Obviously, she was raising the children and keeping me supplied with what I needed for ministry, but she must have felt left out,” stated Matthew sadly.

“I think it’s part of the New Way. Jesus changed the status of women. We both feel that this is what marriage is all about.”

“Please don’t feel sad. I think your wife was as included as most of the apostles’ wives. At least you allowed yours to travel with you. Many of them left their wives and children behind,” said Gabriela.

“As you probably have put two and two together, Basha and Sarah and I walked from Capernaum together today. She was telling me that if she were ever to marry again, her husband would have to want a wife who was equal in the ministry. I wasn’t sure what that would look like. I think I understand it better now. I think I should let you two get some sleep before a really big day tomorrow. Will you go to synagogue?”

“Certainly. Let me get you a lantern. Do you need a blanket or anything else?”

“No, I have my travel bag. Thank you.”

“Breakfast will be at sunrise, and you are welcome to join us.”

“Thank you, I will. Shalom.”

“Shalom,” said Gabriela and Orly together.

Chapter 12

Orly had his early morning prayer time on the rooftop so he wouldn't disturb Matthew. Gabriela went to the barn to milk the goats. When she returned to the house, she found that Mother Ruth had sat out a simple breakfast. Matthew was already there and helped Gabriela with the jars of milk. He poured the four cups and Orly joined them for breakfast. Matthew said that he remembered visiting the synagogue in Cana with Jesus. He always felt welcome there. Orly commented that Ruler Jedidiah had become a good friend.

"Did he perform your wedding?" asked Matthew.

"Yes, and Seth's. Did you know that it was at Seth's wedding that Jesus turned the water into wine? That was my first encounter with Jesus. I helped fill those water jars, and I decided then that when I was a free man, I would find Jesus and follow Him."

"You were one of Mr. Kenan's slaves?" asked Matthew amazed.

"Yes, sir. He has always tried to find slaves that he could train and help to become free men and women, like my mother and me. One of the men being baptized today, Julius, was a former slave of his. He's now a blacksmith, is married, and owns a nice house here in Cana. I think that Mr. Kenan is one of those giants of a man that God is really pleased with. He doesn't say much, but he has impacted many, many lives — especially mine. We need to get going. Mother, aren't you going with us? It's your choice, but you don't have to stay here," said Orly. So, for the first time in ten years, Mother Ruth walked to synagogue and sat with Gabriela and the other women.

Jordan introduced the Apostle Matthew, but like James and John, he was eager to hear Jordan's message. Jordan was concluding his series on Jesus' last command to the disciples and was encouraging the people to find someone to tell about Jesus' love this week. "How many of you have seen a change in your life since you accepted Jesus as your Messiah?" Most of the men raised their hands. "How many of you know of someone that you could tell about that change?" About half of the hands went up. "I remember traveling with my parents and hearing Jesus teach about the need for us to be light to a dark world. I remember Him putting a basket over His head and dancing around. I thought it was funny. But what He was saying was that we mustn't cover up God within us. We need to let the people around us see that we are different. You claim there's a difference, then talk about it. Don't be afraid. I'm sure those around you are wondering what is making you different, and that's your opportunity to tell them how much Jesus loves them. You don't have to know a lot to be able to tell people that Jesus died for them. You can tell them how you've changed and how good it's been. You can talk about the weather, or you can talk about peace and love and joy. It's up to you."

Matthew talked with Jordan. "You are an incredible communicator. When did you grow up? I remember you always tagging along with your dad, but you are a lot bigger than I remember."

"Well, working as a blacksmith helps with the muscles. But yes, it's been a while since I've seen you. I feel the Holy Spirit called me here in a very specific way, and I'm so grateful that Orly and Ruler Jedidiah gave me the opportunity."

Ruler Jedidiah welcomed the Apostle Matthew. "We seem to be blessed with a lot of apostles visiting lately."

"Well, God is up to something big here and we want to be a part of it. We see God using these two young men and want to support them in any way we can. Have you experienced any problems with the Nazareth synagogue?" asked Matthew.

"No, none whatsoever. Of course, we had very little contact before. They consider the Cana synagogue quite inferior since I am not a priest. So, we really get along fine," laughed Ruler Jedidiah sarcastically.

"Could I visit with you tomorrow? I need to go with Orly right now."

"I teach school every morning, but I'm available tomorrow afternoon."

Matthew walked home with Orly, Gabriela, and Mother Ruth. As they were walking, Mother blurted out, "I miss my friends at Mr. Kenan's. I'm usually sitting under the shade tree and talking to everyone right now. I wouldn't exchange my freedom, but is it okay if I miss my friends?"

"Mother, I am so sorry. You are a vital part of Mr. Kenan's group, and I should have asked if you would rather be there or here. I will walk you over to Mr. Kenan's if that's where you want to be, or you are welcome to stay here and watch the Gentile baptism. It's your choice."

"This is one of those hard free woman choices, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am, and nobody can make that decision but you."

"I'm sorry to be so much trouble, but I want to be at Mr. Kenan's and I don't think I know the way yet."

Gabriela hugged Mother Ruth and assured her that they would be there later to walk her home, but it might be late since they didn't know whether their Gentile friends would stay for dinner or not.

Orly escorted his mother to Mr. Kenan's, and she sat under her favorite tree and was greeted by Benjamin and Jordan. Before Orly left, she was surrounded by all her friends from the kitchen.

Orly walked as fast as he could to get home, but when he arrived, Gabriela had already locked up the goats and was supervising Matthew as he carried the water pots out to the courtyard. She was filling the trays with bread and then covering them with cloth. She asked Orly to set out the bowls of cheese. "Oh, I forgot the butter. Orly, I left the molds along the bottom shelf of the cellar. Just bring up all four. Some people may prefer butter to cheese. I don't know what people will want to eat!"

"You two make such a great team," commented Matthew.

“I believe sharing the ministry and praying together has made us very, very, close. I couldn’t be happier,” said Gabriela.

When Orly brought up the butter molds, he helped her turn them out onto plates and cover them with cloth. Everything was in readiness, and they still had almost an hour to wait. The men sat down and began to talk. Within seconds Gabriela was sound asleep.

“Orly, I need to stay longer than I expected before I head back to Jerusalem. I promised Ruler Jedidiah that I would meet with him this week. So, I was wondering if it would be possible for me to continue to camp out here for a few more days.”

“Certainly. We’d be happy to have you, or like I said, Seth has more comfortable accommodations.”

“Oh, I was very comfortable last night. Your property is lovely and listening to the stream was a great way to go to sleep. Is that where you baptize?”

“Yes, sir. There’s a pool right in the front that is only about waist deep. Kobe used it for baptisms before I bought this place. It belonged to a member of the group who passed, and I was able to purchase it.”

Joshua arrived and was introduced to Matthew. Joshua offered to let him do the baptizing. “I really prefer to watch and don’t want to make anyone nervous about my being here,” said Matthew. Orly agreed and asked if he would mind leading the group in a prayer at the end. “Sure, that would be fine.” Matthew and Joshua went down to the stream to wait and left Orly and Gabriela to greet their guests.

Lucas and Amata were the first to arrive and they were leading about forty people, mostly sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. Their son had come from Capernaum to watch his parents be baptized. Lucas led them down to the stream. Titus and Appius arrived next and brought eight single men with them. Orly and Gabriela’s heads were spinning as they tried to remember names. But when Markus and Diana and Julius and Marcella arrived with more people than Orly could count, he just invited everyone to go down to the stream.

Orly stood before the crowd. “Welcome to our home. You have been invited to witness something that has already happened in the lives of some of your friends, or parents, or grandparents. Baptism is an amazing picture of what happens when a person invites Jesus to be their Messiah and pay for their sins — past, present, and future. Why don’t you eight come up here with me? Lucas, do you believe that Jesus died for your sins?”

“Yes, I do!” said Lucas.

“Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of Jehovah God, the only true God?”

“Yes, I do.”

“When you asked Jesus to be your Messiah, did anything happen to you?” asked Orly.

“Yes. I felt this incredible peace and joy that I have never felt before. I felt like God was instructing me and telling me things.”

“What kind of things?”

“I heard him telling me to treat Amata better, and to apologize when I messed up. He told me to stop arguing with my son and admit I might be wrong. But it's like He's with me all the time.”

“So, is it your desire to be baptized?” asked Orly.

“Yes, it is.”

Orly explained to the crowd. “This has not been rehearsed. Lucas has just shared with you what has happened to him. Now we are going to picture it for you this way. Lucas will kneel and when he is ready, he will put his head completely under water. That will symbolize that he is ready to give up his old way of life. Then he will raise up his head and stand up and that will picture that he is ready to begin following Jesus and obeying Him. Baptism is also a picture of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. He died for the sins of the whole world, but each individual must make the decision to invite Him into their lives.

“Amata, do you believe that Jesus died for your sins?”

“Yes, I do,” she replied.

“Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of the only true God?”

“Yes, I do.”

“When you asked Jesus to be your Messiah, did anything happen to you?” asked Orly.

“Yes. I felt God's presence inside of me telling me that He loved me. He said He would take care of me.”

“So, is it your desire to be baptized?” asked Orly.

“Yes, it is.”

Orly led them both into the water. Lucas knelt with Orly at his side. Orly whispered that he would probably want to hold his nose. Then Lucas plunged his head under the water. Orly made sure it was completely submerged and then began to help Lucas stand up. Orly stated, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Jehovah God; the Son, Jesus; and the Holy Spirit.” Lucas gave Orly a huge hug.

Then Amata knelt with Orly on one side of her and Lucas on the other. She held her nose as she had seen Lucas do and stuck her head under the water. Both men helped her to stand, and Orly stated again, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Jehovah God; the Son, Jesus; and the Holy Spirit.” All three of them began walking out of the stream and Amata was grateful that Gabriela had warned her to bring a blanket to wrap in. She was freezing. Orly expected to introduce the next man, but Joshua had taken over while Orly was walking out of the water.

Joshua stood at the front and said, “I too am a follower of Jesus. I work with these guys at the Metal Shop and today I have the privilege of baptizing them.

“Appius, do you believe that Jesus died for your sins?”

“I do!” said Appius.

“Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of Jehovah God, the only true God?”

“Yes, I do.”

“When you asked Jesus to be your Messiah, did anything happen to you?” asked Joshua.

Orly watched fascinated that even though he had not told Joshua about the change in questions, he was following his lead perfectly. Orly felt that God was confirming that the leadership team that he envisioned would indeed work. Orly missed how Appius responded, but he heard Joshua ask, “So is it your desire to be baptized in obedience to Jesus’ command?”

“Yes, it is.”

Then Joshua baptized Appius. As they were coming out of the water, Orly called for Markus and Diana. He asked them the same questions and they told how Jesus had made a difference in their lives. Orly baptized them. Joshua repeated the questions with Titus. Titus told the crowd that the best part was this incredible peace that he was in a right relationship with God and all his sins had been forgiven. Joshua baptized Titus. Then Orly turned to Julius and Marcella. He asked them the same questions and baptized them. As they walked out of the water Julius began to speak to the crowd. “Orly talked to us about the empty spot that we all have deep inside. If you want to know more about Jesus and how He can put you in a right relationship with the true God, please ask any of us. We want to share with you how you can have this peace and joy.”

“Thank you, Julius. My wife and I and Mr. Kenan have prepared some refreshments for you. We want to invite you to stay and visit and ask questions. But first the group wants to sing a song of praise to Jehovah God. Then the Apostle Matthew will speak and lead us in a prayer of blessing.”

Gabriela began to lead them in singing Psalm 150. The eight who had been baptized, Joshua, Matthew, and Orly joined in. Matthew moved to the front of the group and said, “This is an historical moment. Jewish Scripture teaches that the Messiah would die for the whole world. John the Baptizer taught that Jesus would die for the whole world, and Jesus taught the same. But up until today, only Jews have become followers of Jesus and accepted Him as their Messiah. Jesus told us that someday the Holy Spirit would guide us to reach the rest of the world. I believe, I may be wrong, but I believe that you eight are the first Gentile followers of Jesus. I commend you for your bravery because many will not understand your new beliefs, and I promise to pray for you as you obediently follow the Holy Spirit’s leading. Let us pray. Father, place your Hand upon these new followers. Guide them, guard them, fill them with boldness to tell others, and bless these friends and family who have gathered to watch this momentous occasion. Bless them and give them a hunger to know more about Jesus and about You. In Jesus’ name.”

Orly announced to the crowd, “Give us a minute to get the food ready, but please come on up behind us.” He and Gabriela walked through the crowd together. They quickly uncovered the bread and cheese and water pots. Then she took her seat on one of the benches. Gabriela welcomed as many as she could and each of the three women introduced her to their friends. It was a busy, crazy, amazing time. Gabriela didn’t feel like being on her feet, and Orly was

surrounded by men asking questions. Amata and one of her daughters-in-law began bringing out more trays of bread. At one point, Orly, Lucas, and Matthew carried two water pots apiece and refilled them from the stream even though it was still the Sabbath.

The people stayed, asked questions, visited, and celebrated with the eight. There seemed to be no negative feelings, and Orly and Matthew were amazed. They wondered what the future would hold. By the eleventh hour, everyone had gone, and it was just Orly, Gabriela, Matthew, and Joshua remaining. Orly said, "Let's walk over to Mr. Kenan's and enjoy the post-Sabbath meal." Orly milked the goats while the other men helped Gabriela carry in the food trays.

Gabriela told Orly, "I don't think I feel like walking over there and back again. I'm exhausted and going straight to sleep — well, I'll probably eat a sandwich, but you know what I mean. Anyway, you go and stay as late as you wish. I think Basha and Sarah will be over tomorrow to help us clean up. At least I hope so. And please tell Joelle that I will walk to her place on Wednesday afternoon to eat goat liver. Can you remember to do that?"

"Certainly. Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm just exhausted and Sabra warned me not to overdo. I was so proud of you today."

"Are you sure it's okay for me to leave? I can ask Joshua to walk Mother and Matthew home."

"No, I'm fine. Enjoy your visit and tell everyone I miss them," assured Gabriela.

So the three men shared with Mr. Kenan's household all about the baptism as they enjoyed the post-Sabbath meal. Walking home, Mother expressed that while she had enjoyed being back with her servant friends, it felt strange that she was free. Orly told her about his struggles with the transition and assured her that she would adjust. She would learn to be friends with both.

At breakfast on Sunday morning, Gabriela seemed to be back to her same energetic self. Matthew said that he would be down at the stream if they needed help with anything. He was going to take some time for prayer and was going to visit with Ruler Jedidiah around noon. Gabriela and Mother Ruth walked to the market. They purchased some more baby yarn and then quickly picked out the vegetables that Mother Ruth wanted to prepare for dinner. When they arrived home, Enoch had brought Basha and Sarah to help with the dishes. Enoch was packing up all the water jars that he had brought from Mr. Kenan's. Gabriela apologized for being so tired, but the market had been a bit much. She sat in the living room and chatted with Mother Ruth, Basha, and Sarah while they worked. Gabriela found herself drifting off to sleep and she didn't even know when Basha and Sarah quietly slipped out. About noon, Mother Ruth started a pan of bread. When Gabriela finally woke up, she was surprised she had slept for so long, but felt much better. Gabriela decided to just take a slow day and sat at her loom for most of the afternoon. She said she felt nauseated every time she stood up. Mother and Amata insisted that she rest. She

was sure she would feel stronger tomorrow. At dinner Orly said that he had talked with Palti about making two cradles instead of one. Palti said to tell her congratulations. After dinner, Matthew apologized for eating and running, but wanted to visit with Jordan. He took the lantern with him and said he wouldn't disturb them when he returned. Orly reminded him that he was welcome for breakfast at sunrise.

At breakfast, Matthew seemed distracted and said that he needed to return to Capernaum to take care of some business there but would be back before the Sabbath. Orly and Gabriela assured him that he was always welcome. Gabriela packed him a small bag of fruits and nuts to enjoy on his walk.

After breakfast Gabriela churned some butter and felt fine. The fatigue seemed to have passed and she was glad that she was able to help Mother Ruth. Tomorrow she would start another batch of cheese. On Tuesday, Mother Ruth asked if it would be okay if she went to the market by herself. "Why?" asked Gabriela.

"I just want to be able to walk there all by myself like a free woman. I haven't gone to the market alone in years and I just want to. Is that terrible?"

"No. No. Not at all. I had just never thought about it. Are you sure you know the way?"

"Yes. I hope you don't mind, but I want to go alone." said Mother Ruth confidently.

Gabriela gave her a handful of coins and showed her where they were kept. She told Mother Ruth that Orly replenished the bowl of coins every Friday when he got paid. That bowl was to cover everything that they needed for food, clothes, and the house. "There's another bowl hidden if we run out. Just ask me and we can dip into that as needed. But this usually covers everything we need." Mother Ruth happily carried a basket to the market and began to look around.

Gabriela started the cheese batch and went back upstairs. She wove for a while and then fell asleep on the living room cushion again. When Mother Ruth returned, they put away the fresh fruits and vegetables and Gabriela remembered to ask Mother Ruth if she knew how to cook goat liver. Mother Ruth said she had never learned to cook it but would be glad to if Joelle's cook would show her how. Gabriela said she would talk with Joelle tomorrow night about setting a time to learn. When Amata arrived, Ruth asked her to check her weaving. Amata pointed out some skipped stitches. Ruth would have to start all over or the garment would have holes in it. Gabriela was still working on the second baby shawl.

After dinner, Mother Ruth went to her room, but she took a lamp and Gabriela was pretty sure that she was weaving on her robe. Gabriela and Orly discussed what they would share with the Gentile group. They wondered if more people would show up than the usual eight. They giggled and wondered what would happen if a hundred showed up. "Then, I guess Jesus would have to multiply the food like He did for the five thousand." Gabriela reminded Orly that she was walking over to Joelle's for dinner tomorrow night, so when he finished

eating with his mother, he should come and get her so she wouldn't have to walk home in the dark alone.

On Wednesday morning after Orly left, Gabriela and Mother Ruth lingered over breakfast, planning out their day. Basha and Sarah arrived. "I told her that you may not be up to a long visit, but she wants to finish her pillow. If you don't feel like it, just say so and I'll take her home. She can come back another time."

"No, this will be great. But I'm going to Joelle's for dinner tonight, so could you come and pick her up around noon so that I can get a nap?"

"Sure. I'll just be at Mr. Kenan's."

"Basha, do you want to go to the market with me? I've got to pick up some vegetables and fruit for tonight's dinner," invited Ruth.

"Sure, I would enjoy getting out. I appreciate Kenan and Vada taking me in, but there's really nothing to do," said Basha.

Ruth and Basha walked around the market and talked. Basha confided that Matthew was hanging around because they were discussing marriage. She wanted to know if Ruth felt it was too soon. "That's nonsense. No one can tell you when it is the right time to re-marry except God. And if He's got a plan for you two to do ministry together, then the sooner you get started the better. He looks like a very lonely man to me."

"We haven't talked to anyone yet, except Jordan. Matthew talked with him the other night and got his approval, but we are still working out details and want to make sure we are in agreement. So, please, please keep this a secret."

"Of course," said Ruth.

When she returned home, Gabriela and Sarah were happily working on her pillow. Mother Ruth put away her vegetables and Gabriela asked what dish she was making. Mother Ruth explained that Orly's favorite when he was a tiny boy was a soup with potato dumplings cooked in it. "It sounds delicious. I'm jealous. But I do enjoy the goat liver that Joelle's cook prepares."

"Goat liver, yuck!" said Sarah.

"Don't criticize it until you've tried it. It's really quite delicious, and Mrs. Joelle thinks so, too. But best of all, it's very good for my babies," said Gabriela.

When Sarah had finished the butterfly, she asked if she could go play with the goats. "Sarah, last time I asked you to stay in the yard, but I had to walk all the way down to the stream and found you playing with the goats down there. And we had to clean you up. I don't think that's the way a young lady should behave when she's been specifically asked to stay in the yard. So, I'm thinking I should either say, no, you may not play with them, or I should give you one more chance. Which do you think I should do?"

"I'm sorry Gabriela. I shouldn't have gone to the stream without asking you first. Will you give me another chance? Please."

“Yes, I will. But remember, if you disobey me, you won’t be allowed to play with the goats again. Run and play, but stay where I can see you from the courtyard, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

This time Sarah obeyed and after playing awhile was ready to resume working on her pillow.

Gabriela found the wool that she had bought to stuff the pillow. She showed Sarah how to push it all the way down into the corners. When the pillow was full, Gabriela showed Sarah how to carefully stitch the open end of the pillow. Gabriela held the pillow closed while Sarah stitched. Sarah was careful, but very, very slow. Gabriela squeezed some fresh plum juice, and they were just sitting down to a snack when Mother Ruth joined them. Sarah asked if she could play with the goats. Gabriela reminded her to stay in the yard and thanked her for being obedient last time.

Both women took their lap looms out to the courtyard and sat down to weave. Gabriela was keeping an eye on Sarah. When Basha arrived, she was surprised that Sarah was not sewing with them. “She needed a break and she’ll be able to finish the pillow easily next time. She’s really good at the stitching, not so good at sitting still for very long.” Basha called for Sarah, and Sarah hugged her mother. They started saying their goodbyes, but Gabriela told Sarah to go into the house and put her sewing away. “Make sure you store the needle properly. You mustn’t lose your needle. You know that a lady makes messes, but she never leaves them for others to have to clean up.”

“Right,” and she quickly scampered into the house to put away her sewing.

“How do you do that? It’s easier for me to clean up her messes than to argue with her. You are so good with her,” said Basha.

“It’s just because I’m not her mother. She’s growing up and I think it’s part of God’s preparation for marriage. We separate from our mothers so that we will desire our husbands. I don’t know, it’s just a thought,” said Gabriela.

“You may be right. But let’s not grow her up too fast. That’s my baby,” said Basha.

“It happens faster than the blink of an eye,” said Mother Ruth.

When Basha and Sarah had gone, Gabriela declared, “Now for a nap. I think I will just stay right here.”

“Let me get you a blanket if you are not going to move into the sunshine, it seems cool to me.”

When Mother Ruth returned with the blanket, Gabriela was already asleep, and Mother Ruth tucked the blanket tenderly around her. *Father, keep her safe and give her a good nap. She’s so precious to me.*

Mother Ruth sat down to weave on her robe and Amata was impressed with her progress when she arrived. Their talking woke Gabriela, and she sat up and greeted Amata. Lucas had already headed to the barn. The ladies moved inside so Amata could begin the

heavier robes. She asked Gabriela which robe to make first. "Orly's, of course!"

So, Amata began loading the big loom with the rusty brown thread. As she worked, she turned to Gabriela and Ruth and asked, "Would it upset you if I changed my mind about the heavy robes?"

"What do you mean?" asked Gabriela.

"Well, this brown is so beautiful, and I can just picture it as a cloak instead of a robe. It may actually be too warm to wear indoors. You might want to wear it over your regular robes. That way, you can take it off if it's too warm, or wear it if it's cold."

"Oh, I like that," said Gabriela. "What do you think, Mother Ruth?"

"I think it's a great idea."

"So, I will need to rethink this pattern." Amata began figuring out how many panels she would need to make the cloak for Orly.

Mother Ruth moved to the kitchen and started preparing the soup. Gabriela finished the row she was weaving and decided it was time to head to Joelle's. She told Mother Ruth to enjoy her time alone with Orly but to remind him to come get her after dinner. "Oh, I don't think he would forget his bride."

Gabriela said a quick goodbye and began her walk to Joelle's. *How good the sunshine feels. Bless my time with Joelle and help me to be an encouragement to her. Bless Orly and Mother Ruth as they enjoy their time together. I praise You for the beauty all around me. You are so good.*

Gabriela had walked about halfway when she realized that she was short of breath and needed to rest. She sat down in a grassy spot by the road and enjoyed greeting the people who were passing by. Many stopped to talk, and she explained that she was having dinner with Seth and Joelle. She felt the babies kicking and realized that with each passing day, their kicks were getting stronger. Now instead of a tickle, they felt more like a thump. She realized that she needed to get back on the road if she was going to beat Seth home and have any time to visit alone with Joelle. She stood up slowly and began her journey again. She had only gone a little ways when she began to feel dizzy. She knew she needed to sit down again, but could not find a place off the road, so she just slowed down and kept walking. She felt a sharp jab of pain in her belly and felt her belly tighten into a hard knot. It hurt so bad. She had to find a safe place to sit. She knew that she wasn't far from Joelle's, so she kept walking. *Just put one foot in front of another.* Then her belly knotted up again and she cried out in pain. "Gabriela, is that you?" called a voice behind her. As she turned, her world went black, and she fell to her knees in the road. She felt strong arms lift her and carry her.

"Joelle, come quickly. Gabriela is sick. Clear the guest room and let me put her down there."

Seth ordered one of his servants to go and find Sabra and have her come quickly. He ordered another servant to find Orly. He asked Joelle what else they should do. She wasn't sure. She put a pillow under her feet. Servants were putting wet cloths on Gabriela's face

and Joelle was sitting by her side and holding her hand. She kept talking to Gabriela, but there was no response. Joelle was terrified that she would die before Sabra arrived. But Seth began to pray, "Father, please help us. And please give Orly courage for whatever lies ahead."



When Orly received the message from Seth's servant, he didn't even tell Mother goodbye, he just bolted and began running toward Gabriela. The servant stayed and made sure that Ruth was okay before he left.

Orly burst into Seth's house, "Where's Gabriela?!" Seth took him into the guest room where Joelle and the servants were tending to her.

"We've sent for Sabra, but she has not arrived yet. I'm sure she'll be here soon." Orly sat down beside Gabriela's mat and told her that he was here and that everything was okay. He talked tenderly to her, and Joelle decided to leave them alone. She came out to talk with Seth and find out what happened. "I was just walking home when I noticed a woman in the road. She was staggering around like she was drunk and then I realized it was Gabriela. I called her name and she turned toward me, but then she screamed and fell to her knees. I picked her up and brought her here. Oh, Joelle, is she dead?"

"No, she's not dead, but she's trying to birth the babies. It's way too soon and the babies won't live. I hope Sabra gets here soon. She's having some strong tightenings, and I don't know what to do. Oh, Seth, I'm scared."

"I know, but we must trust that God knows what is best," said Seth firmly as tears ran down his face.

Sabra arrived out of breath and was shown into the guest room where Gabriela was. Orly was weeping by her side. She gently asked him what happened. He said he had no idea. The servant had just said come, and he had come. Sabra instructed Orly to lift her, and she put some pillows under her hips so that her head was lower. She removed the pillow that they had put under her head and then called for Joelle to tell her what had happened. Seth and Joelle both entered the room and Seth told her what he had told Joelle. "So, she walked from her home and almost to here when she fainted, and you felt that she screamed in pain just before she fell?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Seth. "She was staggering around like she was drunk. But I recognized her and called her name. That's when she screamed and fell. I carried her here, and Joelle has been tending to her."

"And she hasn't come back from her faint?" Sabra asked Joelle.

"No. She's just been lying there quietly except sometimes she seems to be trying to birth the babies. She breathes really hard and holds her belly and whimpers, but she's not awake."

“Okay, thank you. I need you all to leave the room and let me examine her.” Sabra listened for the babies and was relieved to hear strong heartbeats. *That’s good. Now what’s wrong with the mother?* She put her head down to listen to Gabriela’s heart and found that it was racing very fast.

She walked out of the room and asked the servants to stay with Gabriela and keep putting wet cloths on her face to keep her comfortable. Sabra sat down in the living room and told the others to be seated. “First of all, the babies seem to be fine. They seem strong and healthy and in no distress. But Gabriela’s heart is racing. I think she’s overtired and will be better by morning. But I want to stay here just in case. Seth, will you send someone to tell Hilmar that I am spending the night. It may take a few days. Will that work for you, Seth and Joelle? You seem to have competent servants who will help with her care. She won’t be able to care for herself through the night and I will need assistance.”

“My servants have helped me through four birthings. They are pretty experienced,” said Joelle.

“Well, I hope we don’t have any birthings tonight. But I need them to keep a close eye on her. Is it okay if I use the mat in this room? I’ll need to check her often.”

“So, she will live?” asked Orly.

“I think she is going to be fine. But we won’t know for sure until she wakes up and is back to herself. Then we’ll talk about what these next few months will look like.”

“Could I spend the night here in the living room?” asked Orly.

“You are certainly welcome. Will your mother be okay by herself?”

“That’s what I need to find out. I’ll get her settled, then be right back.”

Orly told Gabriela that he was going home to check on Mother but would be right back. Her eyelids fluttered and she whispered, “Be careful.”

“I will, my love. And I will be right back. Sabra is here and she’ll take good care of you.”

Orly reported the change to everyone, and Sabra nodded. She went back into the room and Orly left to go tell Mother what had happened.

Chapter 13

“Mother, it’s me,” Orly called as he opened the door. Ruth was sitting on the cushion weaving on her robe. Orly could tell that she had been crying. He told her what he knew. “I’m going back over there to spend the night. Are you okay here, or do you want me to walk you to Mr. Kenan’s.”

“No, I’m fine here.”

“I don’t know whether I’ll go to work tomorrow or not, but I’ll have to come and take care of the goats early in the morning. So, I’ll update you then. Okay?”

“I’ll be fine, Son,” said Mother.

Orly headed back to Seth’s. He quietly slipped into Seth’s house and stuck his head into the guest room. A lamp was burning, and he could see that Sabra and Gabriela were both sleeping. A servant was sitting by Gabriela’s side watching her. He motioned for her to come out and talk with him. “Has she stirred since I left?”

“No, sir. But Mrs. Sabra says she is sleeping well and that her heart is settling down. I’m to call her if there’s any change. She gets up and checks on her often. Is there anything I can get for you?”

“No, thank you. Just let me know if there are any changes, okay? I’ll be in the living room.”

“Yes, sir.”

Orly slept fitfully and spent most of his time in prayer. He felt that God was assuring him that He had a good plan and that he should rest. Orly still found it hard to relax. At times he got up and paced while he prayed. It was a long night.

Since Sabra and Gabriela were both asleep, he quietly slipped out and ran home to milk the goats. He ate some breakfast while he told Mother the little he knew. He was eager to get back. When he arrived, Seth was leaving for work. Orly asked him to let Mr. Kenan and Lucas know that he wouldn’t be working today. Seth agreed that his priority should be Gabriela.

Orly greeted Joelle and knocked on Gabriela’s door. Sabra invited him to come in and he went straight to Gabriela and kissed her forehead. “Good morning, Orly. I’m glad you are here. Did you milk the goats for me?”

Orly was so relieved to hear her voice, he kissed her forehead again and assured her that he had milked the goats and checked on Mother. “I won’t be working today. I’m going to stay right here and just hold your hand all day.”

Sabra smiled and left the two of them alone for a few minutes. Joelle invited her to eat some breakfast and she agreed. She asked Joelle if she would be able to care for Gabriela for about five days. She wouldn’t be allowed up and would need a servant to attend her at all times. She thought that would be too much work for Orly and Ruth.

Joelle assured her that she and her servants would gladly do that. "If not," said Sabra, "I have trained servants that Orly can hire."

"No, we can do that. It will be my privilege."

"Okay, I need to talk with Orly about some things. Is there a private place where we can talk?"

"Certainly. You are welcome to use the rooftop." Sabra slipped back into the room and asked Gabriela if she had felt any more tightenings since the one about the ninth hour of the night.

"No, I don't think so. That's good, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's very good. I think you just got really overtired carrying these babies around and we've got to get you rested. Now, your job today is to stay flat and let everyone take care of you for a change. I don't even want you lifting your head. I'm going to talk with Orly for a bit and you are going to shut your eyes and sleep some more. I'll be back later."

Gabriela was already drifting back to sleep, and Sabra motioned for Orly to follow her. Orly followed her to the rooftop and they both took seats. "Orly, you heard what I just told Gabriela. Do you have any questions?"

"I'm just glad to see her awake and being herself."

"Yes, that's a good sign. But, from here on out, there's going to be a lot of changes. We'll keep her on total rest for the next five days. Then I'll re-evaluate. It's possible that until the babies are born, she won't be allowed up. Do you understand?"

"Whoa. So, this is really serious?"

"Yes. Her heart is not strong enough to carry these babies and take care of anything else. On Monday of next week, I'll make the decision on whether she can get up for personal care, or whether she will need to stay completely flat. I'm hoping that she'll be much improved by then."

"I'll provide whatever she and the babies need. You know that."

"Yes, Orly, I know that and I'm glad. Many husbands are not so considerate of their wife's needs. Now, I need to tell you something else."

"What? I want to know everything. What else is wrong?" begged Orly.

"Last night I listened several times while the babies were sleeping. When they are quiet and still, I can get a better listen. Orly, there are definitely three heartbeats."

"Three hearts? That means three babies? All at the same time? No wonder she's so tired. Oh, my. Are you sure?"

"I'm certain. There are three healthy little hearts beating in there. Now, I do not want you to tell Gabriela. I believe it might be too much of a shock right now. It's up to you if you want to tell anyone else."

"No, that's not fair. Can we keep it a secret until Gabriela can decide when and who to tell? Is that all right?" asked Orly.

"Certainly. Now, I've got some other patients to see today, and I'll be back this evening to check on Gabriela. I've given Joelle strict orders to keep her flat and she understands the importance of keeping

those babies inside their mother for as long as possible. So, I'll be going now. I'll see you tonight."

When Orly made no response, Sabra asked if he was okay. "Orly, remember, you mustn't tell Gabriela. Maybe I shouldn't have told you, but I thought you would want to know."

"Of course. And thank you for your care. You'll be back this evening?"

"Yes, I won't spend the night unless I'm needed, but we'll decide that tonight."

"God bless you and give you a good day. Shalom," said Orly.

"Shalom," replied Sabra.

Orly stayed on the rooftop and tried to get his mind to wrap around three babies. He had always dreamed of having a home filled with happy, smiling children, but three at once? He fell on his knees and began to pray again for Gabriela's safety. *I wonder if I should send Enoch to get her mother to come and help? That is a possibility, but where would I put everybody? Where will I put three babies? I'll have to tell Palti to make three cradles. O Father, give me wisdom.*

Orly walked back downstairs and checked on Gabriela. The servant had just changed her blankets and she was sleeping again. Orly wandered out to the courtyard to find Joelle. She was watching the children playing in the yard. She greeted Orly and asked if everything was okay. He asked again if she was sure about providing care for Gabriela for the next five days. He told her that Sabra had said she would decide on Monday if he could take her home or not. "Orly, quit worrying about it. Of course, Seth and I are happy to provide for her. She's been like a sister to me. I'm hoping that she will recover quickly, but Sabra seemed to indicate that it may be much longer. I think you need to get back to work and try to stay in a normal schedule."

"Do you mind if I hang around today and just make sure she's okay? I could take my shift caring for her and give your servants a break."

"Mrs. Joelle, she's awake if you want to come in," said the servant watching Gabriela.

"Let Orly visit with her for a while, and you come watch the children."

Orly practically ran to the guest room. "Gabriela, you're awake. I'm glad."

"I think I've slept all day. My goodness, what time is it?"

"It's almost noon. Have you had any more tightenings?"

"No, I don't think so. But the babies are certainly kicking."

"Are you feeling better?"

"Oh, yes. Yesterday I had such a headache and the pain in my belly and back was pretty bad. Sabra said that I was trying to birth these little ones way too early. Now, she says, I have to be good and stay flat. Am I at Joelle's house?"

"Yes, you were walking to Joelle's when you fainted. You are going to have to stay here for a while before we can go home. Sabra

wants you to stay flat and let everyone else take care of you. If you don't, then we'll lose the babies. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Orly, I understand, and I'll be good and do whatever is best. I just know it's going to be hard on you, and that makes me sad."

He suggested she go back to sleep and rest if she could. He stretched out on the mat beside her and watched her sleep. Late in the afternoon he called for a servant and slipped out. He told Joelle he was going to check on Mother and would return after dinner to spend time with Gabriela. Joelle promised she would send a servant to get him if anything changed.

Orly took his time walking home. He wanted to process what was happening. *I need to prepare for the group for tomorrow night. I need to make sure Mother is doing okay. I need to get back to work. I will probably need to hire help to care for Gabriela for the next four months. Father, help me. Abba Father, I need you. I am lost without Gabriela. Please heal Gabriela quickly.*

Orly called to Mother as he opened the door. He found her weaving in the living room. "How's Gabriela?" He gave her the update but didn't share the secret.

"Oh, Son, that sounds serious."

"It is. But I've talked with her, and she understands where she is and what is happening. She's just very, very tired. Sabra will check on her again this evening."

"That's good."

He told her that he'd like to go down to the stream to pray until dinner and then after dinner go back to see what Sabra said. "I'm planning to go to work tomorrow if everything stays the same." Orly walked down to the stream and sat in the grass and tried to pray. Lizzy and Kizzy wanted to play, and he scratched their ears and tried to plan out tomorrow's message. *I know I'll need to share with them about Gabriela. I need to be honest with them about my own struggles. We had planned to talk with them about starting groups in their own homes. Was it only five days ago that this area was packed with Gentiles wanting to know about Jesus? Gabriela's troubles could be just Satan's way to distract us from what is really important. The apostles warned me about persecution. Could it be Satan attacking my family, or my job, or my finances? Oh, Father, help me not to be distracted by the earthly problems and trials of this life. Help me to keep my eyes on the goal. You have called us to minister to the Gentiles and I want to keep trusting You no matter what Satan throws our way. Thank You for this incredible peace that I feel. Thank You for being present with me. Sustain me. Fill me up and equip me to teach these new followers so that they can lead even more Gentiles to You.*

Orly got up and headed to the house. He knew now what to say to the group. As they ate dinner together, Orly invited Mother to attend the Gentile group tomorrow. He assured her that she would be welcome. "Lucas and Amata will help you to get set up for the group. I need to stop by Mr. Kenan's to make sure they are sending bread tomorrow night and I'll check with Joelle. I hate to run, but I would like

to hear what Sabra has to say. I may sleep there or come back here, but I'll see you in the morning. Goodnight, Mother."

"Goodnight, Son, and tell Gabriela that I miss her and am praying for her."

"I will, Mother."

He stopped at Mr. Kenan's house and then couldn't resist running just a little to get to Seth's house. He didn't want to miss Sabra. When he arrived, Sabra was examining Gabriela and Orly had to wait outside for the news. Joelle reported that she seemed to be getting stronger and feeling better all afternoon. Orly asked Joelle if Mother should provide the main dish for the group tomorrow night since most of her servants were busy with Gabriela's care. "I just supposed you were cancelling the meeting tomorrow, but we can provide the meal. Let me check and see what Deborah has planned for tomorrow. I'll let you know so that Ruth can make the side dishes."

"Thank you so much, Joelle. I'm sure Mother could make something, but it does make it much easier," said Orly.

"It's not about making it easier. Seth and I want to be a part of the Gentile ministry. It's just a little thing and we want to do it."

"Thank you. I'll get off work at the eleventh hour tomorrow and visit Gabriela. Then I'll go home and lead the group. I know she's in great hands with you and your servants. I'll never be able to thank you enough."

"Like I said, we're all in this together. We're a team, and we take care of each other — sometimes literally."

Sabra came out from the room and asked the servant to return. She said that Gabriela was recovering nicely but she still needed to stay flat and should not be up for any reason. "Do either of you have questions?"

"I was thinking I would go back to work tomorrow since Joelle is taking such good care of Gabriela. Do you think that's okay?"

"Of course. Joelle can let you know if there's any change."

"I'll check on her over my noon break," said Orly.

"I'll be checking on Gabriela twice each day," said Sabra. Joelle can keep you updated. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Orly went in to see Gabriela. She was awake and smiled when she saw it was him. "Oh, Orly, I'm so glad you came. What are you going to teach the group tomorrow night?"

Orly grinned and said, "To pray for you!"

"Oh, Orly, I don't want to be the focus of attention. I thought you were going to talk with them about starting groups of their own."

"That's exactly what God told me this afternoon. He said that I wasn't to let our problems interfere with our ministry and we need to push forward."

"I'm so glad. And I can support you with prayer — if I can stay awake. The babies are really rambunctious right now. Put your hand on my belly and just leave it there a minute. Can you feel anything?"

Orly laid his hand on her belly and started to shake his head when suddenly someone kicked his hand. His eyes grew large, and Gabriela knew that he had felt his son or daughter for the first time. "I think that one is going to be a blacksmith. He's got quite a wallop." Orly left his hand on her belly and felt several kicks before he moved it. "Doesn't that hurt?"

"No, not really hurt. I'm well padded, but it's getting bigger than a tickle and bigger than a thump. Shall we call this stage a wallop?"

"Just don't give them hammers!" said Orly.

"Orly they are taking such good care of me, and I don't want you missing more work. Do you think you can go to work tomorrow?"

"Yes, I was thinking about it, if you are doing okay in the morning."

"I'm going to be fine and so are the babies. I just need to get rested enough to lug them around. I'm sorry I tried to walk all this way. I had walked it just a couple of weeks ago, so I felt it would be fine."

"The babies are growing, and it was too much. But I'm glad that God brought you here. You are getting such great care. God knows what is best."

"And what message are you going to bring to Mr. Kenan's group? Isn't it your week?"

"Yes, but I plan to ask Matthew if he's back. I want to spend the whole day with you. I think I am going to go home tonight and get a good night's rest and go to work tomorrow."

"I think that's a great idea. I'm going to sleep, too," said Gabriela.

As Orly left, he told Joelle and Seth that he had felt the babies kicking for the first time. He was so excited. They all agreed it was a special time. "Tell your mother that I'll be sending over a thick vegetable stew. Your guests can just dip the bread into it, and she won't need to make butter or cheese. She just needs to set out some nuts and raisins."

"Thank you both. We really enjoy your dishes, and it makes the meeting so much more relaxing. Now, I'm going home to get some sleep. I'll check with you before I go to work tomorrow. But send a servant if anything changes."

"Of course. Shalom."

"Shalom"

Orly walked home feeling content and excited about the meeting tomorrow night. *I got to feel my son kick me. Or maybe it was my daughter. That was incredible. Thank You, Father. Teach me to be a good abba. Please protect Gabriela as she carries these little ones — these three little ones. Oh my.*

Mother's room was already dark, so he slipped into his blanket and quickly fell asleep. He woke early and walked down to the stream. He sang Psalm 150 to help him remember the baptism and his purpose in leading the group tonight. As the sun began to glow in the east, he walked to the barn to milk the goats. He asked if Mother needed the leftover milk or if he should take a jar to Gabriela. She agreed that Gabriela might enjoy it. So, Orly left for work, via Seth's

house. He helped Gabriela take some sips of goat milk. The servant volunteered to feed it to her by spoon. He promised to check on her at noon and left for work with Seth.

“This is a rough way to start your role as abba,” said Seth.

“Yeah, it feels a little overwhelming when I think of having to feed her, change her blankets, and keep watch over her. I guess I’m feeling a little scared,” admitted Orly.

“I don’t think Sabra will let her go home until she can take care of her basic needs.”

“Sabra mentioned something about my hiring some ladies who are trained to care for these problems.”

“Just know that we are willing to take care of her as long as you need the help. She is such a delight that our servants are fighting over who gets to care for her,” assured Seth.

“That sounds like Gabriela,” sighed Orly. “I’m so grateful that she’s doing better.”

When they arrived at the shop everyone wanted to know about Gabriela. Orly assured them that she seemed to be getting stronger each day but was still not allowed to be up, or even lift her head. He thanked them for their prayers and said he would check on her again at noon. Lucas called them all to start their day. It felt good to be back at work and doing something normal for a change. The morning passed quickly, and at the noon break he ran to Seth’s house to check on Gabriela.

Gabriela was sleeping, but Joelle reported that Sabra had removed the pillows under her hips and all was well. She shoed Orly back to work and he reluctantly left without waking Gabriela.

The men were just getting back to work, and Lucas assured Orly it was okay that he was a little late. Orly was in charge of the apprentices and was teaching them to shape tools, but he kept checking the sun all afternoon and couldn’t really concentrate. He did remember to ask Jordan to cover Mr. Kenan’s group and suggested that if Matthew was back, maybe he would do it. Jordan agreed but seemed distracted. Orly gave the apprentices their final assignment before he left. He ran all the way to Seth’s house. Gabriela was awake and fussed about him being out of breath. He told her he had come at noon, but she was asleep, so he was eager to see her. “I need you. And I need your prayers for tonight.” After they prayed together, Orly laid his hand on her belly and felt the wallops. He grinned from ear-to-ear. “That is so amazing!”

“See what I mean. I’ve been telling you how special it is to feel new life. I’m so glad you can share it with me now.”

“I’ve got to go set up for the group, but I had to see you and make sure you were okay. I’ll see you in the morning, but Seth will send for me if you need me before that. Okay?”

“I want you to focus on what the Holy Spirit is saying to the group. I’ll be fine.”

“Okay. Shalom.”

“Goodnight, Orly. Shalom.”

Orly reluctantly left her room and called the servant back to watch her. Orly accepted the dish that Joelle's cook had prepared for the group. "You two are so generous. Thank you. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Orly walked quickly toward the house, but he knew that Amata and Lucas would take care of setting everything up with Mother. He needed time to pray and think, so he slowed down and tried to get his thoughts together. *Father, guide me. Keep me tuned to You so that I know what You are saying. Help me to be totally transparent and real but help me to show them my trust in You. Teach me what to say and what not to say. Guide me, please.*

By the time he reached home, everything was ready, and the group was arriving. Everyone made Ruth feel welcome. Of course, they all wanted to hear about Gabriela. Orly promised a report right after the Sabbath prayer. He asked Mother to light the Sabbath candles and tears flowed down her cheeks as she did so. This was the first time in ten years that she had lit them. He led a prayer of blessing and gave them the update on Gabriela. "Sabra said she would make a decision on Monday as to the next steps, but right now the babies are healthy and strong, and I got to feel them kicking. It was a very, very precious moment for me. Gabriela was sad to not be with us tonight but encouraged me to go ahead and focus on moving forward. So, let's enjoy the good meal that Seth, Mr. Kenan, Lucas, and Mother have provided for us." The men filled their plates while the women talked and got acquainted with Ruth.

When Orly started the meeting, he asked, "What kind of response have you gotten from those who attended the baptism last week?"

"Everyone I've talked to wants to know why we haven't invited them or told them about Jesus sooner. They want to know more," said Julius.

"Yeah, that's pretty much what I'm getting, too," agreed Lucas.

Marcella said, "I didn't go to the well on Wednesday because I'm getting so many questions and I have no idea how to answer them all."

"Let me share an idea with you that my friend Yanis suggested. I would like to try it with you if you are willing."

"Let's hear it," said Lucas.

"My suggestion is that we turn this group into a leadership team. We would continue to meet each Sabbath night to answer your questions and I'll teach you a message to share with your own group. Then each couple will invite a new group to meet with you sometime on Saturday. You simply teach them the lesson we've discussed the night before. Of course, the Holy Spirit will be guiding you. Jesus said the good news would spread like wildfire and we need more Gentile leaders. Any questions so far?"

"So, you are saying that we start hosting a group of people who want more information about Jesus just like you and Gabriela did, and you'll teach us what to say and answer our questions like a coach?" asked Julius.

"Exactly."

“Wow! That could be really good,” said Julius.

“That could be really scary,” said Markus.

“May I ask a question right now?” asked Marcella.

“Certainly.”

“I don’t want to be rude, but I need to know the answer.”

“Marcella, remember, there is nothing off limits to ask. If you don’t ask the question, you’ll never get the answer.” Orly said gently.

“Okay. Your wife almost died this week and we ... well, I didn’t think we would meet this week. Don’t you think, well ... didn’t God zap you for breaking His rules? There, I’ve said it.”

Orly smiled and said, “That’s a very good question and I’m glad you asked it because now I get to teach you something that God has shown me. First of all, we have four ladies with us tonight. I don’t want to hear the gory details, but how many of you have lost a child or grandchild, or had a difficult pregnancy that threatened your life?”

“I lost two babies and I had to stay flat for the last two months for two of my boys,” volunteered Amata.

“My daughter was on complete rest with her last baby,” said Diana.

“I had a really hard time with my first baby and almost died giving birth,” said Marcella.

“I only had one son, and he didn’t give me any problems until after he was born!” Ruth said and everyone laughed.

“What I’m trying to say is that carrying a baby is a risky thing. Sadly, it sometimes results in a woman’s death or the death of the baby. It’s especially dangerous if she’s carrying twins. Now, let’s suppose that God is love, as I know Him to be. Let’s say that He knew ahead of time, because He is omniscient, that Gabriela’s body needed to slow down and take a break. Let’s look at what this God of love arranged. First, Seth was walking right behind her when it happened. He picked her up and carried her to his house which was just around the corner. Joelle knew to elevate her feet. Sabra was available within an hour. All of Seth and Joelle’s servants know how to care for a woman. I certainly would not have known what to do. Right now, the servants are fighting over who gets to sit and feed her because she’s so fun to be around. She’s getting spoiled rotten and getting stronger every day. Now, do you think that God zapped her, or is that God blessing her and loving her?”

“That’s pretty amazing, isn’t it?” said Marcella.

“Do you think God sent this collapse to make her rest more?” Amata asked.

“I honestly don’t know. It could have been Satan trying to get us to quit our ministry focus, or it could have been God giving her a time to rest, or it could have just been what happens to a woman carrying twins who tries to walk a mile when they shouldn’t. What I want you to see is that God did not zap her. He is taking care of her regardless of the cause or the source. He will never leave her or me, and we’ll get through this. God may still choose to take her or the babies to Heaven, but I will still trust Him to do what is best for all of us.”

“Would you grieve?”

“Certainly, I’m human. I’ve grieved this week. It’s been tough to stay focused on life and not think about the ‘what if’s.’ But God just keeps reminding me that He is in charge, and He knows what is best. I trust Him. Are there any other questions?”

After a few minutes of silence, Orly said, “Then I have a question for you. How many of you are willing to invite a small group of friends or family who are asking questions about Jesus to your home next Saturday? Each couple will need to decide who to invite and then prepare a meal for them. We’ll plan to meet next Sabbath night and discuss the lesson and answer questions.”

“Couldn’t we just meet somewhere and let you answer their questions?” asked Titus.

“We could, but where? And do you think you would feel more comfortable asking questions in a large group, or in a small intimate group?”

“Definitely a small group.”

“And each couple can pick and choose who to invite and how many. You already know who wants answers and who doesn’t. So, invite those who are eager to learn, not those who want to argue about everything. And yes, Gabriela and I will be available to answer any questions any time. You see me every day at noon. You are welcome to come and talk with Gabriela when she gets home. And remember you have the Holy Spirit already guiding you step-by-step. Let’s close with Psalm 150 and then if you are willing to lead a group next Saturday, let me know. If not, then maybe I haven’t heard the Spirit right, and we’ll pray some more. Okay?”

Orly began to lead them in Psalm 150. They sang it a couple of times and then everyone started talking among themselves. One by one, each of the three couples came and said that they wanted to invite a group over next Saturday if Orly would tell them what to say. After the couples had gone, Mother went inside and left Orly to talk with Titus and Appius. “Orly, you keep talking about couples doing this, but can we do it, too?”

“Of course! I didn’t mean to make you feel left out. You brought eight other guys with you to the baptism. Do you think they would like to know more about Jesus?”

“Oh, yeah. They come over to our place a lot. Some of them still live at home and they just come over to hang out. We usually roast some meat and eat junk from the market. We just didn’t know whether you were only talking to the married couples.”

“Nope. I was talking to you, too. It sounds like you’ve got the perfect setup for a men’s-only group. Jesus’ inner circle was all men. Are you two on board as a team?”

“Yes, I can’t wait to tell the guys we are going to set up a class to answer their questions. I think they will all want to come.”

“Then it looks like we are all in agreement and will start the training next week. I’ll see you at work on Sunday. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

Chapter 14

On Sabbath morning, Orly milked the goats and then joined Mother for breakfast. After breakfast he was still lingering at the table when Mother asked, “Why aren’t you up and running to see Gabriela? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing is wrong, Mother. I just wanted to walk you to the synagogue this morning. Then, you can walk with Mr. Kenan’s group to his house.”

“I just assumed I’d stay home all day and skip going to Mr. Kenan’s.”

“Unless you don’t feel like going, I see no reason for that,” said Orly.

“Okay. Give me just a minute and I’ll be ready.” Orly helped Mother clear the table, then they began the walk to the synagogue. They greeted many friends along the way who all wanted to know how Gabriela was doing. He assured them that Seth and Joelle were taking good care of her and that he was on his way now to visit. When he could finally get away, he walked as quickly as was allowed for the Sabbath to get to Gabriela. He knocked and a servant let him in. He went straight to Gabriela. She was sleeping, so he whispered to the servant, “What am I supposed to watch for?”

“Just watch her face and see if she indicates any pain or discomfort and watch her belly to see if it tightens into a tight ball. Call me when she needs her blankets changed. I’ll be nearby and I can hear you call.”

Orly stretched out on the mat beside Gabriela and just watched her sleep. She was so beautiful and looked so peaceful. He spent his time praying and thinking about the future with such a full house. *I need to talk with Palti about adding a room, no, two rooms. Where should they be placed? I wonder if Lucas and I could do it ourselves?* When Gabriela opened her eyes, Orly said good morning and that he wanted a full report.

Gabriela said Sabra was pleased but was still not letting her raise her head at all. She had had no tightenings. She was eager to hear all about the group. At times a servant would knock and bring her a snack or change her blankets, but they primarily talked and giggled and enjoyed just being alone all day. Occasionally, she would doze, and he would take a break, but it was a special time to just be quiet together — a true Sabbath for both of them. It was so hard to not tell her about the third baby, but Sabra had said to wait, and he was determined to obey. As the sun started to set, Gabriela insisted that he go and take care of her goats. He said he would bring her some milk just as soon as the Sabbath ended.

When he returned, Gabriela was excited that Sabra had allowed the servants to put a pillow under her head. “What a luxury! Now maybe I can get a drink without pouring it all over myself. I can’t get

up, but I'm making progress. And Sabra says the babies are doing fine."

"That's good," said Orly.

"Now, you need to go and see if they will fix you a late plate at Mr. Kenan's. You'll need to get a good night's rest so you can work hard tomorrow to support me and these little wiggle worms."

"Wiggle worms with a wallop!" declared Orly and they both laughed. "What if I don't want to leave you? What if I just moved in and stayed here and quit my job so that I could look at you all night long?"

"You would be bored silly, and we would be broke. Now, go and take care of yourself so that you can work. Tell everyone at Mr. Kenan's that I said hello and I miss them."

"Okay, if you insist. I'll see you in the morning."

Orly meandered to Mr. Kenan's house. For some reason, he didn't want to hear about group. He didn't want to deal with all the questions. He just wanted to savor what a wonderful day it had been with Gabriela. He walked slowly and it was late before he arrived at Mr. Kenan's. Mother tucked her arm in his and they slowly walked home.

Mother headed to her room and Orly pulled out some leftover bread and pickled fish and made himself a sandwich. He took a lantern and stepped off an area where they might add two rooms and sat in the courtyard. As he sat on the bench, he felt tears flowing down his face and realized that God was very present with him. He fell to his knees and worshipped. He felt so unworthy to be His servant, yet so very, very blessed. He didn't feel like praying, or praising, or asking for anything. He just wanted to be quiet and still before God. So, he stayed on his knees and worshipped until there was nothing left. Then he slipped into his blanket and fell into a deep and restful sleep.

On Sunday morning, Orly checked on Gabriela and took her some goat milk, checked on her at noon, and again after dinner. Gabriela told him that Sabra wanted to talk with him tomorrow morning before he went to work, but as far as she knew, there had been no change. They prayed together and Orly promised to be back bright and early in the morning.

He milked the goats and ate a quick breakfast before sprinting to Seth's house with a jar of milk. Orly left the milk in the kitchen and hurried to Gabriela's room. She was still asleep. He came back and talked with Seth and Joelle as they were finishing breakfast. "Seth, would you please remind Lucas and Mr. Kenan that I need to meet with Sabra, and I don't know if I'll be at work today."

"Sure," said Seth. He warned Orly that Sabra might want her to stay longer and that that was totally okay. "We want whatever is best for Gabriela and the babies. She can stay here until Passover if she needs to!"

Orly grinned, "Are you two trying to steal my girl?"

"You know what I mean. She's always welcome. So don't get upset if this is a little longer than you want it to be."

"I know that you two have provided her with better care than I ever could. I will be forever grateful to have such friends."

Sabra knocked and was let in by a servant. "Good morning. Let me go examine Gabriela and see how she's doing. If everything is good, I'll need your help, Orly."

"I'm available for whatever you need."

Seth left for work and Joelle was busy with the children. Sabra called for Orly and he practically ran into the room.

"Slow down. In fact, just sit there on the mat and listen to me. Everything looks good to give this a try. We're going to move a cushion in here and Orly is going to lift you up and let you sit for just a few minutes. You are going to feel dizzy and possibly nauseated. I need to know whether your heart will adjust to sitting up. So, Orly, first of all, we need a cushion. Gabriela, your job is to relax and let Orly do all the work. It is your job to tell me if you feel any tightening or pain in your belly. Do you have any questions?" Both shook their heads.

Orly moved a cushion into the room and at Sabra's direction picked Gabriela up and sat her upright. Gabriela immediately began to moan and became very pale. Sabra kept talking to her and checking her heart. After about ten minutes, she told Orly to put her back on the mat. She continued to listen to Gabriela's heart and listen to the babies. When she turned to Orly, she told him that Gabriela did great and that she was very encouraged by what she heard. Gabriela muttered, "Didn't feel so great."

"I know, it feels terrible, but you just sat up for the first time in almost a week. Let me tell you the good news. Your heart had a fit, but it settled down pretty quickly. That tells me it's just not used to working that hard, but it didn't quit on us or get worse. In fact, the longer you sat, the better it sounded. The babies did fine. Do you feel any tightening or pain?"

"No, just nausea."

"That's really good. Do this two more times today and I'll see you again in the morning to see how much she's improved."

Orly asked Gabriela if she felt like him going on to work and she assured him she would be fine. She just felt really tired and wanted to sleep. He kissed her goodbye and ran to the shop.

Orly gave his report to Mr. Kenan and Seth as he came in the front door. Mr. Kenan walked with him to Lucas and told him not to count his being late today. "Now, get busy."

"Yes, sir!" Orly replied as he began heating a project that he had started yesterday.

At noon, Orly reminded Lucas that he might be a little late since he needed to sit Gabriela up again. Lucas said he would stay until he got back and would cover for him.

Orly ran all the way to Seth's house. Gabriela was smiling and seemed ready to give it another try. This time when he lifted her, she turned pale, but didn't seem as sick as the first time. After a few minutes, she was ready to return to her mat. She whispered, "I just want to sleep." Orly kissed her goodbye and hurried back to work. He

made it just in time to call the men back to work and Lucas didn't have to stay late. The apprentices were working on their own and that helped the time pass more quickly. He was so into his work and trying to avoid thinking that Markus called for cleanup time, then grinned at Orly.

"Thanks, Markus. I was busy and forgot," said Orly.

"Somebody's got their mind on a girl," teased Markus and all the men agreed.

"Yep," said Orly, "and she's got my heart wrapped around her little finger! Thank you, guys, for understanding. Hopefully, things will be back to normal soon." Orly cleaned up his station and then called quitting time when the sun touched the horizon.

He walked home and met Lucas and Amata as they were leaving. "I hope it was okay, but I told Ruth what you had told me. She was pretty worried when she didn't hear anything today."

"Thanks, Lucas. I was just in a hurry to get back to work, I didn't even think. I have to keep two women happy now!"

"And maybe four," said Amata.

"I could have a houseful of females. Argh!" said Orly, laughing. He quickly ran into the house and apologized for not sending her a message. So, while she finished putting dinner on the table, Orly told her all the details. "Now, I need to go back and do it again. Then tomorrow Sabra will check her and see if she's stronger. I think Seth was right; this is going to be longer than five days." They ate dinner quickly. "I'll see you in the morning," he called as he grabbed a lantern and started running toward Seth's house.

Gabriela was awake and they laughed together at the thought of him living in a house filled with women. Surely Jehovah would grant him at least one son. Soon they began talking about plans for the group and remembering what they had shared with them the first night they met. "I think I gave them about two thousand years of Jewish history."

"It's a wonder they didn't all just run away screaming," she giggled. "I think you had better sit me up before I get too tired."

"Okay, let's do it." He gently lifted Gabriela off her mat and onto the cushion. She seemed to handle it better than either of the previous times and was actually able to smile at him and assure him it was okay. She wiggled her toes and told Orly she missed seeing them.

"Who?"

"My toes. I miss them. I can't see them for this humongous belly!" she giggled.

"I think it's time for Mrs. Silly to go back to sleep." Orly lifted her in his arms and stole a kiss before laying her back on the mat. He told her to sleep well, and he would see her in the morning.

On Tuesday morning, Orly met with Sabra again and she watched Orly lift Gabriela onto the cushion. She listened to her heart and to the babies while she continued to sit up. She let her stay up until Gabriela said that she was tired. Orly stood immediately and placed her back on the mat. "That's exactly what I want. You need to

sit up between three and five times a day for as long as you are comfortable. I'll ask Joelle to have your head elevated a little more each day so that it will be easier to eat. On Friday we'll re-evaluate. Any questions?" When they had none, Sabra got up to leave.

"Thank you, Sabra, for all your care. May God bless you."

Orly left for work and Joelle had her servant, Zan, slide another pillow under Gabriela's shoulders and head. It felt wonderful. Joelle reminded her to let Zan know if she experienced any tightenings or pain. Gabriela promised and began to look around the room. Zan brought her a cup of goat milk. It felt so good to be elevated enough to sip on the milk by herself. The two talked for quite a while. Zan would be free in just over a year and Gabriela asked her if she had considered training to be a midwife like Sabra. She admitted that she had not thought about anything except freedom. Gabriela reminded her that she would need a way to support herself.

For Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, they continued with the sitting routine three times a day. Orly was hoping that Friday would bring a significant change since Gabriela was able to sit up longer each time.

On Friday morning, when he arrived, Sabra was already there and was asking how the week had gone. Gabriela told her that she was having no pain and no tightenings, and she was able to sit up for half an hour without getting too tired. "Good. Are you ready to try the next step?"

"I'm ready," said Gabriela eagerly.

"This time I want Orly to lift you to the cushion and let you sit. When you feel ready, I want you to stand to your feet for just a few minutes and then sit back down. Orly, your job will be to stand in front of her and not let her topple over. Gabriela, you are to sit back down if you feel any pain, understood?"

"Yes, ma'am." She looked at Orly and said, "I'm ready." Orly lifted her and sat her on the cushion. She sat there for just a few minutes to let the dizziness subside, then she slowly stood to her feet. She and Orly both were grinning. Sabra told her to sit back down. She asked her if she wanted to sit awhile longer or whether she was ready to get back on her mat. "I'm ready to go back because Orly needs to go to work." Orly picked her up and put her back on her mat.

"Okay, here are the rules to get you through the Sabbath. I would like you to sit three to five times a day, but Orly will need to lift you there. Once you are sitting, you may stand three to five times before you lie back down. Do not try to walk, just stand. By Sunday, I think you will be ready to start walking. Then your legs should be strong enough to get up off the mat. So, I'll see you again on Sunday morning."

Orly left for work but promised to return at the noon break. He took his time because he was so weary he could hardly put one foot in front of the other. He checked in with Mr. Kenan and apologized for being late. He explained that Gabriela needed to be lifted three to five times a day and he was trying to do it morning, noon, and after dinner

at night. "While Sabra is encouraging, she still won't say when Gabriela can come home." Mr. Kenan could see Orly's discouragement and asked if he could pray with him. Orly sat and cried while Mr. Kenan prayed. Mr. Kenan asked if there was anything else he could do to help. "Well, I need permission to talk with Jordan about leading your group until things get more settled. He seemed upset that I asked him last week and I need to know what's going on."

"He's having a rough time right now."

"Is something wrong at the synagogue?" asked Orly.

"No, no. I think you two should talk. Let me call Jordan and you two take a break."

"You don't have to pay me for this morning. It's almost noon anyway. I'll talk to Jordan, then, I promise, I'll be back to work this afternoon and take care of my responsibilities."

"Orly, you are doing fine. I've lived through Vada being sick and I know the stress of it. I can't pay you for this morning, but if you need time off, just take it. Let me call Jordan and you men take a short break to figure out who is leading what. I assume you're doing the Gentile group tonight."

"Yes, sir. And thank you, sir."

Mr. Kenan walked to the back and called Jordan to come to his office. Jordan left his work and came quickly. "I need you to take a walk with this gentleman and settle some things. You are excused because I think it's important." Jordan looked concerned.

Orly led them out the door and around back to the grassy area where they could talk without being overheard. "Hey, man, what's wrong?" asked Jordan.

"Nothing. I'm just cracking up, that's all. Gabriela is getting better but it's taking forever, and I'm exhausted. I came in to work but got to talking with Mr. Kenan. I told him I hadn't even had time to speak to you and I can't do Mr. Kenan's group right now. I was wondering whether you thought it would be okay to ask Joshua. Joshua keeps coming to my mind as someone who is ready to take the next step in leadership and we'd talked about it before. But since I don't know what your plans are, we just need to figure this out."

"I was wondering what you wanted to do. I'm really not up to doing it either. I'm still dealing with Matthew and Mother and my head is just not in the right place. I think it would be great for Joshua to lead if he's okay with it."

"What's going on with your mother and Matthew?"

"You haven't heard?" asked Jordan incredulously. "I thought everyone knew by now."

"What?"

"They are espoused to be married just before Passover and then they are heading back to Carthage."

"Wow! That's amazing."

"I guess so, but I'm just not feeling right about it. I know you don't have time to talk, but I've been fighting with my mother to leave Sarah

here. It's not safe to take her. Hey, let's plan to get together after you get Gabriela home and we'll catch up, okay?"

"It makes me sad that I haven't been available. This must be really hard for you."

"Yeah, well you've had your own problems to deal with. I'm praying for Gabriela and glad she's doing better. I've got to get back to work. I'll talk with Joshua at noon. If he can't, then I'll take care of it."

"Thanks, Jordan, and I'll be praying for you."

"You go take care of Gabriela and give her my love."

Orly got up slowly and headed back to Gabriela. He thought about Matthew and Basha teaming up to do ministry and understood why Jordan would be afraid for Sarah and his mother. He hated to see his friend so discouraged. *Maybe I will be able to meet with him next week.*

He began to run so that he would have extra time with Gabriela. When he knocked, Zan had just changed her blankets and Gabriela was awake and eager to be lifted to the cushion. He told her he had asked Jordan to cover Mr. Kenan's group. "Are you ready to stand?"

"Yes, but I need you in front of me."

Gabriela pushed to the front of the cushion and stood up successfully. She stood for a few minutes and then sat down. Orly told her that Jordan was going to talk with Joshua about helping him.

"I think that's great. I think he's ready, don't you? And I'm ready to stand again."

"He said if Joshua couldn't do it, he'd do it."

"I'm ready."

"Are you sure? Why don't you rest a minute or two more? I don't have to rush."

"But I want to do it five times like Sabra said. I know I can do it and I want to. How many have I done?"

"Four."

"One more, but just a short one," said Gabriela.

Orly stood in front of her, and she stood. She was really exhausted and when she sat down, he gently lifted her back onto her mat. "Are you okay, or should I take out some of these pillows?"

"No, they are fine. Just let me catch my breath. That was hard."

Orly sat and watched her for a few minutes. Once her breathing returned to normal, he kissed her goodbye and rushed back to work. He made it in time to call for the men to return to work. He got the apprentices started on some basic wheels for a wagon. It reminded him that he hadn't talked to Palti in several weeks, either. He wondered when the oxcart would be ready. It just seemed that life kept on rushing by and he was standing still. At least tonight he would be able to catch up with the Gentile group. He began to heat his next assignment and soon he was immersed in his work. He checked on the apprentices, cleared his area, and left at his regular Friday time.

When Orly arrived, Zan was concerned that Gabriela had been sleeping most of the afternoon. She smiled when she saw Orly. He asked if she had had any pain and she said no. "But I'm really tired.

Let's not stand so much tonight. But I'm ready to sit up." Orly lifted her off the mat and onto the cushion. After a few minutes she stood for a short time and then sat back down. "Let's do it again," said Gabriela. Orly stood before her, and Gabriela got up slowly. She only stood for a few seconds and then sat down. She said she felt tired and just wanted to rest.

"Are you feeling pain?" asked Orly.

"No, I'm just tired. Maybe we did too much too fast." They decided to let her rest and try a little slower tomorrow.

"I want to go back to my mat." Orly gently put her back on her mat.

Soon Orly was on his way home with a promise to return early tomorrow and stay all day long. He arrived home with Joelle's dish for the group. Everyone had already gathered, and Mother lit the Sabbath candles. He prayed for each person present and especially Gabriela. Then he asked God to bless those who would hear the good news tomorrow. Orly shared an update on Gabriela, and they began their meal together. As Orly sat and ate with the men, he felt that he hadn't sat down all week. He was eager to hear what was going on since he missed the noon breaks.

The women were eager to learn more about Gabriela, but Ruth admitted she really didn't know any more than they did. Soon they were talking about the prices at the market and general women's topics.

After they had cleared the tables and moved the benches, Orly stopped them before they could be seated. "Tonight, I would like for you to sit in teams. You need to practice working together." Everyone got settled onto the benches and Orly invited Mother to sit beside him. "Let's begin with prayer. Father, thank You for being present with us tonight. Help us to learn everything that You want to teach us. In Jesus' name I ask.

Orly emphasized that they would have to rely fully on the Holy Spirit to know how to lead their groups. "All I can give you is the lesson portion. But there's some basic rules for everything else. Number one rule: Don't answer a question if you don't know the answer! It's okay to not know the answer and you can promise to find out before next week. Number two: Remember that you are the leaders. If you refer them to me, then they will start depending on me, not you. Be the leaders that God has called you to be. And this is probably the most important: Pray, pray, and pray some more for you to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and for them to be ready to hear. Any questions?" Everyone seemed settled so Orly continued. "Tonight, for the lesson portions, I'm going to take the role of mentor. If you don't know the answer, that's okay. We'll all learn together. We'll start with Markus and Diana. What did God tell Adam and Eve about a Messiah after they chose to not obey Him?"

"Well, first of all, we are talking about Jehovah God who created everything. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, He promised to send a Messiah to pay for it," answered Markus.

“Good. Now, Diana, what was the name of the next man we learned about in Jewish history that God promised to send a Messiah?”

“Ooh, that’s not fair, Markus got an easy one,” pouted Diana.

“That’s okay. We’re here to learn. Appius do you know?”

“Was it Abraham?” he asked tentatively.

“Yes. It was Abraham. Now, what did God tell him?”

“He said He would make him a great nation and send a Messiah that would be for the whole world.”

“Good. Titus, tell me a little more about Abraham and what happened there.”

“Well, after Adam and Eve sinned, everybody just started doing their own thing and it became a big mess with people worshipping all kinds of weird stuff and making up their own religions. God called Abraham and said that he would have lots of sons and they would become the Jewish nation. God asked them to obey a bunch of rules to keep them away from people that would pollute them. He made them a separate people from all the other nations,” explained Titus.

“Very good. But what was God’s plan or goal for doing this, Lucas?”

“He was using the Jewish people to produce the Messiah. And he gave them lots of rules to show them they needed a Messiah,” said Lucas.

Amata added, “But God’s plan all along was that this Jewish nation would produce the Messiah and share Him with the whole world, not just the Jews.”

“Very good. See, you guys know a lot of Jewish history. Julius, Moses was the next man we talked about. Do you remember what he did?”

“I know he wrote down the Law that God gave him, and he led the Jews out of slavery from Egypt,” said Julius.

Marcella added, “I know, I know. Then the Jewish leaders started adding new laws and more and more laws and made a mess out of what God had said. And they began mixing God’s Law with the Gentiles’ laws around them until everybody got really confused.”

“Good job. Markus, during this time of confusion, what was God doing to try to get the people back on track?”

Markus frowned and said he wasn’t sure. Diana asked, “Is this where God started sending prophets and teachers to tell them about the coming Messiah?”

“Yes, it is. Abraham lived about eighteen hundred years before Jesus and during this time, God was trying to keep the people on track, but they just didn’t get it. Then what happened about 400 years ago? I believe it’s your turn, Appius.”

“Sorry, I don’t remember.”

“Me neither,” said Titus.

“Does anyone remember what happened four hundred years before Jesus was born on earth?” asked Orly. He was faced with shaking heads and looks of dismay. “God stopped sending His

prophets and teachers. He was silent for four hundred years. The Jewish leaders just created their own laws and rules. Now, who can tell me what happened about thirty-five years ago?"

Appius jumped in again, "That was when John the Baptizer came."

"Yes, his dad Zechariah was a priest. God told him that He was sending him a son to be a prophet and forerunner of the Messiah. What was John's primary message?" asked Orly.

Titus asked, "Do you want me to answer?"

"Yes, let's start going around the circle again, but we're almost done."

"I think John's primary message was to repent and get ready for the Messiah, but he also taught that this Messiah would be the Son of God who would be sacrificed for the sins of the whole world."

"Good job. What happened next?"

"Jesus was born, grew up in Nazareth, and was baptized by John the Baptizer and started His ministry," said Lucas who was next in line.

"Actually, I wouldn't mention Nazareth just yet. I mean, you can, but technically, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and then they lived in Egypt for a while before moving back to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph's hometown. And that is the background behind Jesus. That will be your teaching portion. Are there any questions?"

Everyone seemed comfortable with it, so Orly continued. "Let me summarize the lesson one more time. God told Adam and Eve he was sending a Messiah. God called Abraham and his family to be separate and promised a Messiah for the whole world. Moses wrote down the Law and organized the Jewish nation. God sent prophets to help the people stay on track. Then there was four hundred years of silence before God spoke to Zechariah and John the Baptizer was born. Then Jesus came. Do you have any questions?"

Everyone seemed relieved that the lesson was short, and they felt confident that they could tell the story. The group stood in a tight circle and Orly prayed for each individual team. Everyone began to leave and wished Orly and Ruth a goodnight.

Orly turned to Mother and said, "I feel like I'm having a baby."

Mother laughed and agreed it was certainly an exciting time. They finished clearing the courtyard, then Mother went to her room. Orly tried to pray but fell asleep.

Chapter 15

Orly got up early and went to the stream to pray. He wanted to pray for each group that would be meeting today, including Mr. Kenan's group. He hoped that Joshua would be leading that group and he prayed that Jordan's burden would be lifted.

He milked the goats and ate a leisurely breakfast with Mother. He tried to explain all the details about Gabriela's progress. Mother reported that she was doing fine and didn't mind being alone. Yet, she was glad that Amata came every day and others stopped by occasionally. She asked him what he thought of Basha and Matthew becoming espoused. "I only heard about it yesterday. When did that happen?"

"Last Thursday. Basha had told me weeks before but didn't want anyone to know. They did a lot of praying about it. She said he wasn't anything like Philip and she was surprised by his attention. Both of them felt the Holy Spirit was guiding them forward. She felt more comfortable with the thought of remarriage because Matthew is so different from Philip. I guess that makes sense." Mother continued to talk about Basha while they cleared the table and walked toward the synagogue. About halfway there, Mother saw a friend that she recognized. She asked Orly to pick her up at Mr. Kenan's tonight. Now, he could get to Gabriela faster. He met Joelle and Seth and their children all headed for the synagogue. They stopped and greeted each other but they knew he was eager to see Gabriela.

He knocked gently on her door and heard her happy voice, "You are earlier than I expected. I'm so glad. I'm feeling much better, and I want to hear all about group."

"Thank you, Zan. I'll call you if we need you," said Orly as he picked Gabriela up off the floor and kissed her while he held her close. Then he sat her on the cushion.

"So, how was group?"

"I'll tell you about group after you tell me how you did last night. Any pains?"

"No, and I slept well all night. Zan said I yelped once during the night and scared her. She didn't know whether I was dreaming or whether the babies were kicking me. I never even woke up. I guess I'm getting used to it."

"Are you ready to stand?"

"Yes, please." Orly stood in front of her, and she stood up. She was able to stand for several minutes before sitting back down. "So, tell me about group."

Orly told her about the teaching style he used, and she agreed that that was a great way to cover the material. She stood longer the second time and felt fine. He told her about the group's responses while she sat. Then she stood for a third time. "I emphasized that they should let the Holy Spirit lead them and reminded them that they could

ask anyone at the shop if we aren't available." Gabriela said she was ready to do her fourth stand. "I also emphasized that they were the leaders, not us, so they shouldn't refer the group to us. They should be the ones to lead their own groups."

"You are so wise. Where did you get that wisdom?" They both smiled knowing that it was not his wisdom but God's. *Oh, it is good to be with Gabriela.*

After she did her fifth stand, he placed her on the mat to rest. Orly told her about Lucas helping him get started as a blacksmith and how they worked a little bit at a time behind Mr. Kenan's back while his muscles grew. He remembered how bad it hurt when he overdid and didn't want her to overdo. "When did Mr. Kenan figure out what was going on?" asked Gabriela sleepily. Orly told her the story of his first day as an official apprentice and how they had surprised Mr. Kenan. Then he kissed her nose and ordered her to rest.

At noon Zan brought her a goat cheese sandwich with sliced cucumbers and asked if Orly wanted anything. "No, thank you. You are spoiling her rotten and look how fat she's getting!" Zan laughed with them and said, "I enjoy spoiling her. She doesn't treat me like a slave. I feel like she is my sister." Then she quickly darted out of the room.

Gabriela told Orly, "Zan will be free in less than two years, and I've been encouraging her to talk with Sabra about apprenticing as a midwife." All day long they repeated the cycle of sitting, standing, and resting. It seemed that each time she was able to stand and sit just a little longer. Tomorrow they would talk with Sabra about what was next.



The sun had set before Orly finished milking the goats, and he hurried to Mr. Kenan's house. The food was still out, and he fixed himself a plate and visited while he ate. Everyone wanted to hear the latest on Gabriela. When Orly had finished eating, Jordan agreed to walk home with him and Mother.

Mother talked about Joshua's first message all the way home. "It wasn't fancy, but it was good and caused everyone to think." Jordan looked exhausted. "I'll leave you two alone," said Mother as she headed to her room.

"It's okay, Mother. We're going up to the roof. Call me if you need me."

Jordan went up and slumped down on one of the benches. Orly grabbed a pile of blankets and sat down across from Jordan. He threw some blankets toward him.

"My friend, I'm here. I've been praying, but I feel you need a safe place to talk."

"Thanks. I feel like I'm going in circles and anger is just eating me alive." The two men sat in silence for a while. Finally, Jordan spoke. "I gave my permission for the espousal because I knew that was what

my mother wanted. But I've been mad ever since. I mean, he gave her the stupidest gifts. He gave her two beautiful robes and a piece of jewelry that must have cost a fortune. My dad would have spent his money on the poor — not luxury items. He gave Sarah and me fancy robes, too. I guess he doesn't want to be ashamed of us at the wedding." Jordan got up and began pacing. "Okay. I'm angry because he's nothing like my dad. I think Mother is making a terrible mistake. She seems to think that because he's an apostle, he's just like Dad, and he's not. I think Mother wants to get back to Carthage any way she can, and this is her ticket. Matthew has promised to take her there. And that brings up the problem with Sarah. I don't think they have any right to take Sarah into dangerous territory. I've told Mother that I will raise Sarah myself and keep her safe with me until she's ready for marriage. She'll be nine soon and it wouldn't be that much work. Then I just go in circles hating myself for saying yes to the espousal, and hating myself for not liking Matthew, and hating myself for not trusting my own mother. I'm just miserable."

"It sounds like it." Orly prayed for wisdom before he spoke. "I've been praying for you since you told me last week. I'm glad you told me. I know it's hard stuff and I don't have the answers."

They sat in silence for a while just enjoying the peaceful starlit skies.

"Jordan, I do have two things that I feel led to tell you."

"What's that?"

"Well, the first one is something that your mother told my mother when Matthew first mentioned marriage. Your mother said that one of the things that made her willing to consider Matthew as a possible husband was that he was completely different from your dad. She told my mother that she could never consider marrying someone who reminded her every day of Philip. She loved your dad so much and no one could ever take his place. She was pleased that Matthew was totally different. They would have to build a completely unique relationship that wouldn't look like Matthew's first marriage because she could never be Ahava, and it wouldn't look like her first marriage, because Matthew was nothing like Philip."

"Okay."

"I don't know whether that helps, but it's something that your mother told my mother and I'm just sharing it with you."

"You said you had two things you wanted to tell me; what's the other one?"

"Well, as I was praying for you on Sabbath morning after we talked, I felt the Holy Spirit very clearly bring something to mind. I don't think you'll like what I've got to say, but I feel certain that I need to say it."

"Go ahead. I'll listen even if I don't like it," grumbled Jordan.

"It was your dad that took you and Sarah into danger when he felt led to move to Samaria, and then to Carthage. He risked both of his children's lives to share the New Way with others."

“Yeah, I guess so. I didn’t feel unsafe. I felt very, very secure and loved.”

“That’s because you were. I was good friends with your dad for just a couple of years, but his love for you both was very evident. He was a great dad. Yet, his obedience to God was what made him great. Obedience comes with high costs and great rewards, but it doesn’t come with promises of protection, only promises that we’ll never face anything alone,” Orly said.

Jordan stood and gave Orly a hug. “I’ve got to get some rest and so do you. Tomorrow is another decision-making day concerning Gabriela, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I’m meeting with Sabra bright and early. I don’t know when I’ll be in to work.”

“Shalom.”

“Shalom, my friend.”

Orly crawled into his blanket and fell asleep praying for Gabriela and for Jordan. He woke early and took the lantern to milk the goats before sunrise. He was back at the house in time to help Mother set out breakfast. “You are losing weight, Son. You must take better care of yourself.” He sat down with her and ate a little before heading to Seth’s.

Sabra had already examined Gabriela and invited Orly to enter. Joelle was also called into the room. “Gabriela is doing well. However, she is still unable to get off her mat by herself which means that she still needs night and day care. She’s not able to carry these babies around. Joelle has indicated that she will continue caring for Gabriela at the current level. But I think that we need to make a choice. Either Gabriela stays flat until the babies arrive, or we spend a week of intensive training to see if she can go home. She won’t get stronger by just exercising three times a day. I can’t promise that she will get stronger exercising more because the babies are growing bigger each day, but I think it is a possibility. It will take a lot of work.”

Orly didn’t even hesitate. “I just need to let Mr. Kenan know that I will not be working this week. I can come in the mornings and stay until nighttime.”

“Okay, so the plan is to work really hard this week and we’ll make a decision next Sunday. I need to see another patient, but I will return as soon as possible to show you some new exercises to try. I shouldn’t be long. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

“I’m going to the shop, but I will be right back.” He verified with Joelle that she was okay with their staying another week. She assured him again that Gabriela was welcome to stay as long as necessary.

Orly ran all the way to the shop and met Mr. Kenan just as he was entering the front door. He asked to speak with him. “Is everything okay?”

“Yes and no.” Orly told him what Sabra had said and explained that he needed to be off work all week to help Gabriela get stronger.

"You understand that I cannot pay you for not being here," said Mr. Kenan.

"Yes, sir. But if there's any chance for Gabriela to come home, I have to do everything I can. And besides, I want to give Seth and Joelle a break as soon as possible. I know Joelle would never complain, but she's having to do a lot more work so that her servants can help Gabriela."

"I'll let Lucas know. And I'll plan to stay and work with Oren and Zuri in the afternoons."

"Thank you, sir. And please pray for us!"

"Of course. Shalom."

"Shalom."

When Orly returned, Gabriela was eager to get started working together. He lifted her and put her on the cushion. She sat for just a minute to clear her head and then stood. They had completed five stands and Gabriela was sitting on the cushion when Sabra returned. "Are you ready to work?"

"I just completed five stands and I feel fine."

"Good. Now crawl back on your mat."

Gabriela stood by herself and then, holding onto the cushion, got down on her knees. She crawled over to her mat and managed to get herself situated on the pillows.

"Hurrah!" shouted Orly and Sabra together. Gabriela grinned and asked if she could go to sleep now.

While Gabriela rested, Sabra outlined the schedule. She wanted Orly to help her sit, then let her stand and begin to take steps. She cautioned him to increase gradually but said to let her walk and sit as long as she was comfortable. "Be ready to catch her because her knees are very weak, and she's carrying a heavy load. And send for me if you need me."

"Thank you, Sabra."

"You are welcome. Oh, and we need to talk about my payment. I'll let you know what you owe me tomorrow. Don't push her today. She'll get stronger as the week goes by. I'm hoping she'll be ready to move home by Monday. Shalom."

"Shalom."

When Gabriela woke from her nap, Orly lifted her to the cushion, and they began the new exercise program. It felt strange to be walking again and her coordination wasn't great. She felt off balance and wasn't sure her knees would hold her up. But each time she tried, her legs felt stronger and more coordinated, and she could walk further. Zan brought them dinner to eat in their room and then they exercised once more before Orly went home for the night.

The next morning, Sabra was very pleased with Gabriela's progress. "You are doing great. How would you like to eat at the table tonight?" Gabriela could still not pull herself up to standing but Sabra assured her that she was getting stronger. "Continue to increase the sitting and walking. Just don't get over tired and get in trouble. Orly, I need to see you on the roof." They left Gabriela to rest and walked to

the roof top. "You owe me six denarii up to this point. Now, if you need time to pay me, I understand, but I wanted you to know that your bill is accumulating."

"Certainly. I brought it with me, and I will pay you the full amount now." He counted out the silver.

"Also, when would you like to tell her about the triplets, or would you like for me to 'discover it' during an exam this week?"

"Oh, I would like to tell her."

"She's definitely getting stronger. But the babies are growing fast. You understand that she may not be able to stay ahead of them for long. And we need to keep her from getting overtired. You are doing a great job."

"Thank you, Sabra."

Orly stretched out on the mat and waited for Gabriela to wake up. He tried to figure out how and when to tell Gabriela about the babies. He didn't know what to say and began to pray for the right time. They walked and sat and talked all day. Midafternoon, Gabriela had just crawled back onto her mat and got settled when she said, "I feel that these babies are growing faster than I can get my strength back. They are definitely heavier today than yesterday."

"Well, Sabra said that is pretty normal when you are trying to stay ahead of three babies. That's why she's not sure that your legs will get strong enough to carry these three little ones around."

Gabriela looked confused. "Three?" she asked. Orly took her in his arms and kissed her forehead.

"Yes, my love. There are three healthy little ones growing inside of you. God has blessed us with a whole family of babies all at once. We'll be outnumbered!"

"Orly, I dreamed it was triplets the other night, but I thought it was just a dream. So, it's true? Are you sure?"

"Sabra told me that she definitely heard three healthy heartbeats. She didn't want me to tell you until you were strong enough to handle it. But she told me this morning that I could tell you. It's the hardest secret I've ever had to keep from you. I hate secrets."

"Me, too. Oh, Orly, three?"

"Yes, three! I haven't told anyone because I wanted you to know first. Sabra promised not to tell. So, right now it's our little secret, but you can tell whenever you wish."

The rest of the day they walked, and talked about the triplets. That evening, Orly helped Gabriela walk to the table. How fun it was to sit and enjoy a meal together with such good friends. "Is it okay if I tell?" whispered Gabriela to Orly.

"Certainly."

"We got some unexpected news today. We are not having twins."

"What?" asked Joelle, suddenly very concerned.

"We are having triplets — three babies!"

"Oh, my. Three? I've never known of anyone having triplets. Oh, my. That explains why you are so large, and why you are having so much trouble carrying them."

“Yes. I think it’s wonderful, but honestly, I’m terrified. How will I take care of three babies all at once?”

“It’s a good thing that Ruth is there to help. You’ll have one apiece,” said Seth.

“It’s going to be a nightmare and a party all rolled up into one. We’ve got to think through a lot of things. I’ll probably need to hire help,” said Orly.

“No, you will definitely need to hire help!” said Seth.

On Wednesday, Gabriela seemed full of energy and excited about the future. “I’ve prayed about it and felt God’s peace. He will provide us with everything we need. Now, we’ve got work to do.” Orly lifted her to the cushion, and they began their routine of walking, sitting, and resting. Gabriela was determined to walk outside to the courtyard and visit with Joelle. The air was so fresh and clear. “It feels wonderful to be outside again.”

“Okay, I’m ready, but I may come back in a little bit.” Orly could hardly keep up with her as she headed back inside. She avoided the cushion in the living area and walked all the way to the room. After a few minutes she was ready to walk again as if filled with a new energy.

“When are we going to tell Mother Ruth? She and Amata need to know. But then everyone will want to know. Who do we tell first? How do we do this?”

“Well, let’s walk to the dining room and we’ll talk there.”

“Okay, let’s go.” She walked to the dining room, and they began to discuss the pros and cons of telling and who should know first.

“Let’s walk back to the living room before we make a decision.”

“You are just baiting me to keep walking,” Gabriela giggled.

“Yes, I am. Is it working?”

“I guess so. I’m not even thinking about walking, I’m just doing it.”

“Your balance is so much better today, and I think you are definitely stronger. Did you sleep well last night?”

“Yes, I did, but let’s go.” She walked back to the living room cushion. “Now, don’t distract me. Who are we going to tell first? I think it should be Mother Ruth and Amata, then secondly everyone at the Metal Shop — that will cover both groups.”

“Let’s walk back to the guestroom, and I’ll tell you what I think,” said Orly. She got up and walked back to the cushion with no problems at all. “I think you are exactly right. Now the question we need to deal with is when and how. And it’s time for you to get some rest. We’ve done two sessions and it’s not even noon yet.” Gabriela was able to get herself back onto her mat but had too much to think about to sleep.

“I want you to run home and tell your mother and Amata and Lucas this afternoon. Then tomorrow at noon, you can announce it at the shop and tell everybody. Then they can tell anyone they wish. It will be spread all over Cana before nightfall. Let’s walk!”

Orly lifted Gabriela up and held her in his arms for a few minutes. “You are going to be a great mother of triplets!” They continued their routine. When Zan brought her a midafternoon snack, Gabriela

insisted that Orly go and tell his mother before Amata and Lucas arrived. He agreed, if she promised to get some rest, and then they would join Seth and Joelle for dinner and do some more walking.



When Orly arrived home, Mother was sitting in the yard beside the oven. “What are you cooking?” he called out hoping not to startle her.

“Just some bread. I wanted to get it finished so that Amata and I could sew together while she was here. What brings you home so early? I thought you were helping Gabriela.”

“Well, I have some good news and some better news that we wanted to share with you,” said Orly.

“That sounds good for a change.”

“Gabriela is definitely getting stronger. She’s been walking around the house today and even out to the courtyard. Sabra said she thought she would be able to come home on Sunday or Monday.”

“Oh, Son. That is good news!”

“Are you and Amata about to catch up with sewing for the babies?”

“Oh, no. Amata is working on the heavy cloaks for the trip and I’m still working to make a new robe. It will go faster when we can both get busy on baby things.”

“Well, I have two new projects for you,” said Orly casually.

“What do we need to make?”

“Well, for starters, can you two focus on making some extra pillows for Gabriela? They don’t have to be fancy, but she needs them to get comfortable on the mat. Joelle is using four pillows to prop her up. So, I was wondering if you could make two more before she comes home. Sorry to spring that on you.”

“As fast as Amata stitches, I don’t think it will be a problem. We can easily make one in a day. We’ll just have to go to the market to get more fabric and wool.”

“Then there’s the extra baby that you’ll need to prepare for,” said Orly.

“What extra baby?” said Mother, her eyebrows rising.

“Well, Sabra says that she hears three heartbeats, not two.”

“Orly, you aren’t teasing?”

“No, Mother, I’m not teasing. Gabriela is carrying triplets.”

“That would explain why she’s having so many problems,” said Mother quietly. “She must be totally miserable.”

“Totally miserable but smiling and giggling as always. I’ve never heard her complain. And we are both excited and terrified at having three babies at once. It’s going to be one crazy household. I’m going to talk with Lucas today about adding some rooms to the house. We’re going to outgrow this place very quickly. We’ll have to have more help

and they will need room to stay. My head is just exploding with all the things that I need to get done. But first, I've got to get Gabriela home. And I've got to get back to working so that I can support a huge family."

"Orly, I can always go back to Mr. Kenan's."

"Goodness, no! We will need all the help you can give us. You'll be in charge of the kitchen and well ... the whole house until Gabriela is back to functioning. Right now, she can't do anything by herself. Joelle has six house servants, and they are having a hard time taking care of everything. I'll need to find more help, not less."

"I can imagine that you and Gabriela are feeling a little overwhelmed. Sounds like Amata and I will need to purchase quite a bit more thread and yarn. Is that going to be a problem, I mean, financially?"

"I guess I forgot to fill your bowl with silver pieces. Let me do that right now before I forget. I'm sorry if you've been short this week, but we should be fine. God always provides."

"Yes, He does and no, I haven't been short. I was just thinking about what all we'll need for the babies. Congratulations, Son. I've never seen triplets."

"Sabra says she hasn't either. They are very rare, I guess. But Sabra says that Gabriela is doing great."

They were sitting together just enjoying their own thoughts when suddenly Mother yelled, "Check the bread!" The bread was a little crusty but still edible. He carried it in the house to cool just as Lucas and Amata arrived. They, too, were surprised to see him and wanted to know how Gabriela was.

"Well, she's doing good, making progress. Sabra says she may get to come home on Sunday or Monday. But I came home to tell Mother and you two some good news."

"What's that?"

"We're not having twins. We are having triplets!"

"Triplets? Three babies?" said Lucas. "Congratulations!"

"Three babies? Oh, my. No wonder she was so big so early. I've never heard of anyone carrying triplets. I thought one baby was heavy, I can't imagine carrying three around!" said Amata.

"We need to make more baby things," added Ruth.

Amata's eyes got wide, "Yes, we do. More swaddling cloths and more shawls."

"And Orly says we need to make two more pillows for Gabriela before she comes home on Sunday or Monday. Do we have the thread and wool?"

"I wanted to talk with you, Lucas, about adding some rooms to the house." The men walked off and left the women to talk. Orly showed Lucas what he had been thinking.

He stepped off an area and Lucas agreed that it would be easy to clear the bushes and get the ground ready. He didn't think he could place the foundation, though. "Do you want me to contact the stone

masons and Palti?" Orly agreed and thanked him for taking care of everything.

"Oh, I planted a couple of fruit trees the other day, one apricot and one plum. I found them in the woods behind my son's place. They may not bear fruit this year, but their roots should settle in by next year. I put them at the edge of the yard because they will be pretty when they bloom in the spring."

"Thanks, Lucas. That will help with feeding these three little ones, too."

"Yep. Today, I'm trying to get a fence built around the garden area. I've got to design something to keep the goats out. Everything I've tried, they just climb right over."

"Lucas, thanks so much for all your help. I'll see you on Friday. Wish I had time to talk, but I've got to run."

Gabriela was ready to work by the time he got back. They walked to the living room, out to the courtyard, around the courtyard, then back again. At each stop he told her about Mother, Amata, and Lucas' reaction to the news. It wouldn't be long until dinner and they were looking forward to sitting at the table with the family. It was fun to sit and listen to the normal activity that was happening all around them. Seth told them that he was headed to Jerusalem on Sunday and hoped to return early the next week. He needed to check on his shops and he was wondering if Gabriela wanted to send any message to her folks. He volunteered to check on them for her.

"That's very sweet. But I think it would be best if you don't visit. I think it would just worry them. They know that we are planning to come for Passover, and it will be a nice surprise when we arrive with three babies." Orly helped Gabriela move back into the guest room. She needed to rest awhile before she was ready to do their final set of exercises.

Thursday morning, Orly left the milk with Mother to make some cheese. After a morning of exercising with Gabriela, he left her to rest while he ran to the shop to share the news. When the guys had gathered for the noon break, Orly announced, "Gabriela is making improvements and Sabra is very pleased with her gaining strength, especially since she is carrying triplets. I thought you guys would want to know and you can tell the news. We want everyone to know so they can be praying for her and the babies' safety."

Jordan grabbed Orly in a bear hug and congratulated him. Then he whispered, "Thanks for talking to me the other night. It really helped."

"Good," replied Orly. "I'm praying for you."

"And I'm praying for you! You've got yourself a handful!"

He told Mr. Kenan that Sabra thought Gabriela might be able to move home on Sunday or Monday. "That's great news. I assume that will somewhat affect your work for a while, though."

"Yes, sir. At least until I can get help lined up. I hate to run, but Gabriela needs to be exercising and she can't without my help."

“Congratulations, Orly. We’ll be praying, and if there’s anything you two need, just tell me.”

“Thank you, sir. I hope I will need Enoch on Sunday or Monday to drive her home!”

“Just let me know when. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Chapter 16

Orly rushed back to Gabriela's room, and they started exercising while he told her about the response to the news. All afternoon they worked on sitting, standing, and walking. Once again, they enjoyed dinner at the table with Seth and Joelle and their children. They managed to fit in all five workouts. Orly kissed Gabriela goodnight and told her how proud he was of her hard work. He would see her bright and early in the morning but would need to leave early for group. She agreed and was already asleep as he went out the door.

Friday morning Orly brought her a jar of goat milk and asked if she wanted to get up herself and drink some. She grinned and accepted the challenge. It was very hard work, but she managed to get onto the cushion by herself. He rewarded her with a cup of milk and asked her how the night had gone. All day they worked on exercising and getting her ready to come home. In between exercises, they discussed the group's lesson for tonight. Both were eager to hear the reports from last week's meetings.

He arrived home in time to check and see what Lucas had gotten started with the addition. He was amazed to see that the land had been cleared and leveled and there was a load of rocks piled at the corner of the house ready for the stone mason to begin work. "They delivered the rock this morning and the stone mason said that he would start on Wednesday. I'll need you to pay me for the rock whenever you are able."

"Lucas, you are a true friend. Just tell me what I owe you and I'll pay you right now."

All four ladies were in the house talking about Gabriela and the triplets. They wanted a report on how she was doing. Ruth lit the Sabbath candles. Orly prayed a blessing and then the meal began. Everyone was talking at once and Orly had a hard time following, but he could tell that things had gone extremely well.

When the meal was over and they were seated in teams, Orly began. "I want to hear about your first group meeting and whether you have any questions before we start tonight's lesson. We'll start on this side tonight. Appius and Titus, tell us about your group."

"We actually had twelve men show up. We roasted some meat in the backyard and then went through the lesson. I think we did pretty good. They seemed interested and asked good questions, but we were able to answer them. We each shared our story, and they all said they would come back tomorrow. So, I guess we did okay."

"Yes, I would say that's a good sign that they want more."

"How about you two?"

"We had thirteen guests, so that was good. We started with a question-and-answer time, and it just seemed to naturally lead into the lesson. We didn't have any questions we couldn't answer, but for

some of them, we told them they would understand better after we had covered more information,” said Markus.

“Were they okay with that?”

“Yeah, I think so,” replied Markus.

“They all said they would be back tomorrow,” volunteered Diana.

“Good. How about you, Julius and Marcella?”

“We had five couples. It went okay. Some of the couples didn’t seem as interested as we thought they would be. We got a little distracted and I don’t think we stayed on the subject really well. We probably took too long going through the history. I think they just got tired,” reported Julius.

“That happens. Do you think they will come back?”

“I think so. I hope so. We’ve been praying for them all week.”

“It’s okay. You can’t control who will and who won’t accept Jesus as Messiah. We are only asked to share the good news and you guys are doing that. Okay, how about you two?”

Lucas reported that all five of their sons who lived in Cana and their wives attended. “And four grandchildren!” added Amata.

“Good, and how was it received?”

“Great. Our son, the one we live with, is still asking questions and, like Diana, we just keep telling him that we’ll answer his questions when we get there. I think he’s eager to learn more. I haven’t heard from the others,” said Amata.

“Those are incredibly good reports. Before we get into the lesson, do any of you have questions?”

Everyone shook their heads and seemed eager to get into the lesson. Orly began, “If you’ll recall, we quit last time with Jesus beginning His ministry. Let the Holy Spirit guide you as to the question-and-answer time, but when you are ready to start the lesson, I want you to ask them the question: ‘What was the first thing that you heard about Jesus?’ Let them tell you about their experience with Jesus. Again, just let the Holy Spirit guide you. This could be a good time to share about your first exposure to Jesus if you haven’t already shared that. If you’ll remember, Gabriela shared about her dad being healed of leprosy. It’s okay to share her story, or you can tell them about meeting Lazarus if you wish and tell them his story.

“One of the major lessons he taught them was what? Anybody?”

“It wasn’t Him doing the miracles!” said Appius.

“Exactly, and then you need to describe how He did the miracles. You need to cover the physical body, the inside self, and the inner core. Is everyone comfortable with that or do I need to go over that again?”

They all nodded that they understood.

“Then the very last week of Jesus’ life, He taught that all people have the same set up. We are born with an empty core. Is everyone comfortable talking about that concept? Jesus came to fill your empty core and mine. Then you simply share what the Holy Spirit has been teaching you.

“To sum it all up, this lesson is teaching about how Jesus did His miracles, how He was physically designed, how we’re all physically designed, and how Jesus came to fill that empty spot that is inside all of us. It will be very personal and unique to each one of you. Be sure and let the Holy Spirit guide you step by step. I think that’s it.”

“I remember the night that you shared this lesson with us. My empty spot was so big, and I thought I was the only one in the world who felt so empty on the inside. It was such good news to know that it could be filled,” shared Markus.

“Me, too. It was a special night,” said Titus.

“I will be praying for each one of you as you lead your groups. Let’s pray. Father, You know who will be ready to hear this message tomorrow and who will not. Please prepare their hearts and minds to be ready to recognize their emptiness. Bless these who are obediently sharing. In Jesus’ name.”

Everyone began to help clean up and straighten up the courtyard. Then goodbyes were said. Orly missed Gabriela so much and wanted to share this night with her, but it would have to wait for morning. Orly kissed Mother on the cheek. “Is this exciting for you?”

“It’s incredible. I’m so glad you invited me to be a part. I feel really comfortable with the other women. I wish I could lead a group, too! I feel like I’m missing out on all the fun!”

Orly gave her a big hug. “I know what you mean, but I’ve got to let the Holy Spirit do the leading, not me. I’ll be on the roof for a while if you need me. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Son. Get some rest.”

When Orly arrived at Seth’s on Sabbath morning, Gabriela was ready to get up by herself again and reported no problems through the night. She had enjoyed the Sabbath meal with Seth and Joelle’s family. As they exercised, Orly reported all the news from the group. Gabriela announced that Seth and Joelle were going to tell the group at Mr. Kenan’s that baby number five was on the way. While it was old news for Gabriela, it was surprising to Orly.

While they appreciated the time together, the day seemed to drag on forever. When they had finished their last set of exercises, Orly left to milk the goats and walk to Mr. Kenan’s. After he and Mother returned home, he moved one of the living room cushions into their room near Gabriela’s mat. He noticed that there were now four pillows on Gabriela’s mat. *Oh, I hope she’s coming home tomorrow. But Father, not my will, but Yours be done. Just give Sabra wisdom.*

On Sunday morning, Orly brought the milk to Mother, but he could hardly sit still to eat his breakfast. He forced himself to slow down so that he wouldn’t be so out of breath when he arrived. He met Seth and Enoch as they were leaving for Jerusalem. He waved and wished them a safe journey. He greeted Joelle and the children who were still sitting at the breakfast table. He remembered to congratulate Joelle. She thanked him and waved him on into Gabriela’s room. Gabriela had finished her breakfast and was as eager as he was for Sabra to arrive. Zan had her blankets changed and they couldn’t

decide whether to begin exercises, or to wait. Finally, Sabra entered and asked how the week had gone. Gabriela asked if she could show her something. "Certainly." Gabriela rolled off the mat, pulled herself up on the cushion and sat down with a proud look on her face. "All right. That's what I wanted to see. What other things have you mastered?" asked Sabra.

"Well, I've been eating dinner at the table recently. I've been walking out to the courtyard and around the courtyard in the grass."

"How far do you walk at one time?" asked Sabra.

"I can walk from here to the courtyard, but then I have to rest a few minutes before I can walk back. Or I can walk from here to the table, but then I have to sit down."

"That's great! And you can get up and down without any problems?"

"Well, it's a lot of work to get up, but I can do it. But I've only been doing it once a day."

"Orly, do you have a chamber pot chair?" asked Sabra.

"No, ma'am. Where would I get one?"

"Hiram has one at the shop. I don't want Gabriela having to go up and down all the way to the ground multiple times a day. I think the chair will really help. And I don't think you want to be changing blankets night and day. So, let's get that in place. Gabriela, there will be no working for you. You may sit and sew, stand, walk, and feed yourself, but there is to be no cooking, making bread, churning butter, milking goats, carrying water jars, or anything else that could make you feel tired. Understand?"

"Yes, ma'am. May I weave on my lap loom?"

"You'll have to be the judge of that. If it feels comfortable, I'm okay with it, but it may put the babies in an uncomfortable position — then you need to stop. And you mustn't sit for very long. You'll need to be moving or resting on your mat."

"So can she go home today?" asked Orly eagerly.

"Yes, but that's all the exercise you get today. Here's how that's going to work. You are going to walk as far as you feel comfortable. When you are ready to sit down, Orly is going to carry you for a ways. When you are rested, you can walk a little further. If Orly carries you part of the way to let you rest, I think you'll make it fine. I will check on you later today. It may be after dinner, but I will get to you."

"Oh, that sounds wonderful. But we can borrow an oxcart from Mr. Kenan," volunteered Orly.

"No, I'm afraid that might be too jarring. This will be safer for the babies. We don't want to put any pressure on them. Take your time. Enjoy your walk and I'll see you tonight. Oh, and I'll tell Hilmar to send you a chamber pot chair. It will make things a lot easier."

"Thank you, Sabra, for your wonderful care. I promise I'll be good."

"I know you will. We need to keep these little ones inside their mother for as long as possible and you've still got four months to go. At least that's the goal. Shalom, and I will see you tonight."

“Shalom.”

“Are you ready to walk to the courtyard?” asked Orly.

“Yes, I want to say goodbye to Joelle.”

Gabriela stood and walked to the courtyard and sat down beside Joelle. “I came to say goodbye. I’m going home.”

“Today?”

“Yes, in fact I’m on my way now. Joelle, how can I ever thank you enough?”

“You can thank me by letting those little ones call me Auntie. I always wanted to have nieces and nephews.”

“Of course. We’ll be praying for Seth’s safe return.”

“Is there anything I can do for you before we leave? I set the cushion back in the living room for you,” Orly said.

“No, but how are you getting home?”

“We’re walking. And I’m carrying her if she gets tired.”

“Oh my. Then get going before you are tired out,” said Joelle.

Gabriela stood by herself and walked out the courtyard gate with Orly holding onto her arm tightly. The road was slightly downhill, and Gabriela had to adjust her balance. She giggled as she remembered Amata telling her that she would be front-heavy. She never dreamed that she would ever be this big!

They walked leisurely as if just taking a stroll. But both of them wanted to run as fast as they could to get home. It wasn’t long before Orly swooped her into his arms and carried her. “I wasn’t tired,” said Gabriela.

“But I wanted to hold my wife. Whatever God has planned for us, I want it to be together.” All the time he was talking, he was walking fast but as smoothly as possible. He didn’t want to jar her. Soon they were back into their own neighborhood.

“Kind sir, would you put me down and let me walk a little more?” asked Gabriela.

“As you wish, m’lady.” Orly stood her up and held onto her as she readjusted to being on her feet. Unfortunately, everyone recognized them and stopped to chat. Orly explained that she wasn’t able to stand, but people didn’t seem to comprehend the urgency of getting her home and off her feet. Finally, Orly just lifted her in his arms and carried her the rest of the way home. “Mother, I need to get Gabriela to her room. She’s tired and Sabra wants her to rest today. You two can talk all day long but let me get her settled first.” Mother understood and stood back to watch as Orly helped Gabriela get settled on her mat with pillows.

“Mother, can you bring Gabriela some milk?”

“I’m sorry, I used all of it after breakfast to make a batch of cheese. How about if I squeeze some juice?”

“Fine,” mouthed Gabriela, too tired to speak.

“That will be fine, Mother,” repeated Orly. “Are you in any pain? Is everything okay?”

“I’m just tired. I’ll be fine. Good to be home, but I want to sleep.”

Orly tenderly held the juice to her lips and let her sip. "Oh, that's good. Thank you, Mother Ruth," said Gabriela quietly.

"You are very welcome, child. I'm so glad you are home." Mother Ruth had tears running down her cheeks. She had pictured this moment but, up to now, had not realized how big the babies had grown and how tiny and fragile Gabriela seemed.

Basha and Sarah arrived to help Ruth clean up the Sabbath dishes. Ruth shut the door to let Gabriela and Orly be alone.

A few minutes later the chamber pot chair from the Mercantile Store was delivered. Sarah was very interested in figuring out how that would work and thought it was totally cool. Basha visited Ruth while they cleaned the kitchen and Sarah stayed outside with the goats. Ruth confided to her that Gabriela looked very fragile, and she wasn't sure that Orly would be able to return to work. "She couldn't even hold her own drinking cup."

"Sarah and I could come more often to help. We really don't have anything to do right now except wait for the wedding. We'll be glad to help. Tell Orly to call us anytime. I've got to find Sarah. Shalom."

"Shalom."

"Mother do you want to visit with Gabriela? She's awake now and feeling better. I'll make her a snack."

She was greeted by Gabriela's huge smile. "Oh, it's so good to see you, Mother Ruth. I've missed you so much. How are you?"

Orly brought in a sandwich that he had put together with lots of butter and cucumbers. He had squeezed some more juice and set it beside her. Mother Ruth told them the chamber pot chair had been delivered and that Sarah was quite fascinated by it.

"I don't think I've ever seen one, so I would be fascinated, too," agreed Gabriela. "I'm so sorry I missed Basha and Sarah. I didn't sleep well last night and with the trek over here, I was just exhausted." She picked up the sandwich and began eating heartily.

Ruth was relieved that Gabriela could feed herself and handle the juice with no problems. Orly carried in the special chair and put it in the corner above his mat. It was a tight fit, but they didn't need much room. Mother Ruth visited for a while and then said that she needed to get the bread started. Orly stayed with Gabriela and lifted her when she needed to relieve herself. Orly carried the pot down to the stream to wash it out. He hated being away from Gabriela but realized that this was the new normal. *Mother will listen for her, and I will have to trust that she won't need anything while I'm out of hearing range. When will I ever be able to get back to work? Should I hire someone to care for her while I work? I'd rather be with her than allow a stranger to care for her. Father, help me to trust You and Your plan. You know my needs and hers. Please guide us and thank You for bringing Gabriela home.*

When Amata and Lucas arrived, Lucas just stuck his head in the door and said hello but wasn't comfortable in their private room. Amata grabbed her pile of woven panels and sat on the cushion and started sewing together Gabriela's heavy cloak. Orly left them alone and told

Mother to call. "I'll stay within hearing distance if you need anything." Mother was busy preparing the bread for baking.

Lucas showed Orly the garden fence that he had designed with a flat hat across the top to keep the goats from climbing over. "So far," he reported, "I haven't seen the goats on top of it and they seem to have lost their interest in trying to climb it. However, once there are vegetables growing inside, they'll try again, I'm sure! "I'll plant potatoes, onions, winter squash, and we'll try some cucumbers. Let me know if you want anything else."

"Orly," Mother called, and Orly sprinted toward the house.

"Orly, Sabra is here and wants to talk with you. Shhh! I didn't mean to scare you. Calm down and catch your breath."

Orly took a couple of deep breaths and then knocked on the door. Sabra called for him to come in. "Gabriela tells me that you mostly carried her, and she didn't do much walking at all."

"Yes, ma'am, everyone wanted to stop and talk, so I just carried her, and they cleared a path and let us get through without all the chit-chat," said Orly.

"I should have realized that everyone would be out that time of day, and they love you two. So, I've listened to Gabriela's heart, and she sounds good. The babies are doing fine. They are strong and busy."

"Oh, it feels good to be home."

"Do you feel ready to go back to the level you were at Joelle's, or do you need more rest?" asked Sabra.

"I'm ready," said Gabriela eagerly.

"Okay, let's see you get up on that cushion." Gabriela was able to pull herself up to the cushion without much stress at all. She proclaimed that her cushions weren't as tall as Joelle's. As she sat, Sabra outlined the rules for the next few days. "I'll leave it up to you to watch closely this afternoon and evening and see if you feel safe leaving her here with Ruth. I don't want her to ever be alone. She may need me at any time. What would Ruth do? Is there anyone around close?"

"She would have to go to Mrs. Veta's house next door and ask her to send a servant to fetch you or me," replied Orly.

"That's not ideal. I think you should hire a slave child that's old enough to run get help if Ruth needs it. The sooner we get you back to your mat and elevate your feet, the safer these babies will be. So, think about it. Then, Gabriela, you need to be really careful. I've already gone over the rules. It's going to be hard to not help Ruth, but you must not. Let's check your balance. Have you tried walking without Orly holding onto you?"

"No. He won't let me."

"Good for him. But let's try that right now. That would make a difference in how much help you'll need here."

"Right now?" Gabriela asked and Sabra nodded. Gabriela stood to her feet and slowly began walking toward the living room. Orly hovered close by, but Gabriela did fine. She sat on one of the

cushions there and looked very deeply satisfied to be in her own home. Mother Ruth was standing in the kitchen watching.

"I think she's good. Remember, if anything causes pain, you get back on your mat, pull out the top pillows and put them under your bottom. Head down, feet up! And call me immediately. Orly, I need to talk with you about payment for the chair. Gabriela, can you get yourself back to your mat?"

"Yes, ma'am, and thank you." They watched as she stood and walked back to her own room. She sat on her cushion for a while before returning to her mat.

Orly paid Sabra for the chair and caught up on her fees. Sabra said that she would check on Gabriela once a week from now on and she could come whenever it was best for Orly. He suggested that early mornings were best because Lucas could cover for him at work then. So, it was agreed that she would check on them first thing on Sunday mornings. "You can call for me anytime, night or day. If she has any pain or tightenings, I wouldn't wait to see if they go away. They might not. Any questions?"

"I've never had a chamber pot. Does it have to be emptied every time she uses it, or can it wait until I'm home from work?"

"Orly, it has a good lid. I think Ruth should remove the cover and replace it, not Gabriela. The lid is a little heavy. Then it can be emptied after you are home. Rinse it out and you are back in business. Please don't hesitate to ask me any questions. Anything else?"

"No, and thank you, Sabra. I don't know how we would manage without you."

"It's what I love doing. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Orly went in to find Gabriela waiting to hear what Sabra had said. He explained about her not lifting the lid for the chamber pot. She agreed that it was heavy. "Have you lifted it?"

"Yes. And I put it back. But it's a little heavy," admitted Gabriela.

"You should have called me," fussed Orly.

"I know, but I needed to try," said Gabriela. "I won't ever do it again. I promise."

"Gabriela don't forget that what you do and don't do affects the lives of these three precious babies. I know it's hard not to do things, and it's even harder to ask for help, but your job is to protect these babies. Are you hurting?"

"No. But I don't want you to not trust me or be mad at me," pouted Gabriela.

"I could never be mad at you. I just love you and want you to be safe." Orly kissed away her tears.

Gabriela enjoyed visiting with Amata and watching her weave. After they left, Orly helped Mother finish dinner. He called to Gabriela while he poured the milk. In a couple of minutes, she very proudly walked to the table and sat down. It felt so good to be home. Before they ate, Orly prayed and thanked God for this special meal together.

They discussed what the day would look like tomorrow. Orly decided that he would work a full day but would run home and check on them during the noon break. He would also let Mr. Kenan know that he would need to take off an hour every Tuesday and Friday morning so that Mother could go to the market. She felt that she could plan ahead for the other days and Basha would be there on Sundays. After dinner, Gabriela excused herself and went to her room. Orly helped Mother clear the table then she shooed him away to spend time with Gabriela. When he entered the room, he found her on her mat crying.

“What’s wrong? Are you in pain?”

“No, I’m just sad.”

“Sad? I thought you would be happy to be home.” She continued sobbing and said that she was happy, but everything felt strange. He took her in his arms and tried to understand. She explained that it was wonderful to be home. But everything felt different.

“So, you had imagined that you would come home, and everything would be just like before? Is that why you are crying?” asked Orly tenderly.

“I think so. And it’s not.”

“No, it’s not. You are a mother now and you have three little ones to protect. Mother and I will do everything we can to help you. But it’s definitely going to be different from before.”

“I know I’m being silly. Please don’t tell Mother Ruth that I was crying. I think it’s just been a really big day. And I also think tomorrow will be hard to see things that need to be done, but I can’t do them.”

“I agree. It will probably be terribly hard. If you aren’t ready for me to go back to work, just say so.”

“So, am I supposed to exercise without you tomorrow?”

“Yes, and no. Sabra says no more exercises, just life. Don’t do much more than what you’ve been doing. And don’t sit still for too long at a time. Just move around wherever and whenever you want to. But you don’t have to keep count or anything. I think you’ll probably want to follow Mother out to the oven if she’s baking. No stairs, but you can move out to the courtyard or yard or wherever you want to explore. Just relax and let Mother help you whenever you need something. And rest as much as you need to.”

“Could I fix my own sandwich?” asked Gabriela.

“What? Mother doesn’t give you enough cucumbers?” asked Orly in mock seriousness.

“I just want to do things myself.”

“I know. But it’s really not for long. Please, promise me you’ll be good. And you haven’t answered me about going back to work.”

“I know. I’ll miss you.”

“I’ll miss you, too. But I think you’ll do just fine, and I’ll see if Mr. Kenan can send someone over to stay with you and Mother.”

“No, Mother Ruth and I will be fine. I’m just being a baby. I think I’m ready to sleep now.”

“Goodnight my love.”

Orly sat in the living room. It bothered him that there wasn't a servant that Mother could send if she needed him. He would talk to Mr. Kenan about it in the morning. He slipped into his blanket and heard Gabriela's gentle breathing. *Oh, it is good to have her home.*

Chapter 17

When the sun woke Gabriela on Monday morning, she felt much stronger and ready to tackle this new day. She pulled herself up with no problem and had some prayer time. When she heard Orly preparing breakfast, she stood up and walked to the table and took a seat. Gabriela knew that Mother Ruth was just as nervous as she was about this day. She was determined to put her at ease. She assured Orly that they would be fine. He reluctantly left later than usual. As Mother Ruth began to clear the table, Gabriela said, "I'm so sorry that I'm causing you all this extra work and I have orders to not lift a finger," said Gabriela.

Mother Ruth sat down again at the table. "Young lady, I don't want to hear that from you again. I'm used to cooking for forty people or more every day with no one ever saying thank you. Now, I have a nice private room. I decide what to cook and when, and I only have to cook for three or maybe six if we count the little ones. And honestly, I think my son had a little something to do with that." Gabriela giggled. "I never had a daughter, but if I did, I would want her to be just like you. I will do anything I can to keep you and those babies safe. It's been a while since I was allowed to do anything except cook, so you will have to remind me if you need anything, or the house needs something. Cooking is easy, but it will take both of us to remind me of the other things. For example, the lamp oil is getting low. Where do you buy that?"

"Help me to remember to ask Lucas to order it from the Mercantile Store. I need to move to the living room, I've been sitting long enough on this hard bench," said Gabriela.

"I'll be in the kitchen. It will just take me a few minutes to clean up these dishes." Mother Ruth worked in the kitchen then came back to check on Gabriela. She said she was going to the cellar to squeeze the cheese and would be right back.

"Would you mind holding my hand while I walk out to the courtyard? I don't want to fall on my first morning home."

Mother Ruth helped her get safely across the threshold and then led her to a bench. "Are you comfortable here while I go to the cellar?"

"Yes, I'll be fine. Don't rush and be careful on those stairs."

"Yes, Mother," said Mother Ruth and they both giggled. Yes, they could work together as a team, and it was going to be just fine. When Mother Ruth returned, Gabriela said that she was going to lie down for a while and rest. She asked Mother Ruth to just watch and make sure she made it safely. She walked all the way to her room without stopping for a rest.

"Mother Ruth, I need help with the chamber pot. The lid is too heavy for me to lift. Orly will take care of emptying it when he gets home, but I just need someone to remove the lid and put it back each time."

“No problem.” Mother Ruth lifted it with ease and told Gabriela to call her when she was finished.

“I don’t remember having this many pillows before. Did you and Amata make these for me?”

“Yes, we did. Now you get a rest and when you wake up, I want to show you all the new thread and yarn that Amata and I picked out for the swaddling cloths and baby shawls. And Amata finished Orly’s cloak. It’s beautiful.”

“That’s great,” Gabriela said sleepily.

Ruth went into the living room and sat down to pray. *Father, thank you that my morning chores are done and so far, everything has gone smoothly. Thank You for helping me to feel needed. In Jesus’ name.*

Orly opened the front door and found Mother dozing on her cushion. He tried to sneak into Gabriela’s room, but Mother roused and called to him. “She was up almost all morning, then we both needed a rest.”

He entered their room and Gabriela opened her eyes.

“Oh, my, you are home early!”

“No, it’s the noon break, and I’ve got to get right back. How’s it going?”

“Great. Your mother is wonderful, and I’m so glad she’s here.”

“Is there anything that I need to do while I’m here?”

“Check with Mother Ruth, but I don’t think so.”

“Let’s see you get up before I leave, okay?” encouraged Orly.

“Oh, I’ll get up. I’m starving!” Gabriela giggled as she began to pull herself off the mat. “See, I’m fine! Now back to work with you and I’ll see you tonight.” He ran back to the shop.

Everyone wanted a report and he let them know that Gabriela and Mother were doing fine. He called time and everyone headed back to work. Mr. Kenan arrived to supervise the apprentices and was pleasantly surprised to see Orly back at work. “Sir, I will need special hours for the next four months. Gabriela must not be left alone, so I need to come in late some mornings so that Mother can go to the market. Basha comes on Sunday mornings, so she can watch Gabriela while she cleans.”

“That’s fine, Orly, but why don’t you see if Basha would come over and let you work. I’m sure she would enjoy visiting with Gabriela.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll speak with her tonight and see if that would work for her. I’ll get back to work now.”



When Lucas and Amata arrived, they were pleased that Gabriela was up and moving around on her own. Gabriela was sitting on a courtyard bench and Amata showed Gabriela the cloak that she was working on for her. She was sewing panels of cloth together and Gabriela asked Amata to bring her the lap loom and let her work on

the baby shawl that she had started earlier. Amata brought Gabriela everything she needed, and Gabriela started to weave, but it made her feel tired, and she needed to rest. She moved into her room and crawled onto her mat. She slept until Orly woke her for dinner. How good it was to be at home. During dinner they discussed asking Basha and Sarah to visit her on Tuesday and Friday mornings so that Mother could go to the market instead of him taking off work. Everyone agreed and Orly promised to be right back.

Orly sprinted to Mr. Kenan's house and found everyone still sitting around the dinner table. He assured them that Gabriela was doing well. He asked Basha if he could hire her to come and watch Gabriela on Tuesday and Friday mornings for about an hour so that Mother could go to the market, since Gabriela could not be left alone.

"Absolutely not!" said Basha. "But we'll be over there tomorrow morning and any other morning that Ruth and Gabriela need us. Orly, that's how the followers of Jesus work. We just take care of each other. Okay?"

"I'm learning. Thanks. I've got to get back to Gabriela."

Orly ran most of the way back and then slowed his pace and took a few minutes to just breathe. *Father, You are so good to provide help for me and wise counselors. Help me to trust You for everything.*

On Tuesday, Basha and Sarah came and visited with Gabriela while Ruth went to the market. Gabriela encouraged Sarah to work on her pillow and showed Basha how to hold the cloth closed so that Sarah could stitch it. Sarah expertly made the final stitches and declared it done. "Bring it here, Sarah, and let me check your work," said Gabriela. "You have done an outstanding job. I'm very proud of your stitching."

When Mother Ruth returned from the market, Basha helped her take some of the vegetables and fruits down to the cellar and asked if there was anything else she could do to help. When Ruth couldn't think of anything, Basha said she would return on Thursday morning. Ruth thanked her, and Basha and Sarah said their goodbyes. Sarah was skipping happily ahead of her mother, clutching her special pillow.

On Wednesday morning, just after Orly left for work, there was a knock on the door as the stone mason crew arrived to work. Mother Ruth and Gabriela listened as the men worked at the back of the house all day. She prepared snacks for Gabriela and helped her with personal needs. It was too noisy in the house, but the presence of the men made them feel uncomfortable going outside. The hammering of stone against stone was most unpleasant. When Amata and Lucas arrived, he apologized for the noise and explained that Orly was adding two new rooms to the house. Amata shook her head. "Men never think about the terrible noise or mess. But I don't know how else you'll get more room if they don't lay the foundation."

Gabriela knew she needed to lie down, but it was too noisy in her room. Now that Lucas was around, they felt safe in the courtyard. Amata reported that it was quieter. Mother Ruth and Amata carried out a couple of pillows and let her lie down on one of the benches. They

pushed two benches together and with the pillows managed to help her find a comfortable position. She was asleep within minutes.

“Poor thing. I just hope she didn’t overdo it.”

“Well, she’s sleeping now and doesn’t seem to be in any distress. Let’s just trust that she will rest up and feel better tomorrow.”

Amata sat in the courtyard and started weaving swaddling cloths. The stone masons finished, and Lucas and Amata left. Joelle sent a servant over with the goat liver dish. He explained that Mrs. Joelle couldn’t leave the children but wanted her to have the goat liver. Ruth thanked him and started preparing dinner for herself and Orly.

Orly left Gabriela asleep on the benches and checked on Mother. “Mother, Lucas met me and told me that you two have had a really hard day. Lucas told me last week they were coming, but I forgot. How did Gabriela handle it?”

“She couldn’t lie down and rest because it was too noisy in the house. We didn’t go outside until Lucas arrived because there were several men working.”

“Why didn’t you come get me?” implored Orly. “You know where the Metal Shop is, don’t you?”

“I couldn’t leave Gabriela here alone,” said Mother quietly, “and it wasn’t an emergency. She’s doing fine, just really tired. I think we should let her sleep until we get dinner ready. I’m sorry, but with all the banging, I just couldn’t get anything done. Help me get some dinner together. Joelle sent Gabriela’s goat liver.”

“Of course.” Orly quickly prepared a skillet of vegetables and took them out to fry. *How could I be so careless? I should have been here to make her feel protected. I should have at least warned them. I could have taken them to Mr. Kenan’s for the day. Father, what should I do? I can’t be in two places at once. How do I take good care of Gabriela? How do I care for Mother? I’m beginning to hire more people than I can afford. Maybe I should just stay home. Give me wisdom. Help!*

He finished the vegetables and took them into the house and then returned to the courtyard to wake Gabriela. *She looks so beautiful and peaceful. It’s a shame to wake her up. But she needs to eat.* As he stood there, Gabriela’s eyes fluttered open. Orly hugged her and apologized for her terrible day. But she gave him a radiant smile and agreed that they had had a rough day. She was sure it was not what Sabra had in mind, but they had survived, and Lucas had said that they were done. “I smell food. Is dinner ready?”

“Yes, it is. Do you need help?” asked Orly.

“I might. They pushed these two benches together so I wouldn’t roll off. Can you pull that one away so that I can sit up?”

He helped her get to her feet and they walked into the house together. Mother Ruth was just pouring the milk and they asked Orly what he was building. He apologized again and explained, “I asked Palti to add on two rooms. I don’t know how you’ll want to use them, but until the babies get older, they could be a guest room and a sewing room. But I’ve hit a major snag. Palti is booked solid for the next three months. So, the plan is on hold for now. I guess that’s why I

totally forgot about the stone masons. At least we've got a foundation laid."

Mother Ruth went straight to her room after dinner saying that she had a headache. Gabriela and Orly sat in the living room and talked. A knock on the door startled them. James and John asked if they could possibly use their camping area. "Come in and visit," insisted Orly.

"No, not tonight. We've been walking since before sunrise to try to make it here tonight."

"Is everything okay?" asked Orly, knowing that they had not planned to return home this way.

"Yes, everything is fine. Could we borrow a lantern?"

"Sure. And please join us for breakfast at sunrise," invited Orly.

"Certainly, and we'll explain the reason for our visit. But I assure you it's good news."

"Do you need anything else? Are you hungry?" Orly quickly packed them a bag of bread and goat cheese then ran down to the cellar to get them a lantern. Orly walked them to the trail and then bid them goodnight. Gabriela was getting onto her mat when Orly returned.

"Who was that?" asked Gabriela.

"James and John. They asked to spend the night but were being very secretive. They said it was good news, and they would tell us tomorrow at breakfast. They looked exhausted and so do you. Let's get a good night's rest. Tomorrow will be a busy day."

Orly kissed her goodnight and then went to the roof to pray for a while before slipping onto his mat.

Early on Thursday morning, Orly got up and went to the barn to milk the goats. He hurried back to ask Mother to prepare for guests and found that James and John were already there. Orly poured the goat milk into cups, and they all sat down to breakfast. "What an honor to have you come, but you have us all curious."

"We were just so tired last night and felt it was too late," said James. "We couldn't return to Jerusalem without telling you that all along the coast of the Great Sea, God is calling men and women to preach to the Gentiles. Even Jonathan's group is mostly Gentiles."

"Each one has a unique story and we felt led to come and affirm that indeed this is something that God is doing. I know you have to get to work, but I was wondering if we could spend the day just praying and resting down by the stream, and then we would love to meet with you this evening to share some of the different things we learned. We think it would be beneficial to you to hear how some of the groups operate."

"That's incredible! Yes, we'd love to hear and yes, I've got to get to work." He quickly kissed Gabriela goodbye and rushed out the door.

James and John wanted to hear what was going on with Gabriela and she giggled. "Not much. Just triplets!"

"Triplets! Wow! Are you two trying to grow your own group?"

“I guess so. It’s been a little rough. I collapsed and was on complete rest over at Seth and Joelle’s for almost a month. I’ve only been home four days, but I’m not allowed to lift a finger. Mother Ruth, tell them your good news while I move back to my room. I’ve been sitting for a little too long.”

“Are you okay?” asked Mother Ruth anxiously.

“Yes, I’m fine, I just need to rest,” said Gabriela.

Ruth told them that she was a free woman and was now living with Orly and Gabriela as a mother and soon to be very, very, busy grandmother. They were surprised that such a bond could be broken but agreed that it was great news. “We saw a judge in Capernaum and visited with your parents and with Yanis and Jenay. They all seemed to be doing very well.”

James and John helped Ruth clear the table and asked if there was anything else she needed. “No, unless you guys would like to catch me some fish for dinner. But feel free to say no, I have plenty of other things that I can fix.”

“We don’t want you to go to any trouble. It looks like you’ve got your hands full with taking care of Gabriela. But we are always available to go fishing. When do you need the fish?”

“About the tenth hour. I’ll make fish-sauce and bake them for your dinner. Do you need the fishing line and net?”

“We have fishing line, but a net would be nice. We’ll see you this afternoon and thank you for breakfast. It was nice to be able to sit still and not eat as we walked.”



When Basha arrived, Ruth went to the market to get the makings for her fish sauce. She hurried home to start it. “I wish I could help, but I think I will take a lot of naps today. I’m still tired from yesterday,” said Gabriela.

When Lucas and Amata arrived, Gabriela warned him that James and John were visiting again and were down at the stream catching fish for their dinner. Amata was eager to get started on Ruth’s heavy cloak. She asked Ruth how she would like her cloak woven. “I’ve always wanted a striped one. Would that be too much work?”

Gabriela was happy that Mother Ruth was learning to make choices and express her wishes. She knew that Amata was being a good influence on her. “It will be fun, but you need to choose which way the stripes will go.” When Mother Ruth needed to stir the fish sauce, she asked Gabriela if she wanted to walk with her. Gabriela agreed and decided to sit in the grass for a while. It was so pleasant to be outside on such a beautiful day.

James and John brought up the perfectly cleaned fish. Ruth quickly covered the fish with sauce and put it in the oven. The men sat on the grass and talked with Gabriela. They were both dads and understood how dangerous carrying a child could be. They were both concerned about her carrying triplets and promised to pray for her.

She reminded them not to tell anyone back in Jerusalem, since she didn't want her parents to worry. Then they headed back toward the stream and promised to join them for dinner.

Gabriela decided to return to the house, but suddenly realized that she had no way to get up. After a couple of attempts, she decided to just stretch out on the grass and take a nap. When Mother Ruth came out to check on her, Gabriela explained her dilemma. They both began to laugh. Then Ruth went to find Lucas.

In a few minutes Lucas arrived looking concerned. Gabriela looked up at him and tried to keep from laughing. He was tall looming over her, and she felt like a tiny child asking for abba's help. "Lucas, can you please lift me up? I'm stuck. I'm a beetle bug stuck on my back."

"Do you want me to roll you over or lift you up into a standing position? I don't want to do anything to hurt you."

"I can get on my knees and then you just take my hands and let me pull myself up. Will that work?" asked Gabriela.

"We can try it." So, Gabriela got herself up to her knees and then Lucas offered her his hands. She pulled herself up and they all had a good laugh. Mother Ruth held her hand as she walked back to the house.

"Let's not try that when we are alone!" said Mother Ruth.

After Lucas and Amata left, Orly arrived home just as James and John joined them. Orly helped Mother get everything out to the courtyard table where they had more room to spread out. Gabriela told about her little adventure of getting stuck in the grass and everyone laughed. But Orly wondered again if he shouldn't be looking into hiring someone to come and get him if necessary. He couldn't believe that he kept forgetting to talk with Mr. Kenan about it. They enjoyed the wonderful meal that Ruth had prepared and then continued to sit around the table to talk. James shared, "My son, Jonathan, is leading a group in Antioch that is made up primarily of Grecian Christians, some Roman, some Jewish, and some Phoenician. They are not requiring anyone to follow the Jewish Law except to not eat meat offered to idols. Because they are not accepted in the local synagogues, they are meeting in homes during the week and have secured an amphitheater for worship on Sunday mornings and a fellowship meal on Tuesday nights, weather permitting."

"How many people are in his group and what is he doing for leadership?" asked Orly.

"There's probably fifty of them, and Jonathan and his wife are leading all the groups. One is all ladies, and one is all men, so they split up on those nights. It's exhausting work, but they are growing."

"That's amazing. Is the synagogue opposing them?"

"Not really. It's not a strong Jewish area anyway, and while some of the Jews have left the synagogue, I don't think the priest there feels threatened. It's just another new 'religion,' and Greeks love their religions," said John.

"Everyone calls them the Christians," said James.

"I like that. But I like the New Way, too. That's what we are thinking of calling our Gentile group. But we need a name for your uncle's group instead of calling it Mr. Kenan's group!" said Gabriela.

Mother Ruth got up and began clearing the table and the men all jumped up to help. Gabriela walked around for a while. Ruth cleaned the kitchen and the men settled in the living room. Gabriela asked Orly to move her mat and pillows to the living room so that she could listen. It made the room a little crowded, but she didn't want to miss anything.

As Gabriela got settled and the men were seated, John began to tell them about a group in Phoenicia they had visited. "A home group from Jerusalem has moved there to teach the Jews in the area and found that there was no synagogue in town. They felt led to open up the meetings to everyone. It's primarily Phoenician with only a few of Jewish lineage. So, they, too, have dropped the kosher cooking and just meet on the beach every Sunday morning for worship, and in homes during the week. There are six leaders. They are all Jewish followers who moved there from Jerusalem. It's also about fifty people total," reported James.

"They are talking about building a gathering place and opening it to all. They may use the building as a school, since one of the leaders was trained as a scribe," added John.

"We found out that Peter had been preaching in Antioch just two weeks before we arrived. So, we decided that it was more important that we come back and encourage you. How is your group doing?" asked James. "You are meeting with eight; is that right?"

"Well, technically, that's changed a bit since we talked with you. There's forty-five and a leadership team of eight," said Orly.

"Tell them what you are doing," urged Gabriela, obviously proud of her husband.

"Okay, so the first eight that I was teaching when I talked with you all became followers of Jesus and were baptized. I visited with Yanis sometime in there, and we talked about starting a training class to grow more leaders. I talked with these eight and they agreed to form four teams and start their own groups."

"But they are babies! They couldn't possibly know enough to lead a group of their own," protested John.

"You don't want them to be teaching their groups about Roman gods. That could lead to a real mess," said James, shaking his head in dismay.

"I'd really like for you two to attend our group tomorrow night. It would be an honor and I would like to hear what you think after you meet them and see what I'm doing. I have condensed what I consider to be the essentials into five basic lessons. Then Gabriela and I are simply helping the teams to learn those lessons and pass them on to their groups. We can't continue to hold onto the leadership. Those of you who spent three years walking and talking with Jesus are going to die off, no disrespect intended, but we need to train leadership. Remember that I only met Jesus once. All I know is what Kobe and Jordan have taught me plus the leading of the Holy Spirit. Please, visit

the group tomorrow night. Mr. Kenan's group will provide all of us with a kosher meal. We'll sit here in the courtyard, and that's all I ask. Just listen and meet me afterward. If you say that I should quit, I'll be obedient, because I want to submit to your authority and your experience, but I strongly feel that I'm hearing the Holy Spirit leading me," said Orly firmly.

"Orly, we will never tell you to quit. We have seen what God is accomplishing through you. But we might be able to give you some warnings and help you, if you will let us," said James gently.

"We are just as new to this as you are. We are not the experts. We'll look forward to attending the group tomorrow night if you are sure we won't disrupt anything," said John.

"No, they are becoming a very mature group — much faster than the synagogue because they are being forced to answer questions. I'm sorry for getting defensive. I just see it as working well and I'm excited about what God is up to," said Orly.

"I need to get to sleep. I'm exhausted. But Orly, I need help," said Gabriela. Orly lifted her to her feet and asked if she was okay. "I'm fine, it's just getting late. I'm getting chilled and you need to put my mat back." James and John quickly said goodnight. Orly reminded them that breakfast would be at sunrise, and they promised to be there.

The next morning, James and John lingered at the breakfast table while Ruth cleaned up the dishes. "We're looking forward to group tonight. I think we will visit with Ruler Jedidiah this morning and see how he's doing."

"He'll be teaching school until noon, but will probably be available after that," volunteered Gabriela. "Also, Orly will take off at the eleventh hour to help get set up. The group won't be here until a few minutes before Sabbath."

"We'll definitely be back before then. I think we'll just enjoy some prayer time and rest this morning. Is there any way we can help you ladies this morning?"

"Not that I know of. Basha and Sarah will be here shortly so Mother Ruth can go to the market. I can't be left alone," said Gabriela.

"Then we'll disappear and see you this evening," said John.

When Basha and Sarah arrived, Mother Ruth went to the market. Sarah happily told Gabriela about visiting two friends yesterday. "Will I be able to play with your babies?"

"Well, little babies aren't very much fun to play with until they are older and start to smile and coo and laugh. Basha, do you mind if I let her feel the babies kick?"

"I don't mind, if you don't."

"Sarah, come here and sit beside me on the cushion. Okay, put your hand right here and leave it there for just a few minutes. What does that feel like?"

Sarah's eyes got wide, and she said, "The babies are playing already. They are kicking each other and fighting over something."

“Yep, they are fighting for more room. They are packed in there pretty close, but hopefully, they will be best friends.”

As Basha and Sarah were saying their goodbyes, Mother Ruth asked, “Basha, we usually have eleven for the Gentile dinner, but could you tell Benjamin that we are expecting thirteen for dinner tonight? I doubt he has made the bread yet, and maybe he could send just a little extra.”

“No problem. I’ll let him know. Should we give Joelle the same message? We are headed over there to visit her and the children.”

“Yes, please. Shalom, and thank you for coming.”

“No problem. Shalom.”

Mid-afternoon, when Amata and Lucas arrived, Gabriela told them, “Last night I used my mat in the living room so that I could visit, but I’m afraid the stone will be hard and uncomfortable out here. I really want to attend group, but I don’t know how.”

“I know!” said Amata. “We could bring out your mat, Orly’s mat, and maybe Ruth’s mat and stack them up so that you could get up and down easier and the stone shouldn’t feel so hard or cold.”

Gabriela agreed and added that there was an extra mat in the cellar. Lucas assured the ladies he would take care of the mats and make sure Gabriela had a comfortable place to rest during the group.

Chapter 18

James and John arrived just before Orly and offered to help. Enoch brought the bread from Mr. Kenan's, and the main dish arrived from Seth's. Everyone worked together to get the benches around the two tables, Gabriela's mats stacked, and all the food trays on the side shelves. Gabriela decided to try out the stack of mats since she was getting tired of sitting. She could see and hear everything while resting with her pillows and blankets.

The ladies had three weeks of talking to catch up on! The men arrived a few minutes before sunset and were introduced to James and John. Mother Ruth lit the Sabbath candles and Orly prayed for the group. Mother brought Gabriela a plate. She could feel the excitement and feeling of urgency as they prepared for the discussion time. The ladies helped Ruth clear the tables while the men set up the benches in a larger than usual circle and Orly again asked that they sit in teams.

"Please welcome James and John. They are apostles, appointed by Jesus to carry on His work. They are excited to hear about what you are doing in leading your home groups here in Cana. Welcome to our leadership team meeting and feel free to ask questions at any time. Let me do a quick review for your sake. What did we cover the first week? Anybody can answer."

"We covered Jewish history," said Appius.

"Yeah, about 2000 years of it!" added Marcella.

"But Orly made it pretty easy for us to summarize. For those of us who have lived and worked with Jews all our lives, it really helped to understand the background," added Lucas.

"How did your groups respond to that? Were they as eager to hear Jewish history as you were?" asked John.

"Oh, yes. It's pretty confusing to see some Jews living with very heavy rules and laws. They just seem weighed down with them. Then after our boss and co-workers met Jesus, we saw a tremendous change in their lives. They were totally different. Working with Mr. Kenan and all the guys at the Metal Shop made us want to know what made them so different," said Markus.

"When we shared the history with our group, they seemed to appreciate finally understanding," said Titus.

"Okay, let's hear your reports and any questions that may have come up," said Orly. "Lucas, why don't you and Amata start off and tell us how your group went last week."

"First of all, our group is made up of five of our sons, their wives, and four grown grandchildren. We started off by asking them what they had seen or heard about Jesus. They really hadn't heard much, so we had to tell them some of the things we had seen, and we told them about meeting Gabriela's dad and Lazarus. We told them about some of the miracles that you told us about, and then we went into

how Jesus was designed with the Holy Spirit inside of Him. They were pretty fascinated with that. Then I told them that during the last week of Jesus' life, he told you guys," pointing to James and John, "that we were all designed the same way."

"But instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit, our center core was empty and dead," said Amata.

"I could see on their faces that they were really interested. I shared with them how I felt that emptiness and told them that everyone needed a Messiah to make that empty core come alive," said Lucas quietly. "It was really hard to send them home because I remember how very, very empty I felt after Orly told us about why we felt empty all the time. But that's what I felt the Holy Spirit wanted me to do. So, I sent them home to think about it."

"Good job. It's hard to be obedient and it's hard to trust, but we must do both. Let's move on. How about you, Julius and Marcella?"

"We have five couples. They all had things to share about what they had heard and seen about Jesus. One couple had even heard Him teach in Capernaum and saw Him do some miracles. That made it easy to move into how Jesus was designed with His core. Then we shared about how everyone was empty, and everyone agreed that they knew what we were talking about," said Julius.

"So last week you reported feeling a little scattered and got off topic. Did this week go better?" asked Orly.

"Definitely. I think we were just so nervous the first time and it was a lot to cover. We forgot to listen and let the Holy Spirit guide us. This week, I felt much more relaxed," reported Julius.

"Good. Markus and Diana, give us your report."

"We had the same thirteen as last week and we covered the same thing the other groups did, but I had a strange thing happen at the well on Monday morning. Two ladies came and asked me if they could join the group to learn about Jesus. They said that their friends had been telling them about the class and they wanted to join. I told them that we would start a new class soon and we would make sure they were invited. They were really disappointed to have to wait, but they finally agreed," said Diana.

"Do you think we should just start another class now?" asked Markus.

"I know that feels tempting, and I haven't prayed about it, but I would say no. Let them wait for the next class. I want you to concentrate on really preparing your group for leadership. I'm afraid if you are trying to teach too many, you'll miss things. But if the Holy Spirit is telling you to start a second group immediately, I'm not going to say don't. Have you prayed about it?" asked Orly.

"Yes, but we're not getting any answers," said Markus.

"Sometimes, if we don't get answers when we want them, we jump ahead of God and find ourselves in messes. I suggest you wait until you are absolutely sure that He is leading you in a particular way. Does that make sense?" Orly asked and they nodded. "Okay, Titus and Appius, what's your report?"

“We have an all-men’s group,” said Titus.

“An all-single-men’s group,” added Appius.

“Yes, and all twelve showed up. Most of them had heard about or seen some of Jesus’ miracles. When we shared about the empty core, man, did we get bombarded with emptiness. They were eager to talk openly about how empty they felt. We assured them that Jesus is the answer. I know that’s getting a little ahead, but they needed some hope.”

“Okay. Those were great reports. So, let’s move on to questions. Anyone?” asked Orly.

Everyone shook their heads and Orly looked at James and John. They indicated that they had none either.

“So, let’s talk about what happens tomorrow. In this group, this was the night you bombarded me with questions, so I want you to be prepared. Remember, don’t answer a question if you are not sure of the answer. There are some basic questions that I want to make sure you remember and can cover. The first one was the story of Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman about having her empty spot filled. Lucas, I think we’re back to you. Refresh our minds about that story and why we would tell it,” said Orly.

“Okay. You said that Jesus was talking to a Samaritan woman and when she asked about getting living water or making her empty core be alive, Jesus answered that all she needed to do was ask,” said Lucas.

“Good.”

“Whew! I didn’t think I remembered. But I did!” said Lucas.

“Okay, what did Jesus tell Nicodemus, the Jewish scholar?”

Amata answered, “He explained that he needed his empty core to become alive or to have a new birth before it would be filled.”

“Very good. You guys remember a lot more than I expected,” encouraged Orly. “So, what do these two stories tell us about getting the empty core filled?”

“Jesus taught that when we ask Him to be our Messiah, He will make our empty core become alive and fill it with the Holy Spirit,” said Julius.

“Now why do we need a Messiah to do this?” probed Orly.

“Because God is holy and we’re not. He can’t tolerate sin. He would destroy us because He hates sin. But Jehovah God is different from what we’ve been taught about our Roman gods. He promised to provide a Messiah to pay for our sins so that we could be in a right relationship with Him. Right?” asked Marcella.

“Exactly. But what was required to be in a right relationship with God?” asked Orly.

Markus replied, “Jesus proved that He was the Messiah by His miracles, but He paid for our right relationship with God by dying for our sins.”

“Good. God had declared throughout Jewish Scripture that the only payment for sin was a blood sacrifice. If we have to pay for our own sins, we are doomed. But if we ask Jesus to pay for us, then we

can be in a right relationship with God,” explained Orly. “Do you have any questions about this part?”

Again, everyone agreed that they were comfortable with the concept and felt that they could teach it. “Good work! Let’s stretch our legs and then we’ll finish up.” Gabriela walked around a bit before getting back on the mats. Some got more food and refilled their cups. But everyone settled quickly and seemed eager to continue.

“Who wants to tell me what Jesus did to pay for your sins and mine?”

“I will,” said Appius. “He told His disciples ahead of time that He was going to be sacrificed and He described it to them in detail. He was scourged and then crucified, He died, and was buried in a rock tomb. Three days later, on a Sunday morning, He came alive again. A lot of people saw Him alive, and He stayed on earth for forty days before going back to Heaven. Now, that’s very summarized, but I didn’t think you wanted all the details. If you do, I can do that.”

“Appius, you did a great job summarizing it. One thing I would caution you about and James or John can confirm it, but I believe that for those forty days, Jesus didn’t stay in any one place. He sorta came and went. He would meet with the disciples and then disappear again. He had a supernatural body that could go through locked doors and walls, but he could also eat and talk and was very much alive and real,” said Orly.

“That’s correct. We had several meals with him, and he was definitely alive,” said John.

“He appeared to over a hundred different followers during those forty days,” said James.

“So, who wants to tell me another benefit of accepting Jesus as your Messiah? Diana, why don’t you take that one?”

“Okay, well, He pays for your sins; He fills your empty core and makes it come alive; He sends His Holy Spirit to dwell inside of you; but then He promises that you’ll live with Him in Heaven for ever and ever.”

“Great job!” said Orly. “And isn’t it sweet?”

“And we don’t have to become Jewish. When we ask Jesus to be our Messiah, we become Jesus’ followers, not Jews,” said Titus.

“But you need to remind them that becoming a Jesus follower may put them in very real danger. They may suffer or even die because the Jewish leaders don’t agree with Jesus. I don’t know what the Romans think. Are any of you experiencing problems because of becoming Jesus’ followers?”

“I haven’t experienced anything so far, but next week is a big festival where we go to the temples each night and worship our gods. When we don’t participate, there may be some questions — but I don’t expect there will be any real problems,” said Markus.

“I know that tonight has been just a jumble of different thoughts. You will have to let the Holy Spirit guide you in what to present and when. Let them know that they can have their empty spot filled by simply asking, but next week we’ll cover more questions. It’s really late

but I wanted to give James and John a chance to comment and pray for us.”

James said, “I feel it’s such an honor and privilege to be with you tonight. I think you have an incredible teacher in Orly, and with the Holy Spirit guiding you, only God knows where this is going to lead or what it will become. I am amazed to hear that you are so eager to learn about Jesus and to share it with your friends. That encourages me. Tonight has been truly special. Thank you for letting us take part.”

John added, “I can’t wait to hear how God uses you to impact the whole world. You are starting out as a small group of eight, but as you multiply, the good news will spread. Jesus wanted it to be spread to the whole world. This is just the beginning. Let us pray. Father, only You know Your plans for this group. Bless them with courage and wisdom to lead their groups tomorrow. Let this work multiply to the ends of the earth. In Jesus’ name.”

No one wanted to leave. There was sweet fellowship until near midnight. Gabriela fell asleep on her mats while everyone else was still talking. Ruth finally took her blanket and went to sleep on the floor of her room without her mat. It had been a busy day. When the group finally called it a night, Lucas offered to stay and help clean up. He and Amata cleared the serving dishes. Orly woke Gabriela and she walked around while the men put the mats back where they belonged. They kept Mother Ruth’s mat and the extra one in the living room because it was the Sabbath. Once the courtyard was cleared, James and John went to their camping area and Lucas and Amata headed home. Orly and Gabriela said goodnight and fell asleep quickly. But James and John could not sleep. They lay in their blankets and discussed all that they had heard. They were amazed that God was working among the Gentiles. They had seen and heard it with their own eyes and ears. This wasn’t Jewish followers leading Gentiles, this was a group of Gentiles who were taking the leadership role and leading other Gentiles. That was what made it so unique and so exciting. James kept repeating: “They aren’t becoming Jews; they are becoming Jesus’ followers. That’s the key.” They kept reviewing what Jesus taught and agreed that he never mentioned becoming a Jew. He honored the fact that He was a Jew, but never said it was a prerequisite for becoming a follower. This was an exciting new understanding. They agreed that their trip here was worth it and they realized why God had led them here — not to encourage Orly, but so that Orly could encourage them. They discussed whether they should travel back to Antioch and share this leadership model with Jonathan. They would need to pray about it. They only got a few hours of sleep before the sun was in their eyes and they raced to the house to join the family for breakfast.

During breakfast, Orly asked if James and John wanted to attend synagogue with Mother. He and Gabriela would spend their Sabbath at home since she would be unable to attend. They asked who would be in charge at Mr. Kenan’s group. Mother Ruth said that she thought Joshua was teaching.

“I think we would like to visit with you and Gabriela for a while this morning. We heard Jordan teach last time and visited with Ruler Jedidiah on Friday. We’ll go to Uncle Kenan’s to visit this afternoon.”

“That sounds good to me. I need to walk Mother to the synagogue if you don’t mind staying here with Gabriela. She mustn’t be left alone.”

“That will be our privilege. I wish I could see Jenay and see how she is doing.”

“Last I heard from Basha she was doing great, beginning to show, but nowhere as big as I am.”

“Good!” said James. “I don’t think she and Yanis would have room for more than one.”

“Oh, there’s always room for one more!” countered Gabriela.

Mother and Orly started their walk to the synagogue and Mother soon found friends and sent him home. As he walked home, he thought: *I wonder if they are going to change everything. Father, help me to not become defensive. You trained Your apostles to guide us. Help me, Father. Help me to listen and learn.*

James and John were still visiting with Gabriela at the table and were discussing Basha’s espousal to Matthew. Orly asked Gabriela where she wanted to move. She suggested a cushion in the living room.

“I am so impressed with your leadership team. I think they know more than most of the followers of Jesus in the Jerusalem home groups that have been meeting for four years now. How did you decide what to teach?”

“You remember that I had taught at the synagogue first. But that was totally different. Everyone there knew the Jewish history and had heard the Scripture and knew the stories, so they had a point of reference.”

“Orly never attended Jewish school or even synagogue until he was thirteen. So his knowledge of Scripture is limited. I think that is actually an advantage in trying to teach the Romans, but I’ll let him tell you,” interjected Gabriela.

“Well, as I told you before, Lucas practically twisted my arm and forced me to set up a class to teach this group about Jesus. Gabriela and I began praying about where to start and we just felt that we would simply answer questions. So, essentially the five lessons are how the Holy Spirit led us to answer their questions. You heard lesson number three last night. Then we’ll cover a hodgepodge of questions on lesson four – like the Sabbath, special celebrations, worship, and prayer. Then the final lesson covers the characteristics of Jehovah God and that He is One God, not three. Jordan helped us put that one together,” said Orly.

“I felt that the group was comfortable with what you shared last night. They seem to have a really good grasp on the basic concepts, and I think you just have to trust the Holy Spirit to guide them as their own groups ask questions. And like you told us the other day, there’s

nothing that grows a follower faster than knowing that he's got to rely on the Spirit to answer questions," said John.

"Just remember they don't have to know everything about Jesus or God in order to become followers," reminded James.

"I know, but I don't want them just adding Jesus to their collection of other gods. There are essential things they need to know."

"Agreed," said John.

Orly told them that he and Yanis had talked about wishing someone would write down an account of their time with Jesus. "It would really help the rest of us. Once I get these basic lessons taught and they become followers, then I need to start teaching them what Jesus taught and I know very, very little."

"That might be a worthy project to tackle. We'll think about it," said James.

"So, what suggestions do you have for me?" asked Orly.

"Keep up the good work!" said James.

"I think we told you before that we are in awe of what's happening here. To get to see it in person was incredible. I mean, I'm sorry, but I just didn't think Gentiles would be able to understand or be interested. I'm blown away at their knowledge and understanding. Now, what is the next step?" asked John.

"Well, I don't know, because God hasn't shown me specifically. But the plan in my head is that these eight will train those in their group that are willing to lead their own groups and it will just keep multiplying while Gabriela and I just keep meeting with our initial eight and growing and encouraging them. I don't expect that every single person will decide to become a follower, but from the sound of things, it is possible. That means we could see approximately ten or fifteen new groups out of this."

"That is incredible. We talked last night about needing to go back to Antioch to tell Jonathan about this. But we know our wives are getting anxious, so we'll return to Jerusalem for now."

Gabriela apologized but said that it was time for her to take a nap. The late night was catching up with her. The men excused her, and Orly checked to make sure everything was okay. She gave him a huge smile and said, "See, I told you it would be okay."

"You get some rest and I'll bring you a snack in a little bit," whispered Orly.

The men continued to visit and Orly shared, "I don't know whether I should say this or not, but you are the men who I look up to and want to emulate. You have actually walked and talked with Jesus, and I just want to soak up everything that you have to teach me. But I want you to know that when I'm with these Gentile followers, I get that same feeling of fellowship and a feeling that I am walking with great men of God being led by the Spirit to accomplish great things," said Orly thoughtfully.

"Well, if you think about it, isn't it the same Holy Spirit that bonds us all together? I felt it last night and it was incredible. It goes against everything I was taught. But it lines up perfectly with what Scripture

and Jesus said.” James noted that it was almost noon and synagogue should be over. They should walk over to visit with Mr. Kenan’s group.

“Mr. Kenan will want you to stay for the post-Sabbath meal, then would you mind walking Mother home? I can’t leave Gabriela to go pick her up. We’ll have to make plans for Jordan or someone to walk her home next week.”

“So, what’s the situation with Gabriela?” asked James.

“Well, Sabra, our midwife, feels that she can be up a little during the day and walk around some, but she can’t do anything. Even sewing just a little bit tires her out. But if at any time the babies decide to come, she’ll have to stay completely flat like she was for those three weeks at Joelle’s. Of course, there’s no guarantee that we would be able to stop the birthing if it starts, so Gabriela just has to be really, really careful and she hates not being able to help.”

“How much longer until she is due to give birth?”

“Sabra says eighteen more weeks,” said Orly.

James whistled. “I’ve never seen triplets, but she looks huge and miserable to me. I can’t imagine her doing this another four-and-a-half months.”

“Pray for both of us to have wisdom and patience. I try not to think about the possibility of losing her, but I know that it’s a lot of stress on her body. God is good. He’s got a good plan.”

“We will bring your mother home tonight after dinner. You look like you could use some rest, too,” said James kindly.

Orly walked them to the door then headed to the kitchen to prepare Gabriela some bread and butter and, of course, cucumbers, for a snack. He took it to her room, but she was sleeping so soundly that he just set the plate and cup near her mat and fell fast asleep. Mid-afternoon he heard her stirring and she thanked him for the snack. She was ready to get up and move around, so they sat outside in the courtyard and talked about the Gentile group and James’ and John’s words of encouragement. Gabriela admitted that she was overtired and had probably sat up too much. She was ready to go back and rest some more. He agreed and helped her get settled. It was so good to have Gabriela back. After Orly milked the goats, he prepared a picnic for the two of them alone, except for three little ones wrestling for their mother’s attention.

Gabriela was already asleep again before Mother Ruth and James and John returned. James and John said they would be leaving at sunrise and wouldn’t bother them, but Ruth insisted that they take breakfast to eat along the way. She assured them she would have it packed and ready to go. After they said goodnight, Orly took a lantern down to the cellar and packed a bag of raisins, almonds, and some apricots to send with James and John. He gave it to Mother to add to their breakfast.

“You are a good man, Son. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thanks, Mother. Do you need any help tonight or are you ready for sleep?”

“I’m heading to my room right now. It’s been two really long days.”

“Me, too. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Sunday morning, Gabriela reminded James and John not to mention her pregnancy to anyone because she didn’t want to worry her parents. They promised, and goodbyes and thanks were said all around. They left just as the sun peeked over the horizon. Orly hurried to milk the goats and Ruth set their breakfast out. Orly ate quickly because he knew Saba would arrive soon. He told Sabra about the busy week, starting with Wednesday’s stone masons keeping her from resting, then James and John arriving and staying up late to talk, and then yesterday spending a lot of time sleeping.

When Sabra entered Gabriela’s room, she found her asleep. She was able to listen for the babies before Gabriela even stirred. She listened to her heart and asked her how she was feeling. She said she just felt tired and that the babies were weighing a ton. She felt like some good rest would be helpful after a busy week. Sabra agreed. She called Orly and told them both, “This is getting into serious fatigue again. Her heart is stressed. We are going to help it rest and then we’ll try it again. I will continue to let you get up and down and even walk a little, but only for very short stretches. You are to spend the next few days mostly on your mat. You cannot take meals at the table. And if you feel any worse, or have any tightenings, you are to go totally flat, elevate your bottom and call me immediately. I’ll check on you again on Wednesday and see if the extra rest helps. I want you to get up and down four or five times a day, but only as necessary. Understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Gabriela.

“Do either of you have questions?” asked Sabra more gently. “These babies keep growing. We’ll have to wait and see whether it was just a rough week, or whether they are going to require Gabriela’s full attention. I’ll see you on Wednesday and we’ll know more then.”

“Thank you, Sabra. I knew I was tired, I just didn’t want to miss anything,” said Gabriela sadly.

“I know. But you want to keep these babies safe. That’s got to be your focus right now. We’ve still got a long way to go before they are big enough to survive. So, let’s focus on the babies this week, okay?”

“Okay,” agreed Gabriela.

When Sabra left, Orly walked out to talk with Mother. Mother assured him that they would be fine and told him to go on to work. He would be late as it was. He promised to check on them at noon. As he was leaving, he met Basha and Sarah. He simply waved and told them he was running late. They greeted Ruth and asked about Gabriela. She told them the situation. Basha said that she would be glad to stay until Lucas and Amata arrived this afternoon. It would probably relieve Orly’s mind, and she would love to help. Ruth insisted she didn’t need help, but Basha said, “Then I’ll sit out in the courtyard and twiddle my thumbs so that if you need me to go get Sabra, I can.”

“Oh, I guess I do need someone here, don’t I?”

“Yes, you do. I’ll stay today. Sarah won’t mind playing with the goats, and besides, we’ve got a lot of dishes to catch up on.” Basha encouraged Ruth to sit and weave and let her and Sarah work. Sarah

worked in the kitchen for a while, then came to watch her weave. Ruth was getting faster and faster, and Sarah was fascinated. Ruth showed Sarah the swaddling cloth that Amata had started on the other small loom. She taught Sarah the basics, and Sarah finished her first row without skipping a stitch. Ruth commented that her row was smooth and not twisty, and she had done a great job. She helped Sarah start the next row, and Sarah added almost a handbreadth to the strip of cloth before she grew tired and asked if she could play with the goats. "Not until the dishes are finished," said Basha. Sarah began to help Basha with drying and putting away the final dishes. "Now, go say hello to Kizzy and Lizzy, but please obey whatever rules Gabriela has set."

"She just wants me to stay in the yard and not go down to the stream by myself."

"I think that's an excellent rule. I will call you when Gabriela wakes up and you can show her that you helped with the swaddling cloth."

Sarah ran outdoors and called for the goats who welcomed her with kisses. They wandered around the yard and played together happily.

"Mother Ruth," Gabriela called. Ruth jumped up and went to Gabriela's room. She needed the lid taken off the chamber pot. In a little bit, she walked out and said hello to Basha, but said she needed to go back to her mat. Basha asked if she could visit her in the room and Gabriela welcomed the distraction. Ruth started a batch of bread. *I do feel safer having Basha here to help me with Gabriela. Just knowing that she could run for help takes the pressure off me. I should go to the market. I think I'm out of cucumbers.*

Ruth stuck her head in the door and told Basha and Gabriela that she was going to the market but would be right back. "Go ahead. Sarah and I will be here, so don't rush."

When Orly ran home at noon, Mother and Basha assured him that all was well. Basha said that she would stay until Amata arrived and would come back tomorrow morning to do the same. "And," she added, "there's no need for you to run home at noon every day. We'll let you know if anything changes."

"But what if I just need a kiss?" Orly asked as he leaned over and kissed Gabriela on the nose. Basha went out to check on Sarah.

After Orly left, Sarah helped Mother Ruth by carrying a plate to Gabriela. Sarah sat down to visit and showed her the weaving that she had done this morning. "Sarah, that's a great job. You are very talented with sewing." They talked about Mrs. Amata working as a seamstress and Sarah declared that that was what she wanted to do when she grew up.

It really helped to pass the time to have someone to visit with, but when she finished her lunch, Gabriela was ready for another nap. Sarah returned the plate and cup to the kitchen. "Gabriela wants to sleep awhile. May I weave some more?" So, each morning Basha and Sarah arrived and spent time helping Mother Ruth while Gabriela

rested. Mid-afternoon, Amata would come, and Gabriela was surprised that the days passed quickly.

On Wednesday, Sabra arrived just as Orly and his mother were finishing their breakfast. She went in to examine Gabriela. She called Orly into the room and explained, "Everything is sounding much better, so I will allow you to sit more today. You will have to be the judge of how much is enough without over-doing. You mustn't get that tired. Get up and walk around, sit for a while and let your body be your guide. If you need to spend most of the day flat, that's okay. But make sure you are getting up and down at least five or six times a day to keep those muscles as strong as possible. We may have to change to staying totally flat, but I hope not. Do you have any questions?"

"So, I can sit at the table for meals?" asked Gabriela.

"You can try. But if it tires you, then don't. Don't do anything that makes you feel tired. And I will see you on Sunday unless you need me before that. Please listen to your body and don't overdo."

"Thank you, Sabra. I'll try my best," said Gabriela.

"Gabriela, I know you can do this. You've just got to put your babies before other people and that is hard for you. You want to take care of everyone else. But that has got to change. You knew you were getting overtired, but you kept pushing. That's just too dangerous for the babies. I can't tell you how much you can do. You are going to have to judge that for yourself. I'll see you on Sunday. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Orly kissed Gabriela and left for work. Gabriela walked into the living room and told Mother Ruth what Sabra had said. They agreed that the babies were more important than anything else right now. So, after a few minutes, Gabriela sadly went back to her room. Soon Basha and Sarah arrived to visit but announced that they were watching Joelle's children this afternoon so that Joelle could get out of the house and enjoy a visit. Sarah brought the lap loom into Gabriela's room and began weaving on the swaddling cloth. At noon, Basha and Sarah left and shortly Joelle arrived to spend some time with Gabriela. Her cook, Deborah, and Mother Ruth headed to the kitchen for a goat liver cooking lesson. Joelle sat on the cushion and Gabriela loved hearing all the news about the children. Joelle was hoping that Seth would be back from Jerusalem before the Sabbath. Gabriela dozed occasionally and the afternoon passed quickly with just chit-chat and catching up. Gabriela thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon. She was surprised when Amata arrived. "Please come again soon. It was a lovely surprise."

"I promise I will — especially if Basha and Sarah can watch the children again," said Joelle.

Ruth needed to work on preparing dinner for herself and Orly, so Amata got busy on the large loom working on Ruth's beautiful green cloak. Gabriela moved out to the living room cushion to watch for a little while. She and Amata talked, but Gabriela returned to her room to get a nap before Orly arrived.

Orly gave Gabriela a kiss and asked if she wanted her liver to be served in her room, or at the table. "I think I will eat my liver alone in here, and then I will sit up with you for a while later."

"I need to go help Mother. I'll be right back with your dinner, m'lady."

After dinner, Gabriela joined Orly in the living room, and they discussed the goals for the group. When Gabriela tired, Orly lit a lamp in the room, and they continued to talk long after the lamp burned out.

Chapter 19

When Orly called time to clean up at work on Thursday afternoon, he was looking forward to a nice quiet evening with Gabriela and Mother. He cleaned the area around his bench and checked the apprentices' work. Seth met Orly on his walk home and asked if they could talk. Orly knew that Seth had just returned from Jerusalem, and wondered whether this was good news or bad.

"Orly," Seth said, "I know you have a lot on your plate, and I don't know where to begin."

"Just tell me so we can share it together," suggested Orly, feeling totally in the dark.

"I was in Jerusalem and kept getting a strong prompting to visit with Mary." *Oh no! Not Mary!* "I told her that the Holy Spirit had led me to come, but I had no idea why. She asked me if I would listen to her story and advise her. She had been taking care of several orphans that were left after the stoning of their parents. Two of them were sisters. They are currently thirteen and eleven years of age. They have been hiding in their parents' home. About a month ago, the tax collector caught them and threatened to put them on the slave block. They ran to Mary's and hid there. It's a messy story, but I promise I'll get to the point. The week before I arrived, two young men who had been attending Mary's group for several years came to her home and asked her to hide them. The Sanhedrin were threatening to stone them for being followers of Jesus. They are twenty and eighteen and were still living at home and working for their dad. Apparently, he refused to pay them, so they couldn't move out. Mary felt that God was leading these four young people to marry and establish a new home, but they desperately needed to get out of Jerusalem. The problem was and is, they don't have any resources. Then I felt the Holy Spirit prompt me and I told her if she would get them married before I started home on Monday, I would bring them to Cana and help them get started. Well, she did, and I did. I got to know them better on the trip and I felt led to talk with you first."

By this time, they had reached Orly's home and Orly invited Seth to join him on the rooftop. He asked Mother to hold dinner. Seth continued, "I found out that Gersham and Mario are both experienced carpenters. They are all four staying in my guest room for tonight. But I'm wondering if you would let them camp here at your place. I think the girls could help Ruth with Gabriela and the men could probably build your addition. That's as far as my mind has gone. I just felt led to share that with you."

"Okay, help me understand this. You brought me two experienced carpenters and two girls who could help Mother with Gabriela's care and they would work for free in exchange for camping on the grass?"

"Well, they would also need food," said Seth.

“Okay. Even so, it sounds like something that God has provided. I think I met Gersham and Mario at Mary’s house a couple of years ago. Bring them to the shop tomorrow at the eleventh hour. I’ll have about an hour to get them settled before our Gentile group meets. They can certainly camp, and we’ll go from there.”

“Oh, that’s a relief. I didn’t know what the next step was, but the Holy Spirit just kept saying, ‘Talk to Orly.’ So here I am.”

“Thank you. I believe that it’s straight from God’s hand. His provision is always perfectly timed,” said Orly.

Orly apologized for making dinner late and helped Mother get the vegetables reheated. He asked Gabriela if she wanted to sit at the table and she agreed. He told them that Seth had brought some fellow followers from Jerusalem. They would come tomorrow afternoon and would camp by the stream until they could find jobs and housing.

“So, I need to prepare a Sabbath dinner and breakfast?”

“Yes, Mother. But they will be camping out, so nothing fancy. I’m sure they will go to Mr. Kenan’s for post-Sabbath dinner. We will have them as guests until they get settled. I’m sure the ladies will help you with whatever you need,” said Orly.

“I just don’t want to see Gabriela overdoing because of company again,” said Mother.

“I promise I’ll keep an eye on both my women to make sure they are not overdoing,” said Orly.

Mother cleared the table and went to her room. Gabriela moved to the living room cushion to talk more with Orly. “You are thinking that you can hire the ladies to help Mother Ruth and me, aren’t you?”

“Yes and no. Seth said that he thought they would be glad to help out in exchange for the camping place. Our only expense will be feeding them. Mother is used to having a staff to help her in the kitchen, and she can teach these young ladies to cook.”

“I thought you said they were married,” questioned Gabriela.

“How about if you go lay down, and I’ll come and tell you everything that I know so far. All I have promised them is that they can camp here until they get jobs and housing. That’s all. If they want to help out, and it’s agreeable with you and Mother, then we’ll let them help in exchange for food and camping. I won’t know anything for sure until I meet them tomorrow. And I certainly will let you and Mother help me in the decision. Okay?”

“Okay. Please tell me what you know.”

“Let’s get you to your mat.” Orly told Gabriela everything that Seth had told him, and they agreed to pray about it.

Basha and Sarah came over on Friday morning. Ruth invited Sarah to go with her to the market. By the time they arrived home, they found that Gabriela was napping and Basha was dusting the living room. She asked what else she could do to help. “All I lack is putting these groceries away and I’m done,” said Ruth.

“Let me help you. Which of these go to the cellar? Sarah and I can take them down for you,” said Basha.

When they returned, Sarah asked if she could weave on the swaddling cloth, so Ruth sat down and began to weave on her own robe. After a snack, Sarah showed Gabriela the progress she was making on the swaddling cloth and Gabriela praised her for sticking with it. She told her that she only lacked two more handbreadths and it would be enough to wrap up a baby.

“You are going to wrap your baby in this?” asked Sarah incredulously.

“Yes, haven’t you ever seen swaddling cloths? asked Gabriela.

“No. How do you wrap them?”

“Well, you start at the neck and wrap it round and round them so they can’t move their arms.”

Sarah’s look was one of horror. “But why would you do that?”

Gabriela laughed and said, “I guess it does sound rather cruel, but babies are really packed inside their mother, and they need to be wrapped tightly when they are born to keep them warm and safe and make them feel comfortable.”

“But their arms are tied up?”

“Yes. They can’t really control their arms very well, so they end up keeping themselves awake, or poking themselves in the eyes, or scratching their faces. So, you swaddle them to protect them. I’m sure you were swaddled as a baby. Go ask your mother.”

Sarah ran to find Basha. “Did you tie me up as a baby?” demanded Sarah.

“What are you talking about?” asked Basha, getting up to see what Sarah and Gabriela were discussing. Gabriela thought it was so funny, she could hardly talk. She just pointed to the swaddling cloth and Basha understood.

“Yes, Sarah, I swaddled you. Gabriela is so proud of you for helping her make swaddling cloths for her babies. She’ll need them to make the babies happy and comfortable. I’m proud of you, too. How about if you take these dishes back to the kitchen and let me talk with Gabriela. She gets the funniest ideas sometimes. Yes, I guess I tied her up as a baby!” They both laughed together. “Are you ready for a nap?” Gabriela agreed since they had group tonight.

When Amata arrived, Ruth was busy in the kitchen. Basha and Sarah left, and Gabriela told Amata that Orly was bringing guests from Jerusalem who wanted to camp tonight. “Your house is always filled with needy people. You are so generous.”

“I’ve never thought about it. But if we really believe that Jesus will provide everything we need, we don’t have to worry about giving too much away,” said Gabriela.

“It’s just so radically different from what I was taught. My parents used to tell me, ‘We worked hard for this, and you mustn’t share anything with anyone.’ The more you had, the more tightly you held it.”

“I think Jewish families are raised the same way. It’s what makes Jesus’ followers so different. We trust that God will provide for us. We work hard, but we also share with those in need.”

"It's incredible to see," said Amata as she got back to work on Gabriela's cloak.

Orly arrived with their guests and introduced Gabriela, Ruth, and Amata. "This is Gersham and his wife, Leah, and this is Mario and his wife, Lena. They've traveled from Jerusalem and will be camping down by the stream."

Mother said, "I made a food sack for you for dinner tonight, and then you can join us for Sabbath breakfast at sunrise tomorrow."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ruth. That is very kind of you," said Gersham.

"Let's go down and grab some lanterns for you. Do you need blankets?"

"No, we have our own, thank you."

"Okay, here's two lanterns and a flint to light them. If you want to gather firewood, you'll see where we build bonfires. We have a group meeting here tonight so you'll be on your own and no one will bother you. Plan to come up for breakfast in the morning, and you can decide whether you want to go to synagogue or not." Orly led the way down the trail and was surprised by Lucas leading the ox away from the stream. "Lucas, I didn't mean to startle you. I've brought some friends down to camp." Orly explained that Lucas was his property manager and Amata was his wife.

"Orly, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Are they Gentiles?"

"Yes, they are Roman. But they are also followers of Jesus. God has called me to minister to Gentiles. The group that you will meet with tomorrow at Mr. Kenan's are all Jewish. I've got to get set up for our group meeting tonight. I'll see you in the morning. Shalom."

"Shalom."

He wasn't sure how they would deal with him having Gentiles inside his home, but it wasn't his problem. They were welcome to camp somewhere else if it wasn't right for them. *I've got to concentrate on the meeting tonight and make sure I'm tuned.*

Orly went in and visited with Gabriela just a minute before helping Lucas get the courtyard set up. They stacked up the mats like they did last week for Gabriela. The group gathered, and Mother Ruth lit the Sabbath candles. Gabriela stayed on her stack of mats and Mother Ruth brought her a plate. Ruth explained to the other ladies that Gabriela had to stay off her feet even more than before. They were all concerned for her, but glad she felt like joining them.

Once everyone had gathered in the circle, Orly began, "I've been concerned about how your groups went last week. I felt like I was really disorganized. I do want to report that you impressed James and John with your knowledge and understanding of the concepts and your obvious dependence on the Holy Spirit. They were very encouraged by you. Thank you for letting them visit."

"Last week was really fun for us. Our group had a thousand questions. I don't know if we covered everything that we were

supposed to, but we used a lot of the material to answer their questions. I felt really good about the group,” shared Markus.

“Did you have any questions that you didn’t know how to answer?” asked Orly.

“Some that I couldn’t, but Diana would jump in and rescue me. We just kept praying for each other and I thought it went great. Like I said, it was a lot of fun.”

“Do you have any questions that I can help you with tonight?”

“No, I think we’re good. I told them we had two more lessons, and they all seem eager to hear the rest.”

“Okay. Lucas and Amata, how did it go for you two?”

“Well, I wouldn’t call it fun. It felt more like a grilling. My family asked some really good questions, but we were able to answer them. One was about giving up our Roman gods. I told them that would be covered in a future lesson, but yes, following Jesus meant giving up false gods. I thought that would cause a stir, but it really didn’t. They seemed to understand that it was all or nothing. But I’m like Markus, I’m not sure we covered everything we were supposed to. We just juggled questions all night,” said Lucas.

“I’m just so glad that they are interested. They are asking good questions, very similar to the ones we asked,” added Amata.

“Good. Do you two have any questions that I can help you with?”

“No, I think we’re good.”

“We got a lot of questions, too,” said Appius. “And we got into trouble. I don’t think that one of our men will be back. When we started talking about Jesus rising from the dead, Justus got all red-faced and started yelling that we were being duped by fairy tales. He said no one lived over a Roman crucifixion. Titus told him very gently that he was exactly right. We completely agreed. We told him that Jesus came back to life after being totally dead. He just kept shaking his head and saying that he was listening to fools and idiots. It really disrupted the group.”

“Did he leave?” asked Orly.

“No, he stayed and listened, but he kept making ugly remarks. It sorta shook up the rest of the group. Everyone seemed hesitant to ask questions after that,” said Titus.

“I figured we’d lost the whole group, but the other guys have been stopping by and making sure we were still planning on meeting. We don’t know whether he’ll be back or not,” reported Appius.

“Sometimes anger is a sign that he’s thinking deeply and is miserable. Just for your information, I have a friend that I’ve been talking to about Jesus for almost three years now. He doesn’t want anyone to tell him what to do. Sometimes he gets really angry at me, but he keeps coming back with more questions. I know that God is at work breaking down the barriers.”

“I don’t want him to scare the rest of the guys away,” said Titus.

“Yeah. I can see that as a problem. You may need to ask him not to come back to the meetings if he’s only interested in being disruptive. But tell him you’d love for him to stay if he wants to hear

your beliefs. I'll be praying specifically for Justus tomorrow and for you two as you deal with him."

"Thanks."

"Okay, that leaves you, Julius and Marcella," said Orly.

"Ours was more like Markus and Diana's. They asked a million questions and I have no idea if we covered what we were supposed to, but we answered questions and they all seem to want to know more," reported Markus.

"Anything from you, Marcella?"

"No, except could we pray for Justus right now before we start our lesson? I think the Holy Spirit is the only One who can change his mind."

"Let's do that. Marcella, will you lead us to pray for Justus."

"Father, we ask that You penetrate Justus' heart and mind and renew that hunger that he felt when he started this group. Help him to stop putting up barriers and let You teach him what he needs to hear. Give Appius and Titus wisdom to know how to point him to You but help them to remember that sometimes it takes time. In Jesus' name," prayed Marcella.

"Thank you, Marcella. Let's get started with tonight's lesson. It's a little more cohesive than last week's, but again, answering questions is the most important part. I've titled this lesson: What would it look like to follow Jesus? The first point is: When you ask Jesus to be your Messiah, He forgives your sins and puts you in a right relationship with God. Jesus taught his apostles that they should pray in Jesus' name. So, who do we pray to?"

"Jehovah God," responded the group.

"Good job. But we pray in Jesus' name because He paid the price for our sins. Second point: If you become a follower of Jesus, how will you keep the Sabbath? Let's start answering in a circle because it's easier for me. So, Lucas, can you handle that one?"

"Well, we keep the Sabbath because God rested on the seventh day of Creation. We also keep the Sabbath because Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," said Lucas.

"Good, but how do we keep the Sabbath?" asked Orly.

"Sabbath means rest, so it means that we do restful things and not only do them ourselves but allow the people who work for us to have a day of rest," said Amata.

"Do we have to keep Jewish Law for the Sabbath?" asked Orly.

"No. We are followers of Jesus, not Jews," said Marcella.

"Julius, let's make sure we emphasize this: Why does God want us to take a Sabbath?" asked Orly.

"Because it's good for us. You told a story about making a wagon with square wheels and explained that God just asks us to do things that are really for our benefit and for our good."

"I'm so proud of all of you. We'll take a break and then finish."

Orly helped Gabriela walk around a little. He asked if she was okay. "I'm doing fine. And you are doing a great job."

Everyone was already seated and ready for more. Orly helped Gabriela back on the mats and got her settled then returned to his bench. “Gentlemen, Jesus elevated the place of women as spiritual equals. You should treasure your wife. She is God’s special gift to you. But that’s free and not part of the lesson. Third point is: As followers of Jesus, we have fellowship with other followers. Can someone define fellowship? Whose turn is it?”

“I think it’s mine. Fellowship is two fellows in the same ship. Because we both have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, there is a deeper friendship than is possible otherwise,” said Appius.

“Very well put. Fourth point: We need to find ways to worship. There’s lots of different kinds of worship. We can worship God alone anytime, anywhere. We can worship with a friend or spouse. And we can gather with other followers. That’s three kinds of worship. But what is worship, Titus?”

“Uh, worship is being close to God, maybe by praying or singing or sharing about Him. I guess I don’t really know how to explain it. For us Romans, worship just means bringing a sacrifice or money to the temple of our god. I’m not sure what it really is.”

“Well, when I think of worship, I think of any time or anywhere that I acknowledge that God is God and that I am not! It’s more an attitude. Any questions?” asked Orly. “Okay, the fifth point is that followers of Jesus have two basic celebrations each year. The first one coincides with Passover, so as Jews we celebrate both, but what do followers of Jesus celebrate at Passover? Mother, I think it’s your turn.”

“We celebrate the fact that Jesus died for our sins, and that He conquered death and came alive to promise us eternal life with Him,” said Ruth triumphantly. It was the first time Orly had called on her and she was delighted.

“The second holiday coincides with Shavuot or Pentecost which occurs fifty days after Passover. What do followers of Jesus celebrate on the first day of Shavuot, Gabriela?”

“We celebrate the day that Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to live inside each follower of Jesus.” said Gabriela.

“Thank you. Now let’s summarize. You have five main things to cover. But again, the most important thing you can do is answer questions and then next week, we’ll end with the characteristics of Jehovah God. Let me go over the five main points: Prayer, Sabbath, Fellowship, Worship, and Celebration. Now, are there any questions? I hope tonight was a little easier to follow. I’ll be praying for you as you lead your groups tomorrow — especially Appius and Titus. May God bless you, each one. In Jesus’ name. Shalom.”

“Shalom,” they all responded.

The men began to put the furniture back in place while the women carried the serving dishes into the kitchen. Gabriela moved to the cushion in the living room, and let the men get all the mats back in place. Marcella and Diana were helping carry her pillows and blanket inside. Tears came to Gabriela’s eyes as she realized that these Gentiles had become brothers and sisters to her.

Gabriela tried to stay awake as Orly lay in the dark talking about the group. “It went so much better than last week. I’m so glad that God is in charge and not me. I was so sure that their groups would just fall apart this week. But did you hear the reports?”

All he heard was the soft sound of her breathing.

Orly woke early and milked the goats and returned to help Mother set out breakfast. The two visiting couples from Jerusalem joined them and Gabriela came to the table. After breakfast was underway, Orly told them, “You have two distinct choices. You can go to synagogue to worship with other Jewish followers of Jesus, or you can stay here and visit with Gabriela and me. This afternoon, Seth will introduce you to the group he attends — similar to the groups in Jerusalem. If you are uncomfortable around Gentiles, then I suggest you work on making other arrangements for housing. I believe that Jesus’ taught that his death would pay for the sins of the whole world, not just Jews.”

“I’m sorry if my husband sounds harsh, but we are certain that this is God’s call in our life. The apostles James, John, and Matthew have encouraged us to pursue this call. They have all visited the group. James and John have assured us that the Holy Spirit is leading similar work all along the coast of the Great Sea. They believe that the wildfire that Jesus spoke about on the night of His arrest includes Gentiles from all over the world. We are excited to be a part of that. But we will not push that on anyone else if you are uncomfortable with it,” said Gabriela.

“Many people say that our parents were killed by the Romans, but it’s not true. It was the Jews who killed our parents,” said Leah. “I’m more uncomfortable around the Pharisees. Seth told us that there were a lot of Jesus’ followers here. We like that.”

“Our parents are very strict Pharisees and have turned their back on us because we worship Jesus as our Messiah. But we were all four raised in very strong Jewish homes. So, we would have many questions. Not because we don’t agree, but just because it would be new for us,” said Mario.

“Do you want to go to synagogue or stay here and visit with Gabriela and me this morning?”

“I think it would be best if we stayed here and visited with you two, if that’s all right. We need to get our housing settled soon.”

“Would you mind helping Gabriela with her mats so she can visit with us either in the courtyard or the living room. I’ll walk Mother to synagogue and be back in a few minutes. Gabriela are you okay with that?”

“Sure.” She gave Mother Ruth a hug and wished her a good day.

Gabriela asked Leah if she would mind helping her in the room. She explained that she could not lift her chamber pot lid, and would she mind doing that for her? She was embarrassed to ask but knew that it would be a deciding factor in whether the girls would be helpful or just be additional work for Mother Ruth.

“Oh, I don’t mind at all,” replied Leah. “God has been so good to us to keep us from becoming slaves. I think it would have killed my

little sister after losing Mother and Abba. We have worked for various followers in Jerusalem, so, emptying a chamber pot is no problem.” She quickly lifted the lid and asked if Gabriela needed any additional help.

“No, thank you,” said Gabriela. When she returned to the living room, she noticed that the table had been totally cleared. She directed the brothers to collect and stack her mats in the living area. She asked the girls to bring her pillows and blanket to the living room so that she could participate. She explained that carrying triplets was putting stress on her heart and she was not able to lift anything at all. She asked the two men if they would bring in some benches from the courtyard. “We’ll be a little cozy, but it’s chilly this morning.” By the time Orly had returned, she had already made friends with the two couples.

“I had to wait for Seth and asked him to stop by after synagogue to pick you up. Gabriela, I need to speak with you alone.”

“Certainly,” said Gabriela as she moved to their room.

“Are you okay with them helping out around here? Would you be comfortable? It will probably only be for a couple of weeks while they build the addition.”

“Sure. I’m feeling a definite yes.”

They rejoined the two couples in the living room. “I don’t like to talk business on the Sabbath, but Jesus said that we should be about helping people. Well, I need help and you need help, so I think it will be all right to discuss my suggestion for you. There is a distinct shortage of carpenters in both Cana and Nazareth. It is so severe that my friend Palti’s waiting list is three months long. Yet, I need an addition put on this house as soon as possible. I was thinking that if you could build my addition, I would pay you what I expected to pay Palti, and that would give you an income. The ladies could assist Mother and Gabriela with housekeeping and helping however they can. We primarily need to have someone here in case of emergency to come get me. There’s just so many ways that I see this as a win-win solution. You camp for free. The girls work in exchange for food, and the men work for pay. Once you finish my addition, we’ll invite Palti out to see if he will hire one or both of you to help him on a permanent basis. If he can’t hire both of you, I’m sure the shop in Nazareth will, but we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. And that’s what I wanted to talk with you about,” said Orly.

“Please, would it be okay if we took time to pray and be certain of this offer? We were not expecting such generosity and we need to all be in agreement,” said Gersham.

“Certainly. Seth will be here around noon to take you to Mr. Kenan’s and we don’t have to have an answer today.”

The two couples left and began walking around the yard but soon there was a knock at the door and Orly invited them in. Gabriela settled on her stack of mats and Gersham spoke. “We cannot believe that God has blessed us so abundantly already. We will certainly

accept your offer. Please be patient with us while we adapt to this new freedom away from the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem.”

“Well, you’ll have to be patient with us, too. We’ve had to accept a lot of help lately and it wasn’t in our original plans. Because it is the Sabbath, I don’t think we should do any more business. Would you four lead us in singing some praise songs together like they do at Mary’s? Gabriela and I really miss that,” said Orly.

Gersham immediately took the lead and began to sing a Psalm of praise. Sometimes Mario would quote a Scripture. When Seth arrived, he joined them, and Orly led them in a prayer of blessing.

Orly told Seth about their plans and Seth agreed it was the perfect solution to everyone’s needs. He invited the two couples to join him and promised to walk Ruth home after dinner. “You two have a great day. Shalom.”

“Shalom.” Leah ran back and gave Gabriela a hug before she left.

Orly and Gabriela had the house all to themselves and Orly prepared Gabriela’s snack. Gabriela lay on her stack of mats and Orly sat on the cushion. Soon Gabriela was sleeping, and Orly began praying for Mr. Kenan’s group and the Gentile groups that were meeting. When Gabriela woke up, she asked Orly to help her walk outside. They sat in the grass and enjoyed the sunshine. Lizzy and Kizzy reminded them that it was milking time, so Orly picked Gabriela up in his arms and refused to put her down until they reached the house. Their time of worshipping together had stirred his love for her. *I had dreamed of having a house like Mary’s in Jerusalem, a safe haven for those who were in need. Thank you, Father.*

Orly helped Gabriela get settled for a nap and he went to the barn to milk the goats. Orly prepared two sandwiches and woke Gabriela from her nap. Later, Seth brought the group to the house and the campers said their goodnights. Mother Ruth caught Orly and Gabriela up on all the news. Orly told Mother about their plans to help the two couples and for them to be a help in return. Her heart was touched to hear that these two young girls had been left orphaned and would need to learn so many things. “I’m so glad that they were spared from slavery. I will be glad to teach them what they want to learn.”

“You’ll need to make sure they know how to get Sabra and me. That’s the highest priority right now.”

“I can take care of that while Basha is here,” said Mother Ruth.

“Goodnight, Mother Ruth, and don’t forget Sabra will be here early tomorrow morning,” said Gabriela.

Sunday morning, Mario surprised Orly as he entered the barn. “I always took care of our goats at home. I’d like to help.”

“Sure,” said Orly. “That’s Lizzy and this one is Kizzy. There’s another milking pan up on that shelf. Gabriela used to do all the milking, but now I do the morning shift and Lucas milks them in the evenings. They are a real nuisance, but we love their milk and cheese and butter. Just remember to put your things away or they will eat everything. Oh, have they gotten into anything of yours?”

“No, we met them on Sabbath morning and knew we’d better hide our blankets. We hung them in the trees so they would be safe.”

“Good. Now, I’ve got to meet with the midwife this morning and then I’m off to work. I think Mother is planning on showing you around town. But then, I’d like for you two to decide what lumber you need. I just want two equal rooms added on. The stone masons have already laid the foundation, so you’ll be able to see the size. If you know what you need to get started, Lucas can take you to the Carpenter’s Shop and help you place the order. He will arrive around the ninth hour.”

Both men finished the milking and headed for the house. They filled everyone’s cup and Orly went to check on Gabriela. Sabra invited him in and said that she was doing great. “Call me if anything changes and I’ll see you next week.” She didn’t even wait for questions.

Orly asked Gabriela if everything was okay and she laughed and said, “Yes, she was just eager to go and deliver a baby. She fussed at me for having company again but was delighted when I told her these were our new helpers. She listened and said everything was good and to stay on the same schedule for next week.”

Orly and Gabriela joined the others at the breakfast table. He ate quickly and was out the door after wishing everyone a good day. Gabriela moved to a cushion while the ladies cleared the table.

Mother told the girls, “As you can see, we have a mess every Sunday morning because of the Gentile meal on Sabbath night. Basha and Sarah usually come over to help me with it as their contribution to the Gentile ministry. But they are usually here by now. They may think that we don’t need them, so why don’t we start with cleaning up this mess. Uh-oh. Orly couldn’t fill the water jars because you guys were camping down there. He usually fills them from the stream. Could you men help the ladies with that? We’ll need about six jars to do all this cleaning and cooking today.” The men jumped to their feet and grabbed two jars apiece while the girls each carried one. They walked back down to the stream, chatting among themselves. They agreed that they enjoyed being here. When they returned, Basha and Sarah had arrived. Gabriela explained that they needed her today, but after that, they would just need friendly visits.

“We are glad to help,” said Basha, “but I’ve actually been wanting to return to Capernaum soon to visit with friends there. I got distracted by Matthew last time and didn’t visit a lot of my old friends. I think Sarah and I will head to Capernaum if you don’t need me tomorrow.”

Mother thanked Basha and Sarah for coming to help and left the mess in the kitchen for them to tackle. Then she and the four young people walked to town. Cana was really just one main street with two cross streets. She first showed them the Mercantile Store and the house right behind it. She explained how to find Sabra. They all agreed that they could find her quickly.

“Now, if you need Orly, he’ll be at Mr. Kenan’s Metal Shop and that’s down this side street. If it’s an emergency, just go around back and start yelling for Orly. He will be working near the back opening, but

it's really noisy in there. Now, do you all think you could find Sabra and Orly if I needed to send you, or would you like to retrace your steps to the house?" They agreed that they could find both quickly if needed. "You are young and learn fast. I'm still trying to get Cana figured out."

"I thought you had lived here for a long time," said Leah.

"Yes, but I was a slave and never left the kitchen for ten years. I was Mr. Kenan's head cook until six weeks ago, so I can teach you if you need to learn how to cook."

"Oh, that would be nice. We really don't know how. We've just been eating what people gave us, or what we could buy at the market," said Leah.

"Well, let's head to the market now and see what's fresh for today." They were surprised to find only six booths but agreed that there would be enough fruits and vegetables to meet their needs.

Sarah was outside playing with the goats and Basha was inside visiting with Gabriela when they returned. The kitchen was all cleaned and ready for use. Mother Ruth was ready to sit down for a rest. Basha called Sarah inside and they gave Gabriela and Mother Ruth hugs and told them that they would be gone for a while. They didn't know when they would return, but they promised to bring them news from Jenay and Yanis. They wished them a safe journey and thanked them for all their help.

"Now, I need to rest, and I will leave you to Mother Ruth's care," said Gabriela. Leah followed Gabriela into her room and asked if she would like assistance. "Yes, please and thank you." She helped get Gabriela settled and then returned to the living room.

The men had gone outside to examine the addition and to figure out how much wood they would need. They asked Mother Ruth if Orly had any building tools. She told them to check the cellar — outside and to the right. When they opened the door, they found every tool they needed. The only thing they would require was a second hammer so they could both work at the same time.



At noon, Orly took Lucas aside and asked him to please help the brothers get started on the addition. They would need to order wood from Palti and might want to talk with Palti about future employment. "I'll be glad to take them to meet Palti. We'll take care of it. How do you want me to pay for the wood?"

"Just tell Palti I'll pay him on my noon break tomorrow. And, Lucas, you probably should ask when the oxcart will be ready."

"Right. I'll see you tonight."

Orly supervised the apprentices all afternoon. He would rather be doing his own work, but they were making tools for the Mercantile Store, and Orly needed to make sure every piece was perfectly formed. Tools were not always easy to make.

Chapter 20

The men were outside measuring for the addition when Mother Ruth looked at the girls and said, "I need to make bread today and it's time to get it started. I can either teach you how to make it, or you can just help me. Which will it be?"

"I'd love to learn how," said Leah.

"Me, too," Lena echoed.

"Okay, I prefer to teach one-on-one and I'm terribly bossy, or so I'm told. So, which one of you is going to learn first, and which one of you is going to make a sandwich for Gabriela?"

"I'll make the sandwich and let Lena learn first," said Leah.

All three of them headed to the kitchen and Mother Ruth began supervising the girls as they worked. Leah took Gabriela her sandwich and cup of milk. Then she stayed to visit with her while Mother Ruth and Lena made bread. Leah returned the dishes to the kitchen and washed them and put them away. Mother Ruth liked what she saw, and she loved teaching Lena to make bread. When Leah returned to check, Gabriela was ready to take a walk. She told Leah that she was afraid to walk outside because, with her big belly, she couldn't see where to step. She asked if Leah would mind holding her arm so that she could balance better and not fall. "I never thought of that. You do have a problem seeing your feet, don't you?" Then both girls began giggling together like longtime friends. They took a circle around the courtyard and Gabriela sat in the living room for a few minutes before heading back to her room.

When Lucas and Amata arrived, Mother introduced everyone. "Do you know what you need to build the addition?" asked Lucas.

"Yes, sir," they replied in unison.

"Okay, let's go talk with Palti before he closes up for tonight."

Lucas and the two men walked to Palti's Carpenter's Shop. Lucas introduced the men and asked Palti if he could order some lumber and let Orly pay for it tomorrow at noon. "So, Orly hired two carpenters from Jerusalem instead of waiting on me. That's what I call a loyal customer!" said Palti rather heatedly.

"Actually, it's worse than that," said Lucas. "These two young carpenters are looking for work and Orly knew that you were looking to hire. He talked them into building his addition first before he gives you the chance to hire them. But of course, if you are not interested, the shop in Nazareth is hiring, too."

"Seriously? You are moving to Cana?" Suddenly Palti was eager to hear about their experience and background.

Gersham started, "I was born blind, so I focused on making small things like kitchen tools, dishes, and candlesticks. Jesus healed me when I was thirteen, and I progressed to making cradles, beds, and tables. I really like doing cabinetry and fine woodwork. I worked for my dad until two weeks ago, got married and moved to Cana at the

suggestion of my friend Seth. I can build houses, barns, and bigger things, but that doesn't interest me as much as the detail work."

Mario said, "I started working for my dad at age eight and by the time I finished Hebrew School, I was building houses in and around Jerusalem. I've designed and built two- and three-story houses, and I prefer that to the details. I can do the detail work, but I don't enjoy it like seeing a structure go up. I can also do some limited stonework, but mostly I work in wood or stucco."

Gersham added, "You also know how to roof with tiles."

"You men are hired! When can you start work?"

"We need to finish Orly's addition first. It shouldn't take longer than two weeks, maybe a week and a half depending on how fast we can get the lumber delivered."

"Let's hear what you need. Are you men on board? Are you interested in working for me?"

"Hold it, Palti," said Lucas. "These men need to know your hours, your pay, and what you expect from your workers before they commit."

"Right." Palti told them the pay and hours. Do you have any questions?"

"Lucas, do we have any other questions?" asked Gersham.

"You've heard the man. Are you ready to give him an answer or do you want to pray about it?"

"We've already prayed about it, and we are ready to say yes," said Gersham.

"I'm in," said Mario.

Palti asked what supplies they needed for Orly's project. They began to walk around the warehouse and picked out what they needed. Palti promised to have it delivered first thing tomorrow. "Then you let me know when you can start work. I'm so far behind I don't think I'll ever catch up."

"Palti, how's Orly's oxcart and cradles coming along?"

"I've been working on the oxcart a little each night, but it's still a couple of weeks out. The sooner these men can get started, the sooner he'll have his cradles. I haven't even started on them, but I remember."

"You're a good man, Palti. That's why Orly wanted his friends to work for you. He knows you'll be a great boss and you'll both benefit."

"Thanks, Lucas. I'll have this delivered in the morning."

The three of them walked away. Gersham and Mario were so excited they could hardly keep from dancing in the streets. Lucas just grinned. *Oh, to be so young and have so much energy!*

Lucas then took them to the Mercantile Store and purchased two hammers. He told the men that that was a personal loan to them, and they could pay him back whenever they had the money.

"Thank you for helping us, Mr. Lucas. I guess we were pretty stupid to just accept the job without knowing what it entailed."

"I think you have two beautiful wives to support, and you need this job pretty badly. I just didn't want Palti to take advantage of you."

And please call me Lucas. I'm older than you, but I serve the same God, and we'll be working closely together for the next few weeks."

"So, you are one of the Gentile followers of Jesus?" asked Gersham.

"Yes, I am. Orly led me to accept Jesus just about six weeks ago, and now I'm leading a group of my own. I'm praying that all fourteen of them will decide to become followers this next Sabbath. You can pray about that if you want to."

"Wow! I can't wait to hear about the Gentile work." When they reached the house, Gersham and Mario ran into the house to let everyone know the good news. There was a lot of celebrating.

Lucas walked down to the barn and started milking Lizzy. In a few minutes, Mario joined him and started milking Kizzy. "Lucas, I've never been in the same room with a Gentile. Let me know if I say or do the wrong thing. I'm really new to this."

"You are doing just fine. And congratulations on your new job. How long have you and your wife been married?" And the friendship began.

Amata was amazed at how easily the two girls fit into the household. Ruth was bossing them around like they were daughters, and Gabriela was letting them help her with everything she needed. *It is such a peaceful household. How I pray that someday my sons' houses will be filled with such love and peace.*

Orly had not even left for work on Monday when the lumber arrived. He helped the men carry it around to the back of the house so it wouldn't be in the ladies' way. Orly left for work and soon the hammering began. The girls built Gabriela a stack of mats on the courtyard and she was soon sound asleep. Mother Ruth sat in the courtyard and sewed the panels of her new robe together. She confessed to Gabriela that she had probably been a little stubborn about making her own robe. It was still a long way from being finished and Amata could have made it in a week. Gabriela asked her if she was getting over-tired with all the cooking. Mother Ruth assured her that she was having fun teaching the girls.

When Orly arrived home, he had a rested wife, a table set with hot food, a start on the new addition, and warm goat milk. He was a happy man. The two couples left soon after dinner. They promised to return at breakfast.

That night, Orly decided to share his plan with Gabriela and Mother Ruth. He asked them to join him in the living room for a few minutes. He told them, "This is something I want you to pray about. It's something that I think would be a benefit to all. How would you feel if after the two rooms are built, we allow Gersham and Mario to move into them until they can afford to buy a place of their own? They really own nothing except a blanket, so even if they could rent a house, they don't have cookware, or furniture, or anything. In a year, Gersham and Mario will be much more financially able to support their wives. You have indicated that you enjoy having them around, and there's much for them to learn. We wouldn't pay them anything and they wouldn't

pay us. We would just be out for their food. But we will get round the clock help from the ladies if we need it. I want your input. Pray about it and let me know.”

After they were both on their mats preparing for sleep, Gabriela said, “Orly, may I ask you a question?”

“Of course, my love, any time.”

“I was just wondering why you didn’t talk to me first. I don’t want your mother making our decisions.”

“I should have talked to you first, but I felt that you would say that we should include Mother since she is also impacted by this decision. I’m asking you to both pray about it. I’m sorry that I upset you.”

“No, I understand, and you are right. She is the one most affected by it since she will have to do all the teaching and supervising. I just needed to ask,” said Gabriela.

“Did you need reassurance that you are still my favorite lady?” asked Orly.

“No. I know that. But yes, it’s really hard when I can’t do anything. I feel so useless. The least I can do is help you make decisions, and I felt like that was taken away from me tonight. I’m sorry for being a baby. I want you to lead this home under God, and I understand why you asked her. You are a wise man and I love you so much.”

“And I love you and will always respect your wishes and desires. You and I will make the final decision and talk to them whenever we’ve decided.”

“Thank you, and goodnight.”

“Goodnight, my love.”

Gabriela lay awake for quite a while and wondered whether she was ready to have four more people in her home permanently. *Well, it wouldn’t be permanent. But a year is a long time. And we are cramped as it is — especially if I need a bed in the living room. And Mother Ruth would be cooking for seven instead of three. But she would have help doing it and the girls do need to learn how to cook. And if I have to be flat again, the girls would be a really big help with changing my blankets and the heavy stuff that Mother Ruth just can’t do. I still need to pray about it.*

The week passed quickly as the men worked on the addition. Life fell into a nice routine and Mother Ruth agreed with Gabriela that Orly’s plan would benefit everyone. Gabriela and Orly planned to talk with them after the Sabbath.

On Friday afternoon, Orly arrived home and checked on Gabriela. He was impressed with the progress on the addition. Gersham asked what kind of interior work he wanted, and Orly said that he didn’t know of anything. They would need to purchase some mats, but they would just be basic rooms for the children and for guests. As Orly and Lucas were walking toward the barn, he asked Lucas, “If I borrow Mr. Kenan’s oxcart, would you drive the new little ox into Capernaum to pick up some mats? We need to get the ox trained, and I will pay you for the extra hours.”

“Sure. But I won’t accept additional money for a pleasure trip. Amata is always looking for a chance to go to Capernaum. See if you can borrow his cart for Monday or Tuesday and we’ll leave at noon and be back before dark. I’ve got to get the goats milked and then I’ll help get set up for group.”

“Thanks.” Orly walked back to the brothers and told them it was cleanup time. They showed him their progress and he was pleased. When he handed them their pay, his heart just about burst. Their dad had required them to work for their upkeep and had taken advantage of them for years. Now, they were getting their first pay, and they were holding the silver and trying to keep from crying. “Use it wisely. It goes fast!”

“Yes, sir. And thank you, sir.”

“We’ll be meeting with the Gentiles for our Sabbath meal together. I’m sure Mother has packed something for you to enjoy while you camp.”

“Thank you, sir. Thank you for all you’ve done for us.”

“I think I should be thanking you and your wives. You are all helping us out. But I’ve got to get set up for group. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

“How much were the hammers?” Gersham asked Mario.

“Six shekels. How do we break our denarii into shekels?”

“I don’t know. We should have asked Orly.”

“Well, let’s go ask.” They headed for the courtyard and saw Lucas and Orly setting up for group. They asked Orly if they could ask him a question. He walked out into the yard with them. “Lucas bought us two hammers and we owe him six shekels. Would you be able to change one of our denarii into shekels so that we can pay him back?”

“Sure,” said Orly. He headed for the cellar and dipped into Gabriela’s emergency stash. He counted out the shekels and brought them to the men. They immediately thanked Lucas and paid him what they owed. Lucas was impressed that they wanted to be out of debt more than they wanted spending money. The two couples took a sack of food the girls had helped prepare and headed to the camping area.

Soon the Gentile group had assembled, and the fellowship was sweet. Gabriela sat up to eat dinner but didn’t linger. She crawled back on her mats and listened from a distance. It wasn’t long before everyone was ready to start their final lesson. There was a distinct excitement in the air as they waited for Orly to begin. “Tonight, as always, I want to hear a report from your groups. Let’s start with Titus and Appius. Did your friend Justus come back?”

“He did not. We both saw him during the week, and he went out of his way to avoid us. I don’t know what else we can do but wait until the Holy Spirit draws him back.”

“You are right. Not everyone will accept Jesus. It breaks His heart and it breaks ours, but God created everyone with a freedom of choice. They may choose to reject Him. How did the rest of the group go?”

"I think it went well. We answered a lot of questions, and everyone is looking forward to learning more about Jehovah God," said Titus.

"Did the group discuss or mention Justus?"

"Most of them apologized for his behavior, but we told them that he was just struggling and processing the truth, and some people put up a bigger fight against God than others. They seemed okay with that and seemed glad that we weren't upset by it," said Appius.

"Good. How about you two?"

"It was good. At least I'm sure we covered all the stuff we were supposed to. They, too, are eager to learn more about Jehovah God and actually asked about whether we worship one God or two? I told them we would talk about that this week," reported Julius.

"Good. How about you, Markus and Diana?"

"Same here. Lots of questions, lots of eagerness for this lesson," said Markus.

"Good. How about you, Lucas and Amata? Anything different with your group?"

"We covered everything. They were not only eager but just demanded answers about Jehovah God and how He differed from Roman gods," said Lucas.

"I think they are really ready for this lesson," said Amata.

"Does anyone have questions?" Everyone agreed that they were okay. "So, first they need to know how Jesus and God are one God. How will you explain it, Appius?"

"Jehovah God is one God, but He has three different aspects, like a husband, son, and dad. God is often called the Father and stays in Heaven. Jesus is often called the Son because He came to earth and became human for a period of time. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit that moves throughout the earth making people hunger for God and then living inside of them when they accept Jesus as Messiah."

"Very good. Does anyone have anything else to add?" asked Orly.

"The Holy Spirit who lives inside us directs us, guides us, empowers us, and changes us to be more like Jesus," said Markus.

"Don't forget to add that Jesus claimed to be God when He said, 'If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.' We are also told that at Creation the Holy Spirit was hovering over the darkness, that Jesus did the actual creating, and that God rested after six days of Creation. From that we have to trust that God is one God with three aspects," said Orly. "Do you have any questions?"

"I don't, but I've got a feeling that our group will," said Lucas.

"Just remember, if we understood it all, then He wouldn't be God," said Orly. "Okay, then the next thing we talked about were the attributes of Jehovah God. We talked about three attributes that start with the letter 'O.'" The group reviewed God's characteristics and Orly was very pleased. They ended with a discussion of God's love for them and then took a break.

After a short break, Orly continued. "Everyone will do this part differently. I just want you to tell them how you made the decision to invite Jesus to be your Messiah. Then allow them time to do it too if they are ready. But make sure they understand that you are not rushing them. They can continue to ask questions and continue to attend the group until they get their answers. Then I suggest that you tell them that both of you are available to answer questions, or to help them accept Jesus by praying with them. Make a place for privacy for those who want to talk with you. Now, what are your questions?"

"What do we do if no one is ready?" asked Julius.

"I think I would wait for a few minutes and then ask if they want to meet again next week to ask more questions, or have they heard enough? But don't rush them or push them in any way. Let the Holy Spirit do His work," replied Orly.

Everyone seemed to be eager and expecting God to do great things. So Orly continued, "Let's sing Psalm 150 and then we'll pray together." By now the song had become familiar to them and they sang it heartily. "Father, we trust that You are moving in the hearts of the people in our groups. We have been faithful to plant the seeds, now we trust that You will bring the harvest. Help us to relax and let You do Your work. Bless each team with wisdom and courage and total reliance on You. In Jesus' name."

"Remember, we are available to answer questions and you are welcome here at any time," said Gabriela.

"Will we meet next week?" asked Markus.

Orly assured them, "Of course, we'll keep meeting for worship and prayer for as long as you guys want to meet."

On Sabbath morning, the two young couples walked with Mother to the synagogue and promised to return after the Sabbath had ended. Orly told them, "I'd like to talk with the four of you tonight if you are not too tired."

Orly and Gabriela had a wonderful Sabbath together. They took naps, ate snacks that Mother Ruth had prepared ahead of time, prayed for the groups, and prayed for the two young couples. They especially prayed for the Gentiles who would be making decisions today. After milking the goats, Orly collected the mats and made Gabriela a stack to lie on in the living room while he fixed them a post-Sabbath snack. They had barely finished eating when the two couples and Mother Ruth arrived home. "Is everything okay? You seem earlier than usual."

"We just had a really wonderful day. Joshua spoke again at group and Oren became a follower of Jesus. We'll have to have a baptism soon!"

"Mother Ruth, that's great news."

Mother Ruth and the men sat on the cushions, while the two young wives sat on the floor. Orly began, "Gabriela, Mother Ruth, and I have been discussing your future. That may sound presumptuous, but we have been very pleased with your work this past week and we wanted to let you know some of our ideas. You are certainly free to

accept or reject them, ask questions, or modify them depending on what is best for you. Our suggestion is that you agree to stay with us for one year. You could live in the two new rooms. It's going to get pretty cold for camping and we're getting close to the rainy season, so you'll need to find indoor housing soon. You two would be working for Palti and you two ladies could continue to work for us in exchange for housing and meals. We would work together as a family to provide whatever Gabriela needs. I assure you we won't treat you like slaves, but we do need help with the work. Your advantage is that you can save up your money to not only purchase a place of your own, but also buy all the things that are necessary to survive, like dishes and pots and pans and mats and robes. The other advantage is that Mother would continue to instruct you in cooking and teaching you other homemaking skills. That's just our suggestion, but we are open to your ideas. I don't need an answer tonight, but I want to start discussing and praying about it with you. If you don't want to work for us, that is fine, but please let us know so that we can find someone else to help care for Gabriela. Do you have any questions?"

"So, you are offering us a place to live and food in exchange for Leah and Lena's work. Are you planning on increasing that workload on them?" Gersham asked.

"Not planning on it. It should go pretty much the way it has this week, but I can't promise that Gabriela will stay healthy. There may be a time in there when we all have to work together to care for her through the night just like a family would. There are no guarantees. But if at any time, it becomes too much work for all of us, I'll hire more people to help."

"I can't imagine turning down an offer like that, but let us talk about it and pray about it. We'll give you an answer tomorrow or Monday. Will that work?"

"Certainly," said Orly, "and goodnight."

"Goodnight and shalom."

"Shalom."

Soon the house was quiet, and everyone was asleep, but down at the campsite an excited group of young adults were talking about decisions. They discussed the pros and cons. They realized that Orly was right. They didn't own anything. They would gradually get some income, but it would have to be primarily used for rent. And the wives admitted that they were learning a lot of very useful things that would help them in the future. They agreed that God had provided them with an excellent teacher in Mother Ruth. She felt like a grandmother who loved them and showed them everything they needed to know. They told the men that it didn't really feel like working. They felt like daughters already and they loved Gabriela. Mario reminded them that once they started work for Palti, they wouldn't be around except in the evenings. But Gershom wondered if they would have enough privacy. They agreed that could be a problem, but asked if they wouldn't be free to take walks, or go up on the rooftop, or to the courtyard. They could go into their rooms and shut the door. The discussion was

definitely leaning toward committing to staying for one year. They agreed to pray about it and discuss it again in the morning. By morning, both couples agreed that it was the right decision to stay and accept Orly's offer.

Mario helped Orly with the milking then they joined the others who were preparing breakfast. Sabra had arrived and was pleased with Gabriela. She felt that she had grown appropriately by using a string to measure her girth. She encouraged Gabriela to keep eating and asked about any changes. She called Orly into the room and asked if he had any questions.

"Is everything okay?"

"So far, so good. Whatever she is doing seems to be the right amount of activity. Don't increase and don't decrease unless you feel a change. If you feel tired, stop. Let's keep these babies happy."

Gabriela giggled, "They don't seem very happy, they are fighting all the time!"

Sabra disagreed. "I don't think they are fighting. Even a single baby does his or her fair share of kicking and elbowing. I like to think they are just strengthening their muscles like butterflies getting ready to fly."

Since Sabra seemed in no hurry to leave, Gabriela asked her how Chaya was doing, and the girl talk began. Orly said he needed to get to work.

Mother Ruth and the girls were tackling the kitchen. They seemed happy working together. Since the men were beginning to tear out the doorways to the house, Orly helped the ladies get Gabriela moved to the courtyard before he left. He knew that Mr. Kenan was aware that Sundays were late mornings for him because of Sabra's visit.

When he arrived at the shop, he asked Lucas about his group. "All five of my boys accepted Jesus as Messiah, two of my daughters-in-law and all four grandchildren. I think the other girls will come around; they just weren't quite ready yet."

"That's great news! I'm so happy for you! Does that make me a grandpa?" asked Orly. "Oh, and Lucas, if you see Mr. Kenan, tell him I need to talk with him." They got busy with their work.

When Orly went to the center to pick up some fresh iron, Markus met him and whispered that all but one couple had become followers, including his son. Orly was grinning from ear to ear. This was better news than he expected. He could hardly wait for noon break to hear about the other two groups. But visiting was frowned on, so he returned to his station and got busy. *Twenty-two new followers. That is incredible. What do I do next, Father? Please guide me.*

Mr. Kenan startled him as he was pounding on a piece. "Orly, come up front." Orly didn't know whether Gabriela had sent for him or whether this was business. But he dropped everything and followed Mr. Kenan to the front. When they had shut the door and could hear better, Mr. Kenan said, "Lucas said you wanted to see me." Orly let out a huge sigh of relief and Mr. Kenan apologized for scaring him. Orly assured him, "That's not your fault. I guess I'm just expecting any day

now for her to be crushed by the babies. It's just so much weight to be carrying around, and she's so tiny."

"I assure you, we are all praying for her safety as well as the babies'. Did you get a bad report this morning from Sabra?"

"No, she's staying stable. She still can't be up or do anything, but she's able to walk on her own just a little and that helps everyone a lot. No, what I needed to ask was if I could borrow your oxcart. Palti is still working on mine. Lucas needs to train the ox to a cart, and we need some supplies from the Capernaum market."

"Do you want the small cart or the large one?"

"The small one will be fine, and thank you, sir."

"I'll have Enoch bring it over in the morning and you may keep it all week."

At noon Orly sat down beside Julius and asked how the group had gone. Julius grinned and said, "You can't wait until Sabbath night to find out?"

"No, I can't. I think I will explode if you make me wait."

"All five couples asked Jesus to be their Messiah and committed their lives to Jehovah," said Julius. "I almost came over last night about midnight to tell you, but Marcella wouldn't let me."

Appius and Titus reported that eight men in their group had accepted Jesus, but the other three had questions that they wanted to talk about next week.

"That's amazing. God is bringing the harvest. Now we get to disciple them and grow them into leaders for new groups. We'll talk about that next week. I need to call time, don't I?"

He called the men back to work and let Mr. Kenan and Seth know that forty Gentiles accepted Jesus this Sabbath. "Thank you both so much for supporting the Gentile ministry."

"That's amazing. I have to get over to your house and visit. I promise I'll try this week. Now, back to work," said Mr. Kenan.

When he arrived home, Amata and Lucas were just leaving. He told Lucas that he had borrowed the oxcart for the entire week, so they could go to Capernaum whenever they wanted to pick up supplies. Goodbyes were said and Orly stopped to enjoy the smells of fresh bread and something hot and inviting sitting on the table. He went to Gabriela's room and found her smiling and happy. He shared with her privately that forty new followers had come out of Saturday's meetings. She rejoiced with him and then they quickly joined the others so the food wouldn't get cold.

"Let's eat and then I want to hear all about your day and see the new rooms and I have some good news to share. But right now, I'm starving. Father, thank you for this food. In Jesus' name."

"I think the news you want to hear from us is that we've made our decision. We would like to accept your offer and commit to being a part of this family for one year. It's an offer we can't refuse. God has affirmed it all day long for all of us," said Gersham.

Orly felt the tears coming as he simply said, "Praise God for His provisions for us. We need you and you need us. He has brought us

together to bless us and grow us. I can't wait to see what He will do with us together."

"What is your news, Son? You said you had some good news to share."

"Yesterday, forty Gentiles became followers of Jesus. There will be more in the coming days, but it's a tremendous wildfire that is going to sweep the entire world." Now the tears flowed freely, and everyone sat in wonder at what God was doing. Gabriela said that she needed to lie down again and went back to her room. She lay on her mat and wept in praise and worship. Leah came and sat with her and together they began to sing Psalm 150. The others gathered around her doorway and joined in. It was a sweet time of worship together.

Finally, Orly opened the door to the first room. The men had done an excellent job and it would be comfortable for a room full of boys, or girls. But for now, it would be a nice, spacious room for one of the couples. Then he opened the second door and found an identical room. Gersham asked Orly if he could talk with him about something and Orly asked, "Privately, or with the group?"

"I guess privately, but first I think we need to decide if we want to camp out tonight until I can purchase some mats. These floors are going to be hard." The couples decided to camp out since the grass was softer and the weather was perfect. Orly assured him that he had already arranged for Lucas to purchase mats for the rooms, but they wouldn't be available until later in the week.

While the girls were helping Mother Ruth clean the kitchen, Orly and Gersham went to the rooftop to talk. Gersham explained, "I see Gabriela really struggling to get up and down off her mat. In Jerusalem, the rich people ordered beds. They are just simple frames of wood — some very ornate, of course, but basically just frames of wood that are a little bigger than the mat. It would keep her from having to get up and down off the floor. I have some lumber left over, and if I could use some of the lumber you have stored in the cellar, I could make two of these beds. Now, I won't have time to carve them up fancy, but Mario and I could certainly make the basic frames. We could put one in your room and the other one in the living room. Then instead of needing to stack four mats, you would just need to move her pillows to whichever bed she wants to use. And if she wants to rest out in the courtyard, the two girls could easily lift the bed and move it. It will just be four legs and several slats of wood. It will not be heavy at all, but it will support probably double her weight. It's just an idea. But we've ended up with a free day with nothing to do, and I really don't want to learn to sew or cook!"

"Let's go down and talk with Gabriela. I think she would be thrilled. First lesson in keeping a wife happy: always check with her first," said Orly.

They came back downstairs and Orly asked Gabriela if she was rested enough to listen to Gersham's idea. Gersham explained what he had in mind. Her only concern was whether she would accidentally roll off.

“Have you ever rolled off your mat before?” asked Gersham.

“No, I guess not,” she replied.

“You’ll have to get used to it, but I’ve made dozens of them, and everyone loves them. I won’t have time to make yours very fancy, but I already have the wood and we should be able to make them tomorrow.”

“Thank you very much, Gersham. It sounds very helpful. It is a strain for me to get up and down off the floor.”

“Then that will be our project for tomorrow. Good night, and thanks again for letting us join your family.”

Chapter 21

Monday was a busy day. Mother Ruth was teaching Leah to make cheese while Lena was churning butter. Enoch dropped off the oxcart, and the men were busy building beds. Gabriela mostly rested. When Lucas and Amata arrived, Lucas started training the ox to pull the cart. Amata helped Ruth finally finish her robe. It had taken her six weeks to make what Amata could have made in one, but Ruth was especially proud of her accomplishment. She tried on the robe, and everyone cheered while she modeled it. She asked Amata if she would make her second robe.

“Have you picked out the thread?”

“Yes, let me find it for you.” She showed Amata what she had picked out.

When Orly arrived home on Monday, he found his wife comfortably reclined on her new bed in the living room. She was delighted and that made Orly happy. On Tuesday, Gersham and Mario reported to work for Palti. Lucas and Amata spent their afternoon in Capernaum. They purchased four new mats and blankets for the new rooms. After work, Mario and Orly had to care for the animals since Lucas didn't return until late.

Mother Ruth told the girls that she would be going to the market alone and left them to care for Gabriela. At the butcher's booth she purchased a fresh goat liver, and then began to shop for vegetables to make a simple dish for everyone else.

When she arrived home the ladies were sitting in the living room chatting with Gabriela. Leah and Lena jumped up to take the basket from Mother Ruth. They encouraged her to sit while they put things away. Leah brought Gabriela a plate with a cucumber and goat cheese sandwich.

“I need to rest just a few minutes and then I'm going to get dinner started. Would you check and see if we have enough bread for everyone?”

“There's exactly seven rolls left,” reported Leah.

She told the girls that she would be preparing a goat liver dish for Gabriela, but a vegetable dish for everyone else. She asked who wanted to help her and who was going to help Gabriela change beds and get a good nap.

“I'll help Mother Ruth and you help get Gabriela settled,” said Lena.

“Okay,” said Leah, surprised that her sister would choose goat liver over a chamber pot. She and Gabriela giggled over it and agreed they were both such delightful tasks.

“I'm ready for a nice long nap, so I think you are free,” said Gabriela.

“I'll be in the kitchen if you need me.” Leah shut Gabriela's door and asked, “Where's Mother Ruth?”

“She took the goat liver out to the fire pit to roast it. I’m preparing these vegetables, and she asked if you could chop the bread into small crumbs to top both dishes. She said if the men only got one piece of bread they would feel disappointed, but if they got lots of toppings, they would be happy and not feel hungry. She’s a smart lady.” So, the girls worked side by side in the kitchen, chopping bread and preparing the vegetables.

When Mother Ruth brought the liver inside in a skillet, she seasoned it well, then surrounded it with vegetables and took it back to the oven. She instructed the girls to chop the rest of the prepared vegetables. As she seasoned the vegetable dish, she explained several possibilities for seasonings so that their husbands would never suspect that it was the exact same dish. Lena carried it out to the other oven and got it started. Ruth sent the girls down to fill a serving bowl with raisins and almonds from the cellar while she mixed up a quick batch of unleavened bread for breakfast. It would be good served with goat cheese. *You’ve got to remember you are cooking for seven now. You keep messing up and having to cover. How did I ever cook for forty people every single day?* Suddenly, she realized that at Mr. Kenan’s she divided the tasks among the servants, and everyone had a job that they were responsible for. She didn’t try to do it all herself. She thanked God for the thoughts that were forming in her head. She took the skillet down to the fire pit and stirred up the embers. She quickly fried the unleavened bread for breakfast and headed back to the house. Amata had arrived and began working on a baby shawl on the large loom. Ruth sat down and started a swaddling cloth. When the girls asked how they could help, she asked them to look in the bottom of the sewing shelves and see how many swaddling cloths were completed. Amata said that they needed twelve for the three babies, but the girls only found five. She stopped what she was doing and asked if the girls wanted to learn to weave. “Sure,” they replied. “We need to learn.” Amata got the girls started on the small loom. Mother Ruth assured them that everyone had to start slowly and then their fingers would adjust to it and get faster. After a little bit, Amata checked their work and showed them some missed stitches and encouraged the girls as they started over.

When Gabriela woke from her nap, she called Leah to help her. Mother Ruth and Lena went to the kitchen to finish dinner and carried the dishes from the outside oven. Lena noticed that it was beginning to sprinkle, and said she needed to run down to the stream and collect their blankets and travel bags. “Do you need help?” asked Mother Ruth.

“No, I think I can get it. We didn’t bring much.” She ran quickly down the trail and carried their four bags and blankets into the new rooms.



After dinner, the couples went to their new rooms for the first time. Mother Ruth was ready to go to her room but took the small loom with her. She was making good progress on the swaddling cloth. Gabriela and Orly stayed in their room and prayed and planned for the Gentile group there. Orly sat on the cushion and Gabriela lay on her bed. "Should I do the baptism lesson, or should I train the leaders to do it?" asked Orly.

"I think we should wait a week. Don't you think there will be more who will be ready this week?"

"I'm hoping so."

"But Orly, you said that it would be their groups. You need to be careful about setting yourself up as the leader. Jesus is the leader, not you."

"I already know that I want each group leader to baptize his own group. What do you think about letting them teach the lesson, do the baptizing, and provide for all the guests?"

"Orly, there will be at least a hundred people again or maybe even two hundred. Are you suggesting that we let them provide the food?"

"If we asked each group leader to bring food to share, it would be much easier. I guess I don't mind eating non-kosher food. What do you think?"

"If we created the menu and then asked for help in providing it, we could avoid things that would be really offensive to us."

"But it wouldn't be kosher, and it would be prepared by Gentiles."

"Would you feel okay eating it?" asked Gabriela.

"I think so, but I don't know. I think we'd better pray about it some more. Why don't you come up with a menu, but don't ask Mother. I don't want her to decide this. And let's talk about it more tomorrow night. I think this week, we'll focus on the reports and praise and worship and answering questions. Let's let it gel for a week before we do the baptism lesson. Then we'll do the baptism service the following Sabbath and let them invite all their friends. Maybe I should give a report to Mr. Kenan's group and let them help us to decide what to do about the kosher rules."

"That might be the wisest thing to do," said Gabriela.

On Friday, Mother Ruth and the girls planned their day. The girls wanted to make a squash soup for dinner and would need to make fresh bread to go with it. They needed to go to the market to get the squash and Mother Ruth asked them to get fruit for Orly's and Gabriela's Sabbath day snacks and meal. The Gentile group would be meeting in the courtyard, so the two couples would need to stay indoors after the Sabbath candles were lit.

When Orly got home, he and Lucas began to set up the courtyard. They carried the new living room bed out and Mother Ruth moved her pillows and blanket. Gabriela enjoyed watching the activity around her. She asked Amata what kind of dishes Roman families ate. She replied, "It's very similar to the things you cook, but we make a lot more meat dishes. I think all people pretty much eat the same things."

“Do you make goat cheese?” asked Gabriela.

“Oh, yes, we make pretty much everything that you and Joelle have served. But I think you use more variety in your seasonings than we do.”

The group began to arrive at the same time as Gersham and Mario. Everyone came together in the courtyard for the lighting of the Sabbath candles and prayer. The two couples wished them a goodnight and went inside to enjoy their meal. The men filled their plates while the ladies gathered around Gabriela and started catching up.

Orly asked if they could begin by singing Psalm 150 and promised to teach them a new Psalm later tonight. They sang together with enthusiasm, each one filled with awe that God would use them to point others to Him. Then Orly began, “I’ve heard the reports from the men. I couldn’t wait. But have you told each other?”

Everyone agreed that they had all caught up during the work week. “I have not planned a lesson for tonight. It is simply a night for celebration. As your groups meet this week, hopefully you can answer further questions, and others will be ready to make their decision. Make sure you let them know that they are welcome to continue to attend the group even if they haven’t chosen to become followers of Jesus. They may need more time to process and will be ready at a later time. So, make them feel loved and welcomed. Now, my question is, do you have any questions?”

“Don’t we need to plan a baptism?”

“Actually, that will be the lesson you will teach the next week and then the baptism will be the following Sab... I mean, Saturday, if that works for all of the groups.”

“So, do we have a lesson for tomorrow?”

“No. But you need to teach them Psalm 150 and you need to answer questions for those who haven’t decided yet. Each one of you knows what your group is struggling to understand, and you’ll have to let the Holy Spirit guide you. If you have any questions or something you want us to review tonight, I’m happy to help you with it.

“One of the things that I like to ask is whether they have heard the Holy Spirit speaking in their lives. You might share some examples of things you have heard or felt recently. You might want to talk about the way you’ve changed since you accepted Jesus. God will guide you. But let it be a celebration. I wouldn’t focus so much on those who haven’t made their choice, as on the ones who have. Hopefully, it will help the others see that making the choice to follow Jesus brings a lot of peace and love and joy. Let’s practice that right now. Let’s go around the circle and tell something that has surprised you about following Jesus. Lucas, why don’t you start us off?”

“Surprised me? I would say my biggest surprise is how comfortable I feel with other followers regardless of their background — Jew or Roman. If they are followers of Jesus, they are brothers or sisters now.”

“Good. How about you, Amata?”

“I feel the same, but I think the thing that has surprised me the most is this sense of purpose. Some of that is because I’m helping Orly and Gabriela get ready for their triplets, but I can’t wait to get up in the morning and wonder who I will meet and how God will use me to minister to them.”

“It’s amazing, isn’t it?” agreed Orly. “How about you, Diana?”

“I guess the surprising part for me is how happy I feel. I think I’ve been happier in these past two months than I’ve ever been. I find myself singing and even dancing at times, just because I’m so happy. It’s my way of worshipping Jehovah. And I do want to learn more songs! I hope it’s okay, but I’ve been making up new songs that I use to worship Him.”

“Of course, it’s okay. Would you sing one for us?” asked Gabriela.

“I guess,” said Diana shyly. She began to sing softly:

I’ve found a Rock to stand on, a God that I can trust.
He is my firm foundation.
I run to Him when I’m afraid, or sad, or feeling lonely.
I’ve found a Rock to stand on. Jehovah is my Rock.”

Everyone agreed that it was beautiful and encouraged her to sing it again so they could learn it too. Diana taught them the song and they sang it together until everyone knew it. Orly had a hard time speaking as he asked Markus to share.

“I think the thing that has surprised me is that when I don’t know the answers, God just places them in my head. I know they aren’t my thoughts because I’ve already tried to figure out the problem. For example, I was stuck on a project at work, and I took some time at break to pray. When I came back to my bench, I knew exactly how to fix it. God had given me the answer. It’s so cool to have a God who knows everything.”

“And what’s the technical word for that?” asked Orly.

“He’s omniscient,” said Markus, “but in a really practical way. I mean, He’s not off somewhere in the Heavens being holy. He helps me figure out real problems. That’s amazing to me.”

“Yes, I continue to be amazed at how practical and present He is in my life,” said Orly.

Each one continued to share and then Orly taught them to sing Psalm 23. They loved the words and sang it over and over. Orly prayed a prayer of blessing over them and then everyone pitched in to help clean up. Soon it was just Orly and Gabriela. They both began to praise God for these precious friends.

On Sabbath morning, as Orly and Mario were milking the goats, Orly told Mario that he really would like to share with Mr. Kenan’s group what was happening with the Gentiles. He hadn’t been able to attend the group in a couple of months since Gabriela had collapsed, and he was wondering if he and Lena would mind missing this week and letting him go and report. Mario agreed quickly and assured him that they would return home immediately after synagogue and

encouraged him to go and share with the group. The two couples and Mother Ruth left for synagogue and Gabriela and Orly spent their morning together. Orly felt the babies kicking and they tried to figure out which baby was which. At noon Orly prepared her a sandwich and she was on the bed in the living room when Mario and Lena returned from synagogue. Gabriela encouraged Orly to go ahead so he could check with Jordan to see what he had planned. He agreed and kissed her goodbye.

Gabriela told Lena that she needed help in the room, and they closed the door behind them. "I know that you are uncomfortable with this part of the job, Lena. We need to talk. Your parents taught you well and as a child, it is necessary to stay away from what is vile and dirty. But now that you are a woman, there are certain things that change. I want you to learn to help me without feeling ashamed or dirty. I want you to be proud of being a woman. Women are the ones who deal with chamber pots, soiled blankets, bloodied cloths, and dirty baby shawls. It's nothing to be afraid of or ashamed of. It's not something reserved for slaves. It is something that every true woman does to serve, like Jesus teaching his apostles to wash feet."

"I've never thought about it that way," said Lena.

"We all have some growing to do. It's hard for me to need this kind of help. But these little guys are growing rapidly," said Gabriela, "and I need a lot of help."

"May I ask you a question?" asked Lena. "Does it hurt?"

"Does what hurt?"

"Carrying a baby," whispered Lena.

"Well, it's not exactly comfortable, because they are heavy, and they are getting heavier. But it is God's design and such an honor to bring life into the world. Did you know that they wiggle inside me? Would you like to feel them?" Lena's eyes were wide, and she wasn't sure whether it was okay.

Gabriela helped Lena place her hand on her belly and told her just to be still for a few minutes.

"Oh, my. They are wiggly!" She giggled and asked what it felt like inside.

"Well, it started out as just a tickle. Now they are getting stronger. When I first felt the babies, I finally knew for sure that they were alive. It's a wonderful feeling."

"Thank you, Gabriela."

"You are very welcome," said Gabriela sleepily.



Orly walked to Mr. Kenan's house and realized that it had been a really long time since he had enjoyed the fellowship there. He hadn't even heard much of what was going on. He hated to miss time with Gabriela, but he knew she would probably sleep all afternoon. He sat under the shade tree with Mother and her friends and asked where he

could find Jordan. Benjamin thought he had seen him headed to their place of prayer. Orly excused himself and found Jordan sprawled on the grass in obvious distress. "What's wrong, my friend?"

Jordan jumped to his feet and yelled, "Orly, is that you or an angel in answer to my prayer?"

"I think I'm just Orly, but it depends on what your prayer was?"

"I'm supposed to lead today, and I've got a hundred possibilities but I'm getting a no on all of them," said Jordan.

"I may be the answer to your prayers, I don't know. I just felt led to share with the group what was happening with the Gentile believers and to once again beg for help. I wanted to run it by you and see if that would be appropriate. I really don't know what you are doing with this group, and I certainly don't want to interrupt anything you have planned."

"No, I think you are my angel, and they would love to hear a report on your work. I know I would!" said Jordan. "Are you ready? It's time!"

"Okay," said Orly as Jordan grabbed him by the arm and hurried him to the courtyard. Several of the men greeted him while Jordan led the singing. Then he called for Orly to come and share whatever was on his heart.

"The first thing that is on my heart," began Orly, "is that Gabriela and I miss you terribly. This group is our family, and it's not the same now that we can't meet with you regularly. A couple that you met last week, Mario and Lena, are staying with Gabriela today to allow me to come. Gabriela is doing okay. Sabra is still concerned that she won't be able to carry the babies, but we have placed that in God's hands. Gabriela is not totally flat, but mostly. If you can visit with her, feel free to drop in. She sleeps a lot but it's okay to wake her up. Thank you for your prayers for her and the babies. We appreciate it.

"This morning, I wanted to give you an update on the Gentile ministry. I think the last time I shared with you, five men and three ladies had accepted Jesus as their Messiah and we had their baptism. In obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit, I've been teaching them what to teach their own friends and family. Last week forty Gentiles became followers of Jesus. So, we now have a total of forty-eight brothers and sisters who are Romans. They have received the Holy Spirit just like we have. He's guiding them and instructing them. It's amazing to see the changes in their lives. I'm going to stop here and see if anyone has any questions and then I have some."

"Won't you need to set up a baptism for these new followers?" Joshua asked.

"Yes, I will. That's one of the things on my list to discuss today. Can you wait on that for a few minutes?"

"Sure."

When there were no other questions, Orly continued. "I am so grateful for your support. I needed to hear that today. Two weeks ago, James and John made a special effort to come and encourage us. They said that the Holy Spirit is leading others all along the coast of

the Great Sea to reach out to Gentiles, and they are becoming followers, too. We talked a lot about how the groups were designed and functioned. You need to know that most of those leaders, even though they are fully Jewish, are not keeping the kosher rules written down by Moses. Their belief is that Jesus died to set us free from those rules.”

Several in the group stood to ask questions and Orly called on Benjamin.

“Didn’t Jesus keep kosher rules?”

“Yes, He did. But that was before He had died to fulfill the Jewish Scripture. He said that His death would set us free from the Law.”

The others sat down because that was also their question.

“Now up to this point, Seth and Mr. Kenan have been providing all the food for the Gentile group. I believe, as the group matures and multiplies, it is important that they start helping more and provide the food. I have promised to abide by your guidance, so after hearing from James and John that other Jewish leaders were not remaining kosher, I’m coming to you with my question. Is it time? Is it right? Is it good? Gabriela and I know that we want to keep our home kosher. The question is: When we are meeting with the Gentiles, should we ask them to provide their own meals? And should we eat what they prepare?”

Immediately, several stood and Orly called on one of the ladies.

“Wouldn’t you become unclean?”

“I don’t think so, and James and John didn’t think so. I believe that there is nothing that makes you unclean except rejecting Jesus as your Messiah.”

“Would you eat meat with blood?”

“Absolutely not. We were thinking of asking the Romans to bring dishes without meat. Right now, they are being very respectful of our desire to remain kosher, but they understand that we are feeling confused. I believe that they will eagerly embrace whatever is necessary to make us feel more comfortable with them.”

“They are also saying shalom whenever I leave them,” added Mr. Kenan. “That surprised me.”

“Yes, but they are not interested in becoming Jewish. They are interested in following Jesus. We need to decide whether it’s okay for Gabriela and me to not remain kosher. Are we insisting on something that Jesus did away with?”

Everyone sat silently for a few minutes and thought about it. Jordan finally spoke, “I appreciate your dilemma and want you to have fellowship with the Gentile followers. If they are going to keep growing, they need to provide their own food. And James and John approved of this?”

“Yes, in fact, Jonathan, James’s son, is leading a mixed group in Antioch where they serve Greek, Phoenician, Jewish, and Roman food. Everyone just eats whatever is set before them. They only abstain from meat that has been offered to idols.” After some more discussion, Orly asked, “If you are in agreement that it would be okay

for Gabriela and me to eat non-kosher foods when we are with the Gentiles, would you stand?”

Everyone stood. Then Orly asked a second question. “Would you consider us to be unclean? Remain standing if you feel that we would be unclean.” Everyone sat down.

“Thank you. If you pray about it and the Holy Spirit tells you differently, please come to me and let me know, because we are genuinely seeking God’s will in this. Now, I don’t think I had a chance to report that on the Sabbath when the first eight Gentiles were baptized, they invited over a hundred family and friends to watch. We appreciate Mr. Kenan and his staff so much for helping us provide food for them. The baptism for this next group will probably be larger, but we’re not sure. We’d appreciate any help we can get for serving them, but I will also ask them to help with the food. We will need bread, cheese, butter, and water jars. I’ve got plenty of water.” Everyone laughed.

“This has been a truly humbling experience, to be called and then immediately crippled by Gabriela’s inability to serve beside me. I am so grateful to this group. Please keep us in your prayers, stop and visit us when you can, and let me know if you can help with the baptism. Gabriela and I pray for you each Sabbath as you are meeting here. We love you. Jordan, come and lead us in closing prayer.”

Orly felt surrounded by love from this group. Afterward it took quite a while to receive all the well-wishers and volunteers. He finally was able to leave and return to Gabriela. She was awake and waiting for his news. He explained to all three of them what had happened. “Would you consider us unclean if we eat what the Gentiles have prepared in their non-kosher kitchens?”

“I’ve never thought about it, but I agree with you that food can’t possibly make us unclean or not in a right relationship with God,” said Mario. “I feel like I’m learning to see through new eyes since I’ve been here.”

“At times I wonder if I’m off track, and then I see the life inside of these new followers and I know for sure that this is God’s work and His call and this freedom from the Law is what He wants for all of us,” said Orly.

Orly and Mario went down to milk the goats. When they returned, Lena had found enough bread, sliced some onions and cucumbers, and set out some cheese, butter, and jelly. “I would have made your sandwiches, but I don’t know what you like. Gabriela, are you going to join us, or do you want me to fix you a plate?”

“I think I’d better stay put. I’m feeling tired tonight. Please bring me an onion and jelly sandwich if there’s still some jelly in there.”

Mother Ruth, Gersham, and Leah arrived shortly. Orly told Gabriela and Mother Ruth about those who had volunteered to help. “For the baptism, Mr. Kenan said he would send Enoch over with the water jars for everyone and enough bread and cheese for fifty people. Seth and Joelle said that they would send enough bread and butter for twenty people. Rebecca said she would send enough bread and

cheese for twenty people. Joelle said that she would continue to send the meal over for the group until you told her it wasn't needed. Mrs. Vada said she would continue to send the bread, also. I think that's all that I can think of."

"You are certainly loved by that group. I've heard bits and pieces, but would you mind telling us about how Mr. Kenan's group got started?" asked Gersham.

"Sure. Gabriela, are you comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you." Everyone settled in the living room as Orly told the history of Mr. Kenan's group.

"Orly, I need to get to sleep. I don't know why I feel so tired tonight, but will you walk with me?" said Gabriela,

"Certainly, m'lady," said Orly.

Chapter 22

Sabra came bright and early on Sunday morning and went in to examine Gabriela. “This raised mat is a wonderful addition. Where did you find such a device?”

“It’s called a bed. Gersham and Mario made two of them for me. The other one is in the living room. They are lightweight enough to move out to the courtyard.”

“Everything looks and sounds okay, but how are you feeling?”

“Honestly, I just feel more and more tired. I feel that all I do is eat and sleep and watch this belly get bigger and bigger.”

“I can’t tell you what it will be like with triplets, but you are reaching the stage where most women begin to complain that the baby is getting heavy to carry around. You multiply that by three and I think it’s going to get much worse. I would prefer that you not feel this tired. But I don’t like the idea of making you stay flat because you still have a long way to go. Is there anything you can cut out that you are currently doing?”

“I probably shouldn’t be sitting at the table for meals. I try to sit up for breakfast and dinner, but it really tires me out.”

“There you go. Let’s do the plate in bed. Let’s try that for this week, but if you aren’t feeling better by Wednesday, let me know and we’ll see what else we can try.”

After the men had left for work, Mother Ruth sat the two girls down and asked for their help with something that was on her mind. “I think instead of me being in charge of everything, it would be good for you two to take charge of some things. Here’s my plan, but I’m open to suggestions. Let’s say that you, Lena, are in charge of bread from now on. You will make all the bread we need and decide when we need to make it.”

“I don’t see why not. I know how to make bread, but you want me to take the responsibility for deciding when it should be done instead of you telling us it’s time to do it. Is that what I’m hearing?”

“Exactly. Also, you need to make sure you have the supplies to make it, so you don’t run out at the wrong time,” said Mother Ruth.

“Then Leah, you will be in charge of the cheese making. I’m always running out, so I need someone to take charge of that. You will need to make sure you have the supplies and make sure that there’s always cheese for Gabriela’s snacks and dinners. Now, I will still need your help with all the other things you are doing, but I can at least not worry about bread and cheese. We’ll trade off whenever you get tired of that role. But it would really help me out and you can learn to master them.”

Both girls got up to check to see what needed to be done. “I’ll definitely need to make bread today,” said Lena.

Leah came back from the cellar and reported that the cheese was getting a little low. “Shouldn’t I start another batch now so that we

won't run out? It takes at least three days to make, right? And how long can you keep cheese in the cellar before it ruins?"

"It will usually last a week if it's kept cool. Now, ladies, we have a very messy kitchen to tackle. Shall we?"

"I would like to check on Gabriela. I'll be right back."

When Leah quietly opened the door, she found Gabriela crying. Leah was startled because Gabriela was always so cheerful. "What's wrong?" She ran to Gabriela and knelt beside her bed.

"Oh, I'm just being silly. I guess I'm just feeling a little scared. I knew I was getting tired, and Sabra said no more sitting at the table. I don't mind that. I think I'm just realizing what a scary thing this is. I'm thinking about the 'what ifs' instead of celebrating today and trusting."

"I can't imagine how scary this must feel, and I don't want you to feel bad about being afraid. But when I'm afraid, I run to Abba, Father God, and ask Him to hold me and comfort me. He always does." Then Leah began to softly sing Psalm 23:

Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies:
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever.

Gabriela began to sing quietly with her. Soon Mother Ruth and Lena joined in from the kitchen. "Thank you, sweet sister, I needed that."

All week the men worked at their jobs while the ladies took care of Gabriela and all the homemaking chores. Joelle came over to visit one afternoon, and she and Gabriela giggled over the difference in their size, but later Joelle confided to Seth that she was really scared for Gabriela. "She is so very big, and it is way too early for the babies to be born." Seth asked when the babies would be big enough. Joelle said she thought most babies died if they were born before nine months and Gabriela was around seven months. "It's such a strain on her body. I'm afraid she will die." Seth reminded her that they had to trust that God would take care of Gabriela and the babies. "I don't think I'll ever complain again about this little guy."

“Oh, it’s a guy, now?”
“Could be!” teased Joelle.



Friday after work, the Gentile group gathered. Each team reported that the week had gone well. There were some questions and as expected, five more had invited Jesus to be their Messiah. Orly led them in singing Psalm 150 and began to teach them what they needed to know about baptism. When he was finished, he asked the usual question, “Any questions?”

Markus asked who would be helping Orly with the baptisms. Orly grinned and said, “Oh, yeah, I forgot to cover that part. Each team will baptize their own members. So that you don’t get exhausted, you’ll take turns. Don’t forget to bring several blankets, it could be a little chilly by then, and remind your group to bring blankets or a change of robes. We’ll just keep rotating through the four groups until we’re done. Does that sound good or are there other suggestions?”

“Let’s go over the details of the actual baptizing,” suggested Orly. When he had finished, he asked, “Diana, will you lead us in your song, ‘Jehovah is my Rock’?” They sang it together and Orly led them in Psalm 23. “Did you teach your group Psalm 150?”

Everyone nodded. “Okay, so we’ll close with that on Saturday. Then we have one more thing to cover tonight. Gabriela, do you want to cover this?”

“Mother Ruth will have to; I’m just too tired.”

“We would like to offer a snack after the baptism to celebrate. We want to welcome those that you have invited and give them a place to mingle and ask questions. We are thinking that we could have about a hundred and fifty people. Is that about right?” The group agreed. “So far, we have volunteers from Mr. Kenan’s group to cover snacks for a hundred. We need your help in covering the other fifty people,” said Ruth.

“But it wouldn’t be kosher,” said Amata.

“No, it wouldn’t. After much prayer, alone, with Gabriela, with the apostles, and with Mr. Kenan’s group, we have decided that we will set aside the kosher rules while we are with you because of the freedom we have in Jesus,” said Orly.

Ruth continued, “Could each of you provide bread and cheese or butter for twenty people apiece? That would allow us a little extra just in case.”

They all agreed and were happy to help. Orly prayed for God’s blessings on each of the groups meeting tomorrow and for the upcoming baptism. He reminded them that they would not meet next Sabbath night but would meet on Saturday.

Orly and Gabriela enjoyed their Sabbath together and Orly got some much-needed rest. They talked about their week, shared their

blessings, and prayed together. They both seemed to realize how precious this time was.

On Sunday, when Lucas and Amata arrived, she told Ruth that she and the other ladies were also going to provide plates of sliced vegetables and fruit for all the people attending. Ruth gave Amata a hug. "It will be a special, special day and I will be here to see you baptize your family."

"Ruth, pray for my son, Magnus. He and his family are coming from Capernaum. He came for our baptism. Now he says he will come again to see his brothers baptized. We hope he will ask questions."

"Of course, I'll pray, Amata."

Once Amata started weaving, she called to Lena and Leah who were talking with Gabriela in the living room. "Would you ladies mind grabbing the pile of shawls and letting Gabriela help you count up how many we have completed?" The girls grabbed the pile of shawls and enjoyed seeing Gabriela's look of wonder as she examined each one. They reported that there were seventeen shawls. "Okay, whenever you go to the market, you need to pick out twenty more skeins of the very smallest, softest yarn. Then we'll re-count when we use those up."

The week passed quickly as they prepared for the baptism. Friday was especially busy as Enoch brought over fifty additional water jars. He had brought two servant boys to help him fill them at the stream. They started lining the jars along the living room walls, but soon ran out of space. The girls invited him to line the walls of their rooms. He asked Ruth to let him fill her jars, too. It seemed that every available space had a water jar with a cloth over it. He said he would return later with the bread and cheese. Just before noon, Rebecca arrived with two of her servants carrying bread and cheese. The bread was wrapped in cloth and inside cloth sacks, so they could easily sit on top of the water jars.

Gabriela had just finished her snack when she heard Joelle at the door. Gabriela moved to the bed in the living room and gasped at the water jars and bread that were accumulating there. "Oh, that's not all, our rooms are filled with water jars, too," said Lena. Joelle laughed and gave her a hug.

"You call that a baby bump?" challenged Gabriela.

"Not compared to that mountain!" laughed Joelle. She helped Gabriela get comfortable on her bed and Joelle agreed that the bed was a great idea. She admitted that she had trouble getting off the floor sometimes, too. The girls visited and caught up while her servants got the cheese and bread stored away for tomorrow. Mother Ruth was at the outside oven baking bread while Lena was preparing another batch.

"You know I'm praying for you. I'll try to visit again next week. I love you, sister," said Joelle.

"I love you, too. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Mother Ruth came in and sat down. She needed a rest before she seasoned the cheese. "What flavors sound good to you?"

"Do we have any walnuts? I really liked that one last time. And do something savory like rosemary or basil. You are so good with the flavors; I know whatever you make will be perfect."

Mother Ruth took the stirring spoon, two large serving bowls and a piece of bread down to the cellar. Lena was punching down her bread in the kitchen area. Gabriela dozed off to sleep and was awakened when Amata and Lucas arrived and started laughing about the stash of food filling the whole house. "There's probably room on the roof for more, but we're not going to be able to walk soon." They agreed. Amata assured her that she and the others would bring their contributions tomorrow.

"So, what can we do to help?"

"We aren't meeting tonight, so would you two arrange the courtyard for tomorrow? Those shelves could probably use a scrubbing, and the benches need to be scooted out of the way yet available for anyone who wants to sit. Be sure and make room for my bed. I want to be as much a part as I can. I'll be praying for you the whole time."

When Mother Ruth finished seasoning the cheeses, she left the two bowls down in the cellar and covered them carefully. She brought back a roll with the two different cheeses to let Gabriela taste. Gabriela thought they were both perfect, and she finished off the roll with a flourish. Mother Ruth poured Gabriela some freshly squeezed plum juice and asked, "I'm sorry. Did we forget your snack today?"

"Nope. These little guys were just hungry, I guess. You and the girls are taking wonderful care of me. But I do think I should go back to my room and try to get a nap before dinner. Could you help me get settled?"

Enoch soon arrived with his load of bread and cheese. He and Leah continued to stack the bread on top of the water jars, and she asked him to carry the five bowls of cheese down to the cellar.

Orly arrived home and he and Lucas walked around the grounds talking about what needed to be done. They both agreed they were so excited about tomorrow that they couldn't concentrate. They walked down to the stream and made sure everything would be ready for a crowd tomorrow. They moved some broken limbs and hoped it wouldn't be too cold for everyone. They ended up back at the barn and Lucas milked the goats while Orly watered Samson. Orly helped Gabriela to her living room bed and Mother Ruth lit the Sabbath candles. Orly prayed a prayer of blessing over each one and a special blessing on the upcoming baptism.

At dinner, Gersham asked if it would be okay if they stayed to watch the Gentile baptisms instead of going to Mr. Kenan's group. Mother Ruth announced that she planned to do the same since she was a part of the group now. Orly agreed and asked if they realized that the food would not be kosher. They said they had prayed and were not troubled about it. Orly welcomed their support.

For Sabbath breakfast, they had olives and olive oil with bread. When Orly and Mario brought in the milk, they laughed about having to drink it all because there was no place to set it. They left the goats in their pen so Orly could start setting up the courtyard while Mother Ruth and the two couples went to synagogue. He carried the water jars out to the courtyard and the cheese up from the cellar. He carried out the small dining table and Gabriela's bed. He had just sat down when Gabriela called and needed his help. She was too excited to go back to sleep, so he sat with her, and they talked until Mother and the others returned from synagogue. Mother quickly started the girls helping her arrange the food trays. Then all they could do was wait. Orly told them Psalm 150 would be their signal to start uncovering the food.

Suddenly, Mother Ruth realized that Gabriela could not be left alone during the baptism. She had wanted to see Amata's family baptized, but she couldn't ask the girls to miss out. Yet, Orly and Gabriela had been teaching her to ask for what she wanted. She asked Leah and Lena to help her in the root cellar. They looked puzzled but followed her there. "Ladies, I have a request, but it is not required of you. Is there any way that one of you could stay with Gabriela so that I could watch the baptisms?"

"Oh, Mother Ruth, I hadn't even thought of that. Certainly, I will stay with her. It will be no problem," said Leah.

"How about if you stay with her for the first half, and then I'll come up and you can go watch the ending?" asked Lena.

"That would be perfect. But I promise we won't leave Gabriela, Mother Ruth. Thank you for reminding us that she can't be left alone. I just forgot in all the excitement."

"Thank you, ladies. It's so hard for me to ask for help, but I promised Amata I would be there, and I forgot, too. It takes all three of us to take care of her. I'm so glad you are here."

The ladies returned and checked the food again and sat down to wait. When Gabriela called to Orly, he took her a sandwich and asked if she wanted to eat in her room or out in the courtyard. She opted to just stay in her room to eat if he would stay with her. So the two of them sat inside and she asked if he was ready. "Being ready is not the problem; waiting is the hard part. I remember doing my first baptism and I treasure this for our group. I feel like a grandpa!"

"And soon to be a first time abba."

He put his hand on her belly and felt the wrestling match that was going on inside. They both grinned. *Life. It was good.* Soon they heard Lucas and Amata arrive. Orly helped Gabriela move to the courtyard. Orly asked them to go ahead and walk down to the stream so that they could greet the others when they arrived. Lucas showed his family his garden before taking them all down the trail to the stream. Soon Markus and Diana and their family and friends joined them. Gersham and Mario and Lena walked down with Mother Ruth and left Orly and Gabriela and Leah to welcome the rest. It seemed that the whole town of Cana was arriving. Now, the food didn't seem to be too much, but

each lady faithfully brought more than she had promised, and they began to set food in the rooms. When Orly realized that it was time to begin, he told Leah goodbye, kissed Gabriela on the nose, and ran down the trail. He welcomed everyone and led them in prayer. He explained the meaning of baptism and then turned it over to Lucas and Amata. Everything worked exactly as he had planned it. Each team took turns baptizing a family or couple or two individuals. At the end Orly invited them to sing together Psalm 150. As they sang, Lena recognized the signal to start uncovering the food. Gabriela asked if there were serving spoons in all the cheese bowls. Lena checked and went to find more. Mother Ruth and Leah joined them and helped uncover the dishes. After being introduced to several people and visiting with them, Gabriela realized that she was feeling dizzy and a little overwhelmed. She asked Lena, who was standing nearby, to please help her. Lena grabbed Mother Ruth and together they assisted Gabriela to her bed in the room. In a few minutes, Orly was kneeling by her side and asking if she needed Sabra. She said, "I don't think so. I just don't feel like talking to so many people. I feel short of breath and dizzy, and I just want to sleep. I'll be fine." Lena assured Orly that she would stay with her, and he and Mother Ruth should go and enjoy their guests. Both left reluctantly. Lena sat and began singing Psalm 23 softly to her. Gabriela fell asleep before she finished.

All afternoon Orly answered questions, greeted new followers, congratulated his group members, and answered more questions. He was delighted to see that Jordan and Seth were mingling with the crowd and seemed to be doing the same. He hadn't noticed them earlier but was glad they were there. Ruth and the other ladies were busy bringing out more and more food. At one point, he noticed that Lucas and his six sons were carrying back fresh water from the stream. For Orly, it was more than he had ever hoped for. When he was able, he would slip away and check on Gabriela. Leah assured him that she was sleeping soundly, and that everything was fine.

As the sun touched the horizon, the women from the Gentile group began gathering up their empty dishes and helping with the cleanup. Mario slipped away to milk the goats and brought up the jars of milk. Seth and Jordan said they wanted to give a report to Mr. Kenan's family before they all scattered. Lucas supervised the cleanup of the courtyard before he left. There was enough bread remaining for them to enjoy a post-Sabbath meal. Mother Ruth began to pull out pickled fish, plum jelly, almonds, and raisins for everyone to eat. She had hidden a roll of goat cheese for Gabriela's sandwich and retrieved it from the cellar. Mother Ruth sliced some cucumbers and onions. Orly went to check on Gabriela. She was still sleeping, but Lena said that she thought he should wake her up and get her to eat something. She left them alone and Orly kissed Gabriela's hand. She opened her eyes and yawned. "Oh, it's dark. Have I slept all day?"

"You got too tired visiting with the crowd, and you came in here. You haven't slept all day — just a few hours. Are you ready to get up and eat some dinner?"

“Oh, I remember feeling sick and dizzy. Stay with me while I get up and let’s make sure that feeling is gone. I think I just got overtired. But I want you here.”

“I won’t leave you,” said Orly. Gabriela rose gently and reported no dizziness. She stood up and walked a few steps and still felt fine. She was able to move into her living room bed. “I want to hear all about the baptism — every single detail.”

“It was the most amazing thing I’ve ever witnessed,” said Gersham.

“Me, too. I’m so glad that God allowed us to see this. This is the wildfire that Jesus told his apostles would happen. And we got to see the beginning of the flame,” said Mario.

“I was just amazed at how happy everyone seemed. They were glowing with joy,” said Leah.

“It was a beautiful, beautiful picture and I think I would like to be baptized next time,” said Lena.

“You’ve not been baptized?” asked Mario.

“No, I was too young, but now I’m ready. How would I do that? I’ve already accepted Jesus as my Messiah and the Holy Spirit is speaking to me, but I’ve never been baptized,” said Lena more firmly now.

“I’m ready, too,” said Leah.

Orly told her, “I think Jordan will be planning a baptism service for Oren soon and I don’t know how many others. I’ll remind him tomorrow that he needs to get that planned before the weather gets colder.”

Gabriela was thrilled with the report. She asked Orly how he was feeling about it. “I just feel so humbled to see these new followers become leaders almost overnight. I’m still in shock that almost fifty people were baptized today. I didn’t count, but it was incredible to see.”

“What’s the next step?” asked Mario.

“Well, we’ll take a week to celebrate and then talk to them about teaming up and starting their own groups. Some of them will feel comfortable with that and some of them won’t. All of my first group wanted to lead groups. I haven’t decided yet what to do with those who don’t.”

Mario suggested, “Would it work to just ask them to join a team and provide prayer support even if they don’t want to lead a group? I mean, you don’t have to just have two people leading. You could have four or five providing leadership for a group. I’ve never led a group, but I felt that I was part of the leadership team at Mary’s, and I occasionally taught, but I didn’t have a place to meet with a group.”

“That’s true. I like that idea. Now, Gabriela, I think it’s time for you to retire. Let’s get you to sleep and rested so that Sabra doesn’t get upset with me in the morning,” said Orly.

“It’s been such a good day. Thank you all for sharing with me, and taking such good care of me,” said Gabriela.

On Sunday morning, Sabra listened and nodded and listened again. She asked Gabriela if staying away from sitting at the table was

helping. Gabriela said it was. Then she confessed that she had had a dizzy spell yesterday while they had a bunch of company visiting. "I immediately went to my room and slept for a couple of hours. When I woke up, everything seemed fine."

"Were you sitting up when the dizziness happened?"

"No, Orly moved my bed out to the courtyard, and I was visiting out there. I think I just got tired from talking too much!"

She listened again and said that she was glad that she had recognized that she needed to rest. "Please continue to listen to your body and don't push past those signals. Did you have any tightenings or pain?"

"No, ma'am. I just felt dizzy and a little short of breath."

Sabra called Orly in and reminded him if there was any tightening or pain, he should elevate her feet and take away her pillows. Then, she looked at Gabriela and said, "No, don't take away her pillows. These babies are really pressing on her breathing. Let me change those orders to just elevate her hips and legs and get me as soon as possible, but don't remove her head pillows or she will not be able to breathe."

"Okay, I'll let Mother and the ladies know since they are primarily taking care of her."

"They are doing a great job. I never thought that you would still be carrying these little ones. But you are doing great. You've got about two more months to go before they would be able to survive. Keep up the good work. Any questions?"

"No, just gratitude to you and to Jehovah for getting us this far," said Gabriela.

"Thank you, Sabra. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Orly kissed Gabriela goodbye and said he would talk with the ladies before he left. Orly asked them to join him at the table. "I just wanted to give you the report. Sabra says you are taking excellent care of Gabriela. She admitted that she didn't think Gabriela would carry the babies this long. We still have two more months to go before the babies can survive. But Sabra wants you to be aware of a new plan if she starts having pain or tightenings." He explained the new plan.

Orly grabbed a plum to eat on his way to work since he hadn't felt much like eating breakfast. He reported to Lucas, but Lucas sent him immediately into Mr. Kenan. "You are here early, sir. Is everything okay?"

"Yes, I just wanted to hear the update on Gabriela. Jordan said that she wasn't feeling good yesterday."

"Thank you, sir. Yes, Sabra checked her out and felt that she was doing fine. Gabriela just visited too long. She sleeps most of the time these days, only getting up for breaks and to change rooms. She wanted to be included but went straight to bed when she got tired. Sabra said there was no sign of distress this morning. If we can keep

this up for two more months, the babies will have a chance to live,” Orly reported.

“We are praying for both of you. I know this has been a hard time for you. I appreciate your work here and congratulations on the baptisms yesterday. Seth and Jordan said it was incredible. Someday, maybe we can get the two groups together.”

“Maybe so. But right now, my focus is on Gabriela.”

“Well, get back to work and if you need time off, just let me know. We’ll work something out.”



The next few weeks seem to crawl by. The Gentile group started providing their own food on Sabbath night. The first week after the baptism was a time of celebration. Then the second week, Orly outlined the plan for each member to become part of a leadership team. From the newly baptized group, seventeen new groups were formed, and everyone wanted to participate as co-leaders. Orly began the new series by quickly reviewing what the four original teams needed to teach their groups, then they spent the rest of the time in fellowship and worship. They felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in such a powerful way, that most of the time, Orly felt he was following instead of leading.



Orly realized that he had lost touch with Ruler Jedidiah and decided to check on him this week on one of his noon breaks. He didn’t want to lose that connection when Jordan left at the end of his apprenticeship.

On Tuesday, Orly told Lucas that he had a meeting with Ruler Jedidiah and might be a little late. “You know the rules,” said Lucas.

Orly ran to the synagogue and found Ruler Jedidiah at his desk preparing lessons. He greeted Orly with a huge hug and told him that he had missed seeing him at synagogue.

Orly said, “Sir, I know that’s important, but it’s more important that I be with my wife right now.”

“You have time for the Gentiles, but not for your own Jewish worship time?” asked Ruler Jedidiah critically. It hurt Orly deeply.

“Sir, do you know that my wife, Gabriela, is carrying triplets, and Sabra doesn’t know whether she will live, or if the babies will survive? I’m doing the best I know how to keep the Gentile group going. I feel that Jordan can handle anything that arises here. I just stopped by to see how you were doing. I understand that he is helping you now instead of doing all the teaching.”

“Orly, I apologize. I did not know your situation and I judged you unfairly. I am so sorry, yet I guess I should offer you congratulations. If

I had known, I would have stopped by to pray with you in the evenings. I am so sorry. Will you please forgive me?"

"Of course. I just supposed that everyone in Cana knew and was talking about it."

"If they are, it's only at the well, and I had not heard. I promise I will visit one evening after dinner. Would that be okay?"

"Yes, sir, and if it's all right, we can talk then, and I can get back to work. But I want to hear how you are doing. Shalom."

"Shalom, my son." *Father, forgive me. I did not know he was carrying such a heavy burden and I have been critical of him in my heart. Please forgive me and bless him. Bless our visit and help me to encourage and lift him up. And please protect Gabriela and their unborn babies.*

The next evening, Ruler Jedidiah stopped by to visit. Everyone had finished dinner, and Gabriela was sleeping on her bed in the living room. She didn't stir when Orly welcomed him in, and so the men just sat and talked quietly. Orly asked him how Jordan and the synagogue were doing. Ruler Jedidiah said that he couldn't be happier. Jordan was teaching him how to use his knowledge of Scripture to teach the congregation. It felt really good as the Holy Spirit guided him and reminded him what to teach and how. Orly was glad to hear such a good report. "Are the people growing?"

"I think so. They are very faithful in attendance. We are seeing a packed house just about every Sabbath."

"That's good. Has Jordan been keeping you informed on the Gentile ministry?"

"No, I haven't heard since you told me that eight had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. How is that work going?"

"Well, last Sabbath those eight baptized forty-eight more and for the past few weeks, seventeen new groups are meeting with almost ninety people attending."

"Orly, that's incredible. And you are providing the leadership for all of these groups? How?"

"No, sir. I'm providing leadership for my original eight and they are providing leadership for their own groups. The apostles James and John stopped by about a month ago to tell me that other Jewish leaders are spreading the gospel to the Gentiles all along the Great Sea. They are having similar responses."

"Orly, I need to let you get your rest. It's so good to catch up with you. I only wish that I could pray with you and Gabriela."

At the mention of her name, Gabriela stirred and opened her eyes. "Ruler Jedidiah, I'm so glad you have come. I miss seeing you each week."

"I just stopped to visit, and I wanted to pray over you if that's all right."

"Certainly."

Orly and Ruler Jedidiah stood by Gabriela's bed as he prayed a prayer of blessing for her and their little ones and for their ministry with the Gentiles.

“Thank you for coming, Ruler Jedidiah.”

“I apologize for not coming sooner, I had not heard that you were having troubles.”

“Oh, they are no trouble, just blessings,” said Gabriela.

He agreed and took his leave. *Father, I don't understand why someone who is doing such incredible ministry would be allowed to suffer as she and her husband are suffering. Please bless Orly and Gabriela and help me to accept those things that I don't understand.*

Orly helped Gabriela to their room. He kissed her good night and went up to the rooftop to pray. He just needed a place to cry and be alone with God. “How can I focus on You when Gabriela is so fragile? Father, teach me. I surrender fully to You, but I thought You had called us to be one — to minister as a team. I don't see how I can go on without her.” He distinctly heard the Holy Spirit tell him that he should have no other gods before Jehovah. “Father, I agree. I surrender Gabriela to You and desire Your will to be done. But I'm human and my mind is often clouded with fears and worries. Help me to take this one day at a time and let You be my Guide. She is not mine. She is Yours, and I give her back to You if that's what You desire. But it's not my desire. My desire is for her to be restored to health and live. Please carry her and let Your will be done. In Jesus' name.” Orly crawled into his blanket and fell into a deep sleep. He dreamed of teaching large groups of Gentiles with Gabriela beside him. He woke up refreshed and ready to face whatever this week brought.

Chapter 23

On Sunday, Sabra was concerned that Gabriela had not grown as much in girth as expected. She asked if she was eating the same. “No, I get really full, really fast. I’m probably only eating half of what I was before. If I eat any more than that, one of these little wiggle worms kicks it right back up.”

“So, you vomit?”

“No, the food just comes flying back out of my mouth. I have to sneak food down there. If I eat more than three or four bites, they kick it back up.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. But it happens to single-baby mothers, too, especially if they are short. I’ll set up a plan for the ladies to bring you less food, but more often. I think that will help. Do you have any questions?”

“No, I’m just glad Mother Ruth has the girls to help.”

“Are you comfortable with them touching your belly? I want to train them to watch for tightenings. We only lack about six more weeks, and they need to know what to look for.” Sabra told Orly that he owed her a denarius and then told him he could go on to work and she would talk with the ladies.

Sabra outlined the planned change in eating. Everyone assured her that they understood. Sabra praised them for taking such good care of Gabriela. “Now I need to train you for what to look for. Are you all willing to touch her belly?”

The girls giggled, “We already have. She’s let us feel the babies kicking.”

“Good. Let’s go into the room. Leah, I want you to feel the babies kicking. Lay your hand on the top of her belly. Now while your hand is feeling the kicks, I want you to notice how soft her belly is. It is not hard at all. Now feel my arm. Is it tight or soft?”

“It’s soft,” said Leah.

“How about now?” Sabra clenched her fist and tightened her upper arm.

“Oh, that’s hard and tight.” said Leah.

“When Gabriela is trying to give birth the muscles around the babies will tighten for just a little bit and then go back to being soft. Every time you are in this room from now on, I would like you to feel those muscles and see if you feel any changes happening. Her muscles should be soft all the time. But if it’s tightening occasionally, it could mean that she’s starting to birth. You need to grab Orly’s blanket and pillow and put it under her hips and legs. Do not lower her head, just elevate her bottom, and get me immediately. Then you can get Orly. Don’t wait to see if it happens again. If you feel even the smallest tightening, call me. Okay?” She took Lena through the same exercise. “Ruth, I know you’ve been through this, but put your hand on the top of her belly.”

Gabriela smiled as Mother Ruth felt the babies kick and move for the first time. Tears were running down Mother Ruth's cheeks. "Do you feel how soft and supple her muscles feel right now even though they are being pummeled?"

"Those are my grandbabies!"

Sabra told the ladies to check her belly about every hour. "Any questions?"

When there were none, Sabra said, "You three are doing a great job. Gabriela has made it this far because of your sacrificial care for her. May God bless you. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Mother Ruth brought Gabriela a plum to eat before she took her morning nap. Then the ladies decided to plan out a schedule for the day. They would make half-sized sandwiches for her main snacks and add fruit or nuts in between. They would try to get her to eat every two hours. But they would check her belly every hour. They decided to just rotate. "I didn't ask if we were supposed to do that all night, too, or just during the day."

"We can't very well go in where Orly is sleeping, so I guess it's just during the day."

"We could leave her fruit or nuts to eat during the night if she wakes up."

"That would be good."

"Mother Ruth, would it be better if we just each took a day and focused all our attention on Gabriela and then rotated days?"

"That would mess up your being in charge of bread and cheese, though."

"Not if you change the rules just a little. If I need bread made, but I'm in charge of Gabriela, it would be my responsibility to let one of you know that I need help making the bread. Right?"

"And I could just scoot cheese-making to days when I'm not in charge of Gabriela or ask for help. I think it could work. What do you think, Mother Ruth?"

"I think I would worry less if one person was in charge of Gabriela and did nothing but care for her all day. I like that idea. And you two being in charge of the bread and cheese has really helped me out. You ladies are the best. I thank God every day for you."

"Okay, another rule. Whoever is watching Gabriela has to work on the swaddling cloths. Agreed?" said Leah.

"Agreed."

"I think Mother Ruth should start us off."

"Okay, but that means you girls will have to go to the market and prepare dinner."

"That's okay. We can do that," said Lena.

"Okay. I'm going in and spend the day with my grandbabies. Call me if you need me." She picked up her loom and sat down on the cushion to weave the swaddling cloths. Every hour she put her hand on Gabriela's belly and checked the muscles. Every two hours she prepared her a snack to eat and woke her up to eat it. Then Gabriela

would need to get up and stretch and go right back to bed for another nap and the cycle would repeat. When the three men got home, they explained the plan and asked Orly to let them know whenever he was ready to take over at night.

Each Sabbath night the Gentile group would come. All Orly had to do was help get the courtyard set up and lead the session. The Gentile ladies took care of everything including cleaning up afterward.

They had been doing the new routine for just over two weeks when everything changed. Leah was with Gabriela when Gabriela wanted to move to the living room bed for dinner. She helped Gabriela up and Gabriela cried out in pain. "Tight" was all she could say. She helped Gabriela back into bed and called for help at the same time. Orly was saying goodbye to Lucas and Amata and heard her calling. He ran as fast as he could and lifted her so that the ladies could put his pillow and blanket under her hips. "Relax and breathe, Gabriela! One of those little ones probably just kicked you wrong."

"It's too soon, Orly, you know that."

"Shhh! Let's be quiet and still and let God settle this down." Leah and Lena began to sing Psalm 23 because they both knew that it helped Gabriela relax.

Within minutes Mario had returned and reported that Sabra was right behind him. Gersham was walking with her, and she would be here as fast as she could.

Gabriela was sleeping when Sabra arrived. She sent everyone out of the room and listened to Gabriela's heart. It was strong. That was good. Then she listened to the babies, and everything seemed normal. But as she waited with her hand on Gabriela's belly, she felt the tightenings. That meant trouble and she knew the babies would not survive if she couldn't get this birth stopped.

She called for Orly, and he came immediately. Sabra was blunt. "Orly, Gabriela has started having tightenings again. Do you know of anything that she did today that would have started them?"

"I was at work all day and just got home. Let me get Leah. She spent the day with her." Leah was crying, but she was able to tell Sabra that it had been a very normal day, and she didn't know of anything that Gabriela had done differently.

"Can you tell me what happened?"

"Gabriela heard Orly talking to Lucas and woke up. She asked if I would help her use the chamber pot and then she wanted to move to the living room. I asked her if she could wait while I checked her belly, and she said yes. I checked her belly and didn't feel anything. I may have missed something, but I feel certain that everything was normal. She stood up and screamed. She sat back down on the bed, and I called for help. I got her to lie back down, and her belly was really tight. Orly came in and lifted her up so we could put the pillow and blankets under her bottom, and Gersham and Mario ran to get you. My sister and I started singing to help her relax and she fell asleep. But when I checked her belly again, I could tell that it was tightening and

relaxing at times. But she didn't seem to be bothered by it. It's very light — not like before."

"Thank you, Leah. You did exactly the right things. Orly, I want to stay for a couple of hours and see what happens."

Orly left and told the family, "Gabriela is having tightenings. Sabra is going to stay awhile and watch her. She suggested we all eat and relax because it could be a long night."

Orly sat down at the table and asked if they wanted to pray together before eating. He led in prayer, but each of the others prayed aloud for Gabriela, the babies, and Sabra. They discussed whether someone should go and tell Mr. Kenan's group. Orly said, "Let's wait until morning and see what the night brings. No need for everyone to be upset all night. God knows what He's doing, and we can rest in that."

Once dinner was finished, Orly returned to check on Gabriela. "Orly, I need you to send the men to Hiram and ask him to send my birthing blankets. He'll know what I'm talking about. Also, tell him that I will be spending the night with Gabriela."

"Certainly. Is there anything else you need?"

"Was there any food left over from dinner? I'm starving," said Sabra.

"I'll send the men and then I'll bring you a plate."

"Thank you."

Orly went and gave the message to Gersham and Mario. They took a lantern and walked back to Hiram's house. Hiram invited them in and pointed to a large pile of blankets and mats. Gersham and Mario picked up as much as their arms could carry and brought it back to the house. Sabra had Orly pile several blankets on top of a mat on the floor and then he gently lifted her and placed her on them. "Now move this bed out. She won't need it any more. As of right now, Gabriela is confined to her mat. Take your mat to the living room. I'll be spending the night here. Let me examine her again and I'll call you when you can come back in."

Everyone just sat in the living room. No one spoke. They were all praying for Gabriela and the babies. When Orly came out he told them what he knew. Gersham and Mario put the bed in the cellar.

"Orly, Gabriela is awake and asking for you." Sabra brought out the plate and thanked Ruth for the dinner. She walked around and stretched. She said it was going to be a long night. She asked if someone would make Gabriela a small dinner. Leah jumped up and prepared a small bowl of soup, with a round of buttered bread and some grapes. She also poured the last of the goat milk into a cup and carried it all into Gabriela.

Orly was pleased that she seemed to be okay. She didn't feel like eating much, but she ate a little. They would save the rest for later. "This time doesn't feel as bad as last time, so I think it will stop soon." Orly just squeezed her hand and hoped she was right. He told her that Sabra was going to spend the night with her, but he would be in the living room if she needed anything. She asked him to call Sabra and

then cried out in pain. Sabra came running and talked quietly to her and helped her to get relaxed again. When she was asleep, Sabra said, "Orly, you need to know the truth. The babies will not live if we can't get these tightenings to stop. There's really nothing anyone can do except pray. I'll stay with her tonight. The tightenings will either become stronger and happen more frequently, or they will become lighter and happen further apart. Try to get some rest. I'll call you if I need help."

"Thanks, Sabra. Can I get you anything?"

"No, I'm fine. Thank you."

Orly started to stretch out on the living room bed, but instead paced around the living room praying. He didn't even feel safe going up on the roof. *Father, I want Your will to be done. I want Your will more than I want mine, but you know that I want Gabriela and the babies to be okay. Please stop these tightenings and protect her and the babies. Give me wisdom to trust You and rest in You. Help me to lead this family well. You know they are all watching how I handle this. Help me to trust You. You are the only One who can control this. You are omnipotent. You can calm this storm. Help me to just be still and trust You. In Jesus' name.*

Orly pulled the mat off the bed and crawled into his blanket. He got up and checked on Gabriela when he would hear her cry out, but each time, Sabra would tell him it was okay and to go back to sleep. It was a long night.

Mario offered to milk the goats alone and Orly agreed. He didn't want to leave Gabriela. She and Sabra were both asleep, so he just waited with the rest of the family for news. When Gersham and Mario left for work, Orly asked them to stop at the shop and let Lucas know that he was not coming in. The girls and Mother Ruth quietly went about their normal tasks, but everyone was whispering and trying to let Gabriela and Sabra sleep. Soon after the men had left for work, they all heard Gabriela cry out in pain again and winced from the knowledge that things were not good. Orly went in to see if he could assist Sabra. He talked quietly with Gabriela, and she seemed to settle down more quickly than last night. Sabra said that the tightenings were not getting any closer, but they weren't getting any further apart either. She thought they might be a little less strong, but she wasn't sure. The good news was that Gabriela's heart was doing fine, and the little ones were as active as ever, so the tightenings were not making them uncomfortable as far as she could tell. She asked Orly to stay with Gabriela while she took a break and got some breakfast. Orly stretched out on the floor beside Gabriela and talked with her. He told her that he wasn't going to work today. He was going to stay with her all day. She wanted to know what Sabra had told him and he said she hadn't said anything except that she wanted breakfast. Gabriela said, "I want breakfast, too. Is that allowed?"

"I imagine, but I'll go ask."

He had just stood up when Lena appeared at the door with a breakfast tray. She had prepared some buttered bread with cinnamon

and plum jelly. "Sabra said to only eat a couple of bites, and then wait awhile before you try some more. I forgot your milk. I'll be right back." Gabriela heartily bit into the bread and had a hard time quitting when Orly reminded her to save some for later.

When Sabra returned, she sat with Orly for a while. "Orly, this could go on for days, or it could start getting stronger, or it could just quit. I can't tell you what is going to happen. I had an appointment with Joelle this morning and since nothing has changed, I think I will go and check on her."

"Is everything okay?"

"Oh, yes. Just a regular check-up. It will just be a few minutes, but the walk is a little longer. I promise I will hurry, but Gabriela may have a few tightenings before I get back. I'll be back as soon as I possibly can, so don't bother to send anyone to get me. Make sure she eats at least a few bites every two hours, more often if she feels like it. And of course, she cannot get up for any reason, so you'll have to change her blankets. Any questions?"

"Do you think the tightenings are becoming less strong?"

"Some of them are, but some of them are about the same as yesterday. I'm not sure what that means. We'll have to wait and see. I'm sorry. Just keep praying and keep her relaxed and comfortable. I'll be back within an hour at the most."

"Sabra, I know you don't usually share about your patients, but would you give Joelle a message? Let her know that we need her prayer for Gabriela and tell her what happened."

"If you are sure you want me to tell her, I will gladly take your message."

"Thank you. Seth will hear at work, but Joelle will want to be praying. Shalom."

When Sabra returned from Joelle's, Orly reported that Gabriela had had three tightenings, but none of them woke her up. She was sleeping soundly, and the babies were busy wrestling. Sabra sent Orly out for a break and listened for herself. Mother and the girls gathered around to hear what Orly could tell them. He said that he felt the tightenings were becoming less hard, but they were still about the same in frequency. He explained that soiled blankets were piling up in the bedroom. They needed to be washed in the stream and dried so that they could be reused. He offered to help, but the ladies stopped him and said that this was women's work. They would take care of it. Lena took Gabriela a plate of snacks and another cup of milk. As she was leaving, she gathered up the soiled blankets and quietly left the room. She and Leah carried them to the stream to rinse them thoroughly.

"Do you think that Orly knows that it is Friday?" asked Leah.

"No, I don't think so."

"I guess Lucas will tell him."

"Is Mother Ruth fixing dinner? I can't remember who's turn it is."

“She’ll be eating with the Gentile group, so I guess we’re in charge. Let’s just fry a pan of mixed vegetables. Is there plenty of bread left?”

“Should be, I made it fresh yesterday. I should make more this afternoon, or we’ll be short over the Sabbath.”

“This is a lot of work, but I’m still glad we are here, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I’m tired, but we would be starving to death if we were on our own without Mother Ruth’s help.”

“Okay, we’re done here. Let’s head back and spread them out on the rooftop to dry. We need to get the vegetables ready for tonight. Gersham will help me bake Sabbath bread after dinner. Oh, we can’t because of the Sabbath. We better hurry.” As the girls rushed into the house, they found that Mother Ruth had started the bread, and all was well.

Sabra called for them to come to the room and she sent Orly to make some more snacks for Gabriela. Sabra showed the girls how to most comfortably change Gabriela’s blankets and then told them that she would be leaving her in their care overnight. They would need to decide how best to do that; either changing the caregiving role frequently, or taking it half and half, or even switching off nights. They would not need to check for tightenings during the night unless Gabriela cried out in pain. Lately she had been sleeping through them. So, they could actually sleep on the mat beside her. But they would need to check her blankets several times during the night and be available to get her snacks or to help her get settled if she was in pain. They were to send for her if Gabriela had three painful tightenings in a row. Or if they seemed to be happening more frequently. She asked if they had any questions.

Lena and Leah said, “No, ma’am.” But inside they were wondering how they would manage to work all night and all day the next day. And they wondered where Orly would be. They had many, many questions, but kept them to themselves.

Lucas and Amata arrived a little early. They were very concerned about Gabriela, and Leah went in to relieve Orly while he visited with Lucas and Amata. They assured him that Markus and Diana were bringing the meal, and they could take care of all the set up. “Oh my, I forgot it was Friday. I’ve been so focused on Gabriela. I’m not even sure what night’s lesson we are on.”

“This is the fifth week for the new groups. We usually discuss Jehovah God and give the group an opportunity to accept Jesus as Messiah.”

“Okay, right. I think we’ll just have to all review that together. My brain is a mess since I haven’t had any sleep to speak of.”

“Would you prefer to not meet?” asked Lucas.

“Of course not. I need you guys and your support. You are just going to have to be the leaders instead of depending on me. I guess it’s a little early to set up for the group. I want to stay with Gabriela, and I need to run some things by the girls and see how they are

feeling. I hadn't realized that tonight starts the Sabbath and I'll be the one on duty all day tomorrow. This week has been crazy."

"May we come in?"

"Of course," said Orly, surprised to see Joelle this late in the day. She was accompanied by Zan and by a male slave that Orly didn't know.

"We brought you and Gabriela a gift. Zan has agreed that she would do the night duty for Gabriela and let your family rest. I am loaning her to you until the babies are at least a month old. She is experienced in birthing and newborn care. She will simply need food and a place to sleep during the day."

"Joelle, that is incredible. I was just telling Lucas that we are all exhausted and this could last a long time. It's a lot of work and I appreciate even more what you did for us before."

"That's what sisters are for. May I see Gabriela before I start back home? I probably should sit for a few minutes anyway."

"Of course," said Orly, as he led her into the house, and they entered Gabriela's room. He kissed Gabriela on the hand. She opened her eyes and was delighted to see Joelle. They talked for just a few minutes when a pain hit, and Gabriela cried out. Orly came running and began talking softly to her. It passed quickly and Orly told Joelle that they were not happening as often or as strongly as yesterday, but they were still not out of danger. Joelle hugged Gabriela and assured her of their prayers. Gabriela was already asleep again and Joelle needed to leave with her male servant to arrive home before Sabbath.

Orly welcomed Zan and introduced her all around as his answer to prayer. Zan blushed, and said, "Thank you, sir."

Ruth assured her that she could use her mat and room during the day, and she would get her a fresh blanket. Zan asked to be shown to Gabriela's room, and Ruth knocked gently on the door. Lena opened the door and told them that Gabriela was sleeping. Ruth introduced the two ladies and asked Lena to catch Zan up on what needed to be done tonight. Lena explained what they were watching for and what had been happening. She said that before she went to sleep, she would leave them snacks for the night because Sabra wanted her to eat anytime she felt hungry because the babies weren't growing enough. "If you have any questions during the night, Orly is sleeping in the living room and will come running to help. Have you had dinner, or should I bring you a plate?"

"A plate would be very nice. Thank you, ma'am," said Zan.

Lena assured her that she would fix her and Gabriela a plate just as soon as dinner was ready. She left them alone and went to help Leah finish dinner preparations. Lena told her that Joelle had sent over her slave to do night duty. "That's an answer to our prayers, but I don't like her calling me ma'am. Can I ask her to call me Lena and we just be friends?"

"I think that will be up to Orly. Our husbands are running late tonight. I hope they make it before the Sabbath begins."

The Gentile group had already gathered before Gersham and Mario arrived. Mother Ruth lit the Sabbath candles and Orly led in a prayer of blessing but especially prayed for Gabriela and Zan and asked God's protection over the babies. Gersham and Mario went inside with their wives for their meal. Leah and Lena took two plates and two cups of goat milk into Gabriela and Zan. Lena told Zan that Sabra said to wake her at least every two hours to take a few bites. "So, I should wake her now?" asked Zan.

"Yes, it's been a while since she ate and the food is hot," said Leah.

Out in the courtyard everyone filled their plates with the food provided by Markus and Diana. They wanted the latest update on Gabriela and the babies. Orly shared that he was struggling with fear and asked for their prayers for peace. He said he was really concerned that Gabriela seemed to be getting weaker and weaker. When the meal was finished, the ladies helped Diana pack away her dishes. By the time they returned, the men had pushed the benches into a circle and the group began their time together.

Orly asked if there were any questions from the groups or any special news to report. They could tell that he was totally exhausted. Lucas asked if he would like him to review the lesson for week five and Orly agreed without resistance. Lucas followed the mentoring style that Orly had used and called on each team member to present their answers to his questions. He did a great job, and Orly felt refreshed just listening to the maturity of these believers. He again asked if there were any questions and was assured that they were all comfortable and excited about presenting this lesson again. Diana led the group in worship songs that they had learned over the past few weeks and Markus said a closing prayer of blessing for each group that would be meeting tomorrow. The group left quickly. There was nothing left to clean up and Orly crawled into his blanket in the living room and fell into a deep and restful sleep.

When he woke on Sabbath morning, he headed down to the barn and was milking when Mario arrived to help. Mario took care of the ox first and then milked the other goat. They walked up to the house together and joined the others for breakfast. Orly thanked them for all their help this past week. "I just hate for you to be alone if you need Sabra," said Mario.

"But I won't be alone. Zan will be sleeping, so she'll be here if I need help. We'll be fine. Gabriela is in the best of hands — God's. Now, you all get a nice Sabbath rest and enjoy the day. I'm going to spend it with my favorite girl." He got up and took a plate into Gabriela. He talked with Zan who felt that while Gabriela had had several tightenings in the night, they were not regular and most of them didn't even wake her. She also reported that she hadn't woken her to eat. She wanted clarification of that from him since Lena had said that she was to eat every two hours. Orly assured her that she had made the right decision. "Gabriela needs to rest, but she should eat if she wakes up during the night because she's not getting enough to eat."

“Thank you, sir,” said Zan.

“Zan, look at me. You are not my slave. In this house we are all free. You will be truly free in just about a year if I remember right, and you might as well practice being free while you are here. I don’t want to get you in trouble with Seth and Joelle, but you are our sister and fellow follower of Jesus. That makes you equal. Now, go and sit at the table with the other members of my family. They have saved you a breakfast plate and will want to hear how Gabriela is doing. Then my mother will show you where to sleep. You rest as long as you need to. It’s the Sabbath, so you can just relax today. I won’t need you until after Sabbath.”

“Thank you, sir ... I mean, Orly.”

Zan had not eaten anywhere but the kitchen since she had become a slave. Everyone made her feel welcome and introduced themselves. “Zan was Gabriela’s favorite when she was being cared for at Joelle’s house,” said Mother Ruth.

“We spent most nights together. I like the night duty. A lot of people don’t,” shared Zan. “Ruth, can you tell me which room is yours, and is it okay if I get some rest now?”

“Certainly, my dear. My room is right beside Gabriela and Orly’s. I put away my blanket and laid out a fresh one on the mat. We are all leaving for synagogue. If you wake up and are hungry, there are snacks in the kitchen. Please help yourself.”

“Thank you, ma’am, I mean Ruth.”

“You are very welcome and very needed here,” said Mother Ruth.

Sabra stopped and Gabriela told her that she was feeling stronger today. “Gabriela, I’m glad you are feeling stronger, but I want to make sure you understand that you will be flat now until the big event. Ideally, the babies will wait for another month, but realistically, I imagine we are only talking about two or three weeks. It’s still too early for them to survive. You need to accept the fact that you will be flat for the duration.”

“I understand. Did you know that Joelle sent Zan to help us with night duty? That means everyone can get a good night’s rest and maybe Orly can even get back to work tomorrow.”

“That’s great news. She is very knowledgeable and intelligent.”

“Sabra, maybe I spoke out of turn, but I’m encouraging her to talk with you about becoming a midwife. I told her that Mr. Kenan lets a lot of his former slaves work for him while they learn a trade. She will be free in just over a year.”

“I’ll think about it. Let’s examine you, and then I may make it to synagogue for a change.”

Orly rested on the mat beside Gabriela, and she mostly slept. The day passed slowly as he changed blankets, fixed her snacks, and felt the babies. When he heard Zan moving around in the kitchen, he asked her to watch Gabriela while he milked the goats. Orly was just entering the house again when Jordan arrived. “Hello, my friend, is everything okay?”

Jordan was out of breath and said he had to get back for dinner, but he was wondering if it would be possible for them to use his stream for a baptism next Sabbath. He promised that no one would approach the house and Gabriela wouldn't even know they were there. He would just lead them to the stream, baptize the five and then leave quietly. "As long as we don't need to provide food or water, you can use the stream all you want. But it's getting cooler, and you'd better do it as soon as possible and bring lots of blankets."

"I think we'll do it next Sabbath."

"Sure. I know about Oren. I'm assuming that Leah and Lena talked with you, but who are the other two?"

"It's two of the new kitchen slaves."

"Oh, that's good. Feel free to use the stream anytime, and you don't have to be quiet. If the group wants to sing praise songs, I could open her door and let her hear."

"Then it's a plan. I'll see you tomorrow."

When Orly finished caring for the animals, he found the two girls looking at the baby shawls. Both agreed that they were beautiful and were amazed at the stack of thirty. Gabriela proudly showed her the one that she had made. Orly asked Zan what she wanted on her sandwich and went to make some dinner for all three of them. He carried the picnic in, and they sat around Gabriela's mat to eat. He asked Zan how long she had been a slave, and she replied since she was eight years old. She had served almost five and would be free at the end of six. They heard the others arrive from Mr. Kenan's and each one visited for just a minute before going to their own rooms. Mother Ruth sat on the cushion and told them that Basha was back from Capernaum and had offered to come over tomorrow to visit. "But Orly, I told her that I didn't know your plans. She said she would come about the second hour and see if she could be of any help."

"Well, my plans are to wait and see what Sabra thinks tomorrow morning. If things stay stable tonight, I will probably try to work tomorrow. I'm going to go fix these ladies some snacks for tonight and then I'll probably go up on the rooftop to pray for a while."

Early on Sunday morning, Sabra arrived and brought another woman with her. Sabra explained that Denna was the midwife who had trained her many years ago and still helped her occasionally. She wanted Denna to be ready to help with this birth. They both went in to examine Gabriela. Sabra asked Zan to stay, and Sabra told Denna that Zan was interested in training to be a midwife. "There's nothing more rewarding!" declared Denna.

Sabra listened first, then Denna, and then they both encouraged Zan to listen. Zan put her ear to Gabriela's belly. "What did you hear?" asked Sabra.

"I think I heard a very healthy little heartbeat. But I only heard one. Why can't I hear all three?" asked Zan.

"That's because when I heard all three, they were able to lie side by side. Now, they are so crowded that I can usually only hear the one on top. What I would like for you to do sometime when Gabriela tells

you that they are sleeping, is to see if you can find all three. You may find them hiding under her ribs, or up high or down low, but don't raise her up to listen in the back. That's probably where one of them will be hiding, but I don't want Gabriela moved."

When Sabra called Orly in, they told him that Gabriela was doing great, and this was just the new normal. He should probably get back to work and let the ladies handle things. They would send for him if anything changed. Mother Ruth took over for Zan and brought Gabriela her breakfast. Mother Ruth reported that she had finished the last of the sixteen swaddling cloths. All Amata lacked now were the carriers, and she would make them on the big loom. She asked Gabriela if she had a preference on color. They talked about making them blue and green and teal but mixing the three together to represent that they were all different, and yet together. Gabriela told Mother Ruth, "My little brothers were just always together. They slept together draped all over each other even after they were five and six years old. There's just a special bond. I think triplets will be the same. So, if Amata hasn't started yet, I would like for each of the carriers to contain the same three colors in a pattern. But the patterns can be different."

"I understand. If Basha gets here soon, I will go to the market and pick out the threads for the carriers so Amata can get started." Gabriela was ready for a nap, so Mother Ruth cleaned up the breakfast dishes. She left Gabriela's door open so that she could hear if she stirred. Leah and Lena were washing the blankets that had accumulated over the Sabbath.

Everyone was rested and ready to tackle a new week and each was praying that it would be uneventful. Basha and Sarah arrived and Mother Ruth went over what she needed to do for Gabriela and showed her how to change the blankets. "I should be back within the hour, but if you have a question or problem, wake up Zan. Would you like for me to take Sarah with me?"

"Oh, she would love that!"

Mother Ruth gave Sarah a basket to carry and started off to the market. She took Sarah to the textile booth and told Sarah she could pick out some thread to weave if she wanted to make herself a new robe.

"I want to make Mother a pillow. Would that be okay?" asked Sarah.

"Certainly. Pick out the thread for a pillow and we'll get you started on my lap loom, since I'm through with all my projects right now. You'll need to pick out six skeins of thread. You can either make it all one color, stripes, or a plaid. Just figure out what you want. I need to pick out the thread for the baby carriers." Mother Ruth began to pull out all the teals, and greens, and blues that she could find. She needed ten skeins of each color and Sarah helped her find them. Sarah finally decided to make her mother's pillow in only two colors, white and pink. Mother Ruth said it was the perfect choice. They picked out fresh fruits and vegetables and asked the booth owner to

deliver the potatoes and onions that were too heavy to carry, a large jug of olive oil, and a bag of ground salt. It seemed that they were low on everything these days. Mother Ruth kept Sarah busy carrying things down to the cellar for her. She checked on Basha who simply gave her a thumbs up that all was well. Mother Ruth collected the dishes and refilled them with more snacks. Sarah asked if she could say hello to Lizzy and Kizzy and Mother Ruth told her that she could even walk down to the stream if she promised not to get in the water. The ladies should be finishing up soon and the goats were probably trying to eat the blankets. She gave Sarah a small cucumber to use to entice the goats to come back into the yard and leave the ladies alone.

Mother Ruth sat down to catch her breath. If Lena made the bread and Leah made the cheese, then all she would need to do was prepare the vegetable dish and keep the snacks available for Gabriela today.

When Lucas and Amata arrived, Lucas headed for the barn and Amata looked over the thread that Ruth had picked out for the carriers. Ruth explained Gabriela's desire for the colors. Amata nodded and began loading the large loom. Everyone was busy, but it seemed that finally life was getting back into a routine and not feeling so stressful.

After dinner, Orly spent some time with Gabriela and let Zan visit with the rest of the family. Orly stretched out beside Gabriela and began to pray. "Father, Abba Father, thank You for Your faithful provision. You have met our needs over and over again. Thank You for sending Zan, and the two couples to help Mother. Thank you for allowing Mother to be here. You've blessed us so abundantly. Help us to trust You for whatever the future holds for these precious little ones. We don't always understand Your plans, but we want to be faithful to trust You and praise You. You are good. And You've been so good to us. In Jesus' name we pray." Orly asked Gabriela if she was ready for sleep, but Gabriela began to talk about her journey from Bethany to Cana. "I don't even feel like the same little girl. God has grown me in so many ways." They began to reminisce together.

Orly said, "And we were both so afraid of the synagogue and look how God has grown Ruler Jedidiah and so many of the Jews in Cana."

"And I remember the night I got to lead my Gentile sisters to accept Jesus as Messiah," whispered Gabriela as she drifted off to sleep.

"God has grown both of us. We wanted to establish a home so that we could share God's love and I think God's love just keeps growing." He kissed her cheek and called for Zan to take over for the night.

The End (Or Only the Beginning?)