

*THE NEW WAY SERIES*

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*Searching for  
Answers  
in Capernaum*

*Dale Weatherford*

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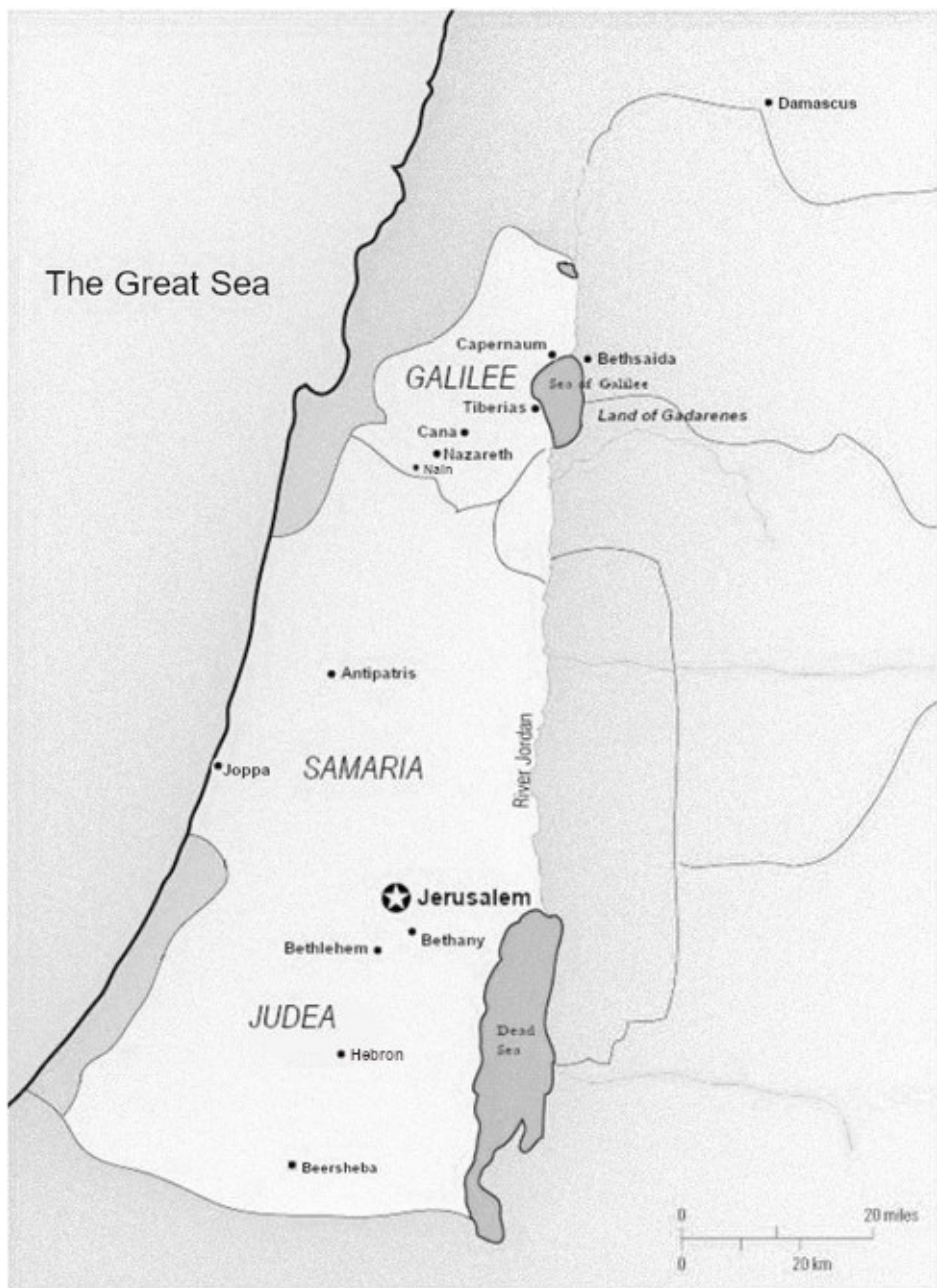
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# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my husband, David, 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 #5**

### ***Searching for Answers in Capernaum***

Capernaum was the perfect small town to raise a family in Galilee — at least for a child. But as one grew into adulthood, how did one explain a religion gone flat, corruption and greed, cruelty and division? Maybe things were not what they seemed. Was there a better way, a New Way of living? Journey with the new generation growing up in Capernaum and maybe you'll discover answers to your own search for something better than the past!

Dale Weatherford

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 .....	9
Chapter 2 .....	17
Chapter 3 .....	25
Chapter 4 .....	34
Chapter 5 .....	44
Chapter 6 .....	52
Chapter 7 .....	61
Chapter 8 .....	69
Chapter 9 .....	77
Chapter 10 .....	85
Chapter 11 .....	93
Chapter 12 .....	100
Chapter 13 .....	109
Chapter 14 .....	118
Chapter 15 .....	127
Chapter 16 .....	135
Chapter 17 .....	143
Chapter 18 .....	149
Chapter 19 .....	156
Chapter 20 .....	165
Chapter 21 .....	174
Chapter 22 .....	183
Chapter 23 .....	190
Chapter 24 .....	198
Chapter 25 .....	207
Chapter 26 .....	215
Chapter 27 .....	224
Chapter 28 .....	232
Chapter 29 .....	242
Chapter 30 .....	247



# Chapter 1

“Sorry I’m late, gentlemen. I’ve been trying to catch up on work since I got back,” said Talman.

“No problem. How was your trip?” asked Jairus as he handed Talman a cup of wine.

“Stressful and contentious as usual. There’s just so much going on right now. Everyone is upset and taking sides, it’s really chaos. Sometimes I wonder how we get anything done with all the controversy. I come home just worn out from the stress. But I know it’s important work.”

“You said you had something we needed to hear,” probed Joel.

“Yeah. You are not going to like it, but I hope you know that it’s not something I can control.”

“Let’s hear it, and we’ll just have to deal with it,” said Jairus.

“Okay, the gist of it is, they don’t want us mentioning Jesus at the synagogue or the school. They want us to just pretend he doesn’t exist. I know. I know. It’s not going to be easy, but they felt it would be better than this constant discussion of whether he is or isn’t the Messiah. The High Priest felt it would be safer if there was less discussion. They will continue to deal with him, but the Sanhedrin’s decision was that we should not mention him in our teaching at the school or the synagogue.”

“That’s not going to be easy since everyone knows Jesus raised Ariel from the dead,” grumbled Jairus.

“I know, but like I said, I have no control over it. I actually brought up the issue and was told that they would shut down any school or synagogue that did not comply. I’m sorry. I told them that I would see to it that his name was not mentioned again.”

“So, we have no choice in the matter.”

“I believe that since Capernaum is such an important little hub in Galilee, they would just replace us with scribes and a priest who would obey their rules, if we choose not to.”

“Surely not! The people elected me as ruler,” stated Jairus.

“But the Sanhedrin are still in authority under the Romans, and they can do as they please. I think it’s in all our best interests to carry out their rules whether we agree with them or not. There are factions within the Sanhedrin who would have you stoned if you don’t.”

“So, we are being forced to obey,” stated Joel.

“I’m just the bearer of bad news. Please don’t think I agree with it. You guys know that I saw Jesus raise Ariel from the dead. You know that I love your daughter, and I don’t want anything to come between us. But as a member of the Sanhedrin, I have no choice but to enforce the rules that they decide,” stated Talman.

“So, you reported to the Sanhedrin that we believe that Jesus might be the Messiah?” pressed Jairus.

“No, I have not reported you and I hope I don’t have to. But now I am required to report it if you mention Jesus in the school or synagogue.”

“So, we can believe it, just not teach it?” asked Joel.

“That’s the way I understand it.”

“That will require quite a bit of discipline on our part to make sure that we don’t teach our students what we are coming to believe.”

“Doesn’t that defeat the purpose of having advanced classes to let them pick our brains and share openly and honestly with them?”

“I understand that. But I don’t know what else to do. It’s the new rule and I was told to inform all the synagogues and schools in my district.”

“Talman, I know you are caught in the middle, and that can’t be pleasant. I promise I’ll comply, but you need to understand that I can’t keep the discussion from coming up. It will take me a few days to let the students know that the topic is off limits. Will you either stay away from the school while we introduce the new rules, or can you give us a grace period? As you know, I can’t control what the boys may ask. Every day they are wanting to know more and more about what the Scripture teaches about Jesus as Messiah.”

“Well, remember, you can teach them about Messiah — you just can’t mention Jesus. And yes, I will make it a point to not be at the school this week. Will that give you enough time to let the boys know that there will be severe punishment if Jesus is mentioned?”

“I would appreciate that,” said Joel, who was head of the Hebrew School.

“Oh, what a headache this is. I thought Jesus would have manifested his control over Rome by now and we wouldn’t have to deal with this mess of secrecy,” complained Jairus.

“Me, too. Some of the Sanhedrin think it will come to a head at Passover. Speaking of which, are you guys taking your yearly hike with the schoolboys?”

“Yes, we have six boys and their dads, and five alumni who want to do the trip with us,” said Joel.

Jairus asked, “Are you going to take your family this year?”

“Yes. We’ll be visiting Nathaniel as usual. I keep thinking that Adam will get around to asking to marry Miriam. As you know, Nathaniel and I agreed to that years ago. That’s something else that I need to deal with if he doesn’t ask her this year. It’s past time for all our daughters to be married. You know it, don’t you?”

The talk turned to parenting little girls who were already of marriage age. They discussed again some of the local prospects but weren’t satisfied with any of them.



“Don’t forget your test on Friday will cover the split of Solomon’s kingdom. You’ll need to be able to list the kings that followed in both

the northern and southern kingdoms until the time of the exile. You'll also be responsible for knowing the prophets who were teaching during that same period. You are dismissed," said Rabbi Joel.

As the boys rushed out the Hebrew School door, Joel walked over to where Jairus was finishing filing away the scrolls that his class had used that day. "We really need to talk with Rabbi Nicodemus about recommending another rabbi. We've got too many young boys in each class, and they are not learning as well as I would like," said Joel.

"I agree," said Jairus. "I don't have enough scrolls for each student in the independent research class. We are growing and need smaller classes. We'll talk to Nicodemus while we are there."

"Did you make the announcement to your classes?"

"Yeah. Did you?"

"Yes, but I don't like it."

"I don't like it either, but I don't know what we can do about it. Like Talman said, we either comply or they will replace us and probably kill us in the process."

"I made it clear to my boys that I was not in agreement with the rule, but that we must follow the Sanhedrin's orders. Hopefully, they won't disobey — at least in front of Talman."

"I told my boys essentially the same thing. I think they will comply. At least everyone except Samuel. He's determined to fight it, and I worry that he'll make trouble the first time Talman comes back to the classroom."

"Should we talk with Samuel's abba? Tell him that he will be expelled if he deliberately brings it up?"

"I don't know. Let me think about it," said Joel.

"Only five more days before Passover break. I am so ready."

"Yes, this has been a hard year."

"It's been confusing to say the least. First, Jesus raised Ariel from the dead and then all the division and fussing about whether he should be allowed to teach in the synagogue. Yeah, I'm ready for a break. I think the hike will do us all good."

"I'm looking forward to time with Nicodemus and the other guys. I need some reassurance that we are on the right track concerning Jesus. I'm just feeling more and more that he may be the Messiah. It will be good to discuss it with our peers instead of being on our own."



"Mother, come with us," said the Apostle James. "We are heading to Jerusalem, and you'll have time to visit with Aunt Mary. Then Dad could meet you there and bring you home." Salome had often traveled with Jesus and His followers when they were in Galilee, but she had never traveled to Jerusalem with them. She usually just met them there over Passover. They were passing through Capernaum and

would be leaving after the Sabbath. She hoped she could keep up on the steep climb, but Mary assured her that she could, and she had her sons, James and John, to help her. *It's still a month away from Passover, but James is right, I am craving time to sit and listen to Jesus teach. Zebedee is so busy with his business and will hardly notice that I am gone. The servants can take care of everything here. And I love spending time with my sister, Mary. I'll ask him tonight.* So, it was decided that she would take a longer than usual trip with Jesus and His apostles and followers. It was quite a change for her as she left her cushy life behind, set aside her fancy robes and shoes, and just became one of Jesus' many followers. There was something special about Jesus, and Salome was certain that He had been sent by God as His Messiah. She wanted to know more, and was sure that this month of travel with Him would help her to understand better.

Zebedee had agreed to meet her at her brother Zeke's on Sunday during Passover week to enjoy a short visit with her family before they returned to Capernaum. Last year he had left her at her cousin Anna's in Jerusalem and then traveled to his own hometown near the River Quishon. He had not been there since he was a child. He had found his only remaining brother and really enjoyed his visit with him and his wife. Salome suggested that he could do that again and go earlier so the road wouldn't be so crowded.



Zebedee rode on the driver's seat with his servant, Noah. Jeshua, a kitchen servant rode in the oxcart. It had been a hard day because Zebedee was used to fishing all night and sleeping all morning. Each year while their four boys were growing up, they had made this trip. But once the boys were grown, they had only occasionally traveled to Jerusalem. It took too long and was a hard trip to make every year. But now that two of their sons and Salome's sister Mary from Nazareth were traveling with Jesus, Salome had talked him into making the trip these past three years. He was a fisherman and didn't really feel comfortable with the whole temple thing. And to be honest he felt uncomfortable with Salome's cousin Anna and her husband who was a jeweler. But he had to admit that last year wasn't bad. He had left Salome in Jerusalem with Anna, while he had explored the area where he had lived as a child. There it was quiet and secluded in the woods. He had discovered that his youngest brother, Lemuel, still lived in the house he grew up in. He and his wife, Beth, had welcomed him.

Zebedee's mind wandered back to his childhood. He was born on the Quishon River catching fish with his brothers. He shook his head as he remembered his parents trying to feed ten boys on such a small river. It was an impossible task and everyone worked hard. As a child he was often hungry. *I remember the day Zidan, Eleazar, and Samuel told me to pack a travel bag and be ready to leave by dawn. They*

*were all grown men, and I was just a child — maybe eight or nine years old. I remember telling Abba and Mother goodbye and I didn't understand their tears. I didn't know that I would never see them or my other brothers again. I remember walking for what seemed like weeks. I kept asking my brothers where we were going, but they ignored me. I was just a worthless child and a nuisance to them. I remember when we finally reached flat land and saw the Sea of Galilee for the first time. My three brothers began to work as fishermen on a boat and I became a net boy — cleaning and repairing fishing nets. The work was hard, but the hardest thing was being alone at night while my brothers fished. I would just throw my blanket down wherever I could find to sleep and hope my brothers would return safely.*

“Are you ready to stop for the night, sir?” Noah asked. “There’s a camping place in less than a mile and the oxen need a break. It will be sunset soon.”

Zebedee and Noah built a bonfire while Jeshua unpacked the bags of food they had brought from home and quickly prepared their dinner. Zebedee sat on a log beside his two servants, and they ate in silence. Soon, he crawled into his blanket and let the servants clean up. Maybe he could sleep tonight.

By dawn they were on their way again hoping to stay ahead of the crowds that would pour into Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. The roads were becoming steeper, and the oxen slowed and needed more breaks. If all went well, they should arrive at Lemuel’s by midday on Thursday. His place was another twenty miles southeast of Jerusalem in the mountains.

There were Roman guards directing traffic and allowing the oxcarts the right-of-way over pedestrians. They reached Jerusalem by late afternoon on Wednesday. It was already getting crowded even though Passover didn’t begin until Friday. Noah skillfully guided the oxen through the crowds and took the road to the south. Zebedee hated Jerusalem’s crowds, but actually thought about trying to find Salome. He missed her.

Because it took longer to get through Jerusalem than they expected, Noah suggested that they stop well before sunset. The campgrounds would become packed with travelers if they waited longer. Zebedee agreed and Noah found a quiet place to stop.

“Since we will be arriving in the morning, the town’s market should still be open. Let’s purchase food to take with us so that we will not inconvenience them too much. I’m sure Beth will welcome your help with cooking.”

“Yes, sir.” The servants replied.

Lemuel had made a life on the river in the same house where he and Zebedee were raised. He had added a small Fish Processing Plant and had landed a good contract with the Sanhedrin so that he provided pickled and smoked fish for them weekly. It was enough income for him and his wife now that it was just the two of them. They had purchased a servant to deliver the fish and help with the work, but their children were grown and gone and not interested in fishing.

There were only two farmers selling produce at the so-called market. The village that Zebedee remembered was no longer there. Only a well marked the place where the village used to be. Jeshua picked out some wheat grain to make the unleavened bread and was glad that he remembered how to make flour. He knew that Beth would have a mortar and pestle and hoped that she had enough salt because the farmers didn't have any to sell. He purchased some winter vegetables but found no fruit. "Maybe, next time we visit, we should purchase our provisions in Jerusalem," said Jeshua. The others agreed. Noah had watered the oxen at the well and they were ready to travel the last few miles toward the Quishon Valley. Zebedee began to relax as they approached the forest. This was where he had spent the first eight years of his life and even though he didn't remember much, his body responded to the feeling of being home. It was good.

"SIR!" said Noah sharply.

"STOP!" ordered Zebedee.

All three men jumped from the oxcart to see what was before them. The men stood aghast at what they saw. The house had been burned to the ground. Only the chimney remained standing. All the small storage and processing sheds had been destroyed and there didn't seem to be anyone around. Zebedee recognized the work of Roman soldiers. Even the stones around the base of the house and sheds had been scattered. This was not an accidental fire. This had been a deliberate act. The three men walked in silence and shock. Tears began to stream down Zebedee's face. They walked toward the river and sat down on some rocks. *Where was Lemuel and why had this been done? Where was Beth? Had they escaped?* Zebedee wondered out loud if the farmers at the little market might know.

"Master Zebedee, is that you?" called a tentative voice from the wooded area behind them.

Zebedee and the other men stood quickly and turned to face the voice. They realized they had no weapons and were penned against the river. They hoped the voice came in peace, but their nerves were frayed.

"Yes, I am Zebedee. Who are you? Show yourself."

A young man came out from behind a tree and knelt at Zebedee's feet. "I am your servant, Urias."

Zebedee recognized Lemuel's servant and pulled him up before him. "Urias, did Lemuel escape?"

"No, Master, no one escaped except me. I was in Jerusalem. It was horrible. So horrible." Zebedee could see the trauma in Urias' eyes.

Urias told him that a group of Zealots had arrived just at the beginning of winter. "They asked if they could spend the night behind the house so that they would not be seen from the road. There were a lot of them, and they were armed. Master Lemuel knew that he couldn't say no. I already had the oxcart loaded for my delivery to Jerusalem, and I begged Master Lemuel and Mrs. Beth to go with me.

I left at dawn and made my deliveries in Jerusalem. On my return, I smelled fire and knew that something terrible had happened. I staked the oxen and cart in the woods and walked the rest of the way. As I got closer to the valley, I could see the flames and heard horses coming, so I hid in the woods until they had passed.”

“Romans?”

“Yes, sir. Maybe a hundred of them. I didn’t know what to do, so I just threw the Zealots into the river. I buried Master Lemuel and Mrs. Beth. They didn’t deserve to die.” Urias couldn’t continue. All afternoon the men talked and tried to decide a course of action. Urias confessed that he had taken the oxcart back to Jerusalem and spent some of the money he had collected from the Sanhedrin to purchase a couple of blankets and some salt and a flint. “Now all the money is gone because I spent the rest on food. I scavenged enough rocks to build a small shelter in the woods and still had the oxen and cart. I didn’t feel safe cleaning up the house and sheds because I was afraid the Romans would return to check to see if anyone was left alive. I didn’t want to be found.” Zebedee kept assuring Urias that he had done the right thing.

“What about Lemuel’s children? Have you notified them?”

“No, sir. I don’t know where they live. They don’t visit often and if they have come, I didn’t hear them.”

“But if I go to the Romans to locate them, it could put them in danger if their parents have been labeled Zealots,” mused Zebedee.

“Yes, sir.”

Jeshua began cooking a skillet of vegetables over a bonfire and Zebedee could tell that Urias had not eaten well in a long time. He had been surviving on fish from the river roasted over a fire with very little else.

After dinner, Zebedee talked alone with Urias while the servants packed away the food. “Urias, what was your arrangement with Lemuel? I know when I was here last year, Lemuel trusted you completely and I see no reason to do otherwise.”

“Master Zebedee, I was hired as a slave when I was fifteen. I had apprenticed as an accountant and purchasing agent for a carpenter in Jerusalem before that. It’s a long story, but when my parents died just before I turned thirteen, my boss offered to take me as an apprentice in exchange for my home. I agreed but realize now that it was a mistake. Once I completed his so-called apprenticeship, he let me go and I voluntarily signed up to become a slave because I had no place to live and no savings. Lemuel purchased me soon after that and continued to train me. When I completed my three years of slavery, he offered me my freedom or the opportunity to become his bondslave. I chose to become his bondslave and intended to care for them both until their deaths. I don’t know if that was ever filed with the Roman government since he wasn’t very good with paperwork. I took care of all his taxes and reports. I am twenty-one years old and seem to be back in the same position as I was at fifteen.”

Zebedee thought a few minutes and then said, “Since Lemuel is gone, you need to consider whether you want to be a free man or have me, as next of kin, to take your bond. Now, if you go free, you can move anywhere you please — but you would be on your own. If you want me to take on the responsibility of your bondage, then you will need to move with me to Capernaum and live and work with my servants there. It is entirely up to you. Let’s get a good night’s rest and we’ll talk more tomorrow.”

On Friday morning, Zebedee looked through the rubble but found very little that had not been destroyed. He thought about cleaning the area but decided to leave that to the sons. The men fished to add to the remaining vegetables that Jeshua prepared. Zebedee led them in a makeshift Seder since they had no lamb, bread, or wine. He prayed for them, for his niece and nephews who would surely discover this soon, and for the families of the Zealots who were grieving.

The four men tried to relax and enjoy the Sabbath. They mostly slept and tried to forget how hungry they were. Jeshua had served them the remaining almonds and raisins for breakfast. Zebedee declared that the Sabbath was ended a little early so that they could fish for their dinner. Once again, they roasted the fish on sticks over the bonfire and were grateful for food to sustain them. After dinner, Urias told Zebedee, “I want to move away from here. I will be your bondslave.” Zebedee agreed to accept the bond and to care for Urias as his own servant.

On Sunday morning, they fished again for their breakfast and Zebedee ordered the three men to cover any evidence that Urias was alive for fear he would be declared a runaway slave and be punished. When they were satisfied that there was nothing more they could do, Zebedee took a few minutes to pause and remember his brother and sister-in-law. Zebedee knew that Salome would be worried about them arriving later than expected at Zeke’s. He hoped they could make it by dinner.

Noah quickly hitched Zebedee’s oxen to the cart and Jeshua had the cart loaded and ready, but when Urias tried to hitch his two oxen to his cart, he found that they would not obey orders. The oxen had been wandering freely for several months and did not respond to commands. Noah tried to help, but even all four men could not get the oxen to accept their yoke. Zebedee was afraid that someone would get gored and called a halt to their efforts. He decided to leave the oxen to wander. They had served Lemuel for many years and were getting too old to be of much value anyway. They had plenty of grass and could forage in the woods, and they had plenty of water to drink from the river. But by now, it was midafternoon and too late to travel. The men unhitched Mr. Zebedee’s oxcart, unloaded the travel bags and blankets, built a bonfire, and caught more fish for dinner. On Monday at sunrise, they again fished for their breakfast and quickly loaded the oxcart to head to Jerusalem.



## Chapter 2

On Sunday morning, the group of men and schoolboys who were walking to Jerusalem were excitedly gathered at the front of the Capernaum synagogue. While they would walk together and camp each night of the journey, they would be responsible for their own food and accommodations once they reached Jerusalem. Ruler Jairus was leading a small donkey carrying all the food for the trip. Everyone waved goodbye to the group as they left Capernaum eating their breakfast of olives and bread rolls. It was always an exciting time to begin the three-week journey. Both Ruler Jairus and Rabbi Joel had invested much time in the growth of these students, and they enjoyed spending time with them in a more casual setting. It was also good to visit with the former students and hear their stories as they walked. Rabbi Joel set a pace that would get them into camping places early enough for a good night's rest before another long walk the next day. They hoped to arrive by midday on Thursday and celebrate the Seder that night, so there wasn't room for error. They had taken a group of the oldest schoolboys for twelve years now and knew how hard to push them, but still make it fun.

As they began their walk, they were joined by other Jewish men and many families all traveling for the Passover celebration. Some of these travelers were from faraway places and had already been walking for weeks. It was fun to hear their stories as they walked. The first night on the road was always the roughest. Feet were blistered from walking, sleeping under the stars was unfamiliar, and someone always lost or forgot their blanket. But generally, by the second or third night, friendships had formed, and routines had been established.

"Zachary, how are you doing?" asked Rabbi Joel.

"Pretty good. My feet hurt, but I think I'm hanging in there."

"Is this your first trip to Jerusalem? I know it's the first time you've come with us."

"Yes, it's all new to me."

"It's a special trip. Let me know if you have any questions. What are your plans when you get to Jerusalem?"

"I hope to find my dad. He is traveling with Jesus and I'm hoping they go to Jerusalem for Passover. I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. I would like to spend some time with him and figure out who this man is that he is following."

"Yes, Jesus is usually in Jerusalem for all the required festivals. I don't doubt that you'll be able to find your dad. I'd be interested in hearing what you learn. I've got quite a few questions myself. So, are you still working at the Fish Shop with your uncle?"

"Yes, sir. I've worked there since I was eight. It's not a glamorous job, but it pays the bills and I've been able to buy a house and take care of myself. But now that I'm settled, I'm wondering if that's all there is. I mean, do I really just want to work, eat, and sleep for the rest of

my life, or is there something more? I guess I'm searching for answers."

"Are you married?"

"No, sir."

"Sometimes raising a family fills that void and satisfies that empty feeling."

"I guess that's what I want to talk with Dad about. He seems to have found something that makes his life worth living. I want to know what that is."

"I think I've found satisfaction not only in my family, but also in teaching. I'll be praying that this trip will help you find what you are looking for."

"Thanks."

As Zachary stretched out on his blanket that night, he started thinking about his life. *I remember how proud I was to finish Hebrew School on my thirteenth birthday. Uncle Zebedee threw a nice party for me and promoted me to a full-time position. I focused all my attention on learning every aspect of the Processing Plant. Uncle Zebedee was pleased with my progress, and I got regular promotions. I remember well the day that Uncle Zebedee called me into his shed and told me that old Barnabas was retiring. He said I was the new steward of the entire plant. I wasn't even fifteen years old yet, and Uncle Zebedee was so proud of me. He has always encouraged me. I certainly needed someone to believe in me. Being the boss makes it hard to find friends, though. Maybe I do need a wife and family. But right now, I just want to talk with Dad and ask my questions.*



Back in Capernaum, Ariel and Hava were sitting in Miriam's room helping her pack for her upcoming trip to Jerusalem. The three girls were best friends and there was much giggling and teasing. Each year, for as long as they could remember, Miriam's entire family had traveled to Jerusalem for Passover and stayed with her dad's best friend, Nathaniel. And of course, Adam would be there. He had turned seventeen this year and worked as a banker with his dad. Miriam was certain that this would be the year that he would talk with her dad about marriage. Miriam knew that her dad had already pledged her to his best friend's son. The only question was when it would happen. So, while others might consider preparation for Passover a religious ritual, Miriam and her two friends were plotting for a marriage espousal. Each robe had to be perfect, and they discussed in detail all the accouterments she would need to make sure Adam knew she was ready and waiting. They had seen each other every year as they had grown up, but this year, she wanted him to realize that she could be something more. His sister, Joanna, had married last year and she hoped her wedding had sparked some ideas in his head. After all, she was now thirteen.

As the sun began to set, the girls hugged goodbye and told Miriam that they would be praying that Jehovah would bless her trip with success. Hava's and Ariel's dads had already left, leading the group of boys from the school. The two girls would spend Passover in Capernaum with their mothers.



On Wednesday night as the men gathered around a campfire, Ruler Jairus called the seventeen men and schoolboys to listen closely. "Tomorrow morning, after breakfast at sunrise, you will be free to travel into Jerusalem on your own. It will be too crowded to try to stay together. But remember, a lot of camps look alike, so be sure and note where you are because this is where we will meet for the journey home. You should plan to be here no later than sunset on Wednesday of next week. That will be the last day of Passover. We are only about a half hour out of Jerusalem. We will camp together that night and start down the mountain at sunrise on Thursday. If you are not here, you will have to hike it alone — we will not wait for you. It will take us approximately five days to hike home because of the Sabbath. Does anyone have a question?"

"So, we'll meet here next Wednesday before sunset and start down on Thursday," verified one of the men.

"That is correct. Now does everyone know where they are staying while in Jerusalem? If not, talk with me or Rabbi Joel tonight. We'll give you some suggestions for places to camp."

Zachary talked with Rabbi Joel. "Do you have any suggestions for where I would start looking for Jesus?"

"Sure. He's usually teaching at the temple courtyard. Just as we enter Jerusalem, we'll be walking right by the temple. You'll see the main entrance. I would expect you to find your dad there."

"And if I don't find him, where do you suggest I stay?"

"On the other side of the road from the temple is a grove of olive trees. A lot of people camp there during all the Jewish festivals. Just throw your blanket down anywhere and you'll be fine. You'll probably even find a family who will invite you to share the Seder with them. There are people from all over the world here for this week. People will be everywhere. Just ask if you need directions and someone will help you. Jerusalem is a wonderful place to be at Passover. Hey, Jesse," called Rabbi Joel.

"Yes, sir," replied a man about Zachary's age.

"Where are you staying?"

"I just camp in the olive grove."

"Have you met Zachary? This is his first trip to Jerusalem. You two ought to get acquainted." Rabbi Joel turned to another man to answer his questions and Zachary introduced himself to Jesse. He told him that he hoped to connect with his dad, but if not, he would be on his own and didn't know anything about Jerusalem. Jesse offered to

go with him to see if they could locate his dad, but if not, he would be glad to show him around.

The two men began to talk and discovered that they had a lot in common. Jesse was working at the Mercantile Store and hoped to start his own store someday. But right now, he was single and living alone except for one servant, just like Zachary. They discovered that they had attended Hebrew School together, but Jesse was a year older.

Thursday morning, the men rose at sunrise and ate breakfast together and then began their final hike into Jerusalem. Jesse and Zachary continued to get acquainted. It took them almost two hours to get into the city since the road was so packed with people. Jesse suggested they stop at the olive grove first and let him claim a spot. Then, even if Zachary found his dad, he would know where to find him if he needed help with anything. Zachary agreed and they walked down the ravine on the left side of the road and entered a very large olive grove. It seemed that every available spot was already taken by campers. But Jesse kept walking until they found a section that wasn't as crowded. He placed his blanket by a deserted campfire to indicate that he was claiming it. "Will that be safe?" asked Zachary.

"Sure," replied Jesse. "I've come here for years, and I've never heard of any problems. We are all fellow Jews, and we are here to worship and celebrate. Now, that doesn't mean that there's not some pushing and shoving."

"Yeah, I think I have some bruises to go with my sore feet," agreed Zachary.

"Everyone is just excited to finally be arriving in Jerusalem, and tonight starts the celebration. Let's go to the temple first and see if we can find your dad, then I need to go to the market and get food for the week."

The two men joined the crowds again as they crossed the ravine and entered the main road. They could see the main gates to the temple but were making no progress. "I've never seen it this crowded," said Jesse.

"Why don't you go on to the market if you can, and I'll look for my dad. If I can't find him, I'll go back to the garden and spend the night with you — or I may spend it standing in this crowd. This is ridiculous!"

"I hate to just leave you, but it looks like it might be the best idea. I'll get enough food to share dinner with you if you can't find him. The crowds will start to clear out by sundown. Shalom."

"Shalom, and thanks again," said Zachary.

Jesse began pushing his way toward the market, while Zachary continued to press toward the temple gates. It was well past noon before he entered the courtyard of the Gentiles. It was wall-to-wall people. There was a man standing on the temple steps teaching the people. Zachary asked and was told that it was indeed Jesus. But from the back of the crowd, there was no way to hear what he was saying. The sides of the courtyards were filled with priests inspecting animals for sacrifices, and people were complaining loudly about the prices of

the temple-supplied animals. Suddenly, Zachary was certain that he saw his Uncle Peter, but getting to him seemed an impossibility. For once, he was glad to be tall and skinny. He gradually began to squeeze through the crowd in the direction of the Apostle Peter. As Zachary got closer, he could see that several men were gathered around his uncle, and he hoped that his dad was one of them. When he finally arrived, Uncle Peter embraced him and seemed genuinely glad to see him. He had always been friends with Zachary's older brother, Saul, and Zachary was actually surprised that he recognized him. "Do you know where I would find my dad?"

"Yeah, wait here. He's over on the other side, but I can probably get through the crowd better than you can. Is everything okay at home?"

"As far as I know," replied Zachary who realized that his family didn't even know he was in Jerusalem.

Peter darted up the steps and behind Jesus to the other side. In a few minutes he saw his dad retracing Peter's steps and striding toward him with a huge grin on his face. Zachary wasn't sure what to make of it. Deep down he felt that he had never had a dad and was surprised that he seemed pleased to see him. Soon he was embraced in a powerful hug and Zachary felt his dad's tears as he sobbed, "My son. My son. How I've missed you. I'm so glad you came. Is everything okay with your mother?"

"Dad, can we go somewhere and talk?"

"Sure, let me just tell the guys." He called to one of the men and told him that his son had come, and they were going to the olive grove. "But I haven't forgotten the meeting. I'll meet you there."

Instead of pushing through the crowds to the front entrance, his dad led him toward the back wall and out a much smaller gate that opened just a short distance from the Kidron Ravine. They hiked down the steep edge and back into the olive grove. Dad led them to a secluded area near the back of the grove and invited Zachary to sit. "Zachary, Zachary, you've become a man. What brings you to me? And tell me news of home."

"Dad, I'm sorry, but I haven't seen Mother or Saul for over three years. Saul kicked me out when you left, and I've been on my own. I really wasn't sure you would want to see me."

"Why would you say that, Son? Every time we were in Capernaum, I asked about you and was told that you didn't want to see me. Since you were a man, I felt that I had no choice but to honor your decision."

"I didn't know that you were ever back in Capernaum," said Zachary sadly. "I thought you just left and never looked back. I was working in the Processing Plant for Uncle Zebedee and just trying to survive."

"Son, I'm so sorry. This is Saul's doings, isn't it? He's always been jealous of my love for you. But I promise that I've always loved you and always will."

"Dad, why did you leave?"

“I left to follow Jesus. Didn’t you know that?”

“But why is following Jesus more important than staying with Mother?”

“Zachary, when I realized that Jesus really was the Messiah sent from God, your mother and I talked. She felt that it was important for me to follow Jesus and serve Jehovah with my whole heart, but she didn’t want to uproot her life and leave her sons. You and Saul both had good jobs with Uncle Zebedee, and she didn’t want to leave her friends and family in Capernaum. We agreed that I would travel with Jesus, and she would stay put. It was her choice, not mine. Zachary, I promise you, I wanted so badly to see you, but I listened to Saul, and I shouldn’t have. I always asked Uncle Zebedee how you were doing, and he raved about your work. Last I heard, he had made you steward over the entire Processing Plant. I’m so proud of you.”

“I think I understand that part. And I forgive you. But I’ve got so many questions and I need answers. Why do you think Jesus is the Messiah and what does that really mean anyway? I mean what did you find in Jesus that you didn’t find in marriage, or a successful job, or raising sons?”

“It would take me several hours to explain and I don’t want to rush. I’ve got a meeting tonight — actually the Seder. I would love to invite you, but Jesus has ordered it to be just Him and the apostles. I’m trying to think where you could stay the night. We’ll meet tomorrow, and I can spend all day with you.”

“I have already made plans for tonight, so, you don’t have to worry about me. Where and when should I meet you in the morning?”

“I’m sure Jesus will be back at the temple teaching tomorrow. Can you find that back gate I took you through?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We usually stay in Bethany and walk in each morning. He’ll probably start teaching by the second hour and I’ll be just inside that gate. Stick your head in and we’ll come back here and spend the day. I want you to meet Jesus and you’ll see why I believe that He is God in the flesh, the Messiah. But right now, I’ve got to go because I don’t know where the meeting is. If I miss the guys leaving the temple, I’ll miss the Seder, and Jesus insisted it was important.”

“I’ll walk with you. I don’t want to miss any time with you. Dad, I love you. I’m glad I came. There’s so much I want to ask.” Father and son embraced and both cried tears of joy at finding each other. They crossed the ravine and Dad pointed out that one trail led to the main road while the other fork led to the back of the temple. They concentrated on climbing the steep edge and said their good nights.

Zachary was glad that he had made plans to meet up with Jesse. He traced his steps back to Jesse’s blanket, but Jesse wasn’t there. He still had a little food in his travel bag, so he wasn’t worried about hunger. He was just excited that he had found his dad and felt completely surrounded by love. Maybe that would be enough to help him move forward with his life and not feel so empty. He threw down his blanket and sat down to wait for Jesse’s return. He thought about

the questions he wanted to ask tomorrow and looked forward to spending time with his dad without Saul around. He was glad he had made the trip.



After all the schoolboys had left the camping area, Ruler Jairus and Rabbi Joel checked to make sure it was clean. Both men were eager to be on their way but dreaded that last push into Jerusalem. The road was steep, and the crowds were incredible. There would be no leisurely discussions. They both knew the way to Rabbi Nicodemus' house, and it was time to start pressing in that direction. They untied the donkey and began the ascent.

For the past fourteen years, ever since they had completed their studies with Rabbi Nicodemus and accepted their positions in Capernaum, they had returned for Passover. It felt like coming home. The backyard would be filled with other alumni that were now scattered all over the world. Nicodemus would have a houseful of current students and there were plenty of servants to take care of all their needs. As they pushed through the crowds, both holding on to the donkey, Joel's mind was filled with lessons learned under Nicodemus' teaching. Joel wanted to ask him what he thought of the newest rule about not mentioning Jesus. He was certain that there would be some lively discussions, and he was looking forward to it.

Jairus just resolutely put one foot in front of the other and pushed forward. He was tired. The stress of the year weighed heavily on him. He was looking forward to the sweet camaraderie of his friends and a place to sit and relax. He thought he saw Talman's family pass them in their oxcart, but he wasn't sure. His thoughts turned to Arial, and he realized that that was another stress. There was no husband good enough for her. He prayed that Jehovah would provide. One of the advantages of being the local ruler was that he knew all the young men in town. Unfortunately, as the local ruler, he knew them all too well and wasn't excited about the future for his daughter. He reviewed each candidate silently as they continued to press into Jerusalem. It was an abba's responsibility to find the proper husband and he felt like a failure.



When Jesse returned from the market, he found Zachary sitting on his blanket and staring into space. "My friend, were you unable to find your dad?"

"Hey, Jesse. No. I found him, but he already had plans for tonight. We are meeting tomorrow. I didn't know where the market was and didn't want to get lost. I just came here and hoped you wouldn't mind. I've still got plenty of food in my travel bag, so I won't be any trouble, and I promise I'll be out of your hair tomorrow morning after breakfast."

“I’m so glad you found your dad, and you are welcome to join me for the Seder. Leave your travel bag under your blanket and come on. We’ll find some real food and I bought enough for both of us to have breakfast.”

“Thanks.”

They wandered around greeting fellow Jews until they found a group that invited them to join them for the Seder. It was a family group and the women turned out to be good cooks. Jesse contributed the chunks of lamb that he had bought at the market and the family welcomed them. The men sat and visited while the women prepared a makeshift feast. They roasted the lamb on sticks and the oldest man led them through the Seder. The olive grove was now filled with campfires and the smell of roasted lamb and fresh baked bread. Jesse and Zachary wandered from campsite to campsite talking with the men and enjoying the wine and song. It was after midnight before they returned to their blankets.

“That was fun! I’m glad I met you. You know how to party! I never dreamed Passover was like this or I would have come a long time ago!” said Zachary.

“Sleep well, my new friend. What time are you meeting your dad?”

“He said about the second hour.”

“I hope I’m not awake by then. Do you know the way?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. I’ll see you next Wednesday. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

A few hours later there was some kind of ruckus further back in the olive grove. Both men stirred and saw some torches and heard some noise, but quickly went back to sleep. It was none of their concern.



## Chapter 3

Ruler Jairus and Rabbi Joel were greeted effusively by their host and mentor, Rabbi Nicodemus. How fun it was to reunite with fellow alumni. All afternoon and evening they greeted the new arrivals and caught up on all the news. It was a close-knit group. Each man had apprenticed and lived under Rabbi Nicodemus' teaching for three or four years and honed their skills of interpreting Scripture. Rabbi Nicodemus was one of the finest teachers in all of Israel and each of his former students represented him well. As Joel visited with Rabbi Nicodemus just before dinner, he asked him for a recommendation for someone to assist them at the school in Capernaum. He gave Joel two names. Barak was an alumnus who was unhappy in his present location, and Elijah was just finishing his studies and was ready for his first job. Joel agreed to talk with them both after dinner. Dinner was served in the courtyard, and Joel was delighted to discover that he was seated at the same table as Elijah. He casually asked Elijah what his plans were after he completed his studies. Elijah's eyes lit up as he explained how much he enjoyed teaching. He hoped to find a school that would let him teach the very youngest boys. He would enjoy teaching interpretation, but his real passion was teaching younger students. Joel was pleased not only because it would meet their needs in Capernaum, but because of the enthusiasm that Elijah showed for his dream. After dinner they continued to talk, and Joel introduced him to Jairus. Jairus asked Elijah where he was from and where he planned to teach. He said that his family was from Nain in Galilee, but he didn't know whether there were any Hebrew Schools in the area. As Joel and Jairus talked privately, they agreed that Elijah would be a good man to add to their staff. They would talk with him in the morning and offer him the job.



Zachary woke the minute the sun was up. He knew that Jesse had said that he had bought breakfast, but he didn't want to disturb him, so he just took his blanket and travel bag and began to walk toward the temple. He had to work his way carefully through the olive grove to keep from stepping on people that were sleeping everywhere. He sat on a rock in the ravine and ate the last of his raisins and almonds. He tucked his travel bag in his robe and waited until the second hour. He began to think about his relationship with his dad and how it had shaped him as a man.

*Dad was one of the best fishermen on the Sea of Galilee and worked for his Uncle Zebedee. My brother, Saul, was four years older than me. He always called me a wimp because I was skinny. The earliest memories I can recall are Dad and Saul heading off to work,*

*and Mother and me being left behind each night. I remember when I was eight years old and announced that I was going to spend the summer working in Uncle Zebedee's Processing Plant. Saul and Dad had laughed and said I would never survive there. Saul told me, "That's where Uncle Zebedee sends losers. And you won't even make it a whole summer because you are worse than a loser." Yep. Having a big brother who was a rising star on the fishing crew made it hard to find my place. It seemed that Saul was always competing with me, always needing to destroy what little confidence I had. I wonder why? How much did Dad actually know about Saul's abuse? I never felt that Dad knew or cared about me. He was Saul's dad, not mine. But yesterday Dad seemed so glad to see me. That's confusing. I don't need my dad's love. I'm a full-grown man and I've made it on my own. But I would like to hear Dad's side of the story without Saul around to interfere.*

Zachary hiked up from the ravine and to the back door of the temple. It was eerily quiet. He walked around and other than a few servant boys caring for the animals, no one else was stirring.

He sat down on the courtyard steps and waited. He guessed his dad and Jesus had enjoyed a good party, too, and were sleeping it off. As he waited on the steps, once again his mind turned to memories. *I remember coming home from work and finding Mother crying. She said that Dad had left. I had a hard time figuring out what was going on because Dad and Saul left every afternoon just before sunset to go fishing. What was so different? But this time Dad wasn't fishing and would not be coming back. He was following Jesus, and she didn't know what would become of her. I assured her that I would provide for her, and she laughed and said I was too young to understand.*

Zachary walked around the courtyard again and peeked inside the temple. He saw a few priests scattered around. Any other time, he would have enjoyed exploring the temple — but today, he really wanted to see his dad. He sat back down on the steps and decided to wait a little longer.

His mind replayed his thirteenth birthday like a nightmare that wouldn't go away. *Soon after Dad left, Uncle Zebedee threw a family party for my thirteenth birthday. Ruler Jairus declared me to be a man and Uncle Zebedee offered me a full-time job. It was such a happy night, and everyone said such nice things. Then on the walk home, Saul told me to pack a travel bag and get out. He had no intention of supporting me. I questioned Mother, but she had sided with Saul and said that Saul was the head of the house now, and I would have to obey.*

*I had been working at the Processing Plant part time for five years and had a little savings. I found a small hut to rent and ate pickled fish, nuts, and raisins for months before I hired Ira, my personal servant. Yep. Life is good now and I don't need a dad. I got my hopes up again. I'll get over it.* He wondered whether he should bother Jesse or just spend this Passover holiday alone. He walked

around the temple once more and then decided to go back to the garden and try to get some sleep.

“Zachary! Wake up! Weren’t you supposed to meet your dad?”

“Yeah,” said Zachary groggily. “I went to the temple, but he didn’t show. I waited for a couple of hours and decided to come back here and get some sleep.”

“Oh, sorry to wake you,” apologized Jesse.

“No, that’s fine.” Zachary sat up on his blanket and rubbed his eyes. “I need to know if your offer is still good, or whether you’d rather be alone. I don’t want to impose.”

“Hey, I am glad to have a friend. I get lonely in Capernaum. I come here to be with people and have fun. You are more than welcome to hang out with me. Are you hungry? Let’s have breakfast.”

“But it’s almost noon,” protested Zachary.

“So? The party won’t start until sunset, and I can’t wait ‘til then.” He set out a couple of rolls and some olives and offered them to Zachary.

“More partying?”

“Yep. The Galileans party on the first night of Passover, but the Judeans celebrate the Seder on the second night. So, here in the camp, we just party both nights. But we need to go to the market to make sure we have enough food to get through the Sabbath. The market will be closed ‘til Sunday.”

“Sounds good and I’ll get to see a little bit of Jerusalem.”

They had just finished their midday breakfast when suddenly, the sun disappeared, and it was like deepest night. Screams were heard all over the grove and people were scrambling to find safety. It was strange and scary. Some wondered if it was the end of the world, but all were forced to just sit and wait. Soon lanterns could be seen moving throughout the grove. People were checking to make sure everyone was safe, but no one could explain what was happening. It was the perfect time to sleep, but since most had slept all morning, it was just a miserable time of waiting in fear and not knowing. Those with lanterns reported that it was not just the olive grove — the whole town of Jerusalem was dark.

Jesse expressed his sympathy that Zachary’s dad had not shown up. Zachary replied, “I shouldn’t have gotten my hopes up. I knew better. It’s the story of my life. I always came last.” Jesse shared that he was the fifth son of a farmer, so he knew what it was like to get the leftovers. “But I always knew I was loved. And my parents made sure I could attend Hebrew School even though none of my brothers did. I left home at thirteen, too. I started working at the Mercantile Store as an errand boy and worked my way up. I saved up enough to pay the apprentice fee and Mr. Immer taught me everything I needed to know. Right now, I’m essentially my own boss. I cover for everybody, including the steward. I think I should get paid more, but probably won’t until the steward dies. I’m thinking about starting my own store on the west side of town. But that takes more silver than I’ve got right now. Maybe someday.”

Zachary shared that he, too, had worked his way up from sweeping the floors to now being the head steward over the entire Processing Plant. "It helps to have the owner be your uncle. But I've been working there since I was eight. So, I've paid my dues."

They continued to discuss their lives in Capernaum and discovered that they were both searching for something more to satisfy them. They discussed marriage and both agreed they weren't ready to support a wife and family. They were more interested in getting established. But deep down, Zachary knew that that wasn't entirely true for him. He knew that the reason he didn't want to marry was because he was afraid. If he ever married, it would be to a woman who shared his dreams, and right now, he wasn't sure what those dreams were.



Talman, his wife Sarah, Miriam, and a couple of personal servants arrived by oxcart and were welcomed at his friend Nathaniel's home midafternoon on Thursday. The giggling girls declared, "We've been watching for you all day. We thought you would never arrive!" It seemed strange to not be greeted by Joanna, but she was married now and would not join them until the Seder tomorrow night. The three younger girls quickly whisked Miriam off to their room to catch up on all the news. Sarah gratefully accepted the invitation for a cup of juice and a place to sit in the living room as the servants unloaded the cart. Soon she and Eden were comparing notes on the children growing too fast and catching up on the previous year. Their friendship had solidified through these past fourteen years because their husbands were childhood friends. The men had grown up in Jerusalem. Now, they were both bankers and members of the Sanhedrin. But Talman had moved to Capernaum when he married, while Nathaniel had remained in Jerusalem.

Talman was tired of sitting and said that he was walking down to Nathaniel's bank. He had just seen him two weeks earlier but wanted an update on what was happening with Jesus. When he arrived at the bank, he found Adam hard at work. "I'm sorry, but Dad is not here. He had some other business that he was trying to finish up before you arrived. If you want to wait, I'll walk back with you. I'll be finished in less than half an hour. I just need to wrap up this one account, and I'll be ready for the holiday."

"Fine, I'll wait for you out front. I'm tired of sitting." Shortly the two men began the walk back to Nathaniel's home. Adam told Talman that his dad had been assigned to watch Jesus all afternoon. "The Sanhedrin want to know where he is at all times. There have been so many emergency meetings this week, we've seen very little of Dad at home and we've been too busy at the office to talk. I'm not sure what's going on, but it's been crazy this past week."

"Because of Jesus?"

“Yes, I think that’s the primary problem.” He told Talman about Jesus coming into the city last Sunday on a donkey foal like the kings of old. “It was breathtaking. The entire city was chanting for him to become king. They don’t realize that Rome is just standing ready for any excuse to destroy us completely. The people have got it in their heads that this peasant is their Messiah and he’s going to conquer all of Rome’s armies with just a snap of his magical fingers. If they don’t settle down soon, Rome is going to crack down on us and it’s not going to be pretty.”

“So, how is business going for you, Adam?” asked Talman trying to change the subject.

“Pretty good. With Dad gone so much, he’s letting me take over more and more of the accounts. It certainly keeps me busy, and I enjoy the work.”

“You’ve always enjoyed numbers. I’m glad you’ve found what you enjoy. That’s important.” Talman didn’t share that he’d always struggled to find satisfaction anywhere. *I guess I enjoy banking and like the money I make, but it doesn’t bring satisfaction. Mentoring some of the older boys at the school is enjoyable, but I’m not sure I would call it satisfying.* He was deep in thought when they arrived back at the house, and he apologized saying that he was feeling tired after such a long journey. Adam assured him that it was understandable, and he would feel more rested after a good night’s sleep in a real bed.

The men washed at the ceremonial pots and then joined the ladies for a delightful meal. Still Nathaniel did not come. Talman had planned to speak with him about Adam and Miriam’s espousal but decided to retire since it was getting late.

As the two families gathered for breakfast, Talman was alarmed to see that Nathaniel was not present. Eden assured him that he had come home for a few hours during the night but had left about an hour before dawn for yet another meeting with the Sanhedrin. “That is really strange. I’m glad I don’t live in Jerusalem. But I’m surprised that they have not called for all of us to be present if there’s such an emergency going on.” She just shook her head and said she would be glad when Passover was over, and things settled down again.

“Jerusalem is packed with people and Abba says that we should stay here and not go to the market or to Joanna’s house. He’s afraid we’ll be captured by some royal prince, and he doesn’t want to fight any dragons to reclaim us.” All the girls giggled.

Talman asked if Eden wanted him to go ahead with the Passover ceremony and the slaying of the lamb, or if they should wait on Nathaniel. Eden wasn’t sure, then realized that the servants needed to start roasting the lamb. “I guess, if you don’t mind, we’ll go ahead. He thought he would be back in time to do it.” She gave orders to the servants, and they brought the lamb to the backyard. Talman led the ceremony and reminded both families that this was Jehovah’s provision for the Israelites to escape Egypt. The blood on the doorpost kept the death angel from killing the first-born of Israel. Talman and Adam put the blood on each door of the house. This was the first year

that Miriam had been allowed to participate. The three younger girls stayed inside and played. The servants prepared the lamb for roasting, and the families returned to the house to visit. About the third hour, Nathaniel returned and apologized to his family for being late and missing the Passover ceremony. He assured them that he would be available to them for the rest of the Passover. Nathaniel tried to act like everything was normal, but Talman could tell that he was upset. He asked if they could talk privately on the roof. Miriam's heart did flips as she assumed they would be talking about an espousal for her and Adam. How she wished she could listen and hear what they were saying, but instead the little girls insisted that she play with them in their rooms upstairs.

"Nathaniel, you look troubled. What is going on?"

"He's dead."

"Who?"

"Jesus."

"Jesus is dead?"

"Yes. And I gave my permission." At this, Nathaniel began to pace the roof. "Jehovah forgive me. I killed an innocent man!"

"You killed him?"

"No, but yes. I didn't vote against it."

"So, it was voted on and it passed, and you feel guilty."

"Well, Caiaphas said that it would be better for one man to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed by Rome. I felt that I had to agree with my High Priest, so I agreed. Now, I just don't know. It was horrible. So horrible. I'll never get it out of my mind. They brought him into the room. They had scourged him. Oh, it was horrible. But instead of pleading for his life, he just sat there and looked sad. He claimed again to be the Messiah and Caiaphas ordered us to vote. All of us stood ... I'm not sure why. I was just in shock. I've never seen anything so terrible, so brutal. Then we all went to Pilate, and Pilate ordered him to be crucified."

"Crucified! After being scourged?" Talman covered his face with his hands. After a while, Talman asked, "Why wasn't I notified? Was Nicodemus and the others there?"

"No. None of the Sanhedrin that had defended Jesus were there. It was a small group — just enough for Caiaphas to get what he wanted. I just wish I had stood up for him. I don't know whether he was the Messiah, but I know he wasn't guilty of anything worthy of death."

"We've got to tell Rabbi Nicodemus. Do you want to come or stay here?"

"I'll go with you." Both men walked quickly to Rabbi Nicodemus' house.



Friday late morning, Rabbi Nicodemus was enjoying visiting with his guests when there was a pounding on his door. His good friends,

Talman and Nathaniel, asked to speak with him in private. They went up to the rooftop and wanted to know if he had attended any Sanhedrin councils yesterday or today.

"No, I've had guests and wouldn't have attended. But, no, as far as I know, there weren't any called meetings of the Sanhedrin."

"Yes, there were! They met and voted with just enough men to get what they wanted. They arrested Jesus last night and they crucified him this morning!" stated Talman.

"Crucified? Does Joseph know?" cried Rabbi Nicodemus.

"I don't know. We came to you first. We knew you would want to know. If you need us, we'll be at Nathaniel's house," said Talman. "My family is with me."

"I'm going to Joseph's. Let me get my cloak." They hurried down the stairs and Nicodemus spoke to his guests. "I need to take care of some official business and I will be back as soon as possible. Please enjoy yourselves and let my servants know if you need anything. Shalom."

Everyone looked around the room and was concerned about what they saw in Nicodemus' face. They knew him well because of the time they had spent together. They knew that there was trouble of some kind, but no one knew what. After a while, things seemed to be back to normal except for their missing host. Joel and Jairus talked with Elijah about the position that was available in Capernaum. He agreed that it sounded like a good fit. Together they discussed a trial beginning on Wednesday. He could travel to Capernaum with the group and get acquainted. Elijah promised to give them a definite answer by the end of the Sabbath. The servants served fruit juice and bread around noon, and everyone was mingling and enjoying rich conversation when suddenly the sun quit shining and everything was pitch dark. The servants groped their way around to light the lamps. Soon the room was as brightly lit as it was last night, but it didn't change the fact that no one could explain why it was dark in the middle of the day. There was a lot of discussion about the darkness that happened in Egypt at the time of the exodus. That darkness was a result of the Pharaoh's refusal to obey Jehovah. These scribes who were so familiar not only with the Jewish Scripture but also with the recent happenings in Jerusalem, felt certain that this was the beginning of some severe punishment from Jehovah. They were not able to predict what would be next, but they knew for certain that Jehovah was behind it.



Mid-afternoon, around the ninth hour, the sun began to shine again, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. But almost immediately, a mighty earthquake shook Jerusalem. Olive trees that had stood for hundreds of years toppled over and frightened screams were heard all over the grove. Zachary and Jesse clung to the ground and prayed

that the pitching and shaking would soon stop. Neither of them had ever experienced an earthquake and were not sure what to expect. Men around them explained that the quake could last for several days until the earth settled down again. "I don't know about you, but I think I'm ready to go home!" said Zachary.

"I guess we could go back to that campground and wait for the others, but we would still need to go to the market to get food. I say we try to get to the market as soon as possible. I don't know whether they will be open or not, but I'm not looking forward to fasting for the Sabbath."

"Okay, let's try it." The two men left their blankets and carefully navigated their way down the ravine and into the main part of Jerusalem. There was much damage everywhere they went, and there were occasional aftershocks that caused them to crouch down to keep their footing. When they arrived at the market, all was in chaos. Food had been tossed about everywhere, and the merchants were trying to put their booths back together.

"Shall we do lamb again tonight, or should we contribute fish?" asked Zachary.

"I'm good with the lamb, and since it is the Seder, I think that would probably open more doors for invitations."

"Okay, then lamb it is. I'll pay for it, since you took care of it last night. How much should I purchase?"

They also agreed to purchase some bread and cucumbers for their post-Sabbath meal and more olive oil and olives for their breakfasts. They had planned to purchase fruit, but there was so much chaos, and they had their bags full, so they returned to the grove without fruit. As the sun began to set, they searched for a group who would invite them to celebrate the Seder. Because of the strange day, all the talk was about the darkness and the earthquake. But as the sun set and campfires were lit, the smells of Passover began to permeate the grove. The Seder meal began again, and Jesse and Zachary were welcomed into a group to celebrate. They shared their meat and planned to spend another evening in celebration and partying. They were in a large family group and after the Seder had been celebrated, the men moved away from the women and children and began to talk about the happenings of the day. "I wish I hadn't gone. I don't think I'll ever be able to erase what I saw," said their host.

"What are you talking about, my friend. Where did you go today?" asked Jesse.

"To the crucifixions. I don't know why I went. All the crowds were pushing that way, and the Jewish leaders were encouraging everyone to head to Golgotha. I just went along to see what was happening. I didn't know it would be so horrifying. I will never forget what I saw."

"So, you went to a crucifixion today?" probed Jesse.

"Yes, but not just any crucifixion. You haven't heard? They crucified Jesus today."

Suddenly Zachary was paying full attention. "They what? Who?"



“The Romans crucified Jesus today. There were two other men crucified, too. It was horrible. And that’s what the darkness and the earthquake was all about. Jehovah was very unhappy and let it be known.”

Zachary’s mind was exploding with questions but refusing to think at the same time. “Who were the other two? Were they followers of Jesus?”

“No, I don’t think so. I think they were just some criminals. I didn’t see any of Jesus’ followers. I heard that they were all beheaded during the arrest, but I heard a lot of things. Are you guys followers?”

“No, but my dad is.” Zachary was up and pacing. “How do I find out what happened to them?”

“Like I said, I heard a lot of things today, but we don’t know that any of it is true. I heard there was a battle here in the grove last night and all of the followers were killed. I heard that the followers are just in hiding, and I heard that they are all in a temple dungeon. I didn’t see any of them at the crucifixion — but then I probably wouldn’t recognize anyone except Peter. I’ve heard him preach.”

“That’s my uncle.”

“I’m so sorry to be the bearer of such terrible news. I thought everyone had heard about the crucifixion by now.”

“No, we just stayed here most of the day. We went to the market, and it was a mess, but we didn’t talk with anyone,” said Jesse.

“I’m going back to my blanket. You stay and enjoy the party. I think I’m going to be sick.” Zachary ran behind a tree and lost his dinner. Then he slowly made his way back to his blanket and lay down. He stared dry-eyed at the sky. *I came to Jerusalem to find my dad, but it is too late. Maybe tomorrow I’ll just walk home alone. I don’t want to stay in Jerusalem, and I will never come back.*

“How you doin’?” asked Jesse as he slipped into his blanket.

“I’m okay. I’ve been disappointed before. I think I’ll just walk home tomorrow. I don’t want to stay here,” said Zachary numbly.

“Tomorrow’s the Sabbath. Let’s talk about it in the morning. Let me know if you need anything. Try to get some sleep.”

“Yeah, goodnight,” said Zachary as he tried to get comfortable on his blanket. It was going to be a long night.

## Chapter 4

Rabbi Nicodemus' servants were impeccably trained, and they selected men to lead the Sabbath candle lighting and the prayer time even though he had not returned. They had secured Micah, one of the oldest alumni, to lead the Seder. Before he began, Rabbi Nicodemus arrived. Servants whisked him off to the back of the house to change his soiled robe. The servants whispered to Micah that he should not begin the Seder, but instead wait on Master Nicodemus.

"Gentlemen," said Rabbi Nicodemus as he entered the room. "I need to inform you of some things that are happening. I hate to interrupt this special time, but I must talk with you. I left this morning, because the Sanhedrin had ordered, without my knowledge or permission, that Jesus be crucified. He was crucified at the third hour this morning. My friend Joseph and I witnessed it today. As most of you know, I have been following Jesus' life closely and believed that He was the Messiah. Today, I feel, proved it to me. I saw amazing things that I will someday outline for you. Right now, I need to let you know that Joseph and I took some action that may endanger your lives, and I want to encourage you to leave as soon as possible for your safety. After we witnessed Jesus' death, we went to Pilate and asked for the body. We laid Jesus' body in Joseph's new rock tomb in the garden behind his house. As you will surmise, Joseph and I will probably be crucified next. We do not wish to endanger your lives. Students, you will return to the campground where we stayed last week near Emmaus. My servants will provide your meals just as soon as the Sabbath has ended. Each one of you should pack a travel bag with food to get you through the Sabbath. It may be crowded there, but you should be safe. Alumni, I recommend that you scatter to other locations. My servants will help you pack food for the Sabbath and again, my apologies for terminating our celebration."

"Rabbi, what will you do?"

"I'm going to bed and get some sleep. Joseph and I made our decision to become public followers of Jesus and we don't intend to hide. We believe that He is God in the flesh, Emmanuel. We are ready to join Him in Heaven or serve Him however we can here."

The students quickly packed their travel bags and left. However, the alumni were discussing among themselves where they would go or whether they should stay and die with Rabbi Nicodemus. In the end, several of the alumni who had homes nearby invited small groups to stay with them. Jairus and Joel arranged for Elijah to join them at the home of a fellow rabbi who lived in Emmaus. It was not what they had planned, but it would be safer for everyone. The four of them stopped at a well and ate their very unusual Seder meal. There was much discussion about the happenings of the day and Rabbi Nicodemus' announcement. If Jesus was the Messiah, why was he dead? And what would become of Rabbi Nicodemus?



Nathaniel and Talman tried to enjoy Preparation Day, but Nathaniel knew he would always feel responsible for killing an innocent man. He hoped that the High Priest Caiaphas was right and this would settle everything down. Maybe life could return to normal. Talman was more afraid of returning to Capernaum and facing Jairus and Joel with the news. Even though he had had no part in it, he knew that they would blame him for not being able to stop it. They didn't understand the danger from Rome and the tightrope that the Council walked to keep everyone calm and safe. Radicals like Jesus had to be destroyed. Yet, snatches of their conversations continued to haunt him. They believed Jesus was the Messiah and had shown him passages from The Law and The Prophets that described him as the sacrificial lamb. *Well, he was certainly being sacrificed and I had nothing to do with it. So, why this feeling of guilt? Why do I feel so empty? I've seen many men die, but I'm behaving like a child. I really would like to just go to bed and pull the blanket over my head. I hate this farce of celebrating. Maybe we should just leave. But I do need to talk with Nathaniel about the espousal, and we have always spent the Passover together.*

Suddenly the room went dark. The girls upstairs screamed, and the servants scrambled around trying to get the lamps lit. The men ran outside to see what was happening. Other than the fire cooking the lamb and pots of food, it was pitch black. It was noon and the sun had disappeared. Talman and Nathaniel fell on their knees in the courtyard and begged Jehovah to forgive them. They felt certain that this was Jehovah's wrath upon them. For three long hours the darkness lingered. While the house was lit with lamps, the strange shadows and darkness at the windows just added to the men's melancholy. Eden convinced the little girls to take a nap so they could stay up later for the Seder meal tonight. But the others sat in the living room and tried to make conversation. Talman fluctuated between telling Sarah and Miriam that Jesus was dead and just pretending he knew nothing. He decided they would hear it soon enough and he didn't want to ruin their Seder celebration. Nathaniel had just invited Talman and Adam back to the rooftop to talk, when suddenly the light returned. But almost immediately there was a violent earthquake. Nathaniel and Eden ran as fast as possible up the stairs to reach the girls. But even as they ran, the stairs were twisting and breaking beneath them. Talman and Adam helped Sarah and Miriam out the front door. Everyone was screaming and some of the servants had been burned by the sloshing pots of food. The earth continued to pitch and roll, and the wooden stairs were completely destroyed. Nathaniel yelled for them to stand under the girls' window to catch them. Talman and Adam rushed to the side of the house to catch the little girls. Servants tied blankets together to make a rope for Nathaniel and Eden to escape and then one by one the servants climbed down the ropes,

too. Everyone was relieved that the earthquake had waited until it was light. It would have been much scarier in the dark. The ladies sat with the girls in the yard while the men checked out the damage with the household servants. The upstairs seemed to be safe. It was just the stairs that had been totally destroyed. The servants suggested that they could build a ladder that would give them access to the bedrooms as a temporary fix until after the Passover. Adam reminded his dad that he had a carpenter friend who could rebuild the stairs. Most of the other damage was in the kitchen and consisted of broken pottery and ruined dishes that had already been prepared for the Seder. Gradually things returned to somewhat normal. The men were busy helping the servants evaluate the damage and making decisions about what to save and what to toss. The distraction helped their moods to lift.

Soon Joanna and her husband, Jedaiah, joined the family. They, too, had experienced minor damage at their home. The men visited on the rooftop and Miriam and Joanna visited with their mothers. Joanna seemed so much older now that she was married. She shared with Miriam that she was with child and didn't have the energy to play games with the little girls. Miriam wondered what it would be like when she was married to Adam. It seemed to her that the women didn't spend much time together with their husbands. She had always dreamed of Adam being her best friend, but he had hardly spoken to her since she arrived. She hoped he would be more attentive when the espousal date was decided.

As the sun set, Eden lit the Sabbath candles and Nathaniel prayed a prayer of blessing over all three families. Nathaniel led the Seder, and Talman had to fight to keep his mind on the present. He tried to enjoy this special time together with Nathaniel's family.

After dinner the men went up to the rooftop while the women and girls visited in the living room. The espousal was set for the day before Shavuot. It was agreed that Nathaniel would bring his family to Capernaum for the ceremony. It would give them a nice trip out of the city. They were still undecided as to when the wedding should be. They agreed to think about it and decide later. Adam made no comment and seemed to be fine with whatever they decided. They agreed to inform the ladies of the dates at breakfast tomorrow morning. Then they climbed the ladder up to their bedrooms and slept soundly.



As the sunlight filtered through the olive trees, Zachary opened his eyes, and the memories of last night came rushing back. *How could he find out what had happened to his dad? Would he ever know?* He knew he didn't want to go home without trying to find out. Jesse's blanket was folded, and he was nowhere around. Zachary couldn't decide whether to start breakfast or wait for him. In a few minutes, Jesse returned and together they pulled out the rolls and

olives for breakfast. "I went to the local well. You have to sort out the rumors, but basically, everyone thinks that only Jesus was killed. All the apostles and followers are in hiding because they figure they will be next. We'll have to wait until the Sabbath is over before we can really start looking for him."

"Thanks, Jesse, but I don't want to ruin your holiday," said Zachary.

"But that's what friends are for. You would help me."

"So, what do we do today?"

"I'm not sure. With the Passover and the Sabbath, I doubt there would be any room at the local synagogues. Do you want me to show you around Jerusalem since this is your first trip?"

"Sure. It beats sitting here and like you say, there's nothing that we can do until the Sabbath ends."

The men packed away their food bags and stored them under their blankets and then began slowly walking around the city. Zachary kept hoping to see his dad, or Uncle Peter, or one of his cousins. But there were very few people out and about and certainly none of the apostles. As they reviewed everything that they knew about the men's whereabouts, Zachary recalled that his dad had said that they were spending nights in Bethany. So, it was agreed that first thing tomorrow morning, they would walk to Bethany to begin their search. Maybe someone there would know where they were hiding.

Sunday morning, they asked around and got directions to Bethany. It was a six-mile walk and they quickly discovered that Bethany was a sleepy little village with not much happening. Most of the people were either in their homes celebrating Passover or in Jerusalem with relatives. All the stores were closed for Passover and the men were not inclined to start knocking on doors. They waited at the well for a while and never even saw a servant. So, around noon they headed back to Jerusalem. Neither had any idea where to start looking for the apostles. When they got back to the olive grove, they both agreed that a nap would probably be as productive as anything else they could do. By evening, they began to wander around the olive grove looking for someone to share their dinner. They had purchased pickled fish and goat cheese to share and soon got an invitation to sit and join a group of mostly men. There was much laughter and fun and both men relaxed as they heard the stories of these Jewish men who had traveled from Phoenicia to celebrate Passover. They were fishermen who made their living on the Great Sea. Zachary felt right at home with them and shared some stories of his life on the Sea of Galilee. But even as he laughed, and drank, and partied the evening away, memories of his dad always threatened to surface.

When Jesse returned from the well on Monday morning, he had a puzzled look on his face. "What?" asked Zachary.

"I heard the strangest thing at the well. Zachary, I heard that Jesus is alive."

"You mean they didn't crucify him?"

“Yeah, I mean no. They did crucify him. And he died. But yesterday morning, he came alive again. He’s not dead.”

“Okay, what was in that wine last night?” asked Zachary.

“I know. It’s not possible. But let me tell you what I heard.”

“Okay. But I still think we need to cut back on the partying.”

“So, according to the slaves at the well, right at sunrise on Sunday morning, when some followers of Jesus went to wrap his body and properly prepare it for burial, the ladies found the tomb opened and the body gone. Later an angel appeared and told them that Jesus was alive and would meet them in Capernaum. Then apparently different followers saw him in various places all day yesterday. He talked with some men close to Emmaus. He appeared to the apostles who were hiding behind locked doors, and he talked with some of the followers personally. I asked several of them where to find the apostles and no one seemed to know. They just said that they were hiding, and they didn’t know where. So, I’m not sure how they know all this stuff about Jesus. But I wanted to tell you that that’s the story being circulated.”

“Thanks, Jesse. Sorry, but I don’t believe a word of it. I think it’s just wishful thinking, but at least I feel that my dad might be alive. He’s probably just too ashamed to show his face for being duped by another false Messiah.”



On Monday, Zebedee and the three servants left the Quishon Valley and traveled back to Jerusalem. The roads were filled with travelers, but they were headed away from Jerusalem, not toward it. As they stopped to water their oxen, Zebedee heard that Jesus had been crucified and that the Romans were searching for and killing all his followers. Zebedee was terrified. The road up to Jerusalem was steep and the oxen couldn’t be hurried. The streets of Jerusalem were packed, and Noah had a hard time getting to Zeke’s house. It was nearly noon before Zebedee knocked on his brother-in-law’s door. A servant welcomed him inside and Zeke and Kenan, Salome’s two brothers greeted him. They told Zebedee that they had attended the crucifixion to support Mary and Salome, but they had no idea where they were hiding now. Zeke invited them to spend the night there, but they decided to check at Anna’s. Again, it took them forever to make their way across town. Anna was not at home. But her servants assured her that the ladies were at a friend’s home and offered to either take them there or send word for Salome to come to them. After some deliberation, it was decided that Zebedee and one of Anna’s servants would walk and leave the oxcart and oxen staked at Anna’s. He instructed his three servants to go to the market and purchase food for the trip home. They should load the cart and wait for him there. He would find Salome and they would get out of Jerusalem as fast as possible.

Anna's servant walked quickly with Zebedee to the friend's house. When Zebedee spotted Salome, he couldn't understand the radiant glow on her face. She was glad to see him, but apparently hadn't noticed that he was missing. He was glad that he hadn't worried her — but was also surprised and confused. He asked if she was ready to return home and she agreed. Zebedee hugged Mary, but she was so busy with people surrounding her that she didn't really seem to notice when they told her that they were headed back to Capernaum. She, too, was smiling radiantly but nodded that she understood. The place was filled with people who seemed to be celebrating, but Zebedee just wanted to get away from the chaos. They needed to find Anna to let her know Salome's plans, but finally just asked the servant to stay and find her and tell her that Salome was going to Capernaum with her husband.

Zebedee and Salome walked quickly to Anna's and found the servants were just returning from the market. Zebedee helped them store the food and promised that they would stop and water the oxen just as soon as they got out of town. He instructed Urias to sit with Noah and help with the driving. He sat in the back beside Salome and tried to understand what had happened. It was hard to hear in the back of the oxcart, but Zebedee got pieces of the story. Apparently, Jesus had been crucified and it was the worst day of Salome's life, but then yesterday she had seen an angel, and Jesus had risen from the dead. Then last night, after she and Anna had gone home, the apostles reported that Jesus had appeared to them and had eaten dinner with them. They were certain that He was alive, and Jesus told them to meet Him in Capernaum. The Passover celebration had been forgotten and everyone was celebrating Jesus' resurrection.

It was over an hour before Noah could get the oxcart out of Jerusalem. He found a stopping place to water the oxen. Zebedee and Salome walked away from the servants to be alone. She seemed to finally realize that she was back with her husband and thanked him for giving her this special time to travel with Jesus and experience his death and resurrection. She also noticed that Zebedee was not his usual self and that he had acquired a new servant. She asked about his trip and was told that they would discuss it later. Noah wanted to know if they should make camp here and let everyone rest or if Zebedee wanted to risk arriving at the next camp after dark.

They decided to make camp and get dinner as soon as possible, since everyone was hungry and tired of fish. They worked together and soon Jeshua set a feast before them. He had bought bread rolls and goat cheese at the market and cooked a pan of vegetables over the fire. They finished off the meal with plenty of apricots and were finally satiated. Salome slept in the cart and the four men threw their blankets on the grass and slept soundly. The sun woke them on Tuesday morning and Jeshua passed out olives and olive oil for them to eat as they traveled. It was too noisy in the wagon to talk, so they just sat together with Jeshua and let the men take turns driving. At each rest stop Salome would tell them more about her time with Jesus

and what He taught. She said that she and Mary had enjoyed the Seder meal with Anna and her family as was their tradition and knew nothing about Jesus' arrest until early Friday morning.

Zebedee explained to Urias that Galileans celebrated the Seder meal on the fourteenth of Nisan as was directed by Scripture, while most Judeans celebrated the Seder on the following night.

They traveled all day on Tuesday and Wednesday. That night Zebedee finally felt ready to tell Salome about his journey. They walked away from the men after they had eaten dinner and sat by a small stream. He told her everything that had happened on his trip, and she comforted him.

By Thursday they were out of the mountains and headed east toward the Sea of Galilee. They should be home by dark. The servants were surprised to have them home early, but quickly prepared a meal for them and everyone got settled for the night. How good it felt to be home. Yet both of them knew that they had been forever changed by their journeys.



"Do you want to go with me to the temple today?" asked Jesse. "I usually go and pay my temple tax and offer a sacrifice."

"Yeah, I guess. I don't know that I'll ever come back to Jerusalem, so I might as well do it once since I'm here," said Zachary.

The men packed up their area and covered it with their blankets. The olive grove was not as crowded as it had been earlier during the first three days of Passover. Many people couldn't afford to stay the entire week, so returned home after the Seder. But the temple was still crowded, and Zachary was even more disillusioned by the noise and filth of the animals being bought and sold for the sacrifices. He paid his tax, offered a lamb, and tried to focus on Jehovah God. But deep down, he wasn't sure if he even believed in God anymore. This trip was not turning out as expected. He just felt bitter, and angry, and empty. Very, very empty. He told Jesse that he needed some time alone to think and left the temple and wandered around Jerusalem. *Why did I come here? It's just made things worse. I found my dad, and then discovered that he's chasing a dream that has imploded on him. I wonder what Dad will do? Uncle Zebedee will probably let the guys come back and fish, but they'll be the laughing stock of Capernaum. Maybe I'll move away from Capernaum. I could probably find a job with some of my new friends on the Great Sea. Of course, I'd have to start at the bottom all over again. But it could happen. Maybe I'll talk with them tonight.*

All day Tuesday, he wandered around the city, looking but not seeing. He just walked to keep from sitting still and tried to keep from thinking. As the sun set, he headed back to the olive grove and found that Jesse wasn't at their camp. All evening he moved from group to group but never found the fishermen from the Great Sea. When he was tired, he returned to his blanket and slept restlessly.



On Wednesday, he and Jesse ate their remaining breakfast food and congratulated themselves on purchasing enough to last through Passover. Zachary tried to pretend to be alive but felt dead inside. Jesse was pretending to not notice. Both men knew that this had been a devastating trip. "I'm sorry I've made this trip such a downer," apologized Zachary.

"It wasn't your fault. I'm just sorry it all happened," replied Jesse. "I hope we can still be friends."

"We've still got the journey back to Capernaum, but I'm actually thinking about leaving. I don't know if I want to stay there. I could probably get work in Tiberius or maybe I could connect up with those fishermen we met from Phoenicia. You see, my uncle and all my kinfolk believe that Jesus was the Messiah. It's going to be a real mess when we get home, and they discover that he was a fake. I'm just not sure I want to be there when my dad comes crawling back home begging for forgiveness."

"I understand. But you've still got a few days before we're back. You might change your mind."

"Yeah, I'm not really sure of anything right now."

"Well, this I am sure of, we need to be at the campground by sunset. It will be interesting to hear how everyone else's Passover went. And I'm looking forward to hearing what Ruler Jairus and Rabbi Joel have to say. I think they have friends in high places in the Jewish leadership. They may have some answers. Is there anything else you want to see or do in Jerusalem before we hike out? It should take us less than an hour to get there."

"I don't really care. And, no, I don't need to see any more of Jerusalem. I've seen more than I care to. Maybe the hike would do me good and clear out my funk. I don't mean to be so down."

"It's understandable. Just hang in there and let me know if there's anything I can do to help. If you'd rather hike alone, just tell me and I'll bug off."

"No, I will enjoy your company, and I really don't have any idea which campground we were supposed to remember. They all look alike to me," admitted Zachary.

"So, let's clean up our camp here and then head out. Maybe getting out of town will help both of us. We should have the campground all to ourselves for a while."



On Wednesday morning, Ruler Jairus, Rabbi Joel, and Rabbi Elijah went to the market and purchased supplies for the return trip. While they would do some fishing, they would still need plenty of food for the group of twenty. They didn't have anyone designated to cook, so they purchased ready-made bread rolls, cheese, butter, nuts, and fruit. They loaded the donkey's packs and slowly started out of Jerusalem. Then they all stopped at the same time and agreed they

couldn't leave town without checking on Rabbi Nicodemus. They traveled back to his home and knocked. They were greeted by a servant but were told that Rabbi Nicodemus had rejoined his students on Sunday and would not be back for several weeks. They asked if there was any word from Joseph. The servant assured them that Mr. Joseph was well and according to his servants had not been harassed in any way. They thanked him for his good news and told him that they were headed home to Capernaum.

"Shalom and safe travels."

"Shalom," they replied.

"Well, that's good news. I'm sure it's going to be an interesting journey home."

They walked in silence leading the donkey, deep in their own thoughts. For the first time that he could remember, Jairus didn't feel excited to be reuniting with his students. He had no idea what to say to them.

When they arrived, Jesse and Zachary were already there skipping rocks in the stream. They greeted them and introductions were made to Rabbi Elijah. Everyone helped unload the donkey's packs and tied her to a tree where she could graze and drink from the stream. After roping off an area to let other travelers know that the site was taken, they collected wood for a bonfire, and threw their blankets down to sit and visit.

The first question, of course, was Rabbi Joel asking Zachary if he had found his dad. And as Zachary told the men about his encounter with his dad, he felt peace for the first time in many days. The anger inside of Zachary melted as he explained that he had planned to meet with his dad on Friday, but because of Jesus' arrest, his dad was unable to make it. He told about being terrified that his dad was dead after hearing rumors that the apostles had been killed, but they had been assured by various people that they were just in hiding for their safety. And for the first time, Zachary realized that he wanted his dad to be safe.

"What have you heard about Jesus rising from the dead?" asked Jesse.

"I'm sorry. I haven't heard that," replied Rabbi Joel.

"Where did you hear it?" asked Ruler Jairus.

"We've heard it all over Jerusalem. I first heard it from some slave girls at the well. But then we've heard it being discussed at the market and in the olive grove groups. Where have you been that you haven't heard it?"

"We were in Emmaus at a friend's house. It's not far from Jerusalem, but we were trying to keep secluded because of our association with Rabbi Nicodemus."

"What's Rabbi Nicodemus got to do with it?"

"Well, it's a long story and we'll share with the entire group tonight. But essentially, he and his friend Joseph stood up to the rest of the Sanhedrin and then ordered us to scatter and hide until things

blew over. So, we've essentially been hiding since Sabbath night. It hasn't been our normal Passover celebration."

"So, Rabbi Elijah, where are you heading?" asked Jesse.

"Oh, I'm going with you to Capernaum. I'll be teaching at the Hebrew School there."

"Welcome. I didn't realize that you were a new rabbi. I just thought you were a friend traveling to somewhere else in Galilee," explained Jesse.

"Nope. This will be my first teaching assignment and I'm excited to try my hand at making Hebrew interesting to little guys who would rather be home playing."

"Now, that will be a challenge. But I'm sure you'll do a great job. I work at the local Mercantile Store, so if you ever get lonely, stop by and visit. Also, if you're looking for lodging, I keep a list of places to rent or buy."

"Thanks, Jesse. I don't think we've discussed that."

"Well, for this first few months, why don't you stay with me and my wife and we'll let you settle into teaching before we throw cooking and cleaning and managing a house on you," said Ruler Jairus.

"Thanks!"

"I manage the Fish Processing Plant at Zebedee's Fish Shop on the east side of town. It's right on the Sea of Galilee, so you can't miss it. I'm also single and always open to a visit. Maybe we three can get together and enjoy some Sabbaths after you get settled."

Soon other students and their dads began arriving. As they gathered around the bonfire and shared a light dinner, Ruler Jairus introduced Rabbi Elijah. He reminded everyone that the Sanhedrin had made a rule that they could not talk about Jesus with their students in the Hebrew School nor in the synagogue. He suggested that if there were any questions, they discuss them openly and thoroughly on this trip, because the new rule would be enforced again once they returned to Capernaum, and there would be severe consequences if broken. He then told the group about Rabbi Nicodemus and Joseph, two prominent Sanhedrin members, who were brave enough to stand up for what they believed was right. They asked Pilate for Jesus' body and placed it in Joseph's private tomb. He asked the boys why this was such a daring move. The students properly replied that a person who was crucified was considered to be cursed. Tradition taught that their body was to be thrown on a trash heap and burned rather than given a proper burial.

"I must confess that I am not certain about Jesus being the Messiah. I know that there are a lot of rumors circulating and we need to be careful to make sure that everything lines up with The Law and The Prophets. Right now, I suggest that you get a good night's rest because we have a big day ahead of us."

## Chapter 5

At breakfast on the Sabbath, Talman announced that the date for Adam and Miriam's espousal was set for the day before Shavuot. Nathaniel and his family would come to Capernaum for the ceremony, and they would ask Ruler Jairus to lead it. The ladies were excited, and Miriam watched Adam's face to see if she could determine his feelings. She thought at the very least, he would want to discuss plans for their future. Even the two mothers were surprised by his seeming lack of excitement. They, too, thought the couple would want to spend some time together and were prepared to have to set some limits for them. Instead, Adam seemed totally unaffected by the news and left to visit a friend saying he would return midafternoon. At the post-Sabbath meal, Miriam and Adam were invited to sit together with the adults, while the little sisters sat at the other table. Adam was a perfect gentleman, but there was no indication that he was excited about the upcoming espousal. Miriam excused herself early and went upstairs to her bed. When her mother checked on her, she explained that she had a headache and just felt tired.

On Sunday, Adam said that he would walk to his carpenter friend's house and see if he would repair the stairs. "I know the Carpentry Shop is closed for Passover, but maybe I can at least get on his waiting list. I'm certain he will be inundated with orders once Passover has ended." Miriam boldly asked if she could walk with him. Adam replied, "No, I don't think that would be appropriate since he is unmarried. I may stay and visit awhile and that would not look good for you to be alone with two unmarried men." And with that, he left. Miriam was disappointed but agreed that he was probably right.

On Monday, Miriam and her dad walked to Joanna's house. He promised to return for her after dinner. Miriam and Joanna had been friends for as long as they could remember. Of course, they only saw each other once a year at Passover, but what fun they had catching up with each other's lives. Last year in addition to Passover, there had been Joanna's wedding. The girls sat in the living room and chatted about all the things that girls talk about. But this year was different. Joanna was married and with child. There seemed to be a wall between them stifling many of the questions she wanted to ask. Occasionally, Joanna was interrupted by a servant who needed her direction. It was like they lived in two different worlds now, and Joanna had become a stranger. *Is it because she's married, or is it because my eyes are being opened to life in Jerusalem? I don't care if it's not polite, I've got questions that I need to ask and if I don't ask them, I'll never know.* "Joanna, you seem unhappy. Is something troubling you? I've known you for a long time and you know that I care. What's going on?"

"I'm just more tired than usual because of the baby. That's all. Is that what you are seeing?"

“Maybe. Maybe I’m just imagining things. But are you happy?”

“What a silly question! Of course, I’m happy. Jedaiah is doing well at his work. I’m carrying his baby. I’m close enough to my parents and family to get to visit often. I don’t know what you are thinking.”

“I’m thinking that I would be bored silly. Do you ever go out? Do you know any other people? Do you get together with friends? What do you do all day?”

“Are you asking about me, or are you worried about being married to Adam?”

“Honestly, both.”

“Well, it’s part of growing up. You’ll be busy supervising your servants and running your household. You’ll probably be carrying his child within the year and that will keep you busy. There’s a lot to do to keep a home running smoothly for your husband. There’s not a lot of free time. We go to synagogue on Sabbath morning, and I have met some other girls. But really, I have no time for just playing with girlfriends like you do. I’m grown up now. You’ll grow up, too. You’ll be thinking about how to keep Adam happy and meet his needs. It’s just the way Jehovah planned for wives. The man is the head of the home, but we women make sure that everything happens. Let’s go out into the garden. You’ll see what a lovely place I have.”

The girls walked out to the back courtyard and Joanna showed Miriam her flower garden. It was still too cool for blooms, but Miriam could see buds forming and imagined fragrant bouquets blooming soon. They sat on benches in the sunshine and struggled to find things to talk about. It was only noon and they had run out of things to say. Miriam wished she had told her dad to come before dinner. But then, she was anxious to see how Jedaiah and Joanna interacted. “Excuse me, I need to check on dinner preparations.”

“Certainly. I’ll be fine here,” said Miriam. *What’s going on with my heart? All I can think about is running back to Capernaum as fast as possible. This feels like a prison to me. It’s not a home. Maybe it will be better when Jedaiah arrives. Please, please let it be better.*

Miriam asked Joanna if she would be coming to the espousal. “I doubt that Jedaiah would allow me to go without him, and he won’t be able to take off work.”

“I wish you could come and see Capernaum. It’s so different from Jerusalem. And you could meet my friends, Ariel and Hava.”

“Are they still unmarried? I guess there’s not a lot of single men to choose from in Capernaum.”

“Maybe not.”

Joanna invited Miriam to come inside as the sun was getting lower and there was a chill in the air. They retreated to the living room and enjoyed sitting near the fireplace. When Jedaiah arrived, Miriam was pleased that he kissed Joanna and asked about her day. She told him that she and Miriam had been visiting. He greeted Miriam and said he hoped she had enjoyed her visit. “Will dinner be soon?” he asked.

“Yes. It’s prepared if you are ready to eat. Just let me tell the servants we are ready.” She excused herself and went into the

kitchen. Soon they were all three seated at the table and served a delicious meal. Jedaiah told them about his day then announced that he was going out to continue working for a while. He promised to not be late and said goodnight to the ladies. Thankfully, Miriam's dad arrived soon to escort her home and she gave Joanna a big hug and thanked her for a lovely day.

As they walked home together, Talman asked her if she had had a good visit. "Let's just say it was enlightening. I think I'm growing up."

"Is that a good thing? I don't want my little girl to grow up too fast."

"Abba, I've had a wonderful childhood. I just have many things to think about before becoming a married woman."

"I'm sure there will be some changes, but you and Adam will be fine," reassured her dad.

Because they were leaving on Wednesday morning, after dinner Miriam asked Adam if they could talk alone on the rooftop or take a walk. He agreed, and they sat on the rooftop to discuss the espousal. She asked if he had any questions and he said he did not. He asked if she did, and she said she had a million. He said, "That's probably normal and nothing to worry about. I will take care of everything, and you will be well provided for."

"Adam, I'm not worried about being provided for. I'm worried about whether you want this marriage or not. I feel that you are just tolerating me. You don't seem to be excited about the espousal and I'm frustrated with that."

"Miriam, we have grown up together. I don't think there's any reason for you to be concerned about my love for you. I will protect you and keep you safe. You will carry my children and be in charge of my house. What more do you want to know?"

"I want to know if you want this, or if it is just a convenience marriage arranged by our parents."

"It was arranged soon after your birth, but I agree with it, and I thought you did. I thought this was all decided and settled long ago. I don't understand your need for some excitement now. What is it that is frustrating you?"

"I don't know. I thought that you would want to be with me and that it meant more than just a business agreement. But I guess that was asking too much. I'm going to bed. Will you see us off in the morning, or will you be too busy with your friends?"

"Miriam, don't be angry with me. Of course I'll see you off in the morning, but I don't know what you want of me. You do know that I have a business to run and now I need to secure us a home and servants and get everything ready for you. I promise you'll be well cared for."

"Thank you, Adam. For that I'm grateful. I'll see you in the morning." Miriam lay on her bed and seethed with anger. *How could I be so stupid! Adam doesn't mind having a wife to run his home and bear his children. Adam just wants to go about his own life and leave me trapped in a stone prison. Why did I think it would be so*

*wonderful? Joanna will be nearby, but other than occasional visits, I will just be alone with a bunch of slaves just like she is alone. What do I do now? Suddenly, her life in Capernaum looked very sweet. But what do I do about Adam? I've loved him since I was old enough to remember. I would never want to hurt him, and he needs me. Bless his cold little heart, he needs me. Could I teach him to love and care for me?* She cried herself to sleep.

After breakfast, Miriam and her parents and their servants began the long journey home. She was grateful for some time to think before Ariel and Hava bombarded her with questions.



Jesse, Zachary, and Rabbi Elijah seemed to bond together on their journey home with the schoolboys. Rabbi Elijah let Rabbi Joel and Ruler Jairus deal with the questions about Jesus. It seemed to be the main topic of discussion. They walked downhill all day Thursday and Friday and then stopped early to enjoy the Sabbath at a beautiful campsite that included a stream. They caught plenty of fish and roasted them over a large bonfire before the sun set. Ruler Jairus led them in a time of worship and singing of Psalms as they watched the stars come out. It was a very peaceful and relaxing time that they all needed after such a stressful and confusing Passover. They continued their journey on Sunday and that night, Rabbi Joel reminded all the campers that this was the last night that discussions regarding Jesus would be allowed at the school and synagogue. They had considered many different angles, and it was agreed that no one really knew if Jesus was the Messiah or not and they certainly didn't know if he was dead or alive. Ruler Jairus and Rabbi Joel agreed with everyone that the retreat for Passover had been one of the strangest anyone could remember. They reminded the students that school would resume on Sunday and wished them all a restful remainder of the week. They arrived back at the synagogue on Monday by noon. Goodbyes were said and everyone seemed glad to be home. Before they parted, Jesse and Zachary arranged to meet at Zachary's house on the Sabbath — their only day off from work. They invited Rabbi Elijah, but he felt that he should spend the day preparing for school to open on Sunday.

When all the travelers had dispersed, Joel invited Jairus to join his family for the Sabbath and to bring Elijah. They both thanked him for the invitation and promised to be there. Then Jairus explained to Elijah that they preferred dropping their titles when students or parents were not around. "Certainly, you may drop my title, but you are my elder. How should I properly address you?"

"I want you to be comfortable calling me Jairus. It's my name. You are welcome to my home, and I want you to feel like family. My wife is Rachel, and my daughter is Ariel. I only have the one child." Before they had even reached the walkway to the house, Ariel ran to

greet her abba. Elijah gasped as he realized that this so-called child was certainly of marriageable age, and her beauty took his breath away. She confidently welcomed Elijah to their home and called to her mother to join them. Juice was served on the courtyard and both women were delighted to learn that Elijah would be staying in their guest room until he could get more settled. Elijah had been surrounded by Rabbi Nicodemus and his group of men for several years. He was surprised at finding himself in the presence of two very intelligent and interesting women. Jairus and Rachel made him feel very welcome and comfortable. But deep down he wondered if he was being viewed as a possible husband for Arial. Not that he was opposed to the idea, but it did cross his mind. Arial showed him to the guest room and called for a servant to fill a water jar for him. Then she left him to get settled while her parents enjoyed some time alone in the courtyard. *This assignment may turn out to be more interesting than what I had planned. Jehovah is my provider. If she is Your provision for me, then I would be very pleased.* At dinner, the discussion focused on the school and the town of Capernaum. When he mentioned meeting Zachary on the trip, he learned more about Mr. Zebedee and his fishing business. Everyone explained that Zachary's dad, the Apostle Andrew, and his uncle, the Apostle Peter, were Mr. Zebedee's nephews. The Apostles James and John were Mr. Zebedee's sons and Zachary's cousins. Jairus shared that Zachary had gone on the trip with them to visit with his dad, Andrew.

The two men had agreed to not mention Jesus' death but found it mentally exhausting to avoid the topic. Both men retired early. Sleep was the easiest solution for tonight, but Ruler Jairus was determined to tell the ladies on Thursday morning before they heard it from other returning travelers.

As Jairus and Elijah joined the ladies for breakfast, they could both tell that they were in trouble. "Dad, do you and Elijah want to tell us about your trip, or do you want us to tell you what is being circulated at the well?"

"I'm sorry I didn't share with you last night. I felt too weary to get into it and I knew it would upset you. I was in hopes that we could take today and spend the entire day answering your questions and sharing everything that we know."

"So, Jesus is dead," stated Arial, "and you didn't think we would want to know that?"

"Daughter, we don't know whether he is dead or alive. If you'll let us eat breakfast in peace, we'll move into the living room and tell you everything we know."

They could tell that both women were frustrated with them, and Elijah couldn't help but notice that Arial's cheeks were glowing with color and her eyes were flashing with anger. He was glad he wasn't the primary target of her wrath and hoped that Jairus would do the talking.

When they moved to the living room, Jairus told Rachel and Arial everything that had happened at Rabbi Nicodemus' house. He tried



not to leave out any details and asked Elijah to supply any information that he might have missed. The ladies listened in horror, but with understanding. Then he shared with them what Jesse and Zachary had told them as they started home on Wednesday. He talked about the discussion all the way down the mountain and the conclusion that they had all made that no one really knew whether Jesus was dead or alive. Elijah watched as the ladies processed the information.

“Abba, have you told Elijah about our encounter with Jesus last year?”

“No, I don’t guess I have,” said Jairus, grateful to change the subject.

“I became sick with a high fever and died,” began Arial. “Jesus and His followers were camped out by the Sea of Galilee — which is about half an hour from here. My dad ran to get Jesus and He raised me from the dead. I have no doubt that if He can do that, then Jehovah can raise Him from the dead after a Roman crucifixion. I don’t know why there’s so much confusion and chaos about whether or not He is the Messiah. It seems perfectly clear to me. I serve a mighty Jehovah God and my faith is in Him.” She turned to her dad, “Abba, I think your eyes are clouded because of your position as a Jewish leader. If you didn’t have the weight and responsibility of this whole town on your shoulders, it would be easier to see clearly. May I have your permission to go to Hava’s?”

“Certainly. But I don’t know whether Joel has told her yet.”

“Then, she certainly needs to be told. I’ll be back before dinner.” And with that she left.

“Jairus, is she okay? Shouldn’t someone go with her?”

“Elijah, our daughter is strong and quite capable of dealing with this in her own way. She has two very close friends who will talk it through and come to their own conclusions. All three of them believe that Jesus is the Messiah,” assured Rachel.

“Yes, but should she go unaccompanied?” asked Elijah, who was concerned for her safety.

“Welcome to Capernaum, Elijah. Here the women and children are safe and don’t need escorts during the day. Arial and her friends wander all over town and surrounding woods and we’ve never been concerned for their safety. Capernaum is growing, but I hope that we can always keep this small town feeling. Everyone knows everyone and a lot of times when Arial was little, we would hear about her adventures before she arrived home. She learned early that her actions were noticed by the whole town, and she has pleased us.”

“Capernaum will take some getting used to after my time in Jerusalem. But remember, I was raised in Nain, so I’m familiar with small towns.”

“Rachel, do you have any more questions or anything that you need me to do this afternoon?” asked Jairus.

“No, I’m fine. You and Elijah look around and do what you need to do.”

“Elijah, let’s see if Joel is available to talk about the next session.” Joel joined them as they walked to the school. He asked how Rachel and Arial had taken the news. “Better than I expected. Did you tell Elizabeth and Hava?”

“Yes, I told them last night and they handled it well. I mean, there were some tears, but they seem to both be okay. Sometimes, I think it’s less complicated for them to believe.”

“Arial said the same thing. She said if we didn’t have the weight of the whole town on our shoulders, we could just believe and trust more easily. She’s probably right. You were wise to deal with it last night. I waited until this morning and Arial, of course, had already been out and about. She heard and was pretty mad at me for not telling her.”

“Ohhh, bad mistake,” agreed Joel.

“She’ll be okay. I think she and Hava will talk it out today.”

“So, you also have a daughter?” asked Elijah.

“Yes, it’s strange, but there are three Jewish leaders in Capernaum. You haven’t met Talman. We became friends in Hebrew School growing up in Jerusalem. Talman was apprenticed to his uncle as a banker, and Jairus and I studied under Rabbi Nicodemus. Mr. Zebedee, Zachary’s uncle said that he would build a school if Rabbi Nicodemus would send a couple of rabbis to lead it, and that was fourteen years ago. Talman and his wife decided to come with us and start his bank. We found wives here in Capernaum, and all had baby girls within that first year after we arrived. The three girls are, or have been, inseparable. Talman’s daughter, Miriam, is pledged to marry and will probably move to Jerusalem sometime this coming year. The girls are heartbroken,” explained Joel.

“You said Talman is also a Jewish leader?”

“Yeah, he is not a trained rabbi, but he teaches a class for the oldest boys and prepares them to apply the Scriptures to their future businesses and homes. It is a really good class, and the boys enjoy the independent projects he assigns them. He helps them to find jobs and apprenticeships. He’s a real asset to us. He took his whole family to Jerusalem for Passover, but should already be back. He’s probably busy at the bank,” said Joel.

“I think it’s important that Elijah knows that he’s a member of the Sanhedrin. Our friendship gets strained at times — like this new rule to not mention Jesus at school or synagogue. We will need to comply with those rules,” added Jairus.

“Okay, so we have a spy in our midst,” said Elijah.

“No more so than you had with Rabbi Nicodemus.”

“Yes, I guess so. I think I was hoping to escape that feeling of always being watched,” admitted Elijah.

“The Sanhedrin have an important job to do to keep peace with Rome. It’s a hard job and like Nicodemus and Joseph, Talman is always having to balance what is best for Capernaum with what the Jerusalem Council wants,” said Jairus.

The men looked over the classrooms at the school and decided how to rearrange the groups so that each man would have his optimal

space. They set aside an area for Talman's class and then started discussing which boys would be in which class. They were discussing supplies when Joel realized the sun was getting low. He reminded the men that they would see each other for Sabbath dinner tomorrow and they all hurried home. Elijah was surprised that dinner was pleasant, and the ladies were no longer angry. They were eager to hear plans for the rest of the school year. He had never been in a home where the women were so included, and he found that he liked it. Arial, especially, had some good suggestions for how to deal with certain boys. He asked how she knew his students so well.

"I've taught your little boys since they were three. My friends and I meet with all the little preschoolers, boys and girls, twice a week and teach them Psalms and other worship songs. If they get restless, take them outside and let them sing for a while."

"Do they sing in Hebrew or Aramaic?"

"Both. But with some of the more complicated Psalms, we've simplified them because they are so young."

"So, you read Hebrew?"

"Yes, and so do my friends. Of course, we sometimes need help when we are trying to simplify the Scripture to make sure we don't miss the true meaning."

"You are an amazing woman," replied Elijah with admiration.

"Thank you, but I'm just trying to fulfil what Jehovah has called me to do. I love music and singing and I'm just sharing it with others."

"And doing a great service to Capernaum's children," said Elijah.

"Jairus, who is hosting the Sabbath meal? I need to let the servants know," interrupted Sarah.

"I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you that Joel said we should come to his house this week. Our three families have done the Sabbath meal together for as long as I can remember."

"So Talman will be there?" asked Elijah.

"As far as I know they are back. Have you talked with Miriam?" he asked Arial.

"No, the servants said she needed to rest. It seems strange. She's usually eager to tell us all the news and they've been back since last week. I hope there's nothing wrong."

## Chapter 6

On Wednesday, the last day of Passover, Miriam and her parents said goodbye to Nathaniel's family and began the long journey home. Miriam rode quietly in the oxcart and was deep in thought. Her mother was concerned but knew that yelling over the noise of the cart made it too hard to communicate. They would talk when they stopped for the night. But at dinner, Miriam barely said a word to her parents. Talman and Sarah were beginning to worry. They watched as she trudged to the cart and lay down on her mat and was quickly asleep. "Do you think she's sick?" asked Sarah.

"Hopefully, she's just tired out from the visit." *I wonder if she's heard about Jesus? I need to tell her and Sarah before we get back to Capernaum. It won't be a secret then.*

On Thursday morning, Talman knew that he had to tell them what was going on. It was one thing to keep secrets from them regarding Sanhedrin business, but this was personal, and he knew they would hear all about it just as soon as they arrived in Capernaum. He was ready to get it over with. He told the servants that there would be a delay in their starting the journey as he needed to talk with his wife and daughter before they got on the road. As they finished breakfast, Talman asked if he could speak with the two of them about some things that had happened in Jerusalem. He threw a couple of blankets in a grassy area and wasn't sure where to begin. "You know that Nathaniel was late to breakfast on Friday morning, Preparation Day for the Passover."

"Yes, and he seemed out of sorts most of the day. Was that Sanhedrin business?" Sarah asked.

"Yes, it was. I'm grateful that they didn't know that I was in town, so I wasn't included in the vote. But on Friday, they turned Jesus over to the Romans and they killed him."

"NO!" screamed Miriam. "NO. NOT JESUS! How can He be dead? He is the Messiah. Why would the Sanhedrin do that?"

"The Sanhedrin were being pressured by the Romans to stop Jesus. Jesus had caused a really big riot on the previous Sunday. He rode into Jerusalem and threatened to take over the government. Rome was not happy. They had to either turn Jesus over to them, or Rome would possibly have destroyed the entire city of Jerusalem. That's why there were so many meetings of the Sanhedrin that week before Passover. They were trying to decide what to do. I wish I had been there to stop it. But I'm glad I wasn't there, because Nathaniel says there was nothing else to do. There was another flare up on Sunday morning, when some of Jesus' followers began to spread rumors that Jesus had come back to life, but then it settled down again. Jerusalem stayed quiet the rest of the week. So, I think everything is safe now and Rome is happy." Talman knew that this wasn't the complete truth, but he felt it was the only way he could

justify being a part of the Sanhedrin and yet having no say in the decisions.

“Abba, does that mean that Jesus isn’t the Messiah?”

“I don’t know what it means.”

“Is that why Adam was so uninterested in our espousal?” asked Miriam.

“I’m not sure. I was a little surprised that he wasn’t more excited,” agreed Talman.

“Is that what is bothering you, Miriam?” asked her mother.

“Joanna says it’s just part of growing up. I need to accept the fact that my life will consist of running a household and raising children. I’m trying to be okay with that, but I thought there would be something more. I’m just feeling confused. I’ll be fine after we get home. It’s just been a long trip.”

“Then let’s get on the road. We’ve got another long day before we arrive tomorrow.” Soon they were on the road and after one more night of camping, they arrived before noon on Friday. They ate their Sabbath meal alone and Miriam avoided seeing her friends. When they would stop by, she would instruct the servants to tell them that she was resting. *I know it will drive them crazy, but I don’t want to be the bearer of bad news. Let their abbas tell them what happened to Jesus. But I need them so badly to help me figure out what to do about Adam and the espousal. What am I going to do? There’s nothing to do. It’s settled and my life is over.* Her mother begged her to talk with her about what was going on, but she resolutely assured her that she was fine. She just needed time to adjust and process all that had happened in Jerusalem.

On Friday morning, Ariel and Hava both met at Miriam’s house. They asked the servant if they could speak with Mrs. Sarah and were led into the living room. Soon Mrs. Sarah welcomed them and called for Miriam to join them. “If you’ve been hiding so you wouldn’t have to tell us about Jesus, we understand. But if you are mad at us about something, or if there’s something else going on, we need to talk,” stated Ariel.

“I can’t remember a time that we’ve gone this long without talking. I can’t stand it!” said Hava.

Miriam broke out in tears again and the two girls and her mother surrounded her with hugs and assurances that they wanted to know what was wrong.

“I don’t want to move to Jerusalem! I don’t want to marry Adam! I don’t want to leave Capernaum! I don’t want to leave my best friends, or my family! I don’t want to live in a prison! I don’t want to grow up! I hate Jerusalem! It was a horrible trip, and my eyes were opened to a lot of things that I had just dreamed up in my head. I couldn’t wait to get back here and be free. Then Dad told us about Jesus, and I felt I couldn’t talk with you two until you knew. And I’ve just been miserable,” Miriam sobbed.

“Sounds like we need to do a lot of talking,” said Ariel.

“And no more secrets, okay?” said Hava.

“Okay,” agreed Miriam as her mother handed her a wet cloth to wipe her face.

“I think I’ll leave you three to talk it out. It’s a beautiful day; why don’t you go to your studio and get some sunshine? Miriam has been indoors all week,” suggested her mother. The three girls walked arm in arm to their special place behind Ariel’s house. There they sat in the sunshine and talked. They agreed to pray with Miriam about what to do, but Ariel and Hava were encouraging her to talk with her abba about breaking the pledge. By late afternoon, Ariel picked up her lute, Hava played her harp, and all three girls were singing worship songs to Jehovah. They asked Him to guide them with His eye upon them. They were ready to join their parents at Hava’s house for the Sabbath meal.

When the girls arrived, they were introduced to Rabbi Elijah, and Talman and Sarah began to relax as they saw peace on Miriam’s face. Elizabeth lit the Sabbath candles and Joel prayed for the three families and Elijah. Everyone made him feel welcome. Talman was thrilled that he would be teaching at the school and assured him that he was greatly needed. The men quickly began discussing the upcoming school session. The ladies and their daughters sat at the other table and talked of many things. Miriam posed the question, “How much did your lives change when you got married? I mean, I don’t want to know all the details, but tell me what you were like before marriage and how that all changed.”

Sarah began by saying, “I don’t think I changed at all. I was raised in Jerusalem and was quite sheltered by my parents. But they expected me to learn all the homemaking skills before marriage. So, every day I sewed some, I cooked some, I shopped at the market, and knew how to run a household long before I married. When we married, we moved to Capernaum and didn’t have servants for a while. It was just the two of us, and we worked together to figure out life. This town offered us a lot of new freedoms. I discovered friends at the well, and we three got acquainted pretty quickly and became best friends. Is that what you want to know?”

Miriam nodded and Elizabeth began. “Rachel and I were best friends here in Capernaum. I grew up with a rather large family and knew how to cook, clean, sew, and care for babies by the time I was six. Getting married for me was a change for the better because I only had to cook and clean for one man — not a houseful. I don’t think I changed. I still made time for friendships. Joel and I had a lot of fun visiting with other couples and introducing him to small town living.”

“Did I hear my name over here?”

“Now, don’t go sticking your nose into women’s talk. You get back to the men’s table.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Joel said as he kissed her on top of her head and returned to the men’s table.

“I may have had the biggest change,” said Rachel. “I was raised as an only child in a wealthy family. We had servants to do everything — much like you girls. But I didn’t know how to boil water! So, my

espousal period was quite traumatic. Mother tried to teach me everything because she suddenly realized how unprepared I was for marriage to a man without servants. Of course, through the years, we have hired servants. But right at the beginning, there were a lot of tears and a lot of strange meals. Jairus was so good about it all, and we had a lot of good laughs. He used to say that just because I loved him, I didn't have to give him burnt offerings. Oh, I was a terrible cook. That was the first servant we hired."

"I think by working together, we have raised you three girls to be ready for whatever marriage Jehovah provides. You know how to do all the things you'll need, yet, you've had a wonderful childhood of freedom from having to do all the work. I hope your husbands will provide you with some servants, but if not, I think you'll do just fine," said Elizabeth.

"Did that answer your question or is there something more?" probed Rachel.

"That helped. But I need to ask a more personal question and I'm not sure it's appropriate."

"If you don't ask it, you'll never know. Why don't you guys head up to the roof to talk and let us have some space here."

"Are you kicking us out?" asked Joel.

"Yes!" all six ladies said in unison.

It took a few minutes to get the men settled on the roof, since Joel decided they needed some extra blankets. The ladies moved to the cushions in the living room. "Now, Miriam, if you still remember your question after all of that, I believe we're free to talk privately," encouraged Elizabeth.

"I guess my question may seem strange, but I thought if you married someone you would want to be with them. I hear you talking about laughing together, of being together, or even crying together. Is that something that grows over time, or was it there in the beginning?"

"I think it certainly grows over time. But for us, it was there long before the espousal. Jairus made me laugh and we talked about everything even before he spoke to my abba about marriage," said Rachel.

"Miriam, I noticed that Adam seemed to be avoiding you this trip. He may just be nervous about the espousal. A lot of men get overwhelmed with the responsibility of taking on a wife. But you talked with him the night before we left. Didn't that reassure you?" asked her mother, Sarah.

"No, Mother, it did not assure me of anything except that he just wanted someone to keep his house running smoothly with no emotional outbursts and no demands on him. Other than providing for me, he doesn't seem to be interested in even being my friend. I keep envisioning a stone prison with me trapped inside doing all the work, while he plays with his friends."

"Whoa, that's scary," said Hava.

"Well, it's a big exaggeration, because he works hard and has a lot of responsibilities at the bank. I think I just need time to think about

it. I mean ... I think I had imagined that our espousal announcement would be greeted with great joy and celebration, and it was a big disappointment. I've got to figure out what I want to happen. Thank you for letting me talk with you about it," said Miriam. "I'm ready to go home now, if it's all right with you, Mother."

"Sure, just let me tell your dad."

As Miriam and her mother walked home, her mother told her that she was proud of her for opening up about what was going on.

"Mother, do you think I'm being silly to expect Adam to show at least a little bit of excitement? I mean, he almost seemed put out that he needed to get a home ready for me. He kept saying for me to calm down because I would be well provided for. I felt like just another responsibility for him."

"I think we need to talk with your abba. Our marriage was also arranged by our parents, and we didn't meet until our espousal. But Talman always seemed thrilled when I came into the room and even though we had to learn how to work together and communicate, he was always eager to be with me. I noticed that Adam just didn't seem interested at all. But you've talked about nothing except moving to Jerusalem and being with Adam since you were a little girl, so I thought maybe there was something going on that I just wasn't seeing. The last thing we want is for you to be unhappy."

"That's the problem. I don't know that I would be unhappy. I just wasn't happy about this visit. I don't know whether my expectations were just too high, or whether I've been deceiving myself all along."

"I understand. I still think we need to talk with your abba tomorrow and get his input."

"Okay. Goodnight, Mother."

"Goodnight, Miriam. Jehovah will guide you."



Jesse walked to the synagogue on Sabbath morning and discovered that it was still closed for Passover travelers. He felt it was too early to visit with Zachary, so he wandered around the beach for a while before knocking. Zachary seemed pleased to see him and welcomed him to the back courtyard overlooking the sea. "What a beautiful view! You've got a nice place," commented Jesse.

"Yeah, I like it. So how was it to be back at work?" The men began to talk and the afternoon passed quickly. Ira served them a post-Sabbath meal and the men arranged to meet at Jesse's next Sabbath.



Urias had arrived in Capernaum with Master Zebedee a week after Passover and couldn't believe his good fortune. He knew that he



would miss the quiet and solitude of the forest, but he was so relieved that Capernaum was nothing like Jerusalem. He had an area in the slave quarters to call his own and he loved getting to know everyone's name and hear their stories. It was like having a family with brothers and sisters and he'd never had that even before his parents had died. Each morning before dawn he ate his breakfast and walked with them to the Fish Shop. He worked wherever Master Zebedee assigned him, but they both agreed that he excelled at the Fish Market and dealing with customers. Most afternoons he assisted Noah with whatever he needed at Master Zebedee's home. He excelled as a jack-of-all-trades and was much younger than the other slaves, so was often called on to help out with heavier projects. *Yes, Jehovah has blessed me, and I will be happy here.*



Life back in Capernaum had settled into a nice routine, when about three weeks after Passover, Zachary answered a knock on his office door and discovered his dad, the Apostle Andrew, standing in the doorway. "Dad!"

"Zachary! I'm so sorry I couldn't meet with you in Jerusalem."

"I know, Dad, I understand. I was pretty mad, but then I heard the news. I'm really sorry for your loss."

"What loss? Haven't you heard?"

"Let's get out of here and go to the house and talk. It's too noisy here. Let me tell my foreman, and we'll go."

The two men walked to Zachary's home and sat in the back courtyard. Ira quickly prepared some juice for them and left them alone to talk.

"What a view! I'm proud of you, Zachary. You have a really nice place."

"Thanks, Dad. How long can you stay? I have a guest room if you can spend the night."

"No, I want to visit with your mother after dinner. I want to answer as many of your questions as I can this afternoon. I'm glad you could take off work, but I should be around for the rest of the week."

"I just need to let Ira know, and he'll prepare our dinner."

As Zachary settled back on his cushion, his dad sighed, "Where do we begin?"

"Well, for starters — I'm glad that you are alive. The first word I heard was that all the apostles had been killed in the olive grove. That was a little hard to handle. But before we left town, we heard that everyone had escaped except Jesus. I'm so sorry."

"So, you haven't heard that Jesus is alive?"

"Dad, I talked with men who saw him crucified."

"Yes, but after three days, He conquered death and He's alive."

"Okay. So, what brings you to Capernaum?" said Zachary trying to find a safer subject.

“I’m meeting Jesus and the other apostles here, but I decided to come early so that I could spend time with you and your mother. The other guys aren’t coming until the Sabbath. I wasn’t sure when you would be available, and I wanted to see you as soon as possible. I hope it was okay to interrupt your work.”

“Of course it was okay. I’m glad you came. So, you really believe that Jesus is alive, and you are traveling with him again?”

“Jesus is really alive. He doesn’t stay with us very much. He just tells us the next place to meet him, and we travel there.”

“I had so many questions all prepared for my time in Jerusalem, but I think I just forgot them all when you didn’t show up and I thought you were dead. I guess I’ve spent most of my time trying to forget.”

“I’m sorry, Son. Let’s just take it slow and get reacquainted. The trouble is, we only have this week and I assume you’ll be working most of the time. I have no idea when I’ll be back in Capernaum again.”

“I’m just glad you came. I think that hearing you say you love me and always have, answered my biggest question.”

“Well, one of the questions you asked me that day in Jerusalem was why I chose to follow Jesus instead of staying home to raise you. Would it be all right if I started there?”

“Sure. I’d like to hear it.”

“You were too young to understand back then, but my life was a shipwreck. At least I hope you were too young to remember. Your mother was not happy because I spent most of my time hanging out with my friends and partying. My life was just a miserable rut. I fished all night, slept all morning, and drank all afternoon until it was time to leave to fish again. I was miserable and so was she. So, I left. Fortunately, I started listening to John the Baptizer. I hung out with his group for a few months, and he helped me get my life on track. He told me I needed to come home and make it right with your mother and Uncle Zebedee. But your mother wasn’t so ready to forgive, and both of you boys seemed settled. She didn’t want me messing up your lives again, but I came home and focused on trying to be a good husband and dad. Our marriage was better than it had ever been, and we were feeling comfortable together again. But John the Baptizer had taught me that the Messiah was coming soon and that I would know Him when I met Him. You probably remember the day I left to follow Jesus. I knew that He was the Messiah. When He invited me to follow Him, I jumped at the chance. I wanted to have a purpose and reason for living. I felt that He could teach me how to find purpose — and He did. I am a totally different man from the one who left here three years ago. I’m a part of a group of men that really support each other and care about each other. Jesus taught us so much about loving people and accepting them. I’m trying really, really hard to follow His example. Every time we’ve come back to Capernaum, I’ve invited your mother to join us and follow Him, too. There were lots of families following Jesus, but she didn’t want any part of it. I can’t make her understand why I believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and she just feels that I deserted her.”

“But he’s dead, Dad. He was crucified by the Romans.”

“Yes, but He conquered death and came back to life on the third day just like He said He would. He told us for a whole year before it happened that He would not only be crucified, but that He would be scourged before that. He told us a lot of details and He told us that He would rise again on the third day and meet us in Capernaum later. I’ve talked with Him, touched Him, eaten with Him. I know He’s alive and not just a ghost. He’s meeting us here. We don’t know exactly when or where, but He’ll be here because He said He would. I don’t know what else to tell you. I believe that He is the Messiah sent by Jehovah. I don’t know what that all means, but I intend to find out.”

Ira announced dinner and the two men ate mostly in silence. “You’ve got a good cook.”

“Yes, I have. I don’t have time to take care of those things and it’s nice to come home at the end of the day to a hot meal. Ira does a good job taking care of me.”

“Have you thought of any other questions?”

“Not really. I’m just trying to process all you’ve told me. I think I’m surprised that you felt so dissatisfied. I didn’t see that. I often wondered why you left and now I think I understand. I can relate to just feeling life is a merry-go-round. I think one of the things I wanted to know was whether Jesus had given you the satisfaction that you were looking for. It sounds like he has, but I’m not sure how or why.”

“He has taught me a whole new way of life that demands that I love others and really care about those around me. He demonstrated that wherever we went. Even if He was exhausted, He was still healing and caring for people. I want to be like that, but I keep failing. I haven’t got it all figured out, but I know I’m happier than I’ve ever been, and I’m going to keep following Him and trusting that someday I’ll understand it better. It’s getting late and I want to visit with your mother while Saul is out. May I visit with you again after work tomorrow?”

“Sure. I’ll be home by sunset, and you are welcome to eat with us. Maybe I’ll have more questions for you. Shalom, Dad.”

“Shalom, Son.”

Zachary lay awake for a long time thinking how similar his life seemed to his dad’s. *I’ve always felt that there was something missing, something dead inside of me. It sounds like Dad believes that Jesus can fill that void. But something is not right. I can sense it. Dad’s still feeling empty. I guess I just don’t trust him. I guess I don’t even trust that he’ll be back tomorrow. I just feel that I’ll get hurt again if I get my hopes up.*

Monday was a long day for Zachary. He had a hard time concentrating on his work and had to discard a whole batch of fish because of his lack of attention. He knew that Uncle Zebedee wouldn’t be happy with that, but there was nothing he could do to salvage it now. It would go on his report and hopefully he wouldn’t notice. *Yeah, right. Uncle Zebedee notices everything!* He tried to pay closer attention to what he was doing and not let it get to him, but he was glad to call for quitting time. *I thought Dad might meet me here. But*

*that's silly. I'm a little old to need an escort home.* But it reminded Zachary that his dad had never done things like that. *I guess I've always been on my own, even when I first started work here. And I'll probably be on my own tonight.* But as he approached the house, he saw his dad standing in the back courtyard looking out over the sea. He smiled and greeted him. "That's my favorite spot," said Zachary.

"I hope you don't mind me letting myself in. Ira said it was okay."

"Sure. Ira was expecting you."

"I was wondering if I could throw my blanket here tonight."

"Dad, I have a guest room and you are welcome. I take it, it didn't go well with Mother last night."

"No, it didn't go well," said his dad sadly. "I won't be going back there."

"I'm sorry, Dad." Ira called them to come in for dinner and they once again ate mostly in silence. Then Andrew began to share with Zachary some of the miracles that he had seen Jesus perform. They laughed and shared together, and it felt good to see his dad happy. He wasn't sure how much he believed, but he could tell that his dad thought it was the truth. Zachary showed his dad to the guest room, and they agreed that he would spend the next few nights with him. Now the days at the Processing Plant seemed to fly by, and each night Zachary and his dad shared dinner and talked. The talk was primarily about Jesus, but Zachary also shared his feelings of emptiness and his fear of marriage. The two men felt a father-son bond for the first time, and Zachary was dreading his dad leaving. But after five nights of visiting and sharing, Andrew reminded him that he would be meeting the other apostles and Jesus again tomorrow, and he didn't know what the future would hold. He promised to return to Capernaum as often as he could, and Zachary assured him he was always welcome anytime. At breakfast on Friday, the men hugged and said their goodbyes quickly so that Zachary could get to work on time.

## Chapter 7

It was Sabbath morning, and Talman, Sarah, and Miriam lingered around the breakfast table. It was only ten days after Passover and the synagogue was still closed for travelers who walked to Jerusalem.

“Abba, I have a question for you.”

“You know I’m always available.”

“Abba, what would be the consequences of breaking a pledge?”

“Well, I guess a pledge is like a promise and I think that Jehovah is unhappy when we don’t keep our promises or pledges or vows.”

“That’s what I thought,” nodded Miriam, who once again was looking sad.

“Miriam, I think you need to explain to your dad what is going on. And Talman, you need to listen to your daughter. There are times when breaking a promise or vow is the right thing to do. Don’t just quote the Law at her.”

Talman realized that he had given an answer without understanding the question. “Miriam, I apologize for not listening to your question. I agree with your mother that there are times and places when promises, or pledges, should be broken. Are you considering breaking a promise? I would like to help if I can.”

“Thanks, Abba. No, I’m not considering breaking a pledge. I’m considering whether or not to ask you to break one.”

“Can we stop talking in riddles and just let me know what I’m missing here?”

“Abba, I don’t want to marry Adam. He doesn’t seem to be interested in marrying me and I just don’t know what to do.”

“What do you want to do?”

“I would like to give him more time, but since the espousal date has been set, time is running out. The consequences of breaking an espousal are pretty serious, and I was thinking that it would be better to break the pledge before the espousal.”

“You are right that breaking the espousal would result in you being a divorced woman and never allowed to marry. It sounds like you are saying that you don’t anticipate marrying Adam. I thought you were happy with him.”

“That’s what is so surprising to me. I went to Jerusalem excited and eager to marry Adam. But while I was there, everything seemed different from the fantasy that I had envisioned. I tried to talk with Adam about it and he didn’t want to hear my concerns or questions. Abba, I don’t think he cares about me at all. He just wants a wife to run his household and carry his children. I would just be his slave. If you don’t want to break your pledge to Nathaniel, then I will break the espousal and take the consequences. I would rather never marry than to be imprisoned in Jerusalem.”

“So, this is serious?”

“Yes, Abba. My mind is made up.”

“Let me think about it. I would need to go to Jerusalem and talk with Adam and see what his intentions are. I should have talked with him while we were there instead of arranging this entirely with Nathaniel. But I promise to look into it. And I’d like to talk with your mother alone.”

“Certainly. I think I will go to my room and take a nap. I have not been sleeping well.” Talman listened as Sarah told him what she had learned about the situation. They agreed that the espousal needed to be stopped. He promised to talk with Jairus and Joel on Sunday after school to see if they had any suggestions on how best to proceed. They had always discussed parenting issues together and he was grateful for their friendship.



Talman, what a surprise!” exclaimed Nathaniel when he answered the knock at his office door about a month after Passover. “Come in. Come in. Oh, I hope this is not bad news. You look exhausted.”

“Nathaniel, we’ve been friends all of our lives; you know me well. I’m not going to beat around the bush. I come bringing news. I don’t know yet whether it will be good news or bad news. You and your son will have to determine that.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t understand you. Let’s get out of here and walk to the market. We can talk more freely there. Let me just tell Adam that I won’t be home for dinner. We can grab something at the market like old times. What’s going on and why do you look so troubled?”

“That will be fine. I’ve been on the road for the past three days and I’m weary. But I have something that I need to talk over with you. I’m afraid it will bring you grief and may even end our friendship.”

“Then the sooner we talk, the better. But I assure you, nothing will end our friendship!” exclaimed Nathaniel.

They walked to the market and went to their favorite Bread Shop. They purchased a couple of rolls filled with goat cheese and found a bench to sit and eat together. “I’m not sure where to begin. I have raised my daughter quite a bit differently from the women in Jerusalem.”

“Yes, you have. She is a very beautiful and lively young lady,” agreed Nathaniel.

“She’s also very intelligent, opinionated, and strong-willed,” said Talman. “And I blame myself for letting her express herself freely. I’m not sure that I’ve raised her to be a submissive wife.”

“What are you saying, Talman?”

“I’m saying that she has no desire to marry Adam. She says that if I don’t break my pledge to you, then she will break the espousal and take the consequences.”

“Whoa. That’s serious. May I ask what she objects to in Adam?”

“You may, but I’m not sure I know how to explain it. She says that Adam only tolerates her and has no desire to be married to her. She feels that he only wants someone to run his house and carry his babies but doesn’t have any intention of letting her be a part of his life.”

“I’m not sure what to say. Our marriages were arranged by our parents. You and Sarah seem to be very happy, and Eden and I have a good marriage. I don’t see any reason that Miriam and Adam won’t be happy once they are married,” insisted Nathaniel.

“That’s what is so hard to explain. Adam does not treat Miriam as if he has any desire to be married to her. She feels like she is being sold as a slave and will be locked in a prison without any input into their marriage. That’s her exact words and it breaks my heart. I admit that I have spoiled her by letting her have her opinions and express herself freely, but I was in hopes that Adam would be proud to be her husband. Sarah and I agree that we saw no such response from him. We feel that he just thinks of marriage as a business deal. We want more than that for Miriam.”

“So you are breaking off the espousal?” said Nathaniel rather heatedly.

“Yes, I am. Whether you understand it or agree with it, I am breaking my pledge and the espousal is cancelled. I hope that someday you will forgive me,” stated Talman.

“What is it that Miriam wants?” asked Nathaniel sadly.

“She wants a husband who loves her, respects her, treasures her, wants to spend time with her, wants to hear what she has to say. Not just someone who provides a roof over her head and food for the table. When Miriam tried to talk with Adam about his lack of response or interest, he said that he intended to provide for her. She said that there was absolutely no emotion attached to it except frustration that now he needed to find a house and servants for her.”

“I must admit that Eden mentioned his lack of enthusiasm when we announced the date,” admitted Nathaniel.

“Yes, we noticed it, too. But we had planned for this day for so long, and I just assumed that everyone was in agreement.”

“What do we do now?”

“I think that you would know best how to inform Adam, but honestly, I would like to see his response. I think it would help me to confirm that Miriam is making the right decision. Could we talk with him together tonight? Or if you prefer, I will leave and let you speak with Adam privately.”

“No, I think it would be best if we talk with him tonight together. And our guest room will always be available to you. I will not hear of you staying anywhere else. Like I said, our friendship will not be broken. We’ve been through too much together. And this, too, will pass.”

“Thank you. I hope you realize how very hard this is for me. I do not break my pledge lightly — especially one to my best friend.”

“Let’s go and see if Adam is at home.” Both men walked resolutely toward Nathaniel’s home. Talman was exhausted from his trip but felt it better to get it over with tonight if at all possible.

Eden was surprised to see Talman so soon after the Passover visit. She knew there wasn’t a scheduled Sanhedrin meeting, but also knew that it was not her place to ask. She sent the servants to prepare the guest room for Talman while Nathaniel knocked on Adam’s door and asked to speak to him on the rooftop. “Dad, I’ve got a lot of work to finish, can it wait?”

“No. It can’t. Please meet me on the roof as soon as possible.”

“Yes, sir.”

Servants brought the men wine and bread, but neither felt like eating. They waited on Adam. “Do you mind doing the talking?” asked Nathaniel.

“Certainly, if you think that is best.”

When Adam arrived, he was surprised to see Talman. He quickly greeted him and asked if everything was okay. “Adam, I asked to speak with you about your plans for the future.”

“I’m sorry, sir, but I haven’t looked for a house yet as I wasn’t sure when the marriage would take place. There are plenty of houses to choose from here in Jerusalem.”

“And did you discuss with Miriam what she might like in a house?”

“I did not. I’m paying for the house and it’s my job to provide for her. I’ll take care of hiring her servants and making sure that she is provided for.”

“Yes, I’m sure you would. And what if the house you select is not to Miriam’s liking?”

“Sir, I don’t understand your question. Is Miriam complaining about a house that I haven’t even selected yet? That seems unfair.”

“No, what seems unfair to me is that you do not seem to want to work with Miriam to create a marriage. When two people plan an espousal, they generally spend time together and discuss what each wants so that they can come to an agreement. I am so concerned about your lack of enthusiasm about the marriage, that I have broken my pledge to your dad, and I am breaking my pledge to you for an espousal to Miriam.”

“Wow. I wasn’t expecting that. I thought everything was settled. I’m sorry if Miriam is unhappy. I agreed to make the trip to Capernaum for the espousal to make you and Dad happy. But honestly, it is really an inconvenient time of the year for me.”

“Son, are you saying that you have no desire to be married to Miriam?” questioned Nathaniel.

“I don’t mind. It’s going to complicate my life to have to find a different wife, but I’m sure there’s one out there. Jehovah will provide, right?”

“Right,” said Nathaniel. “You may return to your work.”

Talman put his head in his hands and cried. Miriam was right. Nathaniel just looked stunned. He was so embarrassed by his son’s attitude. “Now, who needs to apologize for their parenting? Talman,



please get some rest. This has been weighing heavy on you. I'll tell Eden."

"Miriam has been crying since the day we left here. It's been a rough few weeks." The men hugged and wished each other a good night.

Talman joined them for breakfast and then walked to the market to stock up on food for the trip home. He wondered what the future would hold for his little girl who was already past the normal age for marriage.



On Monday, when Zachary arrived home from his day at the Fish Processing Plant, he was startled to see his dad, Andrew, standing in the courtyard. He quickly explained, "Jesus showed up and taught us a lot of things. We're returning to Jerusalem early in the morning and I just couldn't leave town without saying goodbye. I love you and promise that I'll come back as soon as I can to visit."

"Can you stay for dinner?" asked Zachary.

"No, I'm supposed to be helping the guys get ready for the trip. I just wanted one last hug."

"I love you, Dad. Come back whenever you can. You're always welcome."

As his dad walked away, he turned to wave. Zachary felt a strange sensation of wanting to run and join him but stood in the courtyard and waved goodbye.

At the stewards' meeting on Thursday, Uncle Zebedee reported to the men that his sons, James and John, and his nephews, Andrew and Peter, had been to visit. They reported that Jesus was definitely alive, and they had met with him at the cove on Tuesday.

Zachary was pleased that he didn't mention the batch of fish that he had ruined last week. There were some problems getting the right lumber they needed for the ship building division and Uncle Zebedee handled a few other questions before the meeting was dismissed. As the other men left, Uncle Zebedee asked, "How's it going, Zachary?"

"It's going well. I reconnected with my dad last week. He stayed with me, and I got a lot of my questions answered. I need to thank you for always being there for me and believing in me."

"You've turned out to be a very fine man, Zachary. I'm glad I could help you get started."

And before Zachary could stop himself, he asked, "Uncle Zebedee, do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah?"

Zebedee didn't hesitate. "Yes, I do. I don't know what all that means, but I do believe He is the Messiah sent from God."

"Thanks, I was just wondering. Dad told me a lot about him, and I was just curious what you thought."

"Well, I've known Jesus since He was a little boy, and I hear about Him from James and John and Peter and your dad. There doesn't seem to be any other explanation for His supernatural power

and the miracles He did. And now there's the resurrection from the dead. That's pretty irrefutable proof that He is who He says He is."

"I guess so. Shalom," said Zachary as he walked toward home.

"Shalom, my son."



Rabbi Elijah was a very popular teacher with the young boys. He was eager for the boys to learn, but very patient with them. His delight was seeing them master the material and he was always trying to think of fun ways to learn. They often took walks through the surrounding woods and made up songs to help them master the twenty-two Hebrew letters they were learning.

Elijah had lived with Jairus and Rachel for a full month and he had saved up enough to look for a place to call his own. He wondered how Jesse and Zachary were doing and wanted to find some friends his own age and away from the school.

School was dismissed at the eighth hour, and he asked Jairus how to find the Mercantile Store. Jairus walked with him, and Elijah explained that Jesse had said he could provide him with a list of rentals whenever he was ready. "Oh, but you are welcome to stay with us. I've enjoyed having you. Now, I'll be outnumbered by the women again!" Elijah laughed but reminded him that he needed to have some alone time with those special women.

"I have really enjoyed staying with you and I think it has helped me to formulate what I'm looking for in a marriage. But I need to get established and start getting a home ready before I consider marriage. Not that I'm thinking about marriage, I just..."

"It's okay, Elijah. It's the way Jehovah created us. When you are established enough to support a wife, Jehovah will put the desire there and you will not be happy until that desire is fulfilled. It is His way. At the next block, turn right and you will see the Mercantile Store. Do you think you can find your way back?"

"Yes, and thank you. I'll be at your home in a little bit. Shalom."

"Shalom."

When Rabbi Elijah entered the Mercantile Store, he was greeted by a clerk. He asked for Jesse and was told to wait. Elijah looked around the store and wondered what he would need to purchase to set up housekeeping. He knew very little about cooking, but supposed that, just like in Jerusalem, he could live on goods he purchased at the market. Soon Jesse was greeting him and both men were trying to ask the same questions all at the same time. They both laughed.

"Okay, you first," said Jesse.

"Well, the teaching is going well and I'm here to see about that list of rentals that you said you had. I can't afford much, but I've been at Ruler Jairus' for a month and feel that I should be on my own."

"Come back to my office. The cheapest place would be too far for you to walk into school each day. Let's see, here's one that's a lot better. It's just one room with a firepit outside to cook on, but the rent

is good. You could save your money to get something better. Or here's a two room one, so you would have a separate sleeping room. It's got an outdoor oven and a firepit. Do you plan to get a slave to do your cooking, or will you be on your own?"

"So many decisions. No. I think for starters, I need to just look at the one room."

"That's the way I started out. It gets pretty boring eating from the market, but you can save your money and rent something bigger soon. All of these landlords expect their pay at the beginning of each week, and you can move out anytime you wish."

"How do I go about seeing this place?"

"I'll walk over there with you and see if we can find the landlord. He's a carpenter and his shop is pretty close. I just need to let the steward know I'll be out."

The two men found the carpenter and he was willing to show them the little house. It was indeed small, but it was private and clean. They agreed on the price and Elijah thanked Jesse for his help. He ran to the market and began searching for the things he would need to set up housekeeping. His money was tight since he had only been working for a month. He was trying to just purchase the essentials. Thankfully, he owned a blanket, but that was all. He purchased a water jar, a lamp and some oil for it, some olive oil, and several rounds of bread for his breakfasts. Since his coins were almost gone, it looked like he would need to continue to eat dinners with Jairus' family this week. By Friday, he would know what else he needed, and decided that each week he would continue to furnish it. He walked to Jairus' house and arrived just in time to wash with him. He shared with the family that he had located a small home and would be spending the nights there. They insisted that he continue to join them for the Sabbath evenings since all the rabbis enjoyed being together. He wasn't sure whether they were just being polite, but he told them that he would at least join them this Sabbath evening. After dinner, he said goodnight and walked to his own home. After sleeping on a comfortable mat at Jairus' house, the blanket felt hard on the stone floor. *Maybe a mat should be on my purchasing list for Friday, but it will be expensive. How good it feels to finally be on my own.*

Each afternoon, after school, he spent a few hours at his home preparing lessons for the next day, but then he walked to Jairus' house for dinner. He enjoyed their warm and welcoming home, but still felt that it was time for him to provide his own way. On Sabbath night, the group of rabbis and their families were gathering at Jairus' home. Elijah especially enjoyed these evenings with what he was coming to feel was his extended family. Sometimes the men would retreat to the rooftop to talk, but some evenings, they would visit all together with the ladies in the courtyard. He particularly enjoyed the lively discussions with the three young ladies and was fascinated that they were unafraid to debate and defend their beliefs. Tonight the topic was Jesus and the Scriptures concerning Messiah. Since the men could not mention Him at school or at the synagogue, they enjoyed exploring what The

Law and The Prophets told about Messiah. They debated why Jesus had not completely fulfilled all of the prophecies, even though he certainly fulfilled many of them. He watched the young ladies hold their own positions against their dads. It was fascinating. He found himself siding with Hava quite often. Ariel was, however, more persuasive concerning her interpretations. It was always a stimulating evening and he genuinely felt welcome. As the evening came to a close, Elijah informed the entire group that he had located a place to live and had moved out of Jairus' home. "Thank you for including me this first month. Shalom."

"Next Sabbath night, I hope to see you at my place," said Talman.

"Thank you. I know I would enjoy that, if you are sure you want me."

"Elijah, you are very welcome to join us, or we wouldn't have invited you."

"Then I will be there. What should I bring?"

"Just bring yourself and enjoy the evening. We remember what it was like just starting out."

"Shalom, and thank you. I'll plan to see you all there."

## Chapter 8

Zachary and Jesse met at Jesse's house around noon on the Sabbath. After greeting each other and catching up on their news, Jesse reported that he had helped Elijah find a house to rent. Both men agreed that they should walk over and surprise him with a visit. "I thought you would agree, so I asked Tobias to prepare a picnic for us for the post-Sabbath meal. I don't think Elijah will be prepared to serve us. I'll carry the basket if you will carry the jug of wine. Maybe we won't get in trouble for breaking the Sabbath." Since both men had grown up in Capernaum, they knew the backroads and how to avoid the Pharisees.

They arrived to find Elijah sitting in his backyard alone. He seemed thrilled to welcome them and they had a wonderful time catching up and getting reacquainted. Jesse and Zachary shared with Elijah some of the crazy things that they did in order to survive their first year on their own. Just like Elijah, they had been amazingly poor and very, very alone. "Well, at least I have a standing invitation to eat with the other rabbis each Sabbath night — so I won't totally starve to death."

"I see you have a firepit. Do you know how to cook?"

"I've never tried and I don't have a skillet. That's on my list, but right now my pay just barely covers my rent. So, I can't buy a lot of stuff. This week I ate with Jairus, but I'm on my own for this next week. I bought some bread and cheese and some onions to get me through the week."

"Maybe you need to come over and let Ira teach you some basics." As the sun began to set, the men enjoyed visiting over a picnic prepared by Jesse's servant, Tobias. Soon goodbyes were said with a promise that Elijah would join them at Zachary's house next Sabbath.



A predictable pattern developed for Elijah. He was amazed that another month had passed as he spent Sabbath nights with the rabbis and their families, then joined Jesse and Zachary after synagogue each Sabbath. As Shavuot approached, the other rabbis invited him to join them on their journey to Jerusalem. They did not take their families, and Talman would provide transportation with his oxcart. Elijah agreed. The three rabbis would stay in the olive grove while Talman would stay with his friend Nathaniel. Talman would have meetings with the Sanhedrin all day on Friday before Shavuot began on the Sabbath. The first day of Shavuot was called Pentecost because it was fifty days after Passover. They left Capernaum on Tuesday morning bright and early. All four men were glad to be away

from school for a break, but they were dreading what they would find in Jerusalem. They wanted to check on Rabbi Nicodemus and wondered aloud if Jesus would be teaching at the temple. The closer they came to Jerusalem, the more tension they all felt. Talman was dreading the meetings and wondered what had happened in the past month since he had talked with Nathaniel. He left the three men at the olive grove and promised to meet them early on Tuesday to get ready for their trip home. Jairus, Joel, and Elijah went to the market to prepare for their five days of camping. On the Sabbath, the three stacked their camping supplies and began to make their way to the temple for Pentecost, the first day of Shavuot. They found that the streets were filled with people. They were not pushing into the temple as usual, they were dancing and singing in the streets. The men were caught up in the celebration and heard the Apostle Peter preaching just outside the temple gates. Peter was preaching boldly that Jesus was the Messiah and that the Jewish leaders had killed Him. He told about the crucifixion and the resurrection. He invited anyone who wanted to confess Jesus as Messiah to simply kneel and repent from their lack of belief. He said that if they chose Jesus as their Messiah, they would be filled with the Holy Spirit of Jehovah. The message was being translated into many, many languages by the other apostles and followers of Jesus. The rabbis were fascinated to hear these uneducated men speaking in whatever language was necessary for all the people to understand clearly the message that Peter was sharing. The more they listened to Peter preach, the more convinced they became that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. All three men knelt in the street and asked Jehovah to forgive their sins by the blood of the Messiah Jesus. Each one of them was filled with an incredible sense of peace and joy. They felt a transformation deep inside that they could not explain. They were grateful when the Apostle Matthew knelt beside them and asked if they had any questions. He explained that what they were feeling was the presence of the Holy Spirit, Jehovah's Spirit, inside of them. If they would listen closely and obey Him, He would begin to guide them, teach them, and empower them just as He had Jesus.

As the sun began to set, the crowds were thinning out, but there were still celebrations in the streets and the olive grove was filled with those who had celebrated Pentecost with the followers of Jesus. As the new followers shared with their friends, family, and fellow campers, more and more people came to understand that Jesus had died as the sacrificial Lamb of God and was, indeed, their Messiah. All evening the three discussed their decision and were absolutely certain that everything that they had experienced lined up with the Jewish Scripture. As they sat on their blankets, they joined in with the crowd singing Psalms of praise. The peace they felt far surpassed the nagging thoughts of what this might mean for their future as rabbis. The feeling in the grove was one of harmony and goodwill.

On Sunday, the second day of Shavuot, it seemed that every Jew in Jerusalem was drawn to the temple to bring their sacrifices of first

fruits and to worship together. The rabbis purchased sacrifices to offer as their first fruits. The priests led the crowd in reciting the Scriptures and singing Psalms of worship to Jehovah. It was familiar and comforting. They stood in the courtyard surrounded by Jewish men praying to Jehovah for the coming harvest. Jairus and Joel had always used this time to pray for their students, since they felt strongly that they were growing a harvest of young men. But today, it felt different. As they walked back to the garden about noon, all three shared that they had prayed for a harvest of men and women who would come to know Jesus. They were amazed that they had had the same thought. They had just finished their dinner when Talman arrived and joined them. He looked exhausted and was very agitated. "I apologize for coming early. Would you guys be opposed to leaving tomorrow morning? I'm just wanting to get out of Jerusalem. I'm ready to go home."

"We spent the day today at the temple and I feel that I have celebrated Shavuot. It's fine with me," said Jairus as the other two agreed. They were concerned about Talman and asked if he would like to spend the night with them. He said he needed to return to Nathaniel's for tonight but asked if they could meet at the market at the second hour to get supplies for the trip. They agreed on a meeting place and said goodnight.

The next morning, they found Talman at the market and each carried a load of food to the stables where Talman had left the oxen. Soon they were on their way out of Jerusalem. When they left the first watering place for the oxen, Elijah crawled up on the driver's seat with Talman. He told Talman that he hadn't driven an oxcart for a while and was wondering if he would let him try. Talman agreed and Elijah took the reins. Elijah noticed that Talman was dozing and hoped he wouldn't fall off the seat. He suggested that Talman might be more comfortable in the wagon. "Are you sure you don't mind driving?"

"I don't mind at all. It brings back happy memories. Why don't you get some rest," replied Elijah. Elijah called for the oxen to stop and let Talman crawl into the oxcart with his two best friends where he was able to relax. Every now and then, Elijah could hear laughter and he knew that being with his friends would be the best medicine for Talman.

It was only midafternoon while they were stopped to rest the oxen that Jairus asked if they should just stop for the night and take a nice long break. There was no hurry, and they were a day ahead of schedule. They had not been able to talk in the oxcart because of the noise, and everyone felt a need to know what was going on. Talman and Elijah got the oxen settled for the night while Jairus and Joel collected firewood for a bonfire that they would burn when it got dark. It was a beautiful area for camping, and everyone threw their blankets on the grass and began to share.

"What's going on, Talman?"

Talman shook his head. "I don't know how much more of this I can take physically. I really felt if I didn't leave, I would explode with

anger. But let me start at the beginning. We met on Friday morning as scheduled. I thought it was a productive and informative meeting. They were reporting that there had been no problems with the followers of Jesus since that first Sunday when they claimed that he rose from the dead. It really was just a routine meeting. There were some reports of Zealots around Bethlehem, but they were taken care of. Everything seemed normal. There were the usual demands by Rome for this and that, but nothing major. Then after the main meeting, Nathaniel and I always work on a committee that looks over the finances. There are six of us who keep an eye on the accounting, and we found several large sums that were unaccounted for around Passover. We finally found out that guards were paid to guard Jesus' tomb."

"Why? He was dead!"

"Yeah, but after several hours of searching and asking questions, we found men who admitted that the Sanhedrin had requested Pilate to guard Jesus' tomb so that his followers wouldn't steal his body and say that he rose from the grave. I don't understand why they couldn't just put that in the books and not make us chase it down. I mean, it makes it look like a criminal activity. I guess as a banker, I just want everything accounted for. And I got a little sideways with the others in the group who just wanted to ignore it."

"So, you are all six supposed to check the books, but you felt they weren't doing their jobs?"

"Yeah, but that's not even half of it. When we found another entry dated three days later that was astronomically higher, yet had no explanation, everyone just decided it was time to call it quits. We agreed to address it after the Sabbath. Getting any kind of information makes you an enemy and everyone was really mad that I was asking questions about where the money went. It's almost like, we are asked to oversee the silver, but just sign off on whatever the High Priest and his cronies want to do. I don't know that I can do that. It's making me sick."

"I'm so sorry. What would happen if you quit that committee?"

"It would make them very, very happy! But I'm not sure I could live with myself. I just don't know. It feels like I will be a dead man either way I go. There are some things worth dying for, but I'm not sure that this is one of them. I've got to make some decisions — but I honestly don't know what to do."

"Did you ever find out what happened to that money?" asked Elijah.

"No, we had emergency sessions all Sabbath afternoon due to the riot that was happening in the streets of Jerusalem. It was all hands on deck to try to stop the uprising. Then yesterday, it was more emergency meetings to try to figure out how to get rid of all the Jesus followers. It felt like right before the crucifixion. They are determined to kill more than a hundred people. It just made me sick."

"Uh, I believe it will be a lot more than a hundred. Do you know what was happening on Pentecost?" asked Jairus.

"No, I was in meetings all day!"



"I would say that number of followers is now in the thousands."

"What?"

"Uh, we were part of that so-called riot," said Joel.

"Except it wasn't a riot. It was awesome!" stated Elijah.

"What was happening? What do you mean you were part of it?" asked Talman.

Jairus answered, "We were a little late going to the temple for Shavuot on the Sabbath. When we crossed the ravine, the streets were packed with people and the Apostle Peter was preaching. I'm talking about thousands and thousands of people."

"Yeah, but the weird thing was that there were followers of Jesus translating everything the Apostle Peter said into the native languages of the crowds. It was amazing," interjected Joel.

"And he was boldly stating that Jesus was the Messiah and the Jewish leadership had killed the Son of God. He explained that Jesus had died as the Lamb of God and that we needed to repent and invite Him to be our Messiah. I knew that he was right, and I did," said Elijah.

"You did what?"

"I repented and asked Jesus to be my Messiah."

"I did, too," said Jairus.

"We all did," added Joel.

"Okay. Let me process this. The riot that the High Priest was trying to get stopped was actually some of Jesus' followers preaching in the streets?" asked Talman.

"Yes. And there was dancing and singing and so much joy," added Elijah.

"Was this preaching designed to get the people to overthrow Rome?" asked Talman.

"Absolutely not. The Apostle Peter was preaching about how Jesus was the Messiah and that we needed to not reject Him because He died as the sacrificial Lamb of God. It all made sense. We went back to the grove of olives and talked among ourselves. Everything that he said checked out with Jewish Scripture. And while I can't explain it, Talman, I feel an incredible peace deep inside me. I've never felt this way before. The Apostle Matthew talked with the three of us after we prayed and told us that the Holy Spirit would live inside of us and guide us. He told us that we needed to learn to listen to Him and obey Him." Jairus didn't know what else to say.

"Now, I'm really trapped. I'm pretty sure that the High Priest and his cronies are stealing money from the treasury, and I've made enemies with everyone on the Jerusalem Council. My best friend Nathaniel is mad at me. Then I come home to find that you three have all been mesmerized by some false religion that I'm afraid is going to get us all killed."

"You know, Talman, for the first time in my life, that thought doesn't scare me," said Jairus. "I've always been afraid of dying, but now, I feel a peace deep inside me. I can't explain it. But I'm not afraid of what this decision of mine brings, and I'm not oblivious to the fact

that it will probably bring a lot of hardships and maybe even death — but I'm okay."

"You are scaring me!" stated Talman. "You guys are talking like crazy men. I'm taking a walk. Just don't go trying to fly or walk on water while I'm gone."

Just as soon as Talman left, all three men gathered to pray for wisdom to know how to help him understand what they had found. They knew they couldn't push him, and they agreed to not talk of it again until he brought it up.

There wasn't any place to walk except along the road. Talman chose to walk uphill toward Jerusalem. He wanted to get tired out enough to sleep. He needed to stop thinking. There was too much happening at once and he wanted to turn it off. He walked until he realized that the sun was touching the horizon and he'd better head back to camp or he would be walking in the dark. He turned and started back downhill. He had succeeded in just putting one foot in front of the other as he climbed, but now, he was trying to sort out the Sanhedrin problems again. He would deal with his rabbi friends later. They would hopefully get back to normal once they returned to Capernaum. At least they weren't plotting to kill him.

When Talman returned to the campsite, the bonfire was blazing and the men were passing around the bread rolls that they had bought in Jerusalem. There was seasoned cheese, pickled fish, onion slices, and pomegranates. Elijah told the three men who had been raised in Jerusalem about growing up on a farm near Nain. He asked Talman where a boy raised in Jerusalem learned to drive an ox. Altogether it was a calm and relaxing evening spent with good friends. They placed their blankets around the fire so that they could watch the dying embers.

The next morning, Talman seemed to be in a better place. Elijah volunteered to drive the oxen, and Talman suggested that they take turns so no one would get overtired. Talman still seemed deep in thought and the others respected his right to privacy. He often came home from Sanhedrin meetings in a total funk and would not share with them until he had had time to process things. At noon Jairus asked, "Talman, do you want to continue toward home, or to take the rest of the day to relax and process? It's entirely up to you. We'll do whatever is best for you."

"Thanks, guys. I think I'm eager to get home. I'm not sure, but I think I will be returning to Jerusalem after just a short rest to try to find Nicodemus and Joseph. I need to know what they have decided to do, since they were not at the meetings. If they have stepped down, I may also. But if they are going to stay and fight, then, I'll have to decide whether I can continue with this."

"Then let's head home and we'll be praying for Jehovah to guide you. It's my turn to drive and I think the oxen are ready when you guys are." The three long-time friends climbed into the cart and let Elijah do the driving. They couldn't really talk because of the road noise, but just having his friends around him helped Talman to feel supported.

Talman found a stopping place just before sunset and the men threw their blankets in a grassy area and pulled out their dinner. Everyone was tired and they quickly settled down for a good night's rest knowing that they would be home tomorrow.

On Wednesday early afternoon, they arrived in Capernaum and Talman dropped the three other rabbis off at the synagogue. They could easily walk home from there, and Talman was eager to get home and decide how soon he would be going back to Jerusalem. *I guess I shouldn't have left, but I had to get away so I could think. Maybe a few days at home will help me clear my head. Maybe I'll just get busy with my banking and forget about Jerusalem.* He was still deep in thought when he pulled the oxen and cart into his own gate. Sarah met him at the door and expressed her surprise that he was home early. He told her that the Sanhedrin meetings were worse than usual, and he had left in anger. Now, he was thinking that he might need to go back, but he wasn't sure, and he didn't want to think about it right now. She understood and quickly went to the kitchen to inform the servants of the change in dinner plans. It would be just the two of them since Miriam was spending the night at Hava's.

Jairus and Joel discussed when they would tell their wives and daughters about accepting Jesus as their Messiah. But even though the Holy Spirit was instructing them to do so, they decided it would be better to wait until they could tell everyone at once.

Elijah arrived home and realized he needed to get to the market before sundown. By the time he had finished dinner, it was too late to visit Jesse or Zachary. He would see them on the Sabbath, and he decided that that would be soon enough to tell them about his decision to follow Jesus.

After dinner, Talman asked Sarah to prepare him food to return to Jerusalem. He would leave at sunrise tomorrow and would have to camp for the Sabbath, but that would give him time to really think this through and decide what to do. He left early Thursday morning without even saying goodbye to Miriam. Sarah was concerned that he wasn't in any shape to make yet another trip to Jerusalem. She asked if he would take one of the servants with him just for safety, but he refused, saying that he could think better when he was alone.

On Sabbath night the other three rabbis and all four families met at Jairus' home. With Talman missing, it seemed wrong to share their good news, especially since Talman didn't agree with their decision. So, they remained quiet.

On Sabbath day, Jesse and Elijah met at synagogue and then walked together to Zachary's house. Elijah told them about his trip to Jerusalem and about deciding to accept Jesus as his Messiah. They agreed it probably felt good to decide one way or another, but Elijah forgot to share about the indwelling Holy Spirit. He shared that he had heard that Jesus had returned to Heaven and that the apostles were now in charge of His ministry. Zachary said, "I guess Dad won't be coming back to Capernaum any time soon, then."

“Probably not,” replied Elijah. “They were all preaching and teaching in Jerusalem. I don’t know which one is your dad, but I’m sure he’s fine. Talman thinks the Sanhedrin are pretty mad about their preaching so publicly, so, there could be trouble brewing.” It was good to be back with the guys and the talk turned to other things.

## Chapter 9

Talman found a peaceful campsite for the Sabbath as he traveled back to Jerusalem. He was grateful for the day of rest, and it gave him time to decide where to start with his investigation. He arrived back in Jerusalem by late Sunday midafternoon and left his ox and cart at the public stable. He walked to Nathaniel's bank and knocked on his office door. "What are you doing here?" demanded Nathaniel. "You mustn't be here!" He grabbed Talman and pulled him into the room, quickly shutting the door.

"Well, that's a pleasant greeting from my best friend."

"There's a warrant for your arrest. You mustn't be here! They will find you and they'll kill both of us. You must leave, but not by the front door. Go out the back, get out of Jerusalem as fast as you can and don't ever come back," urgently whispered Nathaniel.

"Nathaniel, I want to know what is happening to the money," insisted Talman.

"No. Get out! Don't you realize the danger you are in? I don't want you killed. Get out. Now!" Nathaniel physically pushed him out a back door that was seldom used and he hoped was not being watched. He slammed and locked the door behind Talman. Talman was left standing in a small alley. Since it seemed to be secluded, he crouched down and hid behind some stone stairs. *A warrant for my arrest? My God, what have I done? I will just stay here until after dark and then check on Nicodemus. I know my way around the city well enough to come in the back way to his property — at least I used to.* Talman found as comfortable a position as he could and stayed hidden behind the stairs until the sun had set. Then he tried to walk as casually as possible through the back roads to Nicodemus' house. He arrived by a trail through the woods, and because it was now dark, he had to move slowly. He had often walked these woods with Jairus and Joel after they were apprenticed to Rabbi Nicodemus. He knew that this trail would lead to the back of the barn. He hated sneaking around but felt certain that the front of the property would be watched by temple guards waiting for him. Nicodemus would forgive him for trespassing, and all his servants knew him well. But when he reached the barn and peeked inside, there were no animals there. It was totally empty. That was strange. He walked to the slave quarters and found that it, too, was totally empty. The house was dark, so there was no reason to knock and possibly call attention to himself. He sat down on a bench in the courtyard. *Nicodemus was gone, but where? He would have taken his students to safety. But he normally left the servants and animals. That was strange.* As he sat on the courtyard bench and tried to figure out what he should do, he realized that he had to know if the house was being watched. If it was not, then he could sleep in the slave quarters and then retrieve his ox from the stable and head home tomorrow. *I will just leave Jerusalem behind and never come back. If*

*Nicodemus has given up and moved away, then I certainly have a right to quit serving in the Sanhedrin. An arrest warrant! After all the trips I've made to Jerusalem and the sacrifices I've made to serve my country well. Yeah, thanks a lot, Talman. You've made such a contribution! Ha! They just see me as someone who will oppose them. They killed Jesus. I heard them plot to kill all his followers. No, they will not hesitate to get rid of me. I need to get out of here. I need to get home to Sarah and Miriam. But is it safe in Capernaum? They know that's where to find me. Will I be running for the rest of my life? Why do they want me dead? Suddenly, he remembered that it was because of the money that was missing. What was that date again? He remembered it was around Jesus' crucifixion because it was only a few entries past the other unidentified expense that turned out to be the hiring of the Roman cohort to watch the grave. Suddenly his accountant's brain remembered that the date was the following Sunday. That was the day that Jesus rose from the dead or didn't. The High Priest claimed the body had been stolen by his apostles. So, what does that have to do with the money? And who would know? Stop, Talman. What does it matter? Is it worth dying for? I need to check around front and see if there's a guard. If not, I should probably get some sleep.* He quietly began to explore around the house and found no guards. He checked out the slave quarters but didn't find a mat or blanket and was afraid to light a lamp. So, he just walked back to the barn and found enough hay to get comfortable. *I'll look a mess in the morning. But, hey, maybe that will be a good disguise.* He was surprised that he slept well, but he still didn't have a plan. One part of him wanted to get out of town as quickly as possible, while the other part of him wanted to expose the High Priest and his cronies as the liars, thieves, and murderers that they were. *But how?* As the sun rose, Talman checked the barn and slave quarters again. They had taken everything, except a worn out slave's robe. It was ripped at the shoulder as if someone had outgrown it, but it would fit him and provide him with cover to get around the city. No Pharisee would give him a second look. He could purchase food at the market and walk around as if invisible. Instead, he walked to Joseph of Arimathea's house and went to the servant's entrance and knocked. He insisted on talking with Joseph's personal servant and was finally admitted to the house. The servant recognized Talman and told him that Joseph was in a temple dungeon and expected to be executed any day. "I'm so sorry. Are you taking him breakfast?"

"Yes, the kitchen staff delivers it every day. They are just leaving, and I need to go with them to see if there is anything that he needs."

"I would like to go with you. I have a pressing question and he may know the answer. Can you provide me with a better servant's robe? This one would not fool a temple guard. I will gladly carry a sack of food."

The servant quickly gave orders and Talman changed from the ragged robe to the nicer servant's clothing that represented Joseph's house. The three men set off for the dungeon. Joseph quickly

recognized Talman and began to speak. He whispered, "Get out of Jerusalem as fast as you can. They want you dead," Then Joseph yelled, "WHAT? NO EGGS! I TOLD YOU TO BRING ME EGGS!"

Talman whispered, "Does the missing money have something to do with the resurrection?"

"Yes, the guards were paid well to say that the followers stole the body," Joseph whispered. "AND WHERE IS MY GOAT MILK?" he yelled. "YOU KNOW THAT I ALWAYS HAVE GOAT MILK TO SETTLE MY STOMACH!"

"What should I do?" whispered Talman.

"Tell John, then get out of town. They will kill you to keep this secret," he whispered urgently. "YOU ARE ALL INCOMPETENT! MAKE SURE YOU BRING ME A DECENT DINNER!" cried Joseph as he gave his personal servant a thumbs up of approval. The three "servants" left quickly and scurried home. They waited until they were inside the locked doors of Joseph's home before they spoke.

"Who is John?" asked Talman.

"I think he is referring to the Apostle John, sir."

"Okay. I don't know what he could do. Do you?"

"No, sir. I just obey orders."

"Do you know where I would find this Apostle John?"

"He's often praying in the temple courtyard. I suggest you put on your tattered slave outfit and take him a message."

"Right. I walk right into their trap. The thought of being inside the temple grounds is more than I can handle."

"Then I suggest you get out of town as quickly as possible."

"Could you get me some juice or something? I didn't have dinner last night, or breakfast, and I can't think straight."

"Certainly, sir."

When the servant left, Talman changed back into the tattered robe. He drank the plum juice and ate a roll with goat cheese and felt refreshed. "How would I find this Apostle John?"

"Do you know where Solomon's Portico is?"

"Certainly."

"Most of the apostles pray there each day. There will be a clump of them. Just ask one of them to help you find John."

"Thank you for your help. Tell your master that I am going to find John and then I will leave town immediately."

"Very good, sir."

"Shalom."

"Shalom."

Talman felt comfortable in the shabby servant's robe in the early dawn, but he wasn't sure how secure he felt in the bright sunlight. He was a long-time member of the Jerusalem Council, and everyone knew him. If someone were to recognize him, he would be dead. He decided to check out the market and judge how secure he felt since he had to purchase some food before heading home. Then he decided to go on to the temple carrying his bags. He was pleased that the temple was not crowded, but at the same time, it left him exposed with no

place to hide. He felt that everyone was staring right at him, especially when a fellow member of the Sanhedrin walked past. *I need to get out of here as quickly as possible.* He tried to walk casually and look relaxed, but his heart was pounding so loudly, he was sure that everyone would hear it. *Relax and look bored. No, look purposeful like a slave on an errand. I don't know. Just hurry up and get this over with.* Talman crossed the courtyard and saw that there was indeed a group of men kneeling in the portico area. "I have a message for John from Joseph of Arimathea. I would not like to be seen talking with him," he whispered to one of the men who seemed to be a part of the group.

"Follow me out the back gate on the east side. It will be safe there," the man said.

Once they were outside the gate, the man said, "I'm not John, but I can give him the message."

"And I am not a slave. I am Talman, a member of the Sanhedrin. I am risking my life to deliver Joseph's message. He said to give it to John, and I would really like to do that as quickly as possible. I don't mean to offend you."

"I understand. Let me get John. You stay here."

Talman looked around him. It was indeed a deserted place. The gate had opened so that there was just a small path leading into the Kidron Ravine. Anyone coming or going would be seen in plenty of time to avoid them being overheard. It was the perfect place to relay the message, but it was also a great place to be killed if caught out here alone. He didn't know how often the Temple Guards made their checks.

It was only a few minutes later that John arrived, and they hiked together into the ravine. It was hot sitting on the rocks, but at least they could be certain that no one was watching or listening. "Who are you, and what is your message?" said John kindly.

Suddenly Talman relaxed. He decided to tell John everything he knew. "My name is Talman. I am a member of the Sanhedrin. I am also a banker, and I found a substantial payment that is unaccounted for. Because I brought it up at the last meeting, there is now an arrest warrant out for me. Hence, the disguise. I sneaked into Joseph of Arimathea's dungeon this morning dressed as one of his slaves and delivered his breakfast. I asked him if my assumption that this had something to do with Jesus' resurrection was correct and he affirmed to me that the guards were paid handsomely to say that you apostles had stolen the body. Joseph asked me to tell you before I get out of town — hopefully with my head still on my shoulders."

"So, are you a follower of Jesus?" asked John.

"I'm a seeker. I don't know what I believe," said Talman honestly.

"Ask Jehovah to teach you so that you can find peace and courage for the days ahead. Thank you for this news and for the risk you have taken to get it to me. This is very important news. Now, God speed your way."

"Pray that I can get out of town safely."

"I will. Shalom."



“Shalom.”

The men parted and Talman made his way to the stable. He had left his good robe at Nicodemus’ slave quarters and there was too much danger to go back to pick it up. He would have to hope the stable owner wouldn’t notice his attire. He carried his two sacks of food and was amazed at the peace that he felt as he talked with the owner. “That was a short stay,” the stable man commented.

“Yes, a short stay for a very long drive. Thanks for your care of my ox. You always do a good job.” Talman waited while the owner hitched his oxcart and brought it out to him. Then Talman placed the bags in the oxcart and drove out of town. He wasn’t sure whether a lone slave was allowed to drive an oxcart and hoped he wouldn’t be arrested for being a runaway slave or for stealing the cart. But as he drove, he began to laugh. He had escaped death, at least for now. *I have solved the mystery of the lost money. Now, my contribution to the Sanhedrin is complete. But will they leave me and my family alone? Should I leave Capernaum?* He needed to stop and rest his ox, but instead he slowed to a walk and continued to put just a few more miles between him and Jerusalem.

Talman camped the next two nights and slowed the ox so that he would arrive after dark on Wednesday. He wanted to get home as soon as possible but didn’t want to be seen wearing his disguise. Sarah was already asleep when he slipped into their room. The servants would care for the ox. They had been surprised by his attire but were too well trained to ask questions.

Sarah slipped out quietly and let Talman rest. Miriam was spending the night with Hava, so she ate her breakfast alone. She hoped that Talman had gotten things settled in Jerusalem. She was tired of this constant drama with the Sanhedrin. Other than their Sabbath night party with the other rabbis, she very seldom saw him. He was either dreading leaving or trying to recuperate from his trips to Jerusalem. She sighed. She knew that his position was important, but wished things would settle down. At least he was home and safe for now. She hoped he would be able to relax before his next trip. Just as she was finishing breakfast, Talman came to the table and kissed her on the cheek. “Where’s Miriam?”

“Spending the night at Hava’s.”

“Again?”

“They apparently have much to talk about these days.”

“So do we. Will you sit with me while I eat breakfast? I’ve had quite an adventure and I’m not sure how much I want to share with Miriam.”

Sarah was surprised that he wanted to talk. Usually, he kept all his Sanhedrin business to himself. “Sarah, I’ve neglected you these last few years and I’m sorry. I thought that I could make a difference by being a member of the Jerusalem Council. Now I see that it was all a waste of time. And it’s not the life I want for us. I won’t be going back to Jerusalem.”

As the servants offered him more milk, he realized that they should not hear what he wanted to share with his wife. "I'm out of the habit of sharing things with you, and I apologize for that, too. Can we go up on the roof so that we can talk in private?"

"Of course."

"Sarah, I think it will be easier to understand if I start at the beginning. Do you have the time to listen?"

"Certainly. I want to know what you are thinking, and I want to share whatever is going on."

"Yes, I've left you out of much because of the secrecy required by the Sanhedrin. But that has all changed."

"I understand the need for secrecy, and I've adjusted to it. But I would love to know what's been bothering you and what's going on."

"Sarah, I was so proud when I was asked two years ago to be on a small group that reviewed the finances for the Sanhedrin. There were six of us chosen. Nathaniel was in the group, too. So, in addition to all the meetings, we had the added assignment of making sure there was a correct accounting of all the money that came in or out of the treasury. It was obviously a good fit for me, and I was proud to be chosen. But it meant that there was very little relaxing when I went to Jerusalem. While the other members were enjoying dinner parties and relaxing, we were going over the books and sometimes worked all night trying to figure out what was going where. Their bookkeeping is atrocious! Anyway, during my previous trip, we discovered two major expenditures that couldn't be explained. One was large, but one was humongous. I pushed to get these two expenditures explained since there was no notation as to where that money went. The amount was recorded as spent. That was all. To me, I was just doing my job. The group, including Nathaniel, just wanted me to ignore it. But, you know me, that sort of thing drives me crazy."

"And rightfully so! Isn't that why they wanted a committee to check the books?"

"One would think. Anyway. I pushed until I found out that one expenditure was to hire a Roman cohort to guard Jesus' grave. I asked why this was necessary since Jesus was obviously dead. They said it was to keep the apostles from stealing the body and saying he had come back from the dead. Now, you need to know that there have been a lot of meetings happening that I have not been invited to attend. I have sided with Nicodemus, Joseph, and Gamaliel in trying to protect Jesus. I'm certain that he was an innocent man, and possibly a prophet sent from Jehovah. Because of that, I was already considered an enemy. When I pushed to find out where the money had been spent, and I was treated so rudely, I left town in anger and vowed that I would never go back. However, on the trip home, I began to suspect that I knew where the money had gone. I decided to go back and try to prove it. I wasn't sure why, but I felt that it was my duty to make sure everyone on the Council knew where the money had gone." He continued to tell her every detail of his trip and as he expected, she was horrified. He hoped he was doing the right thing by telling her. "So

here I am. I even have the tattered slave's robe. You might not have let me in last night if you had seen me."

Sarah was quiet for a few minutes and looked puzzled. "What is it, Sarah? Tell me what you are thinking."

"Talman, if the Sanhedrin paid that large an amount of silver to the guards and are willing to kill anyone who knows about it — doesn't that verify that Jesus really did rise from the dead?"

Talman continued, "If the guards were paid to keep the disciples from stealing the body, then if something happened and the disciples somehow managed to do it, they could have easily killed the apostles and taken the body back."

"That would have been logical if the apostles stole the body. Yes. But what if there was a supernatural resurrection that they didn't want the people to know about?" asked Sarah.

"Then they would have had to pay the Roman cohort a very large amount to keep them from telling. Sarah," Talman was almost yelling. "Sarah! Caiaphas, the High Priest, reported that there had been no further problems since the resurrection. What resurrection? Does this mean that Jesus really did rise from the dead?"

"Wouldn't that mean that he really is the Messiah?" asked Sarah.

"Why did Joseph want me to tell John?"

"I don't know. Maybe to reassure him of the truth?"

"Well, let me tell you. The apostles did not steal the body from a Roman cohort. They were hiding in the portico of the temple and looked scared to death when I approached them — and they thought I was a slave. There's no way they would have taken on a single Roman guard, let alone a whole cohort."

"So, if Jesus rose from the dead, does that mean he really is the Messiah? Let's go ask Jairus," said Sarah.

"No, Sarah, not just yet. There's something else we need to discuss. There's a warrant for my arrest. We have to decide what to do."

"Oh, yeah." Suddenly all the excitement left as they discussed the possibilities. They had lived in Capernaum for fourteen years and most of their married lives. Their banking business, all their friends, Miriam, and all her friends would be uprooted by a move. But then, if Talman was killed, that would all be unimportant anyway. They discussed the pros and cons of moving and staying. They discussed every angle they could imagine. Then they sat in silence and thought.

"Sarah, would you be agreeable to just staying here and trying to forget? We wouldn't tell anyone else. We would just live as if it never happened. If I'm arrested, then you and Miriam would be surrounded by friends who would care for you. I can't see relocating."

"I'll do whatever you think is best."

"If they decide to pursue the arrest, they will find me unless I totally leave Israel, and I don't think I'm willing to do that. Let's just stay here and enjoy whatever time we have left together with our friends. Do you want to go over to Jairus' now?"

“Not really. Miriam should be home soon. How much are you going to tell her?”

“Just that I’ve resigned from the Jerusalem Council, I guess,” said Talman.

“So that will be our story for everyone? There was too much stress and you disagreed with the way things were being done. Does that sound right? You know that people will want to know why you resigned,” stated Sarah.

“Yes, I guess. I don’t think we should say much more than that.”

“Mother, where are you?” called Miriam.

## Chapter 10

Talman went to his bank on Friday and found that everything was in good order. His steward had taken care of things in his absence, and Talman gave him a substantial bonus for his service and told him that he had resigned from the Sanhedrin and would not be making the monthly trips to Jerusalem. “Are you relieving me of my job, sir?”

“Of course not. I just want you to know how much I appreciate all the extra work that you’ve shouldered over these last several years.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Is there anything that I need to take care of this morning?”

Talman asked.

“Please take a look at this account; I was a little hesitant to make this loan. I have put him off until you returned.” And quickly Talman found his day returning to normal.



Sarah and Talman walked to Joel’s house for Sabbath dinner that night. Miriam was already there visiting with her friends. Everyone welcomed Talman back and commented that he looked more relaxed than the last time they had seen him. “I am more relaxed. I resigned from the Jerusalem Council and won’t be going back. Sarah and I discussed it and feel that it is the right decision. It’s putting too much stress on me and my family to do all this traveling.” The others agreed and congratulated him on making a wise decision.

“I guess my only concern is who they will assign to oversee the school. Do you know?” asked Joel.

“No, I don’t. I guess I hadn’t thought that far. But you are right. Someone will be assigned to check on us and make sure we are obeying their rules. But I don’t see a problem with that as long as we continue to stay compliant.”

“That’s a question we need to deal with at some point. But let’s enjoy Sabbath dinner for now,” said Joel.

They moved to the courtyard where the four men separated from the six women. The men talked about school starting on Sunday and they avoided the discussion about Jesus and instead focused on the curriculum that needed to be covered. When dinner was over, Joel started to lead the men up to the rooftop, but Talman asked if anyone would mind if they stayed in the living room with the ladies. “I’ve been traveling so much lately, I would like to catch up with everyone, and Sarah and I have some questions we wanted to ask.”

“Sure, it’s all right with me, if it’s okay with them.” The ladies laughed and began to make room for the men to join them. The daughters moved to the floor and let the men take the cushions.

Talman shocked them all when he stated, "I have come to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. My question is: Is that enough evidence to make him the Messiah? And what does that all mean?"

"If you'll recall, the three of us had an experience at Pentecost that we tried to share with you on our trip home. You were preoccupied with Sanhedrin problems, and we were never able to tell you about it," began Jairus.

"I have not shared that experience with Elizabeth or Hava," stated Joel. "I don't know why, but it just never seemed the right time."

"I have not shared it with Rachel and Ariel either."

"Okay, guys, will somebody *please* tell us what happened in Jerusalem and what all the secrecy is about?" demanded Ariel.

Jairus, Joel, and Elijah explained in detail what they had learned at Pentecost and how they had invited Jesus to be their Messiah. They told about the Apostle Matthew talking with them and telling them that the Holy Spirit would begin to guide them just like He guided Jesus. He had told them that they needed to learn to recognize His voice and to be obedient.

"Have you heard him guiding you?" asked Talman.

"No, I haven't," said Jairus. "Or at least not that I know of."

"Me neither," said Joel.

"I haven't noticed anything different except a strange peace and maybe a little more boldness to consider breaking the Sanhedrin's rules," said Elijah. "I told Jesse and Zachary on the Sabbath, but then we got to talking about other things."

"So, all three of you asked Jesus to be your Messiah. I have believed for almost a year, but I know nothing about the Holy Spirit. What do you guys know?" asked Ariel.

Jairus explained that the Holy Spirit was Jehovah's Spirit that was often mentioned in Jewish Scripture. "He was present at Creation and is mentioned quite a bit during the period of the judges. He would come upon a judge and equip him or her to do a particular task, but He didn't stay for long. Once the task was completed, He disappeared," said Joel.

"During the time of the prophets, the Holy Spirit guided them and filled them with power to do miracles, and they prophesied that the Messiah would be filled with the Spirit," added Elijah.

"I believe that this teaching of Jesus that every follower would be filled with the Holy Spirit is consistent with the Scripture spoken by the Prophet Joel. He said that Jehovah would pour out His Spirit on old men and young, women of all ages, and even servants. I believe that we are living in that day. The Apostle Matthew indicated that we would need to learn how to hear Him and follow His instructions. I'm not exactly sure how that will work, but I know that there is a difference in my life. Like Elijah, I just feel different on the inside. But I can't explain it," said Joel.

"Dad, would you pray with me? I want to ask Jesus to send me this Holy Spirit," said Hava.

"Me, too," said Elizabeth.

“Certainly. Do you want to do it here? Or should we go to the rooftop?” Joel asked.

“I’m okay right here,” said Elizabeth, and Hava agreed.

Joel prayed, “Jehovah God, please hear the prayers of my wife and daughter and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with them and guide them.”

Hava prayed, “Jehovah God, I know that Jesus is Your Messiah. I know that He paid for my sins with His precious blood. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit and show me how to obey You. And please teach me what I need to learn. In Jesus’ name.”

Elizabeth prayed, “Jehovah God, I want Your Holy Spirit to guide me. I believe that Jesus is the Messiah and came to die for my sins. Please forgive me and cleanse me.”

Both women lifted their heads to reveal radiant smiles and tears of joy.

Rachel began to pray and when she had finished, Ariel prayed. Jairus prayed a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing over them.

Miriam prayed next and was followed by her mother, Sarah. After a few minutes of quiet, Elijah prayed a prayer of blessing on them and boldly prayed that Talman would find the answers he was seeking. Talman said that he needed to take a walk and would return later to escort the ladies home.

He walked into the back courtyard and into the yard where it was dark, and he could be totally alone. He fell on his knees and cried out, “Jehovah, forgive me for being so stubborn and rejecting Jesus. You know that I know the truth now and want to ask You to let Jesus be my Messiah. I need Your forgiveness and I want to be filled with Your Spirit. I’m scared of what You will require of me, and You’ll have to help me be obedient. Please help me to be obedient. Please help me.”

Talman was filled with an incredible peace. He couldn’t remember anything that had brought him so much satisfaction all the way to the core of his being. He lay on his back and looked up at the stars and committed his whole life to whatever Jehovah wanted. “I’m yours, Jehovah. I want to be obedient. Just show me how.” As he lay there, he felt that the Holy Spirit was instructing him to continue to enforce the rule that Jesus was not to be mentioned at the school or synagogue. “Jehovah, that’s not what I was expecting.” But he heard no other explanation. He dreaded going back into the house, but he knew that he needed to let them know what had happened.

He opened the door and began to cry as he explained to the entire group that he had invited Jesus to be his Messiah and the Holy Spirit had come in and spoken to him. The others rejoiced with him, and Sarah and Miriam came and hugged him. Everyone gathered close together as Jairus prayed a prayer of blessing over them and asked Jehovah to give them wisdom to lead the school and synagogue and all the people of Capernaum to Jesus.

As the three of them walked home, there was a sweet feeling of oneness, but deep down, Talman knew that he had not been totally obedient and needed to talk with the other rabbis about what he had

heard. He also wondered if keeping secrets about the arrest warrant was pleasing to Jehovah. He had considered it his own business and no one else's. Now, he wondered.



As Elijah walked to the synagogue on Sabbath morning, he was curious what Jairus would share. *How will the people respond if Jairus announces he's become a Jesus follower? Everyone knows about Jesus healing Arian, so I suppose they will be okay with it. I think I need to share more with Jesse and Zachary. I think I know how to tell them now, and I'm ready. Maybe they, too, will become followers and we can help each other learn. Zachary may already have more information since he's reconnected with his dad.* As he approached the synagogue, he began to interact with the people around him and greet some of his students and their parents. It felt good to be accepted in this community. *I wonder if they will offer me the position at the end of this session?* He entered the synagogue and sat in his usual spot beside Joel and Talman. "Can you two meet me at the school after dinner tonight?" asked Talman.

"What's up?"

"There's more to my story that I didn't want to share in front of the ladies. I just want to talk with you three," said Talman.

"Sure, I can be there," said Joel.

"Sure. I'm hoping to share more with Jesse and Zachary this afternoon. Pray for me. I'll let you know how it goes," said Elijah.

Jairus began to lead the synagogue in worship. He continued a series that he had begun on the prophet Daniel but didn't mention his decision to follow Jesus. Joel and Elijah were surprised, but Talman was relieved. They talked for a few minutes afterward and Jairus agreed to meet them at the school after dinner. The three older men took their families home for a quiet day of Sabbath rest, while Elijah began his walk to Jesse's house.

There were the usual greetings and catching up on their week. Jesse's servant, Tobias, brought them juice and some honey bread. "I told you last week that while I was in Jerusalem for Shavuot, I heard the apostles preaching in the streets and decided that Jesus was the Messiah. Well, there's more to it than just that, and I'd like to share it with you if it's okay." Jesse and Zachary agreed that they would like to hear. He told them about the Apostle Matthew telling him about the Holy Spirit and that he needed to learn how to recognize His voice and to obey Him.

"You know that I went to Jerusalem for Passover to try to learn more about why my dad followed Jesus. Then when he came here, he tried to sound confident about Jesus' resurrection, but I kept detecting that he wasn't sure. He seemed afraid of something. But now, you are saying the apostles are boldly preaching and teaching right in the



faces of the Pharisees and Sanhedrin? That's quite a change. What do you think happened?"

"I think that when the Holy Spirit came, He began guiding them and filling them with power to be bold and unafraid. Ever since I accepted Jesus as my Messiah, I have felt different on the inside. I haven't heard Him speak, but I feel stronger and more confident. I'm meeting with the other rabbis tonight to discuss whether we'll disobey the Sanhedrin's rule about not mentioning Jesus at the school. I think it's high time we throw off their restraints."

"Whoa. That's serious business," said Zachary.

"Yes, but I want to be obedient and do what Jesus would do. I don't think He would want us to be quiet."

"Let me get this straight. You say that the Holy Spirit came in to guide you when you asked Jesus to be your Messiah," probed Zachary.

"Yes."

"Then you said, you haven't heard him guide you. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Then where is this feeling coming from that you need to upset the whole town of Capernaum?" demanded Zachary. "I don't like it. I would think that you would hear Him clearly tell you what to do and when. I would think that obedience would imply hearing an order or command. But that's just my opinion. I don't know anything; I'm just telling you it doesn't sound right to me."

"Why do you think it would be upsetting to the town if we mention Jesus?" asked Elijah.

"Because when Jesus first moved to Capernaum it almost split the town in two. There were a lot of angry people because Jairus let Jesus speak at the synagogue. Most of them didn't want him to speak. There was a vote taken, and if I remember right, there was seventy-five percent or more that were against Jesus speaking there. That's when my Uncle Zebedee and all his sons and workers quit attending the synagogue. So, if you took a vote right now, it might be one hundred percent. I don't know. But I think Ruler Jairus would not be the ruler very long."

"But I thought everyone was supportive of Jesus after he raised Ariel from the dead," protested Elijah.

"They love Ariel, and they love Ruler Jairus, but I'm not sure they want to hear about Jesus. Most of them lean toward the Pharisees and don't want any trouble with the Sanhedrin. My guess is they would turn against Ruler Jairus in order to keep the Sanhedrin happy," explained Zachary.

"What about the school?" asked Elijah.

"The school is a little better because it's made up of both, but I would still guess if it came to a vote, they would side with the Sanhedrin."

"That's really surprising to me. I know that on the Passover retreat, most of the boys and their dads were angry that they couldn't talk about Jesus. I thought that was what I heard."

“You are right. How many boys were allowed to make that trip?”

“Six. Are you saying that only six out of our fifty students would be supportive?”

“It’s a possibility. I think the policy of not talking about Jesus and letting every man decide for himself is a good one. But like I said, that’s just my opinion. I’m not a follower,” stated Zachary.

“I skipped synagogue this morning. Did Ruler Jairus announce his decision to follow Jesus?” asked Jesse.

“No. I’m not sure why. Last night he said that he intended to, but he didn’t.”

“This could get really messy for you. You may not have a school to teach in next session,” said Jesse.

“Hey, I may be dead if it’s as bad as you say,” replied Elijah.

“Just be careful. Okay?” said Zachary.

Their talk turned to other topics and just as soon as dinner was finished, Elijah had to leave to meet the other rabbis at the school. He was having second thoughts about whether they should talk about Jesus in the school and synagogue. *I want to be obedient, but like Zachary pointed out, I really don’t have any clear direction. Maybe the older rabbis will just decide and leave me out of it.*

As the men gathered at the school, Talman had pulled four benches together so that they could sit and talk. “What I shared with you last night was true, but it wasn’t the whole truth. I did not want to share in front of Miriam and really did not intend to share it with anyone except Sarah. But now, I feel a strong urge inside of me to be completely honest with you. I think it is the Holy Spirit guiding me. I will need your support and understanding in the coming days.”

“What’s going on, Talman? You know we’ll support you.”

“Is this more Sanhedrin mess?”

“Yes and no. But let me explain. This may take a while, but I need to give you some background.” He told them about being assigned to check the books, finding the discrepancies, returning to Jerusalem and learning of the warrant for his arrest, and about his adventures while there. “So, I didn’t actually ‘resign’ from the Sanhedrin. I’m still a member, but I won’t be going back. They will replace me in approximately three months if I don’t attend the scheduled meetings. But they may come after me before that.”

Joel whistled and exclaimed, “Man, you are in a mess.”

“Maybe. But the strange thing is that I feel better than I’ve ever felt. Sarah and I talked when I got back, and I feel our marriage is stronger than it’s been in years. We put together that Jesus had to have miraculously risen from the dead, or they wouldn’t have spent so much money to try to cover it. Then you guys shared your experiences, and when I asked Jesus to be my Messiah, I just felt an incredible peace. I know that whatever happens, I’m okay.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Jairus.

“If we are going to follow Jesus together, then I need to be totally honest with you. Sarah and I are agreed, though, that this is not

information that we want Miriam or the girls to know. There's no need to upset them."

"Agreed," said Joel.

"Now, there's more that I need to tell you. When I prayed and Jehovah forgave my sins and I felt the Holy Spirit come in, I promised Him that I would be obedient to whatever He wanted me to do. I'll admit that I was terrified that He would want me to go back to Jerusalem. But instead, He clearly said that I should continue to enforce the rule that Jesus not be mentioned in the school or the synagogue."

"What? Why?" demanded Jairus.

"I don't know. I told Him that was not what I expected. I thought He would want us to start teaching about Jesus being the Messiah. I got no answer."

"Are you sure you heard the Holy Spirit?" asked Joel.

"You've never wanted us to teach about Jesus. Now, you are a follower of Jesus. Why would you want us to keep quiet? That's just wrong! I'm ready to teach it and take the consequences and I think you should be, too," stated Jairus.

"You know that I was required to enforce the Sanhedrin's rules, but this is different. I'm sure of what I heard. I don't consider myself part of the Sanhedrin anymore, but I'm trying to keep my promise to be completely obedient to what the Holy Spirit tells me, and I'm trying to be honest with you guys about what I've heard."

"But it doesn't make sense," protested Joel.

"I agree. I don't understand it. I just know what I heard. And I'm not going to try to figure it out. I'm just asking you to please not teach about Jesus in the school or the synagogue."

Elijah knew that he had to speak up. "Actually, I shared with Jesse and Zachary about what happened at Pentecost. I told them that I was excited to get to share my decision with my students. We talked about it most of the afternoon and they gave me a lot of the background about Jesus teaching in the synagogue. They both felt that breaking the Sanhedrin's rules would result in all of us being fired. They didn't think that anything good would come of it. I'm afraid that I agree with them. I know I'm not a full rabbi and have no say in your decisions, but I needed to let you know that I, too, feel that it would stir up trouble that is unnecessary. I don't know whether that's from the Holy Spirit, because it really came from Zachary — but I just have a strong feeling that he's right."

"Unnecessary! How can you say that it's unnecessary when we should be telling others the good news that we've discovered?" demanded Jairus.

"I don't know. I'm in the same boat as Talman. I don't understand it. I just feel it strongly," replied Elijah. "I'm getting a strong feeling that there is a difference between obedience to the Holy Spirit and doing what we think is best. Especially, when we don't agree on what is best."

“Okay. Let’s start over. School has been in session for two weeks since Shavuot. Has anyone mentioned Jesus?” asked Joel. Everyone shook their heads. “Have any of the students brought it up?” Again, everyone shook their heads. “Jairus, I haven’t heard you mention Jesus at the synagogue. Why is that?”

“Well, before it was because we hadn’t shared it with our wives and daughters and especially Talman and his family. But after last night, I planned to share it with the synagogue this morning. But it just didn’t happen. I can’t really say why. I didn’t chicken out. I guess I just forgot. I don’t know why I didn’t share.”

“Have you heard the Holy Spirit tell you to not share it, or to share it?” queried Joel.

“No. I haven’t heard the Holy Spirit say anything,” confessed Jairus.

“Then I’m going to agree with Talman and Elijah that we should continue to obey the rule to not mention Jesus in the school. You’ll have to make up your own mind about the synagogue, Jairus, but I caution you to be absolutely sure that it is Jehovah leading you because it could cost you dearly.”

“I’m willing to pay that price,” said Jairus quietly.

“I know you are. But wouldn’t you want to be absolutely certain that it is Jehovah leading you if it’s going to cost you everything?” asked Joel gently.

“I guess so.”

“I know I’m not in a position to teach you guys, but the Holy Spirit spoke clearly to me when I told Him that I was willing to obey anything He told me. I suggest we all pray diligently to really know Jehovah’s will in this before we make any changes,” said Talman humbly. The other three agreed and returned to their homes, each deep in thought.



There were only four more weeks before school would end for this session and there would be a three-month break for the summer. What a strange year it had been, but there had been no contact from Jerusalem and the men agreed that they would not travel to Sukkot this year. Joel called a meeting with Jairus and Talman to discuss whether to offer Elijah a permanent position and increase his pay to that of a full rabbi. All agreed that he certainly had earned it and there was no opposition. Elijah accepted the position, but then announced that he would be traveling to Nain to visit with his family over the summer break. He asked when he should plan to return to begin the fall session.

## Chapter 11

After the stewards' meeting at the Fish Shop on Thursday, Zachary asked Uncle Zebedee if he might have time to talk with him. "Business or personal?"

"Personal. I just have some questions about Jesus, and I was wondering if you could help me sort them out."

"I would be glad to. But your Aunt Salome would love to see you. She probably knows more about Jesus than I do. We were just talking last night that our home has been awfully quiet recently. Why don't you come for Sabbath dinner tomorrow night?"

"I would enjoy that. Thank you, sir."

Zachary had not been to their home in years. He had avoided family gatherings because he knew that Saul would be there. *I hope Uncle Zebedee doesn't decide to invite him, too. If so, I will just leave. I will not stay in the same room with a man who has totally destroyed my family, even if he is my brother.* Once that was decided, he relaxed and began to think about the questions he wanted to ask.

After work on Friday, Zachary walked to his uncle's house and joined him at the ceremonial washing pots before entering the house for dinner. He was enthusiastically greeted by Aunt Salome who hugged him and welcomed him. "Your uncle brags about you all the time, but I haven't seen you since you were a little boy. I'm so glad you came to visit."

"Thank you for the invitation. I had forgotten what a lovely home you have." As they began to eat the wonderful dinner that the servants had prepared, Uncle Zebedee asked Zachary if he would like to begin discussing his questions. But Aunt Salome insisted that she wanted to hear more about Zachary.

"Well, there's not much to tell. I work at the Processing Plant. Jehovah has blessed me with a nice home with a courtyard overlooking the sea. I hired a servant a few years ago to take care of things and prepare my meals so I wouldn't starve to death. I recently reconnected with my dad, and he stayed with me for a few days and told me quite a bit about Jesus on his last visit. Was that the last time you talked with James and John?"

"Yes, if that was when they met Jesus in the cove. They told us that Jesus was planning on returning to Heaven and leaving the ministry to the apostles. They seemed a little overwhelmed with all the responsibility. Jesus would meet them in Jerusalem," said Uncle Zebedee.

"They left pretty quickly after that and we haven't heard anything since then," said Aunt Salome.

"Dad stopped by to say goodbye and that he was meeting Jesus in Jerusalem. I haven't heard from him, either. But maybe I have news for you. My friend, Rabbi Elijah, traveled to Jerusalem for Shavuot. Apparently, quite a bit has been happening in Jerusalem. Would you

like to hear what I was told, or would you rather wait and hear it from James and John?" asked Zachary politely.

"Oh, we'd love to hear what you've heard," said Aunt Salome, and Uncle Zebedee agreed.

"Rabbi Elijah went with the other rabbis to celebrate Shavuot. They encountered a very large crowd on Pentecost. The streets were packed with people, and the apostles and many other followers of Jesus were teaching all along the main streets. Apparently, Uncle Peter was doing some pretty powerful preaching and boldly stated that Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God and that anyone could accept him as their Messiah just by asking. Then, this is the part that is confusing to me. Rabbi Elijah said that the Apostle Matthew stopped and talked with him and told him that when you asked Jesus to be your Messiah, Jehovah would send His Holy Spirit to dwell inside of you and guide you just like Jesus. I don't really understand all that and thought maybe you two could explain it to me."

"That's very interesting. But I have to be honest, I don't understand it either. You say it was the Apostle Matthew who told him this?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, Matthew is a very reliable man, so if he said it, then I believe it is true. But I'm not sure what it means."

"I wish we could help you, Zachary, but I guess we'll have to wait until the boys visit again. Hopefully, that will be soon. Jesus keeps them pretty busy."

"Oh, my friend said that Jesus had gone back to Heaven to be with Jehovah God, but that He would return soon to fulfill the rest of the prophecies."

"That is consistent with what James and John told us when they were here. They said that Jesus was leaving them in charge of the ministry. Who knows when they will visit again!"

"Yeah, Dad said he would be back as soon as he could. I just thought you might have heard something. It's been several months since they were here. Thank you so much for the lovely meal. I enjoyed visiting with you."

"Not so fast, young man. You haven't told us whether there's a special lady in your future. It sounds like you have a good job, a nice home, and a servant. Has someone caught your attention?" pried Aunt Salome.

"Unfortunately, I have nothing to report. I've made new friends this year, but both of them are single men. And honestly, I'm not sure I'm marriage material. Watching my parents hasn't given me a lot of desire for marriage. But I promise, you'll be the first to know when Jehovah provides the right woman." He kissed Aunt Salome on the cheek and wished them both a good night.

"Shalom," they both called.

"Shalom, and thanks again for a lovely Sabbath dinner."



Elijah and Jesse went to synagogue and then returned to spend the afternoon at Elijah's house. His house was small, but as long as it wasn't raining, they could enjoy his yard and cook meat over his firepit. Zachary arrived a little late and brought a sack of rolls that Ira had sent for them to enjoy. Elijah gratefully received the gift and declared that Ira's bread was ten times better than anything he could find at the market. Elijah said he had lots of news to share. "The rabbis offered me a teaching position starting in the fall. Then maybe I can afford a decent house. That's my big praise and a relief to get that settled. My pay should double and then it will go up every year that I teach. It's a good offer and I've already said yes." The other two men congratulated him. "I've decided to visit my brother and sister. They have farms in Nain, but I haven't seen them in three years. I'll plan to stay with them for the summer, since I won't have any income at all for those three months."

"Whoa. Have you talked to Rabbi Joel about helping you out for the summer?"

"No, and I don't want to."

"Why? He should be able to advance you some money to get you through the summer," said Jesse.

"Yes, but then it makes it really awkward when I ask for permission to marry his daughter," said Elijah.

"What? I should have seen that coming. You've been hanging out with them every Sabbath night. Now, I see it wasn't just for the free meal!"

"No, it wasn't. Hava has captured my heart, and I'm hoping her dad will let us be espoused just as soon as I get back from Nain. We'll see."

"Well, for starters, why don't you move in with me, and I'll store your stuff while you are gone so you won't have to pay any more rent until you get a couple of paychecks in the fall. I've got a guest room that no one is using and it's close to the school. It will be no problem," said Jesse.

"And we're not meeting at your place again until you are settled. I didn't realize that you were in such dire straits financially."

"I'm doing okay now, but the pay stops when the work stops. Every rabbi knows that, and you save up all year so that you don't go hungry. But at half pay, there wasn't anything to save. If you are sure about this, would it be okay if I moved my stuff to your house tonight? I usually pay my landlord at the beginning of the week, so if I could get out today, that would really help. I came here with one bag, and I haven't been able to add a lot. If you guys can stay and help, we could move it all between sunset and sundown. Then we wouldn't break any Sabbath rules and I could inform him that I'm out." The three men quickly packed up all of Elijah's possessions and set them by the front door. They could easily carry everything he owned in one trip.

Just as soon as the sun touched the horizon, the two men took Elijah's belongings to Jesse's house. Elijah took the last bag and talked with his landlord. He hurried to Jesse's and found that the men had lit the firepit. They roasted the meat that Elijah had bought for them and enjoyed the bread that Ira had sent. While they sat around the fire and ate, Elijah asked if either one of them had thought about inviting Jesus to be their Messiah or if they had any questions. Zachary told him that he was interested in learning more, but really didn't understand what it all meant. Jesse said that he, too, was interested, but had decided he just didn't understand enough to make a commitment. "I wish I could remember exactly what Peter said, because it was so clear. What are your questions? Maybe I could at least help you get those answered," said Elijah.

"I've got lots of questions. But I think the main one is what does it mean that Jesus is the Messiah if he's not going to stop Rome?" asked Jesse.

"Rabbi Nicodemus taught us a long time ago that he didn't think that Jesus came to be a political Messiah, but a spiritual one. He was the sacrificial lamb that was slaughtered to pay for our sins and the sins of the whole world. His primary purpose in coming to earth was to die for our sins."

"So, he never intended to defeat Rome?" asked Zachary.

"No, I don't think so. He came to defeat Satan and death, and to pay for our sins that keep us separated from Jehovah. Jesus told Rabbi Nicodemus that Jehovah loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to die for us and that if we would simply believe in Him, we would have eternal life."

"Eternal life means going to Heaven," stated Jesse. "But I thought all Jews went to Heaven."

"Rabbi Nicodemus said that The Law and The Prophets doesn't teach that. Rabbi Nicodemus taught us that the Jewish Scripture says that only the people who are in a right relationship with Jehovah would have eternal life. And Jesus told him that when he accepted Him as his Messiah, there would be a new birth that would make him alive on the inside and his sins would be forgiven, putting him in a right relationship with Jehovah. All I can tell you is that I've believed for a long time that Jesus was sent from Jehovah and probably was the Messiah. But when I realized that He had risen from the dead and conquered death, all the Scriptures pointed to Him, and I fell on my knees and asked Jehovah to let Him be my Messiah. When I did that, it was like an immediate change happened inside of me. I physically felt like I was alive for the first time. I don't know how to describe it, except that I know that Jehovah's Spirit is living inside of me."

"Do you hear Him speak to you?" asked Zachary.

"No, not really. Although Talman says that he heard Him speak clearly. I can't say that I've heard Him. But I know that there's something different. I just don't know how to describe it."

Their talk turned to Elijah's plans to walk to Nain. No one knew the directions, but Jesse promised to ask around at the Mercantile



Store. Zachary said his good nights and told Elijah if he needed anything to let him know. They agreed to meet at Zachary's next Sabbath.



"What's wrong, Hava? Are you missing Elijah?" asked Miriam.

"Don't tease me. You know that I am. He's been gone for two weeks and Sabbath night is just not the same without him. But I don't want to hurt you, Miriam. How are you handling not waiting on Adam? You haven't talked much about it. Are you okay?" asked Hava.

"Of course I'm okay! It was me that stopped the espousal. I just feel relieved that I'm not off in Jerusalem and missing my friends."

"Do you think there will ever be anyone who can take the place of Adam, or do you think we'll just live with our parents and be old maids?" asked Ariel.

"Oh, I think there already is someone taking the place of Adam in your heart!" declared Hava. "I've seen the way you look at Jesse."

"Jesse? Who is Jesse?" asked Ariel.

"He's the man who always comes to synagogue with Elijah. He would make a wonderful husband," said Hava.

"Now, how would you know that?" demanded Ariel.

"He's letting Elijah stay with him and storing his things while he's gone. So, he must have a house."

"When have you two talked with unmarried men without my knowledge?" demanded Ariel.

The girls giggled and Miriam said, "You're not my mother!"

"Nor my abba!" Hava added. "Ariel, we're not leaving you out. You know that Elijah has been whispering to me and sometimes I walk him to the door on Sabbath nights. I know he's interested in me, and I'm certainly not opposed to his attention."

"And the only time I've seen Jesse is when he and Elijah stop to greet Hava when they are leaving the synagogue. We usually wait outside for a few minutes to make sure we are in the right place at the right time."

"So, that's how that works. I want to meet Jesse."

"Wait with us this Sabbath and we'll introduce you," said Miriam.



"Elijah!" Elijah had arrived at his sister's home near noon after three and a half days of walking. She was working in the garden and he had sneaked up and given her a hug. They had always been close, and she was thrilled that he had come. She quickly took him into the house and squeezed some juice for him. "Let me look at you. My, you've grown up. Is my little brother now a rabbi?"

“Yes, Deborah, Jehovah has blessed me with a good position in Capernaum.”

“So, you didn’t come from Jerusalem?”

“No, I walked from Capernaum, and I lost my way a couple of times. It’s not a busy trail and I couldn’t remember ever traveling that way.”

“I don’t know that anyone does. I’m glad you have arrived safely. Sit here and rest while I pick more vegetables for the soup I’m making for dinner.”

“I’ll help you. How is Jonah?”

“He’s doing fine. We’re getting old. Both girls are married and have their own places. They are happy and both will be bringing us a grandchild this fall. Jonah wants them to be boys so they can help us on the farm. He’s planting the fall barley today and I’ve got to get this soup cooking.”

“I don’t know how much I remember about farming, but I’ll be glad to help out for a while, if he’ll let me. I actually drove an oxcart the other day and it all came back pretty quickly.”

“My baby brother, all grown up. Oh, I’m so happy that you’ve come.”

“Speaking of brothers, how is Seth?”

“He’s not good. His wife passed away soon after Dad, and he’s just been lost without her. The children are all grown and settled, but no one wants to work the land. The boys all apprenticed for other trades and the girls married and they’ve moved all over. At least my two have stayed close, but his have scattered. I don’t know what this world is coming to. No one respects the old ways. I thought children were supposed to stay on the land of their fathers and keep it in the family. I don’t know what Seth will do. Our son-in-law, Caleb, wants to buy this place and farm it with his own property.”

“So, Seth is farming the land all by himself?”

“Yes, and he’s older than we are.”

“Maybe I could help him out this summer, too.”

“It sounds like you are planning to stay awhile. Don’t you have a job to get back to?”

“I do, but it won’t start again until Tishrei. I can work for my friend Jesse back in Capernaum, but I was hoping that I could visit here with my family at least for a while.”

“Of course, of course. Your help would be welcome. We can’t pay you, but you are welcome to share our home and food.”

“I wouldn’t accept pay from my sister or brother. We are family and I have not been here to help in three years.”

“I’ve never seen a rabbi get his hands dirty! Are you sure you remember what farming is like?” teased Deborah.

All summer, Elijah worked with his brother and brother-in-law on their farms. He spent the nights wherever he worked and enjoyed being included in the family. Deborah always hosted the Sabbath dinners and Seth joined them. Elijah got acquainted with his nieces and their husbands and felt welcomed and loved. But deep down,

there was a yearning to be back in Capernaum with his friends, and especially to talk with Joel about Hava. Seeing both of his nieces carrying a child made him think of her and their future. Day by day he plowed the fields and helped to gather the harvests. As he grew closer to Seth, Deborah, and Jonah, he began to tell them about Jesus. They had heard very little about Him except that He had taught in their village and raised a friend of theirs from the dead a few years ago. They had not heard that Jesus had been crucified, but listened as Elijah told them all the things he had learned. By the time Elijah started back to Capernaum, his entire family had invited Jesus to be their Messiah. There was no synagogue in Nain and each family worshipped Jehovah as they chose. A friend of Jonah's had relatives in Capernaum and drew him a map of how to get home. Tearful goodbyes were said as Elijah began his trek back to Capernaum. Deborah packed him food for his journey and the family sent him on his way not knowing when they would see him again.

## Chapter 12

When Jesse arrived at work on Sunday morning, he was absolutely determined to speak with Mr. Immer that afternoon. He unlocked the door to the Mercantile Store and began to sweep in front of the door whistling as he worked. He wanted everyone to know that the store was open for business. He began straightening the shelves and carrying merchandise from the warehouse. He was totally surprised when Mr. Immer, the owner, arrived. He didn't usually check on them until late afternoon just before closing. *Uh-oh. Obadiah's going to be in big trouble!* Jesse quietly went about his business and let Mr. Immer ascertain for himself that the steward was not there. "Where's Obadiah?" he asked.

Jesse tried to sound casual, "He usually arrives by noon. I'm sure he's on his way. Mr. Immer, would you have time to talk with me sometime today? I have a question for you."

"Certainly. But let's take care of these customers first. Why isn't Obadiah here to help you? Is he sick?" asked Mr. Immer.

*I'm not going to lie. And I'm not going to cover for him.* "I don't know. I just assumed that you knew his schedule. I've been opening up for several months now." They worked together to assist their customers. Everyone asked for Jesse as they came in. Some wanted to make purchases, and one needed help finding housing. "I'll be glad to help you, but it will have to be after noon because I won't have anyone to cover the store until then." The customer promised to come back later. Jesse made sure that Mr. Immer heard that conversation. He continued to carry merchandise from the warehouse between customers and missed Obadiah's arrival. He would have liked to have seen the look on his face when he discovered that Mr. Immer was there. Jesse was not sure what was said, but when he entered the front of the store, Obadiah's face was as red as a beet and Mr. Immer did not look happy.

"Jesse, meet me in my office," barked Mr. Immer.

"Yes, sir."

"You said you had a question."

"Yes, sir. I have worked for you since I was thirteen and then apprenticed under you. You have taught me everything that I know about running a Mercantile Store. I have decided to speak with a young lady's dad about getting married and I've been doing a lot of thinking about my future. I have located a building on the west side of Capernaum that would be an ideal location for an additional Mercantile Store. It is right on the main road and not far from the market. It would be very visible to all the new people who are moving in. I don't have the money to purchase the building and would have to borrow. You have been so very good to me, and I really don't want to set up a competitive business. My question is: Would you consider purchasing a second Mercantile Store on the west side and hire me to be your

steward? I believe that it would make a nice profit for you in a very short period of time, and I need to find a job that will support a wife and family.”

“Thank you, Jesse, for coming to me with this. You’ll have to give me some time to think it over. I am very troubled about Obadiah’s behavior, and I need to deal with that, too. How long have you been opening the store for him?”

“Since I finished my apprenticeship.”

“Have you been compensated for the extra work?” asked Mr. Immer.

“No, sir. My pay has not increased since I was an apprentice.”

“And how long has that been?”

“One year, sir. I’ve worked for you for five years, but I only finished the apprenticeship last year.”

“Jesse, you have a right to be ready to leave. I need to check the records and see what is going on. Can you give me a few days to try to make this right?”

“Yes, sir. And thank you, sir. I’ll get back to work.”

“Obadiah, I need to see you in my office.” Jesse had no idea what was discussed between the owner and the steward, but he didn’t imagine that it was pleasant. He just hoped that this discovery by Mr. Immer would not derail his hopes of becoming the steward of a new Mercantile Store.

When the meeting was over, Obadiah was definitely avoiding speaking to him. Mr. Immer asked Jesse, “Can you show me the property that you were interested in?”

“Certainly. I will need to get the owner’s permission at the Pottery Shop in the market.” Mr. Immer walked with Jesse to meet with the owner. Jesse introduced them and told him he was a prospective buyer and asked if they could see the property. The owner handed Jesse the key and invited him to look around all he wanted.

“Everyone seems to trust you, Jesse,” commented Mr. Immer.

“Yes, sir. I hope I’ve earned that trust and intend to keep it. I was taught by a good businessman.”

They walked to the building, and Mr. Immer looked over the property. Jesse explained that the storefront, the warehouse, and a small house in the back were all included in the price. The building had been used as a pottery factory, but now the owner was retired and only sold what he made at the market. It needed some major cleaning and would need all the pottery wheels removed and storage shelves built to replace them. Jesse wondered out loud if the pottery wheels could be sold somewhere as it seemed a shame to just waste them. Mr. Immer made no comments, just walked around and looked. The little house had two sleeping rooms and was approximately the same size as Jesse’s current house. It would be a little tight if he married. He checked around back and was pleased to find a small courtyard and plenty of space to add on. *I wonder if Rabbi Joel would consider it adequate housing for Miriam. Surely, he would understand that my income would increase. At least I hope it will.* He realized that Mr.

Immer was ready to leave, so Jesse locked up the house and building to quickly join him. They stopped at the market long enough for Jesse to return the key, but he gave Jesse no indication of his thoughts. Mr. Immer left Jesse at the market and said he would be in contact. Jesse dreaded going back to the Mercantile Store and being alone with Obadiah, even though he knew he had done nothing wrong. Thankfully, they were busy right up until closing time. Obadiah pulled the curtain over the door and both men began sweeping and straightening the shelves for tomorrow. Neither spoke. Jesse hated the tension but saw no reason to speak. When the sun was half-way down, both men left the store and walked in opposite directions. Neither knew what tomorrow would hold.

Jesse was not surprised when Obadiah showed up to open the doors the following morning at the Mercantile Store. And Jesse was relieved when a customer wanted to look for housing. Jesse took him back to his office and discussed his needs and then told Obadiah that he would be out of the store for a while. Obadiah seemed equally relieved. They really didn't have anything to say to each other, even though they had worked together for five years. They both knew that Obadiah had mistreated Jesse in Mr. Immer's absence. It was customary upon finishing an apprenticeship to be placed in a position of authority and to have a substantial pay increase. Jesse had assumed that he would be given a store of his own to oversee. But that had not happened. *Maybe I should have left and found another place that needed a trained steward. I guess it's my own fault, but I can't change that now.*

Mr. Immer didn't show up at the store for the next few days, but on Friday he arrived just as the two were opening the door. He said that he wanted to speak with Obadiah first, so Jesse continued to prepare the store for business. He swept in front of the store and began to assist customers. He was glad he couldn't hear what was being said behind the closed doors. After what seemed like a lifetime, Jesse was called to the office. Obadiah gave no indication of what had been said, and quickly got busy with customers. Jesse reported to Mr. Immer. "Jesse, I have purchased the property that you recommended to me. It will need some work to get it ready to open as a Mercantile Store. I have considered your request and think that you would be the best man for the job. I would like to hire you as my steward for that store. I believe that you will make it a profitable business." They agreed that Mr. Immer would cover all the expenses of getting the store ready to open and he would pay Jesse's and any employee's salaries for the first month. After that, they would be on their own and Jesse would simply pay Mr. Immer a percentage of the profits. It was risky because if the business failed there would be no income. But if it succeeded, he would benefit accordingly. Jesse knew that he was ready to make that commitment and accepted Mr. Immer's offer. "There's another matter we need to discuss. There is a house on the property, and I would like to offer it to you rent-free for one year as compensation for the pay you did not receive this past year. Next year,

at this time, we'll discuss what you want to do with that house. Would that be acceptable to you?"

"Yes, sir. But I acknowledge that I probably should have moved on and looked for another job after my apprenticeship with you ended. I just wanted to work for you, and I really want to run a Mercantile Store."

"Then I think you are the right man for the job. Are you ready to go to the new location now and discuss what needs to be done?"

"Yes, sir." *Is this really happening? I think I just got my dream job. I'm going to be in charge. Can I do this? Am I ready? I better be because it's happening.* He walked out the door with Mr. Immer without a backward glance. This time, Mr. Immer was talking non-stop about what needed to be done. He was consulting Jesse on every detail and Jesse was trying to keep up and take it all in. Mr. Immer had already located a man who wanted to purchase the pottery wheels and would be arriving on Monday to pick those up. He had already hired a carpenter but needed Jesse to decide exactly what he wanted. Jesse's head was spinning with his own ideas, but Mr. Immer kept throwing out ideas and questions. Marcus and Eli were the merchandise purchasers for the other store. Would they purchase for both stores, or would Jesse prefer to hire his own purchasers? So many questions that Jesse had never considered. Mr. Immer handed him the keys to the buildings when he left middle of the afternoon and assured him that he would stop by each day in case he had further questions. "The carpenters will be ready to start on Wednesday, so you need to have your basic plans drawn up by then." And suddenly Jesse was alone in the building. He walked around letting it all sink in. He was a steward now and it was his responsibility to make this business work. He didn't know where to begin, so he grabbed a broom and began sweeping. As he swept, he began to visualize how he wanted the front of the Mercantile Store to look. He took a piece of coal and marked off certain areas. There was already a small office to one side, and he thought that should be sufficient for his office, at least for now. *I will need to add an accountant's office. I could talk with Rabbi Talman about how to hire an accountant.* Then he began to sweep the warehouse. It was harder to visualize the layout because of all the pottery wheels, but once they were gone, he could decide where to build shelves and what needed to be done there. He realized that the sun was setting, and he needed to get home in time for the Sabbath. He locked the doors and walked quickly to his home. His servant, Tobias, had the Sabbath meal prepared, and Jesse, as usual, invited him to join him for the meal because he didn't like to eat alone. He told Tobias about the changes that had happened today. They discussed when the move would take place. Tobias said he would begin packing whenever Jesse was ready. "I didn't get a chance to look over the house today. I have no idea how much work it might need."

"Would you like for me to take a look at it on Sunday?" asked Tobias.

“That would be great. I remember that there were two bedrooms, so you would be welcome to one, but I don’t know where we’ll put Elijah. And I don’t know what we would need in the way of repairs. I don’t even know whether there was an oven or firepit. I was just overwhelmed by everything. I can’t believe this is happening. It’s what I’ve always dreamed of, but never thought it would.”

After attending synagogue, Jesse didn’t even wait around to say hello to Miriam. He wasn’t sure that he even heard the message because his head was so filled with ideas about the new store. He walked as quickly as allowed on the Sabbath to Zachary’s house. “You’re not going to believe what happened yesterday!”

“Rabbi Talman said yes,” guessed Zachary.

“No! And how did you know about that?”

“Maybe because Miriam is all you talk about these days,” said Zachary.

“It is not! I’ve got a lot of other things on my mind besides Miriam,” protested Jesse. “You are looking at the steward of a brand new Mercantile Store on the west side.”

“What? When did that happen?” The two men began to share excitedly all the previous week’s happenings. Zachary was thrilled with Jesse’s good fortune but warned him that being a steward has its ups and downs. All afternoon the friends talked and dreamed together.

“So when are you going to talk to Rabbi Talman?”

“About the accountant?”

“No. About Miriam.”

“I can’t until I finish the house, can I?” asked Jesse.

“Actually, you should talk to him soon. The house comes after the espousal. Now that you have a good job and the means to support her, you need to let him know your intentions so that he doesn’t marry her off to someone else,” said Zachary.

“So, that should happen soon?” asked Jesse.

“Only if you know for sure that she’s the one you want to spend the rest of your life with. You told me that the only thing that was holding you back was the finances. Seems to me that Jehovah has blessed you with the resources you need to support a wife, if that’s what you want,” said Zachary.

“And what about you, Zachary? When are you going to settle down? You’ve got the finances and the house. Why aren’t you looking for a wife?”

“I guess I’m just not marriage material. Seeing my dad and mother fighting all the time and then them deciding to go their separate ways has made me realize that I don’t want to be tied down with a woman who doesn’t share my dreams and my beliefs. I don’t think I’ll be ready to marry until I get my questions answered about Jesus — and then I may still not be ready. I may just stay single for the rest of my life.”

“If that makes you happy, then I’m fine with it. I’ve always known that I wanted a wife and children and a home. I just couldn’t afford it. When should I talk with Rabbi Talman?”



"You could stop by his bank and talk with him about hiring an accountant and then bring up your interest in marrying his daughter. I think your dad is supposed to do the asking — but I don't know what happens if you are on your own."

"Maybe you could ask Rabbi Talman for me — you know, be my representative."

"Not a chance! This is all yours!" laughed Zachary.

The men enjoyed the post-Sabbath meal that Ira prepared for them and then Jesse left early to prepare for his big day on Sunday.

Jesse and his servant, Tobias, walked to the new site after a quick breakfast. The sun was just beginning to rise and Jesse was eager to see the house. They entered the living area and were pleased that the house had been fairly well maintained. There were very few changes that would be necessary for them to move all of Jesse's belongings. Tobias suggested that he could do a thorough cleaning of the new house and be ready to move by the end of the week. "Tobias, I need to talk with you about something that has been on my mind."

"Yes, sir," said Tobias hesitantly.

"Tobias, I want to get married. Have you ever worked for someone who was married?"

"Yes, sir. But I was just assigned to the kitchen. I don't know anything about marriage, sir," replied Tobias.

"Well, I think that if I were to marry, you would need to live somewhere else."

"Yes, sir," said Tobias trying to show no emotion.

"Let's take a look outside and see where your room would be," said Jesse, not realizing that he had scared Tobias terribly.

"Yes, sir," said Tobias quite a bit more enthusiastically.

They walked around the house and noted that there was plenty of space to add an additional room at the back of the preparation area. "But that's getting ahead of ourselves. I've got to get to the warehouse. Let's plan to move whenever you can get this one cleaned. Check for anything that needs to be repaired or added before we move. I would like to be out of the current house by the Sabbath so that I can rent it out as soon as possible."

"When will Rabbi Elijah return, sir?"

"In the next couple of weeks, I would think. Hey, that's a great idea. He may want to rent the other house if he's going to marry Hava. It would be a great starter home for them. Okay, I've got to get started on the store. Shalom."

"Shalom, and have a great day," said Tobias.

Jesse was unlocking the doors to the warehouse when the man who was purchasing the pottery wheels arrived with his oxcart. Together they lifted each of the twelve wheels into the cart and Jesse received the silver. He laid it in a pile in the office and would give it to Mr. Immer when he visited that afternoon. Jesse continued cleaning the warehouse so that he could get a good picture of what it would look like. He liked that the back doors were large enough for an oxcart

to unload supplies, so he marked off an area for really large items. Then he began to sketch on the stone floor the various sized shelves he would need for each section. Mr. Immer arrived around noon and was pleased with Jesse's ideas. He made some suggestions and together they discussed when he should hire an accountant. Jesse suggested that he could talk with Rabbi Talman in the morning, since he was a banker and would know where to find an accountant. The day passed quickly, and Jesse hurried home and began making plans for the move.

On Monday morning, Jesse put on his best robe and made his way to Rabbi Talman's bank. He rehearsed over and over what he wanted to say. But when Rabbi Talman answered his knock instead of a servant, Jesse forgot everything that he had planned.

"Good morning, Jesse. How can I help you this morning?" said Talman.

"Sir, I was wondering... well, I was wondering if you could make some recommendations for me... I mean... about my business," said Jesse. The words seemed to trip over each other, and he wasn't sure that he was making sense.

"Certainly. I have time and I would love to help you. What kind of business are you thinking of starting? I thought you worked at the Mercantile Store."

"I do, I mean, I did, and I still do. Oh, man, this is harder than I thought. If you have got the time, I'll try to explain."

"I want to help, but I certainly don't understand."

"Just this week, Mr. Immer purchased a new building on the west side of Capernaum, and he's made me his steward. I am designing a Mercantile Store for the west side starting with just a basic building."

"Is that the old pottery factory?" asked Talman.

"Yes, sir. I don't want to take up a lot of your time, but there are many things that I don't know about running a business. I mean, I apprenticed under Mr. Immer, and I took your class, but since I am the steward ... well it's harder than I expected and there are some things that I want to change in the new store."

"Such as?"

"Well, I would like to hire an accountant who would also be in charge of keeping records of the inventory. I think it would be a great idea — but I don't know where I would begin looking for such a person — or if they even exist. I thought that you might know."

"Actually, that's a very good idea and it tells me that you are thinking wisely. Many accountants make really good money, and don't truly earn it. Combining the two jobs would make it a wiser investment for you. I have a friend who trains accountants. I would be glad to speak with him and see if he has someone to recommend."

"Oh, that would be great, Rabbi Talman. I really appreciate your help." Talman expected Jesse to leave, but he just continued to sit there and seemed to be struggling for words.

"Is there something else that I can help you with?" asked Talman.

“Sir, this is not business, so I don’t know if it’s appropriate to talk here and now, but I would like to talk with you about your daughter, Miriam,” Jesse managed to squeak out.

Suddenly Talman understood the stress that Jesse was displaying. “Jesse, we can talk now if you would like, or we can meet later. What is best for you?”

“Oh, I would prefer to talk now, if you’ve got the time.”

“I think I can take the time when it concerns my daughter. What were you thinking?”

“Sir, I just know that when I see her after synagogue on the Sabbath, I can’t stop thinking about her. I would like to have your permission to spend more time with her with the possibility of marriage. My dad passed several years ago, and I have no idea how to arrange a marriage. But I want you to know that I would like to be considered as a husband now that my job is secure. I own a home, or there’s a home on the property that we could move to. I want to add some rooms to it. There are two sleeping rooms, but my servant will need a place to live. I’m sorry, I’m getting this all jumbled up.”

“Well, first, let’s talk some more about business. What is the arrangement between you and Mr. Immer concerning this house on the property?”

“He said that I could live in it rent-free for one year while I get the business started, and then at the end of one year, he will either sell it or rent it to me. We’ll decide then.”

“Jesse, I know Mr. Immer very well. He’s a very good businessman, but I have some concerns about that arrangement.”

“Okay,” said Jesse, wondering what could possibly be wrong with free housing.

“Mr. Immer knows that you will probably make extensive improvements to that house during the course of this year. So, at the end of one year, that house will be worth a lot more than it is right now. Make sure you get a price settled before you make any improvements. Otherwise, you may pay for the improvements and then be required to pay for the higher value of the house.”

“Oh, Rabbi, I had not thought of that!”

“I’ve seen too many young men starting out who get taken in by that offer. What Mr. Immer has offered you is free reign to improve what he owns. Don’t do it. Either don’t improve it during this year, or get a price agreed upon now. Your best bet would be to go ahead and purchase it right now, if at all possible. That is, if you intend to purchase it.”

“Yes, sir. I can see that. Thank you for the warning. I feel stupid.”

“Well, you are not stupid. I remember you from my class several years ago and you were always my top student. It’s just a legal loophole that can really hurt you if you are not aware of it.”

“Thank you, sir. When could we talk about your daughter? Or how do I go about asking to marry her?”

“I think you have already asked and now I need to pray about it, talk with my wife and Miriam, and see what they have to say. Since

this is not work related, why don't you meet me here next Sunday evening and we'll talk after work."

"Thank you, sir, and if you have any questions, I'll be working at the old Pottery Shop to get it transformed to my new Mercantile Store."

"Shalom, Jesse."

"Shalom."

Jesse couldn't tell whether Talman was leaning toward a yes or a no. *Oh, this is going to be a long week. Thankfully, it will also be a very busy one.*

On Tuesday, Mr. Immer stopped by to see if Jesse was ready to tell the carpenter what he wanted. He listened to Jesse's plans and agreed. He was pleased that he had talked with Rabbi Talman about the accountant. When he offered Mr. Immer the silver from the sale of the pottery wheels, he reminded him that he should use it as operating expense. "Mr. Immer, I have one other thing I would like to talk with you about."

"Yes, Jesse? I like what you are doing so far. I think I've made a wise choice in putting you in charge."

"Thank you, sir. I would like to go ahead and purchase the house on the property instead of waiting for a year. I know that you intended to allow me to live here rent free for a year. That is a substantial amount of money that I hope you would apply to the purchase price. I am not comfortable making improvements to a house that I do not own and have no guarantee of ever owning."

"Let me think about it, and I'll get back with you in a few days."

"And, sir, you need to know that the closest well is over a mile away. I would like for you to take that in consideration when setting a price."

"I need to look at the numbers and see what a fair price would be for you. I promise I'll get that to you by the end of the week."

## Chapter 13

As Elijah walked, he felt that it had been a successful summer. His family had come to know Jesus and he was returning to Capernaum feeling strong and healthy after a summer of farming. He thought he would stop by Jesse's house and let Tobias know that he was back. He needed to drop off his travel bags and then he would let the rabbis know. *When should I talk with Joel about marriage? Will he be pleased, or will it cause tension at the school? One can never predict these things.* As he thought of Hava, he began to wonder what kind of house he could afford. They would have to start off small, but generally the espousal period was one year. That would give him time, with the new rate of pay, to begin to purchase all the things that they would need for a home. As he walked, he made a list in his head of all the things he would need to set up a proper house for Hava. Just thinking about her made the journey seem shorter.

Elijah arrived midafternoon on Thursday. It had been a pleasant journey and he had enjoyed his time alone. Tobias welcomed him back and served him juice. "I'm going to walk over to Joel's house and see if he is available. I'll be back for dinner, though," he said with a grin.

"Master Jesse is not at the Mercantile Store this afternoon. He said he was working with Mr. Immer on a project."

"Thanks, Tobias. I'll see you both at dinner. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Elijah walked over to Joel's house and wondered whether he should just get it over with, or whether he should wait until after the Sabbath was over. *It might be nice to just enjoy being together tomorrow night without the tension.* He laughed out loud. *Well, it's either my tension or everyone else's. So, I guess I'll wait. I just hope I haven't waited too late. What if he announces that Hava was espoused while I was away?* Suddenly, talking to Joel seemed urgent. He could hardly keep his feet from running. *Calm down. If Jehovah has provided her for me, He will keep her for me. At least I hope.* He knocked on the door and was greeted warmly by the servant. He sat in the living room and waited for Joel. The men hugged and each wanted to know all the news. Was Talman safe? Did Elijah find his family well? So much to catch up on. And suddenly, Elijah knew that it was time. "Joel, I've been doing a lot of thinking this summer. You know that I am just starting out as a rabbi, and I don't have any way to support your daughter except on the promise that you will pay me a rabbi's salary. But I believe that by the time the espousal period is complete, I will be able to support Hava, so I'm asking if you would consider it. I love your daughter and will take good care of her. I have not talked with her, so I don't know whether she feels the same way, but I think that this is the next step. I wasn't planning on speaking to you today, but I couldn't help myself. I just want to be completely honest about my

intentions and let you decide if that is something I should pursue, or if I should forget it.”

“Well, it’s not totally a surprise. I suspected that when you returned you would ask, and I’ve prayed about it. However, I would like to talk with Elizabeth and Hava. I’ll give you an answer tomorrow night. You are coming to Sabbath dinner, aren’t you?”

“I would enjoy that, if I’m welcome. Where are we meeting?”

“We’ll be at Jairus’ house. I’ll send him word that you are back — or are you headed over there to visit?”

“No, I want to be home when Jesse arrives. Tobias is planning my dinner. So, thank you for letting him know that I’m back.”

“Of course. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

*That was easy. Now all I have to do is survive until I get the answer tomorrow night. I wonder if he’ll tell me before the Sabbath meal or wait until afterward. That could be awkward either way. I guess every man has to deal with the waiting. And I need to hurry home, or I will miss Jesse’s arrival.*

It was a sweet reunion and once again both men wanted to talk all at the same time. There was so much to catch up on. Elijah was thrilled with Jesse’s good news about the Mercantile Store and his new status as steward. Tobias called dinner and then joined the men to eat. Jesse told Elijah about the house on the property and that he was waiting on Mr. Immer to give him a price. If he decided to move, he would be willing to rent Elijah this place. “I think it would be a great starter house for you and Hava, but not a good permanent one. You don’t have to rent it, if you don’t want to, but right now there’s no room at the other house if I end up buying it and renovating it for Miriam.”

“Have you asked Talman?”

“Yes, and he said he would give me an answer on Sunday night after work. I don’t know whether I can wait that long!” exclaimed Jesse.

“I asked Joel this afternoon. He said he would let me know tomorrow night.” Both men congratulated each other and agreed that the waiting was excruciating. Both knew that it was exactly right, but they were not sure that the abbas would agree.

On Friday, Elijah walked with Jesse to see the new store. Jesse showed him his plans and the progress the carpenters had made. They walked over to the house and discussed the rooms that Jesse wanted to add and how Rabbi Talman had warned him not to make improvements on a house he didn’t own. They both agreed that they would never have thought about that. The carpenters arrived and Elijah left so that Jesse could work. Soon after noon, Mr. Immer arrived to check on the progress and was pleased. He promised to send the purchasers over to talk with Jesse about how and when he wanted to start stocking the shelves and when the store would open. Jesse tried to be patient as they talked about everything except the house. Finally, Mr. Immer gave Jesse the price that he expected for the house and the land around it. Jesse had already prepared his answer and quietly replied, “I have rented and sold a lot of houses in

this area, and I am not interested in making the purchase at that price. I will accept your offer to live here rent free for one year, but you need to know that I will not be interested in purchasing the house at the end of that period.”

“But it’s an ideal place for you to live and still be close to your family, and you have plenty of room to expand to meet your future needs.”

“Yes, but I’m not buying a future house with ample space. I am buying a simple starter house that is not within reasonable walking distance from a well. The price you have in mind is not possible for me. I suggest that you continue to use it as a rental, or tear it down to provide for more warehouse space.” The carpenter called for Jesse just at the perfect time and Jesse excused himself and walked away.

*Wow. Rabbi Talman was spot on. I’m glad he warned me. But two can play that game. Mr. Immer trained me well to negotiate and get the price I want. Now, we’ll see who wins. I mustn’t show him how much I want this place for Miriam.*

When Jesse returned to the house, Mr. Immer had gone. Jesse locked the door and returned to the store.



Arial, Hava, and Miriam met in their outdoor studio behind Arial’s house. “Tonight’s the big night. I will be pledged to Elijah. At least that’s what I think will happen. And you will be pledged on Sunday night.”

“I’m not as certain as you are. Your dad knows Elijah well, but Jesse is a little more unknown. I’m worried about Dad’s intention to question Jesse about his relationship with Jesus. I made it clear that I am not interested in any man that doesn’t share my beliefs.” She knew that he attended synagogue faithfully with Elijah. And she knew that Elijah was a follower of Jesus, but she didn’t know for sure about Jesse. All three girls agreed that life would get very complicated if husband and wife didn’t both desire to be obedient to Jesus. They finally pulled out their instruments and began to play some Psalms, but they found themselves attracted to the more somber and sad ones rather than the joyful ones, and they weren’t sure why. Arial was happy for both of her friends but was feeling melancholy that life seemed to be passing her by. Many of her friends were already married and raising children. She was fourteen and still living with her parents. She knew her dad felt that there was no one good enough for her. She prayed that Jehovah would provide for her heart’s desire.



On Friday night, the rabbis gathered at Jairus' house and Elijah was welcomed back after his summer break. While Rachel lit the Sabbath candles and Jairus prayed a prayer of blessing on the group, Elijah couldn't help wondering if this would be his last night with them. "Jairus, could we use your rooftop? Elijah and I need to talk before dinner."

*Oh good. Let's get it over with.*

"Elijah, I've talked it over with Elizabeth and Hava, and both are in agreement with your request. You have been a part of our rabbi family and I have no doubt about you. I feel that I know you pretty well. I do, however, need to know when you want to arrange the espousal and what plans you have for the wedding."

"Thank you, sir. I have refused to let my mind go that far, but I guess I do need to make plans."

"Yes, you may start making plans to marry my daughter. How soon do you want to set the espousal?"

"As soon as possible!"

"What about one month from now? Can you be ready by then?"

"What needs to be done? I thought it was just a ceremony to indicate we were going to start making plans."

"Well, the only thing that you would be required to do is to provide gifts for Hava that indicate your intent is to love and care for her."

"Okay. One month would be perfect," agreed Elijah.

"Now, how about some celebrating with dinner?"

"That sounds wonderful. May I speak with Hava before the espousal?"

"Yes, but not alone. Your relationship with her will continue as it has been until the espousal."

"I understand. One month. Yes, sir."

The two men joined the others and Jairus let the servants know that dinner could be served. Joel said, "I would like to announce that I have pledged Hava to Elijah and set the date for the espousal one month from tonight — if you are available to perform the ceremony, Jairus." Congratulations were said and the party began. Hava smiled at Elijah shyly across the room, but the girls quickly finished dinner and went to Ariel's room. Much giggling could be heard from there. Elijah had a hard time paying attention to the rabbis' conversation. He told them about his successful visit with his family. After a while, Talman asked if he could talk with the men privately on the roof. They left the women who were still talking about the upcoming wedding and gathered on the rooftop.

"I think you had it easy, Joel," said Talman. "You've had six months to really get to know Elijah. I have it much harder, but I'm hoping that you guys will help me with this decision."

"Of course; how can we help?" asked Joel.

"Is this about the school?" asked Jairus.

"No, it's about Miriam. Jesse has asked for permission to marry her. I know very little about him. I know nothing about his background, other than that he was a great student. I do know that you, Elijah, are



good friends with him. I don't want to spoil your evening or in any way take away from this special time, but I promised Jesse to give him an answer on Sunday night. I have many questions and would like everyone's input."

"Is she ready for marriage? I mean after the break off from Adam," asked Joel.

"Apparently. She was very excited when I told her Jesse was interested. I asked her how she had gotten to know Jesse and she indicated that she had simply said hello to him a few times at synagogue. So, she doesn't know anything about him either. I mean, I'm grateful, but do either of you know anything about him? Then I want to hear from Elijah."

"He was an outstanding student, a hard worker. His family lived about six miles out of town, so he walked into Hebrew School each day. Yet, I don't remember him ever being absent," volunteered Joel.

"He went with us on our last Passover trip and helped with the younger boys. I think of him as a good man and a hard worker. He's worked at the Mercantile Store since he finished school and is very highly thought of by his customers," volunteered Jairus.

Everyone turned to Elijah and he knew they were depending on him to guide them. "I got to know Jesse on the trip here from Jerusalem. We became good friends. When he realized how limited my finances were, he insisted that I move in with him, and so I lived with him for that last month of school, and he stored my belongings while I was away. I am living with him again now until I can work enough to afford to rent a place."

"Elijah, I'm sorry. I forgot how hard it is that first year. We should have done more to help you get established," said Joel.

"Hey, I survived. But what I'm saying is that Jesse is a very fine man and generous. He will take good care of Miriam. I don't know whether you know that he's just been made steward over a new Mercantile Store that will be opening on this side of town."

"Yes, he told me that."

"What does Miriam think?" asked Jairus.

"Well, like I said, she was pleased, and I think she's healed from her experience with Adam. But she is adamant that he be a follower of Jesus. Do you know what he believes, Elijah? Have you discussed it with him?"

"Oh, yes, we've discussed it multiple times. Both he and Zachary believe that Jesus is the Messiah. But both of them are trying to figure out what the Apostle Matthew meant about the Holy Spirit. They are both still searching. Maybe Miriam could help him to understand it better than I can."

"I can see that I did have it easier, because we've worked together and we've had this time together every week to really get to know you," said Joel.

"Would it be possible to just tell him that I want there to be more time to get to know him?" asked Talman. "We could invite him over

once a week to let them get to know each other better before we announce the espousal.”

“Well, it’s not traditional,” said Jairus.

“No, but neither are our girls! Wouldn’t it be worth it to see him over a period of time?” asked Talman again.

“Is that fair to Jesse?”

“Well, it could work both ways. He could back out before the espousal, also, if he sees something in Miriam that he doesn’t like.”

“But doesn’t that increase the possibility of them getting too familiar?” asked Jairus.

“Oh, this part of parenting may be the hardest. I haven’t slept since he asked me.”

“Jesse is going to be pretty busy with opening up his new store and may not mind waiting for three months. If you invite him to dinner once a week, would that give you the assurance that you need?” asked Elijah.

“We could occasionally invite him to our Sabbath gathering just so we could all get to know him better,” suggested Jairus.



As Elijah and Jesse ate breakfast with Tobias, Elijah shared the news that he would be espoused to Hava in one month. He needed to prepare gifts for her. Tobias told him that he also needed a gift for Rabbi Joel and Mrs. Elizabeth. The men talked about what those gifts should be. “School will be starting next week, so I need to get busy thinking about it now.”

As they walked to synagogue together on Sabbath morning, Jesse wanted to know if there had been any discussion about his request to marry Miriam. “Yes, but I am not at liberty to disclose anything that was said. You’ll have to wait until Sunday night to hear the outcome, but I think you will be happy.”

“Thanks, Elijah. You’re not saying that just to pacify me, are you?”

“No, I’m saying that for my own self-protection so that you don’t drive me crazy between now and then,” teased Elijah.

Later both men admitted that they heard very little of the message that morning as their heads were filled with ideas for the future. After synagogue, they stopped and said hello to Hava and Miriam, and the girls introduced Ariel to Jesse. As the men walked toward Zachary’s house, Jesse wondered out loud how they could get Ariel and Zachary together. “Oh, that would never work. She’s a very independent lady. And I don’t think her dad will ever find a man that’s good enough for her,” said Elijah.

Zachary greeted the men and heard all their exciting news. The afternoon was filled with questions and plans as they talked about espousal gifts and how in the world they would host a wedding. Since neither of them had a dad, it would be up to them to come up with a plan — and they were marrying two of the most popular girls in the

town of Capernaum. Suddenly, they realized that it would take a year's wages to host a proper wedding for them. They didn't know what to do. Jesse said that he would talk with Talman on Sunday, and if the answer was affirmative, he would tell him that he and Elijah were both wondering what would be expected for the wedding. They were fairly certain that the espousals would be canceled and both men were dreading the thought of not only losing the ladies of their dreams, but for Elijah, it could possibly mean that he would need to relocate to a new school. He knew he couldn't stay when his heart was broken. It was a sad post-Sabbath dinner.

On Sunday, all three men headed to their respective workplaces with heavy hearts. That evening, Jesse left the Mercantile Store's construction site a little early and arrived at Rabbi Talman's bank just as the sun touched the horizon. Talman invited Jesse to walk with him to the market where he purchased rolls filled with cheese and a jug of wine. They found a bench and sat watching the merchants loading up their goods and closing for the night. Jesse told Talman about Mr. Immer's price for the house and his reply. Talman was impressed that Jesse understood the process of bargaining in order to get the best deal. Jesse laughed and said, "I never thought I would be using what my mentor taught me against him. But he did, indeed, teach me well." Rabbi Talman agreed that it must feel uncomfortable.

"Jesse, I'm afraid that the news I bring to you may disappoint you. But as I've prayed about Miriam's future, I can't in good conscience say yes at this point." Jesse felt devastated. He wasn't sure he could sit still. "But I am not saying no. Please hear me out. It was easy for Rabbi Joel to say yes to Elijah's request to marry Hava because we have gotten to know him over this past school session. But I don't feel that I know you that well."

"I understand."

"You also do not know Miriam very well. This is not a traditional arrangement, but I want my daughter to have a say in who she marries."

"I would like that, too."

"I have discussed my feelings with the other rabbis, and I am asking you to wait three months before the espousal. During that time, we want to invite you to join us for dinner after work, either Tuesday or Wednesday — whichever is best for you. You will get to know Miriam under our supervision. You will see how she was raised, and you will know better whether you are really interested in being married to her. You may cancel the espousal at any time in the next three months without explanation. But the same applies to Miriam. My wife and I had an arranged marriage and it has worked out well, but being married to a stranger isn't always a good idea. Even though we didn't know each other, our parents did. We would prefer that you spend this time in prayer and seeking Jehovah's will for your future."

"So, you are not saying no?" asked Jesse with a sigh of relief.

"No, I am not. In fact, everything that we know about you is very positive. Only two questions came up. One was whether you would

approve of the way Miriam was raised to be an independent woman. You need to get to know her a little better before we allow a marriage. And more importantly, we would like to learn more about your relationship with Jehovah. Miriam has committed her life to obedience to Jesus. That could cause some problems in your marriage, if you don't support or agree with her choices."

"Rabbi Talman, I certainly would like the opportunity to get to know Miriam better. It will be hard to wait, but I agree with your reasoning and will look forward to joining you weekly for a family dinner."

"Good. Would Tuesday or Wednesday after work be best for you?"

"I would like to come as soon as possible! But either time is fine."

"Then we will plan on seeing you before sundown on Tuesday. Until the espousal, you will not be allowed to be alone with Miriam. Do you have any other questions?" asked Rabbi Talman.

"Yes, sir. Elijah and I were talking last night and realized that while we can certainly support the ladies and care for their needs, we don't know how in the world we are going to be able to finance a wedding for the whole town of Capernaum. I mean, your families are so loved. I imagine it would cost a year's wages to feed that many people."

"Jesse, that's something that will be discussed between you and Miriam during this period. I certainly hope that she would be happy with whatever sized wedding you can provide. You'll find that while we are known to the whole town, we're actually fairly private. My impression is that the girls would all want a relatively small wedding. But I may be wrong. If I am, then we'll deal with it at that point. Right now, it's not something to worry about. Your family would not be able to help?"

"No, sir. I have four older brothers who are running the farm and resent that I was allowed to attend school and escape. Since my parents have passed, I have not returned. I am certain that my brothers would not be willing or able to help me."

"It's getting late, and we both have work tomorrow. Are we in agreement about the espousal date?"

"Yes, sir, and I will enjoy seeing you and your family on Tuesday afternoon. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Elijah had waited up for Jesse and was eager to hear his news. "So did you discuss the prohibitive cost of the weddings?"

"Yes, and he said that it would be up to each couple to decide what they wanted. He suspected that both girls would want small, private weddings. But women can surprise you, so he said it was something we would have to discuss before the espousal period and come up with our own solutions."

"Okay, that sounds fair. I just don't want the rabbis to think that I can host a week long party for the whole town."

“I think we better start saving as much as we can, though. I may have to sell this house to finance the wedding.”

“Let’s get some sleep and we’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

## Chapter 14

Jesse kept busy on Monday and Tuesday. He talked with Mr. Immer's purchasers and went over all the merchandise he wanted them to purchase for him on a regular basis. Then Rabbi Talman sent over two different accountants for him to interview. He decided on Amos, a middle-aged gentleman who seemed confident that he could figure out a way to keep up with inventory. He was prepared to start work immediately and Jesse asked him to start stocking the shelves in the warehouse. The purchasers had already delivered several loads of goods that needed to be unpacked. The shelves were not complete in the front, but the carpenters hoped to be finished by the end of the week. They had already mounted the sign out front that read: Westside Mercantile Store. Jesse felt his dream had come true but knew that there was still unfinished business with Mr. Immer concerning the house.

On Tuesday afternoon, Jesse left work a few minutes early and followed Elijah's directions to Rabbi Talman's house. He was so nervous he could hardly breathe, but hoped that they wouldn't notice. Rabbi Talman greeted him and introduced him to his wife, Sarah, and his daughter, Miriam. Jesse couldn't quit smiling and tried to focus on what Rabbi Talman was saying.

They sat and talked together in the living room. Jesse was surprised that the ladies were included in the conversation. That was not what he expected, but he thoroughly enjoyed hearing Miriam's voice. When they moved to the table, Miriam was seated beside him, and he was amazed at the lively conversation. They all made him feel comfortable as they asked how the new Mercantile Store was coming. He didn't want to monopolize the conversation, so he asked Rabbi Talman how many boys he was teaching this year at the school. "Your class was my favorite. I think it really encouraged me to save up my money for the apprenticeship with Mr. Immer."

Rabbi Talman asked if he had settled the purchase of the house and Jesse told him where that stood. The ladies wanted to know the details and Jesse told them his plans to add additional rooms and a well. He was amazed at how comfortable he felt in their home. Rabbi Talman invited Jesse to the rooftop to talk and see if he had any questions. They visited for a few minutes and then both admitted that it was getting late, and they needed to be prepared for work in the morning.

Jesse walked home with his heart singing praises to Jehovah. He had never met a woman who was allowed to speak freely. He definitely wanted to know more. He would talk with Elijah about it tomorrow night.

On Wednesday afternoon, Mr. Immer arrived and was pleased as he walked through the warehouse and met Amos. He invited Jesse to walk out back with him. "Jesse, you were entirely correct about the

price of the house. I've talked with several men who deal with houses, and they all agree that I was not being fair. So, here's my new price."

"Okay. That's more in line with what I was thinking. But you had indicated to me that I should be compensated in some way for the year that I was not paid as an apprentice graduate. You had indicated that you were willing to let me live in this house rent free for a year. Would you be willing to knock off that amount from the price of the house?"

"You are one tough businessman."

"You taught me well, sir. I do not intend to cheat you in any way, but every penny counts as I save up for my wedding."

"So, congratulations are in order?"

"The espousal will need to be delayed for three months so that I can focus on getting the store up and running, but yes, her father has pledged her to me."

"Jesse, if I can borrow your accountant for a few minutes, I think that we may be able to come to an agreement today instead of putting this off any longer."

"Certainly. I will get him for you." Jesse ran to the warehouse and called to Amos. Mr. Immer asked Amos to witness the property lines and make sure that they were in agreement on what Jesse was purchasing. Jesse realized that once again he had made a stupid mistake by not getting that clarified first. He ran into the store to grab some stakes and a hammer to mark each corner. The property line would be fairly close to the front of the house in order to allow ox carts to be driven into the warehouse for loading and unloading. But all the property behind the house would be included in the purchase. There was enough room to expand the house and the courtyard, a good-sized backyard, and enough room to plant a garden. Then there was a large, wooded area which would provide firewood and more room to expand in the future. When they had made a complete circle of the property, Mr. Immer named his price, which was the earlier offered price with a sizeable reduction for the missed salary compensation. It sounded fair to Jesse, and he agreed to it. He probably had enough silver saved up to be able to purchase it immediately. And he asked when and where he would like to exchange the money. Mr. Immer asked if he and Amos would meet him at the original Mercantile Store tomorrow and said he would assemble five additional men to witness the transaction.

"Thank you, Mr. Immer. We'll see you at noon tomorrow at the Mercantile Store. And Mr. Immer, I have one other question. Amos and I have not been paid for last week's work. I was wondering when you could take care of that? Amos is a good man, and I don't want to lose him before we get started."

"I thought you had received money from the sale of the pottery wheels."

"Yes, sir. That has all been used to pay the carpenters. Now I will need more silver to pay them when they finish this week."

"I need to go right now. You and Amos let me know the amount you need for the carpenters, and I will take care of that and your salaries tomorrow. I have already paid the purchasers for the goods they have delivered. Is there anything else?"

"No, sir. And thank you, sir. We'll see you tomorrow. Shalom."  
"Shalom."

Jesse could hardly wait to get home. He needed to count his savings and see if he really could afford to purchase the house. He was angry at himself for not knowing the exact amount he had. But there was no changing that now. He was fairly certain that Zachary would help him out if he was a little short, but he didn't want to stress their friendship if at all possible. He hurried home and told Tobias to hold off dinner for a few minutes. He told him and Elijah the plan and went to his room to find his savings. He counted each piece of silver carefully. Then he counted them again. He was definitely short. He came out of his room and into the preparation area. Tobias watched as Jesse counted out the silver that was to be used for this week's household supplies and food. He took all of it to his room and counted it all again. Finally, he told Tobias to serve dinner. "What's wrong, my friend? Are you short?" asked Elijah.

"Unfortunately, yes. I am supposed to be a great steward and I made the ultimate mistake. I offered an amount I cannot pay."

"How much are you short? Maybe I could help. After all, I have been living here and eating for free. How much do you need? I only have one week's pay, but maybe it would help," offered Elijah.

"I am short by five denarii. I thought I had enough, but I don't. Oh, hold it. Mr. Immer is supposed to pay me for last week. I assume he will bring it. But if he doesn't, I could lose the house."

"Then I will give you the five denarii and you will have it available if he doesn't pay you. But if he does, then we don't have to do without food. I suggest that we enjoy our dinner and then talk about a plan."

"Thank you, my friend. Sometimes I wonder if I can juggle all these things. So much is happening all at once."

"Tell me about your dinner with Miriam," prompted Elijah.

Now, Jesse was smiling and ready to celebrate.



Jesse met Amos at the store and soon the carpenters were hard at work in the front of the store. An office for Amos had been added and all that remained were the shelves and the displays. *If the carpenters finished today, then Amos and I could set up the displays in the front on Friday and we could actually open on Sunday.* Jesse sighed contentedly.

Just before noon, Jesse and Amos walked to the old Mercantile Store and met with Mr. Immer and the men he had selected as witnesses. Jesse slipped the house key to Mr. Immer since he knew he would need it to formally complete the transaction. Mr. Immer



named his amount in front of the witnesses and described the property that he was selling. Jesse agreed and counted out the silver. He was grateful for Elijah loaning him the five denarii since Mr. Immer didn't offer to pay him. Mr. Immer counted the money and handed Jesse the key. Jesse thanked the witnesses for their time and thanked Mr. Immer for the house. As he turned to walk away, Amos spoke to Mr. Immer, and reminded him that he and Jesse had not been paid for last week's work and the carpenters would expect to be paid whenever they finished — which could possibly be today. Mr. Immer quickly paid them from his bag of silver coins. He said he would see them on Friday.

When Jesse and Amos returned to the Westside Store, the carpenters were cleaning up and were ready for his final approval. Jesse looked over all their work and asked them if they would be available to add an addition to his house in about a month. The carpenter wanted to look it over. Jesse showed him the property but admitted that he had no idea what he wanted added. They agreed to talk again later, but the carpenter suggested that when Jesse had his plan, he should contact the stone masons first to let them lay the floor before the carpenters could start building. He also suggested that Jesse compare the price of building with wood versus building with stone, since stone was more readily available in Capernaum. Jesse thanked him and assured him he would be in touch soon. He wondered if he would be allowed to talk with Miriam about what she might prefer before the espousal.

On Friday, Mr. Immer stopped by and looked around with approval at the way Jesse had designed the store. He said that he would stop by on Sunday to see how the first day was going but felt that it would be a great success. He left a supply of silver with Amos to take care of their pay and operating expenses for the first month and instructed Amos to let him know if there were additional start-up expenses. Then he reminded Jesse that he would expect to be paid on the last Friday of each month based on his profits and at the end of each month thereafter. Both Jesse and Amos assured him that the books would be ready for inspection.

After attending synagogue, Jesse and Elijah went to Zachary's to spend the afternoon. They discussed several ideas on how to save money for the upcoming weddings. It was finally decided that Elijah would move his mat and few belongings into the warehouse of the new Mercantile Store and not pay rent. If asked, he was serving as a night watchman in exchange for a place to stay. Jesse would rent out his current house until closer to Elijah's wedding. That would bring in additional income. Then Elijah would probably want to rent it from him for Hava in about a year. Everyone was excited for Jesse's big opening day tomorrow and Zachary promised to walk over sometime to see the new store.



Hebrew School was back in session, and they were starting off their second week on Sunday. Rabbi Joel had completed reading a section from Leviticus and the students had just been sent to their respective classes when there was a knock on the door. All the rabbis looked at each other and took a deep breath. They were all anticipating a visit from the Sanhedrin and were glad that Talman was not present. Rabbi Joel opened the door and welcomed the stranger into the room. He could tell immediately from the robe that their suspicion was correct. "I am Rabbi Meshullum. I have been assigned by the High Priest as your representative to the Sanhedrin."

"Of course," said Rabbi Joel. "Please come in. You are welcome to look around. We have just completed our group time and the students have moved to their individual classes. I am Rabbi Joel, the headmaster." He led Rabbi Meshullum to his class. "Class, this is Rabbi Meshullum. Abram, please tell the rabbi what we accomplish in this class."

"Sir, we are the oldest class of students. Our focus is on interpretation. This morning, we are studying the fourth chapter of Leviticus."

"Thank you, Abram. Class, please prepare your interpretation and I will return shortly." He took the rabbi to Jairus' class.

"This is Ruler Jairus. His class is younger, but they are looking at the same text."

"We discuss the culture and time period so that the students will be prepared to interpret the Scripture properly. We do beginning interpretation, and include background information and surrounding context so they have a clearer picture."

"Thank you, Ruler Jairus. I heard your message yesterday at the synagogue. You are a good teacher and make it easy for the people to follow The Law and The Prophets."

"Thank you, sir," replied Ruler Jairus realizing that he was glad that he had not mentioned Jesus.

Rabbi Joel led him into Rabbi Elijah's area. "Rabbi Elijah teaches our youngest students. What are you covering today, Rabbi Elijah?"

"We are still learning the basic Hebrew letters, but this week, we are beginning to put the letters together to form words. We are especially looking at the words found in our text for today. The words we are studying are: bull, lamb, blood, head, and sin."

"I would like to speak privately with two of your older students," stated Rabbi Meshullum.

"Certainly." Rabbi Joel led him back to his class and told him to pick whomever he desired.

Rabbi Meshullum selected two boys and they walked outside to the courtyard. Rabbi Joel was grateful that he picked strict Jewish boys and not some of the boys like Samuel that might cause

problems. He tried to continue teaching his class but found that he had a hard time concentrating.

When Rabbi Meshullum allowed the boys to return to their classes, Rabbi Joel asked if there was any more information that he needed. "Yes," he said, "I thought Talman taught here. Where would I find him?"

"Talman is not a rabbi. He does teach a class here encouraging the older boys to apply The Law and The Prophets to their future businesses and encouraging them to apply for apprenticeships and other opportunities."

"So, he is not here at the present?"

"No, he only teaches a couple of days per week in the afternoons and the days vary depending on his availability."

"I see. So, I guess I will find him at his bank," said Rabbi Meshullum.

"I would assume, sir," said Rabbi Joel, realizing that there was nothing more he could do to protect Talman.

"Good day, sir. And keep up the good work. Shalom."

"Shalom," said Rabbi Joel as he quickly called Jairus and Elijah to him. "He's headed to Talman's bank. We need to be praying for Talman."

"Should we send him word?" asked Jairus.

"No, I think it is too late," said Joel. "Let's just pray." The three men moved out to the courtyard and bowed their heads to ask Jehovah's protection over Talman and his family during this time of crisis.



At the bank, when Talman answered the door to his office, he discovered Meshullum standing in the doorway. "May I come in?"

Talman took a deep breath and said, "Certainly. You are always welcome, my friend."

Meshullum shut the door behind him and asked, "Is it safe to talk here or should we go elsewhere?"

"It should be safe with the door closed." Talman was amazed at the peace that he felt flooding through his body. He had known that this day would come, and he had prayed that Jehovah would give him wisdom and strength for whatever happened.

"We have missed you on the Council," Meshullum began. Talman just sat quietly. "I know that you were just doing your job. But I want you to know that things have blown over and there is no longer a warrant for your arrest. I was told to simply take over your job of checking the school and synagogue for compliance to the Sanhedrin's rules. I asked if I should bring you back with me and I was told that the warrant had been destroyed. I just wanted you to know so you wouldn't be worried about it."

Talman breathed a sigh of relief. "That is a relief to me and will be for my family. Thank you for letting me know, but I will not be returning to Jerusalem."

"Not even for the holy days?"

"No, I'm afraid I would not feel safe. Too much trust has been broken, and I will worship here with my family. I served the Council for almost ten years, and I feel I have done my duty. Now you will get to make that lovely trip from Jerusalem every three months. I'm sorry."

"I just want you to know that since I did not see you at the school, I will not include you in my report. Now that I know that you only teach in the afternoons, I will make sure to visit in the mornings."

"I assure you, both the school and the synagogue are abiding by Sanhedrin rules. No one, including myself, is teaching anything subversive."

"Good. Let's keep it that way so I won't have to deal with problems." He stood to leave and then added, "You were interested in where the missing money was spent. It was apparently used to keep the Roman cohort quiet, but obviously it didn't work. They must have told, and Jesus' apostles have preached it all over the city. I think that's why your arrest warrant was revoked. Everyone in Jerusalem knows that the High Priest tried to cover up Jesus' resurrection. It was good to see you again, Talman. You are a good man, and it is our loss that you are no longer on the Council. I'll be back here in approximately three months. Today, I need to travel to Tiberius. Shalom."

"Shalom," said Talman. Once Meshullum was gone, Talman fell to his knees in his office and praised Jehovah for guiding him to keep the school and synagogue compliant. He praised Jehovah that the warrant for his arrest had been revoked. He knew that it wasn't the Roman cohort that had told — it was his telling John. That had given the apostles the assurance they needed to boldly proclaim that the cohort had been paid off to dispute the resurrection. Jehovah was certainly into details, and he praised Him. He closed up his office and walked toward the school, then changed his mind and walked home to tell Sarah. It would take a load off her mind, and he would go to the school later.



"Talman, where have you been? We were worried," cried Jairus when Talman arrived just as school was being let out.

"Everything is fine. We'll talk later." They said shalom to the remaining students and focused on getting them out the door for the day. Once the school was emptied, the four men gathered in Joel's classroom and pulled the benches together.

"We were afraid you would be arrested," said Jairus.

"Then, when you didn't come, we were certain that it had happened," added Joel.

“Well, I have very good news. Meshullum was a good friend of mine on the Council and I’m glad he’s the one assigned to do our supervising,” said Talman. “It was amazing, but I felt total peace the whole time I was talking with him.”

“So, he’s just going to ignore the arrest warrant?” asked Jairus.

“No. There is no arrest warrant. Apparently, when I told John where the money had gone, he and the other apostles began telling everyone. The Council thought it was the Roman cohort who had not kept their mouths shut. The Council decided that there was no longer a reason to arrest me. The whole purpose of my arrest was to keep the information secret. So, my arrest warrant has been revoked and I’m a free man,” said Talman. All the men expressed their relief, and Talman told them that he was late to school because he felt led to tell Sarah first. They agreed that she should hear first. “The other good news is that Meshullum was very pleased that there was nothing subversive to report to the Sanhedrin, as everyone seems to be complying with the Sanhedrin’s rules. He thanked me for that and begged me to keep it that way so that he wouldn’t have to report otherwise. He’ll be back every three months to check on us.”

“He took Michael and Jonathan outside to the courtyard to talk privately. I was glad that we had complied with the rules because that was all they could have told him,” said Joel.

“Oh, Meshullum also said that he would make sure and check on the school in the mornings so that his report would not mention my class. He didn’t want to upset any Sanhedrin members that might still hold a grudge against me. And since I am not a rabbi, he saw no need to include that I was teaching here.”

“Sounds like a nice guy. Is he a follower of Jesus?” asked Elijah.

“I’m not sure. I know we discussed it a few years ago, and then it just became too dangerous to talk about. I don’t know which way he’s leaning. But he certainly seemed to want to make us look good on the report.”

“Where is he spending the night?”

“He’s on his way to Tiberius and won’t be back for three months. I wanted to walk over to Jesse’s Mercantile Store and see how his first day was going. Anyone want to walk with me?” asked Talman.

“Sure.” All four men walked over to the new Westside Mercantile Store and discovered that there was indeed a crowd. Jesse and Amos were taking orders as quickly as they could and there was still a line of people waiting. Jesse quickly waved at the rabbis and indicated that he would get to them as soon as possible. They waved back and said they would return tomorrow.

That night, Jesse asked Elijah if he could recommend any students who would be able to help him after school. Elijah said that Talman was the best man to ask, since he worked with the older students and prepared them for jobs. Elijah reported that the school had been inspected by the new Sanhedrin supervisor and it had passed without any problems. Tobias had finished cleaning the new home and would begin moving their things tomorrow. Jesse asked him

to focus on packing and then he would be available to help move on Wednesday.

Jesse felt a lot more comfortable walking to Rabbi Talman's house on Tuesday afternoon. He could report that the house had been purchased and the store was doing well. There were almost as many customers today as there had been the last two days. He remembered to ask what everyone thought of doing a wood addition or a stone one. He primarily wanted Miriam's input, but they all discussed the pros and cons and it felt good to discuss their future together, even though he wasn't allowed to call it that. Everyone seemed to agree that while stone was cheaper and probably more permanent, the wood provided more warmth from the cold and dampness and made nicer sleeping areas. He found out that Miriam loved fireplaces, though. So, he was trying to figure out how to add one to the living area. He wanted to tell them about his idea for a well, but decided to wait until he had some definite answers.

Jesse told Talman that if the store continued to attract this many customers, he needed to look into hiring someone to help him as a clerk or as an apprentice. If he knew of any boys who were interested, he would be happy to talk with them. But together, they decided to wait and see how busy the store was in one week. He didn't want to hire someone and then have to let them go if the customers dropped off. He told Miriam's family that he would be moving into the new home tomorrow night even though it still needed the new rooms added.

## Chapter 15

Jesse walked home feeling that it had been a successful visit with Miriam's family. He walked quickly and began to pack his room in preparation for tomorrow's move. He and Elijah talked some about the visit, but both were exhausted after a long day.

On Wednesday morning, Jesse took some boxes and bags to the new house as he headed to another busy day at the store. Tobias made multiple trips carrying wooden boxes to the new house. Once school was out, Elijah began moving his things into the warehouse and then helping Tobias. Tobias stopped late in the afternoon and prepared a quick dinner. When Jesse finished his fourth busy day at the Westside Mercantile Store, he simply walked out the back door of the store and into his new home. The three men ate together and reviewed their day. Elijah had set up the back corner of the warehouse for his sleeping mat. He had lined up some large wooden crates to block off the area and set his lamp on a small table that Tobias had provided from the old house. It wasn't fancy, but he could save his rent money for the upcoming marriage and espousal gifts.

On Thursday night, Tobias announced that he would have the old house completely emptied and clean by the Sabbath so that Jesse could rent it out. Jesse expressed that that was going to be difficult because he couldn't leave the store to show property. He needed to wait until he could hire a clerk. Elijah offered, "Why don't I work as your clerk for a couple of hours every afternoon? You can show property during those hours and Amos can keep me straight and take care of anything that comes up. Would that be a fair exchange for my food?"

"Actually, it would be a lifesaver. Not the money part — but right now I can't leave the store for anything and there's several important things that I need to take care of besides just showing property."

So, on Friday, Elijah reported to the store just as soon as school was out. He had no problem helping the people with their needs and found that he really enjoyed it. After being with the little boys all day, it was refreshing to be with adults. During those two hours, Jesse was able to rent out his house and some others that were available. Now Jesse had a steady income to start adding on to the new house and digging the well. He'd have to wait for Sunday, but he wanted to talk with the other shop owners around him and discuss the well.

Elijah spent his Sabbath dinner with the rabbis and their families. Everyone knew now that his primary interest was Hava. However, he was still not allowed to be alone with her and everyone discussed everything together. Elijah looked forward to the day they could have private conversations. It wouldn't be long.



The next week seemed to settle into a better routine for Jesse. He and Amos would work until midafternoon keeping the Westside Mercantile Store running, then Elijah would join them about the ninth hour and work until closing time while Jesse took care of business outside the store. He promised to talk with Rabbi Talman about securing a clerk to help out full time because Amos wasn't finding time to keep his accounting or inventory. There was a steady stream of customers.

On Monday afternoon, Jesse finally found time to talk with the owners of the Candle Shop and the Textile Shop across the street. He asked them about the empty lot between their two stores and explained his interest in purchasing it and digging a well. Since the well would attract customers for all three stores, he was wondering if they would share the cost of digging the well. The owners were interested and promised to give him an answer by the end of the week.

On Tuesday, Jesse was looking forward to reporting his idea to Rabbi Talman and his family. It would make living in the house so much easier for Miriam and he hoped she would be pleased. "Rabbi Talman, I need to hire a full-time clerk. Is there someone you could recommend for that position? I just need someone to wait on customers."

"Let me think about it. Usually, you would hire a younger boy who could work after school hours for a while before moving him into a full-time position. But it sounds like you need someone full time immediately."

"I could come and help you," suggested Miriam.

"Yeah, right," said her dad. "That's not going to happen."

"I know. But it would be a good solution. I think a woman would make a great salesperson," declared Miriam.

"I'm sure she would, and I know it would attract customers! But I agree with your dad, it's not going to happen," said Jesse, laughing.

"Don't laugh. There are lots of Roman businesswomen who run their own shops. Someday, you'll see, we girls can do more than just carry children and run your houses."

"What kind of shop would you have, Miriam?" asked Jesse.

She only thought a minute before she answered, "A music shop. I would sell musical instruments and teach people to play them."

"I hope you'll always enjoy music. Sometimes, when it becomes a job to make money, it becomes less enjoyable or fun, if you know what I mean," volunteered Jesse.

"I guess so. I enjoy playing and teaching to make people happy," agreed Miriam. "It's what I feel that Jehovah has called me to do."



Jesse's next statement would have been about her teaching their children — but he caught himself and stopped his mouth just in time. "What instruments do you play?" asked Jesse instead.

"I primarily sing and let Ariel and Hava play because they are better than I am. But I can play the lute and the harp, and I would love to learn to play all kinds of instruments."

"Does Jesse know how you girls work with the preschoolers of Capernaum?"

"No. Probably not. We teach a music class for little ones twice a week and they all seem to enjoy it. I don't play an instrument then because someone has to supervise the boys and girls and I love doing it. I usually lead the singing and let the other girls play their instruments."

"So, you are good with children," stated Jesse.

"I love little ones," said Miriam passionately.

"I'll look into finding you someone to help you out at the store, Jesse," said Talman abruptly and Jesse realized that the talk had turned a little personal. *It's harder than I anticipated to keep clear of loaded topics.*

"Yes, sir. I probably need to be going. These are really busy days for me. Thanks for dinner. Shalom."

"Shalom," they all replied.



On Sunday of the next week, after spending the Sabbath day with Elijah and Jesse, Zachary was at the Processing Plant supervising the cleaning of some large vats. One of Mr. Zebedee's servants approached him. "Mr. Zachary, Master Zebedee said that you should come to his house as soon as possible because Master James and Master John have arrived from Jerusalem."

"Okay. Tell them that I will be there shortly." He had never been summoned to their house and he hoped that it didn't mean bad news. He quickly told Malachi, his foreman, that he would be at Mr. Zebedee's home if needed. It wasn't far from the plant, but was mostly uphill from the beach, so he was out of breath by the time he arrived. He was invited into the back courtyard and quickly recognized his cousins who all worked at the Fish Shop owned by Uncle Zebedee. He suddenly realized that Saul might be invited, too, and didn't know whether he wanted to stay or not. He took a seat on a bench near the back of the courtyard and tried to hide. He kept searching to see who all was present. It appeared to just be Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome's four sons and their children. He seemed to be the only one outside the immediate family and he began to wonder why he was invited. He stood to greet Uncle Zebedee when he offered him some wine. "Zachary, I'm glad you came. James and John said that they wanted to give us an update on what has been happening in Jerusalem since they were here last. We thought you would want to

hear. I asked about your dad, and they assured me that he and Peter are fine — just very, very busy.”

“That’s good to hear,” agreed Zachary. “And thank you for inviting me. I do want to hear the update.” Now Zachary could breathe but he still felt slightly uncomfortable, because he really hadn’t been a part of this family except through work. He knew Jaden, Zebedee’s oldest son, was the head of the fishing crew. And he knew Jonas, because he was steward over the ship building operations. But he’d never been around James and John. They had been fishermen and then they left to follow Jesus at the same time as his dad. Jaden sat down near Zachary and asked how he was doing. They visited awhile and Zachary asked, “So, what’s planned for tonight?”

“It’s just our family getting together. Dinner will be served shortly and then James and John will share with us what’s happening with Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem. Last time they were here, they met Jesus for breakfast on the beach and they were really excited about His resurrection. You know about all that, right?”

“Just what my dad told me before he left.”

“So, you are as current as the rest of us. I’m eager to hear what the news is tonight but I’ve slept all day and it’s past my dinner hour. I certainly hope they serve dinner soon,” said Jaden.

“Well, I’ve worked all day and I’m definitely ready for food,” said Zachary. Zebedee was trying to quiet everyone for the prayer of blessing. He led the prayer and then invited the men to fill their plates. Zachary found a place at a table with the other men. When dinner ended, Zachary was surprised that the women and children stayed in the courtyard to hear the report.

James and John stood so that everyone could hear. “The last time we were here,” began James, “we were eating breakfast with Jesus. A lot has happened since then and we want to share that with you tonight. From here, we traveled with my family and the rest of the apostles back toward Jerusalem. We went to Bethany to spend the night as was our custom. Jesus met us there and we spent two days and a night camping out and receiving His instructions. One of the things He did that day was to remind us to wait in Jerusalem until He sent the Holy Spirit to guide us. He commanded us to take the good news to everyone and reminded us that He would never leave us as orphans. He assured us that the Holy Spirit would always be with us. Then He began to speak to each one of us individually. When Jesus had finished speaking to everyone, He began to rise up into the sky. I can’t explain it — but He just floated up and up until we couldn’t see Him anymore. Then we noticed two men standing with us. Their robes were whiter than white and I’m certain that they were angels. They said that when Jesus came again, it would be in the same way that He just left — on the clouds. After they left, we worshipped there and then decided to go on to Jerusalem as He had commanded. We spent the next ten days in prayer and worshipping at the temple. He had told us to wait for the Holy Spirit, but we didn’t really know what that would look like or when it would happen.

“On Shavuot, all the apostles and followers of Jesus met at the same room where we had celebrated the Seder with Jesus. There were over 100 of us there. We were just sitting on the floor singing songs of worship when suddenly there was a great wind blowing inside the room. It was strange, but got stranger. We could see flames of fire touching everyone on the head, but it didn’t burn us. We just suddenly felt an incredible power. I felt like I was alive for the first time. I felt that Jesus was inside of me and telling me to go and preach out in the streets and not be afraid of the Jewish leadership.” James had tears running down his cheeks as he remembered. He sat down to take a break and John began to speak.

“I saw and felt everything that James has told you and I also felt this incredible life inside of me. It was unlike anything I had ever felt. The Psalms say that with my Jehovah I can leap over a wall — and that’s the way I felt. I was filled with power and such a desire to get outside that room and preach the New Way to anyone who would listen. Suddenly, everyone was rushing toward the doors. It wasn’t something we talked about or planned. It just happened. It was the day of Pentecost, and the streets were filled. It was about midmorning, and many people were headed to the temple for Shavuot. Peter began to boldly preach. He stood just outside the temple gates and began to preach about how the Jewish leadership had crucified the Lamb of God. He called for all to repent and accept Him as their Messiah because He was Emmanuel, God with us. This power inside of us was amazing. But that’s not all. Most of you have been to Jerusalem during the festivals, and you know that Jews from all over the world come. All of a sudden, this power within me began to speak a language that I had never heard before or learned. I was speaking to a group of people from Syria. I simply repeated what Peter was preaching to them. But I was apparently speaking — or they were hearing — Syrian. It was happening all over Jerusalem. Every nation and every tongue heard the good news in their own language. Over 3,000 men and women asked Jesus to be their Messiah. It was an incredible day. James, are you ready to talk again?”

“Sure. That day was incredible, but what happened next is equally extraordinary. Groups began to form all over Jerusalem. They met in homes and encouraged one another to live out Jesus’ teachings. They shared meals and spent as much time together as they could. We apostles began to teach at the temple each day out on the courtyard steps just like Jesus did. Every day hundreds would pray and ask Jesus to be their Messiah. We just kept preaching the same message over and over telling them that Jesus loved them, died for them, and desired to put them in a right relationship with Jehovah. Each time someone would invite Jesus to be their Messiah, they would be filled with this incredible peace and energy from the Holy Spirit. We could see them just transformed with joy. It was amazing.”

John added, “We also were going from house group to house group to teach them everything that we knew about Jesus, to answer questions, and just to serve them however we could. So, that’s what

we've been doing for the past several months. I'm sorry we haven't been able to get back here, but we came as soon as we could get away. We are actually making a circle throughout Galilee to preach this message and let the followers of Jesus know the update," finished John.

"So that's our update," added James.

Zebedee spoke quietly but firmly. "I am thrilled to hear your report, but are you saying that the Holy Spirit is available to all followers of Jesus? Or is He only available to the apostles?"

"Dad, that's what we came here to tell you. To tell everyone. Jesus died to pay for our sins. He's the Messiah," said John.

"I know that. But what is this about the Holy Spirit? I have never heard that part," said Zebedee.

"On the night of the Seder meal before Jesus was crucified, He said that He was sending the Holy Spirit to guide us the same way He was guided. He said that everything He did was led by Jehovah's Spirit inside of Him. We thought it would only be for the apostles, but we were wrong. Once a person, any person, asks Jesus to be their Messiah, then the Holy Spirit comes in and begins to guide their life and gives them the same power that He gave to Jesus," explained James.

"I have believed for a long time that Jesus was the Messiah, but I have not received the Holy Spirit. Why? Is it only for a select few? Am I doing something wrong?" asked Zebedee.

"I don't know how to explain it. All I know is that when the people in Jerusalem asked Jesus to be their Messiah, the Holy Spirit came into them. But when we visit places where people have already accepted Him as their Messiah, we have to tell them to ask again. I think maybe you asked Jesus to be your Messiah before the Holy Spirit was available. So, maybe, you just need to pray and ask again. I can't explain it," said John.

Zebedee immediately fell to his knees and loudly prayed, "Jehovah, You know my heart. I have accepted Your Son Jesus as my Messiah, as the payment for my sins. I'm asking You to send the Holy Spirit into my life to guide me and empower me to do Your work. Help me to be obedient to You. In Jesus' name I pray."

Suddenly, everyone could see the difference in Zebedee as his face began to glow with joy and peace. He began to worship and praise Jehovah and thank Him for His presence. All around the courtyard, men and women began to pray and ask Jehovah to send His Holy Spirit into their lives. Zachary knew that this was the missing piece that he had been looking for. He got on his knees and confessed that he believed that Jesus had died for him and had paid for all his sin. He asked to be filled with the Holy Spirit and promised to obey. He knew without a shadow of a doubt that something changed deep inside of him. He felt different. He felt stronger and more confident. He didn't feel alone. James and John stayed and answered questions for all those who wanted to talk with them, but Zachary said goodnight

and thanked Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome for inviting him, then slipped away. He wanted to be alone.

He slowly walked back toward his house but ended up walking along the beach. He knew it wasn't safe to be out at night alone, but he didn't care. He just wanted to worship. At times he kneeled in the sand and felt Jehovah's presence in a way that he had never experienced. He felt like a new man, somehow transformed. He finally walked back to his house and fell asleep. Morning came quickly, but the feeling was still there. He was overwhelmed with Jehovah's presence. He knew he had to go to work, but all day long, he felt Jehovah's Spirit within him — speaking to him and reassuring him that he was on the right track. He felt he was living in two different worlds — going through the motions of work, but really existing in a spiritual realm that he could not explain.

That night, he shared with Ira what had happened. Ira also believed that Jesus was the Messiah but said that he had not received the Holy Spirit. He asked if he could pray privately, and Zachary assured him that would be okay. Later the two men hugged as fellow followers of Jesus. They didn't know where this would lead, but they knew that they were changed men.



On Tuesday, Zachary called all his workers together for a meeting and shared with them what he had learned about Jesus being the Messiah and that they could pray and ask the Holy Spirit to come into their lives. Some of them prayed right there and others thanked him and left the meeting unchanged. He assured them that it was their choice and not a requirement for working for him. He just wanted everyone to know about the peace and joy that he was experiencing, and they could readily see the change in him. He could hardly wait for the Sabbath so that he could share it with Jesse and Elijah. Each day was filled with joy, and he often found himself humming bits and pieces of Psalms that he remembered from Hebrew School.



After work on Tuesday, Jesse visited with Talman, Sarah, and Miriam. How he treasured these nights, but with each visit, he wanted to ask more and more questions about Miriam. He wanted to learn everything he could about her. Yet, he was supposed to keep it all neutral. Tonight, Elijah's and Hava's espousal was the center of the conversation. There was very little that he or Miriam could contribute that didn't get them into trouble with her parents. It was like walking on eggshells and both of them struggled to find neutral subjects.

Finally, the conversation turned to work and Talman said that he had found a couple of men who were interested in talking to him about becoming clerks. "I wonder if I should hire both of them. It certainly has been busy lately, and then Amos could do his job instead of waiting on customers."

"It might be a good idea if you have that many customers. What you don't want is two workers goofing off with nothing to do."

"Oh, I have plenty for them to do. The warehouse is a mess because no one has time to keep it organized. I could assign one to the store and one to the warehouse in addition to waiting on customers. That should keep them both busy. Thank you, sir, for all your help. But I need to be going. I assume that I will see all three of you at Rabbi Elijah's espousal on Friday. I will look forward to that. Thank you for a lovely evening. Shalom."

"Shalom."

*Whew! That was a tough one. I thought we'd never find a safe subject. Guess I should stick to work topics.*

## Chapter 16

A few minutes before the tenth hour on Friday, Zachary and Jesse helped Elijah carry some boxes to the school for the espousal. Elijah was grateful that he had been allowed to bring his two friends since he had no family to represent him. The school was empty, so they had time to arrange the boxes the way Elijah wanted them, and they took their seats in the room that had been set up for the ceremony. It was only a few minutes before the other three rabbis and their families arrived. They took their seats on the opposite side. Ruler Jairus asked Elijah to introduce his friends then asked Rabbi Joel to introduce his guests. Jesse was asked to present Rabbi Elijah. He told about his growing up on a farm in Nain and about his brother and sister and nieces. He told about the sacrifices they had made so that he could study under a retired scribe in Nain since there was no Hebrew School. Zachary then stood and told about Elijah studying under Nicodemus in Jerusalem and being invited to join the school in Capernaum. "Elijah accepted Jesus as his Messiah at Shavuot and is trying to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I believe that that has prepared him to be the best possible husband."

Ruler Jairus asked Rabbi Joel to present Hava. Joel stood and told about her friendship with the other two girls and how they had grown and become loving, caring, giving young ladies. He stated that Hava enjoyed her music but had also been trained well to run a household. "She will be an excellent wife and mother just as she has been a friend to all. She, too, has accepted Jesus as her Messiah."

Ruler Jairus asked if Rabbi Elijah had brought gifts to show his intentions, and he stood to present them. First, he gave Rabbi Joel a stack of papyrus and a supply of ink. Rabbi Joel responded appreciatively. Then Elijah presented Mrs. Elizabeth with a bag of beautiful thread. He said that he knew she would want to design her own robe, but he wanted her to know that he noticed that pink was her favorite color. She agreed and exclaimed over the beautiful thread that was a pale pink with flecks of a darker pink interwoven in it. It would make a beautiful robe. Then he turned to Hava. "I present you with a skillet to represent the meals we will share together as man and wife." Hava smiled and accepted the skillet. She was a little surprised that it was not terribly romantic or original. She would have thought he would do better than this. But she smiled.

"And I have brought you some thread to weave into a robe because I know that both you and your mother like to weave. I thought that blue was your favorite color. I hope I'm right." Hava peeked in the bag and expressed her joy at the beautiful colors. There were twenty skeins of yarn, but there were at least ten different shades of blue. She could imagine a beautiful robe. He was glad that he had made her happy but could hardly wait to give her his final gift. "And finally, I brought you my mother's lyre. It was stored at my brother's house, and

he agreed that you should have it. My mother used to play it for me when I was very little. I hope you enjoy it.” Now tears ran down Hava’s face as she received the lyre and stroked the beautiful wood. She plucked the strings and assured Elijah that she loved it and would soon have it tuned perfectly. “I know you will. I can’t wait to hear you play it.”

Ruler Jairus reminded the couple that they were now espoused and could proceed with plans for a wedding in the future. Then Rabbi Joel invited everyone to his home for Sabbath dinner to celebrate the espousal.

All the guests helped to put the schoolhouse back into its usual order and then carried the gifts to Rabbi Joel’s house. Jesse walked with Zachary and suspected that he was nervous about meeting everyone. He was surprised to find that Zachary seemed to have his mind elsewhere. “Hey, what’s on your mind? Has this espousal got you thinking of someone special?”

“Huh? Oh, no, I wasn’t thinking about the espousal. I was thinking about a meeting that I went to on Sunday. I’ll tell you about it tomorrow. Let’s enjoy the evening.”

The men were welcomed into Rabbi Joel’s spacious home and Elijah and Hava seemed to be in a world all their own. The other four young people sat with their parents and visited. “Zachary, I don’t remember meeting you. Are you from around here?” asked Elizabeth.

“Yes, ma’am. I’ve lived here all my life and attended Hebrew School under these rabbis. And I traveled with them to Jerusalem this past Passover. I would love to go again if you plan on going,” said Zachary to Ruler Jairus.

“We’ve done it for the past thirteen years and really enjoyed it, but I’m not certain we’ll go this year. It’s always been a special trip for the older boys. Last year was a little unsettling to say the least. I just don’t know how many will want to go this year.”

“Dad and Joel always stayed with a friend of theirs and he’s no longer living in Jerusalem. So, I’m not sure what they would do for the Passover week,” said Ariel.

“They could always camp in the olive grove like we do,” volunteered Jesse.

“That’s a possibility. We’ll just have to wait and see,” said Jairus.

Zachary had been told by both Elijah and Jesse that in this family the women were allowed to speak their minds, so he was not surprised when Miriam spoke up. “What kind of work do you do?”

“I am steward of my uncle’s Fish Processing Plant.”

“Oh, you are Zebedee’s nephew,” said Rachel.

Zachary wished he could think of a subject to divert the attention off of him. Apparently, Elijah and Hava felt the same way and invited the four other young people to take a walk in the yard. “Don’t go far; it’s almost the Sabbath,” called Elizabeth.

Hava showed everyone her garden where she was trying to raise some lilies. There was only one bench and the three girls squeezed



onto it and left the men standing. They talked of the weather and reviewed the ceremony. “Your dad looked scared, Ariel,” said Miriam.

“I don’t think he was scared. I think he was just choked up about you growing up and becoming a wife.”

Hava took Elijah’s hand and squeezed it. “Now we have so much planning and talking to do. I have so many questions.”

“I hope not about me,” said Elijah.

“Of course not. Although I want to learn more and more about you. I just want to get started making plans for the future,” said Hava.

“So, I suppose you’ll be too busy for the rest of us from now on,” said Ariel.

“Of course not. And besides, Elijah has to work during the days.”

“Does that mean that I can visit you more often?” asked Elijah.

“I was thinking we could spend Sabbath days together.”

“Well, we go to the synagogue in the morning, and I usually spend the afternoon with my friends. We’ll have to figure out something so that I can spend time with everyone,” said Elijah, suddenly realizing that his life was forever changed.

Sabbath was announced and Elizabeth lit the candles and Joel said a prayer of blessing especially over Elijah and Hava, but also over their guests. Joel directed the young people to sit together at one table and the parents at the other. He said he didn’t want to divide them into men and ladies because “That’s just not how we operate at this house.” He laughingly said, “And I don’t think we could separate Elijah and Hava anyway. So, please take a seat and we’ll be served shortly.” The three young men were seated across from the young ladies and the conversation lagged for a few minutes while the servants brought the plates.

Everyone enjoyed the meal and the conversation was lively. They had finished eating, but were still sitting around the table when Ariel asked, “Zachary, you said that Elijah was a follower of Jesus, and you also stated that he was obedient to the Holy Spirit. I have a lot of questions about that, and I was wondering if you could explain it any better than Elijah. I never really understood it.”

“Well, I’m not sure I understand it, but I heard the Apostles James and John teaching on Sunday night, and I invited the Holy Spirit to be in complete control of my life. This has been the most amazing week,” said Zachary.

“What do you mean controlling your life? Does He tell you what to do?” asked Hava.

“Yes, He does. I feel Him deep inside of me. I feel His presence always — at least since Sunday. And He’s been directing me all week, sometimes with a thought or feeling deep inside, but I know it’s Him. I’m very excited to get up each morning and see where He will lead me next.”

“That’s amazing,” said Miriam. “My dad has been talking about hearing the Holy Spirit speak to him and guide him in decisions.”

“But is it scriptural?” asked Ariel.

"The Scripture that keeps coming to my mind is found somewhere in Ezekiel. It talks about Jehovah pouring out His Spirit and changing our hearts from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh so that we hear Him and obey Him," said Zachary. He had absolutely no idea where that knowledge came from, and he hoped it was correct.

"Are your dad's scrolls in his office?" Ariel asked.

"Sure, help yourself," said Hava. "I want to see, too."

Both Zachary and Ariel rose from the table and went into Rabbi Joel's office to get the scroll of Ezekiel. When Ariel found it, she pulled it out and they were scanning through it to find the passage when a very loud and angry voice rang out. "ARIAL, GO HOME! GO TO YOUR ROOM AND STAY THERE. Joel, can you provide a servant to escort her?"

"Certainly. But what is going on?" asked Joel.

"I'll handle this!" stated Jairus as he angrily turned to Zachary. "Young man, you have disgraced my daughter and I demand that you leave at once! How dare you insult me in this way. Leave and don't ever approach my daughter in any way in the future!"

"I'm sorry, sir. And I won't, sir. I .... " Then he felt the Spirit tell him to be at peace and to leave quietly. He simply walked out the front door and never looked back.

Zachary walked to his home and greeted Ira. He lay on his mat and wondered how to apologize to Ruler Jairus without making him further upset. He would need to talk with Elijah tomorrow. He hoped that he had not totally ruined the espousal party and was grateful that the dinner was almost over before he had messed everything up. But he felt the Holy Spirit assuring him that He would take care of everything and not to fret. So, he went to sleep trusting.

On Sabbath morning, Zachary walked along the beach and wondered what the day held. He worshipped as the sun rose and returned to his house for breakfast. He felt a deep longing for fellowship with other followers of Jesus. He wondered if Jesse and Elijah would come this afternoon and convinced himself that they probably wouldn't. But soon after noon they both arrived. "I can't stay long, but I wanted to assure you that I am not upset with you. I know that you did nothing wrong," said Elijah.

"What happened after I left?" Zachary asked.

"Everyone tried to pretend nothing had happened and finished their meal. The women and girls left soon afterward, and we men tried to talk some sense into Jairus, but he was too angry to listen. You need to know that he's just upset because his little girl is growing up. Her two friends have already made that step and Jairus wants to keep her for as long as possible. I think it will blow over."

"I'm sorry that it messed up your espousal party. And I'm sorry that I got Ariel in trouble. She doesn't deserve to be treated that way."

"No, she doesn't. I'm sure that Joel and Talman will talk to Jairus about it. But I don't want you worrying about it. It didn't mess up my espousal. But I've got to run. I don't know what's going to happen with

our Sabbath time together, but I've been invited to spend the afternoon and evening with Hava, so, I need to run."

"Thanks for coming. It means a lot to me," said Zachary.

Zachary and Jesse decided to walk along the beach to talk. Jesse asked Zachary what he thought of Miriam. "She seems like a really nice lady. You two will make a great couple. How are the visits going?"

"Well, it's awkward because it seems that everything we mention is about marriage, or children, or the house. It's so hard to have a conversation without stepping on something offensive."

"It will be easier when you are espoused."

"Yeah, but I've still got two months before that will happen. I'm afraid it's going to be a long wait. So, tell me more about your meeting with the Apostles James and John."

"They talked about all the things that had happened with Jesus since the crucifixion. Then they explained about the Holy Spirit. It's totally changed me, and I know it's Scriptural. I remember the quote from Ezekiel about Jehovah sending His Spirit to change our hearts from stone to hearts of flesh so that we could obey Him better. I know it's in there. I just don't know where. That's what Ariel and I were looking for."

"Maybe you should ask Elijah. He'll look it up for you."

"Yeah, I guess. I just don't see that we did anything wrong by looking at the scrolls together."

"It wasn't looking at the scrolls, it was being alone with her in the room. Talman emphasized that I couldn't be alone with Miriam until the espousal."

"Oh. The door was open and I didn't notice that we were the only ones in the room — I was just focused on finding that verse. I'm sorry I messed up, but the Holy Spirit keeps assuring me that He will work it out. So, I'm okay."

"You keep talking about the Holy Spirit. You sound like Rabbi Talman. What did you think of Ariel?" asked Jesse, changing the subject.

"She's a nice lady. You guys had warned me that the ladies could read the Scripture, but I'm not used to being around women who are allowed to speak so freely. It was interesting."

"So, you are not thinking about Ariel as a possible wife," probed Jesse.

"Why does everyone think I need a wife?" asked Zachary. "Aunt Salome was pushing the other day, too. I'm just not interested. I may be sometime in the future, but right now, I'm more interested in figuring out what Jehovah wants me to do and where He wants me to be. I don't want to wait and discover it after I'm married. That's not exactly fair to the lady, don't you agree?"

"No, I guess not. I thought you were pretty settled as steward at the plant. Are you thinking about quitting?"

"No, I just want to be available to whatever Jehovah wants and I don't know what that is. I think I'll talk to Uncle Zebedee in the morning and see if he would let me take on an apprentice. Then I would be free

to go or stay. I wouldn't want to leave Uncle Zebedee in a bind after all he's done for me."

"Are you ready to head back? We've walked pretty far," suggested Jesse.

"Sure. Tell me how your week has gone. Is the store working like you planned?"

"Yeah. I hired a couple of new clerks to start tomorrow. Talman sent them over and once I get them trained, it will free me and Amos to do our jobs. And maybe I can get started on the house renovations."

"Is Elijah still living with you?"

"Yes and no. He's living in a corner of the warehouse, but he takes his meals with me and Tobias. He's helping out with the food costs, but we're both trying to save up money for the weddings."

"Yeah, I wonder when that will be. I probably won't see you two much after that."

"I guess things are already changing with Elijah being busy on the Sabbaths."



When Jairus and Rachel arrived home they found Ariel asleep and the house quiet. Jairus told Rachel that he needed to finish up some study before synagogue tomorrow. There was no mention of the incident all day on the Sabbath. Ariel seemed quiet and deep in thought and walked out to her music studio in the afternoon. Joel and Talman came over after the Sabbath and asked if they could talk privately with Jairus on the roof. He welcomed them and congratulated Joel on Hava's espousal.

"Yes, that's what we wanted to talk about."

"Well, Ariel seems to be fine and I'm sure Elijah realizes that his friend is no gentleman. I think he owes all of us an apology for inviting him," said Jairus.

"Jairus, I know that you are very protective of Ariel, but I need to let you know what Miriam told me. May I speak?" asked Joel.

"Certainly."

"Miriam said that it was Ariel who asked Hava if she could look at Joel's scrolls. Then Ariel invited everyone to come and look with her. They were busy with a conversation and only Zachary got up to follow her, but it was the entire group's intention to come and see what she wanted to show them in the scrolls. Miriam says that she feels that it was not Zachary's intention at all to be alone with Ariel. He thought everyone was coming," explained Talman.

"Hava's story is the same. We talked with her after Elijah left and that's exactly what she told us."

"So, you are saying that while I found Zachary and Ariel alone in your office, thoroughly enjoying themselves, they had no idea that they were alone. If they were so oblivious to the fact that they were alone, then I see that as a problem and I dealt with it."

“Yes, you did. You have a right to protect your daughter and you can believe whatever you want about Zachary, but it is my opinion that he is a good man,” said Talman.

“I just hope you won’t hold this against Elijah. He was hurt enough that his friend was mistreated at his espousal. Shalom,” said Joel.

“Elijah should be ashamed for inviting such a friend!” declared Jairus.

“And if you believe that, then I’m going to ask that you not teach at the school until your reason returns. I’ll cover your classes until this settles down and you can think straight. I will not have my students affected by a misunderstanding between their rabbis. Shalom,” said Joel. He walked down the stairs and left Talman and Jairus standing on the rooftop.

“So, what does he want? I think Elijah should apologize to me for his friend’s behavior,” said Jairus.

“And I think there was no misconduct intended,” said Talman.

“It may not have been intended, but it certainly happened. I saw it with my own eyes!” said Jairus.

“What you saw may have been an accident and an indiscretion, but I do not believe — from what Miriam has told me — that it was deliberate in any way. I would think you would be pleased that they were searching Scripture for something.”

“Talman, what am I going to do? Your daughters are cared for and loved. Why hasn’t Jehovah sent the right man for Ariel?”

Talman wisely kept his mouth shut.



Zachary sat at his desk and continued to record the data, but his mind was far, far away. An idea was forming in his head, and he wasn’t sure whether it was from Jehovah or just his own thoughts. There was a knock at his door, and he opened it to find Ruler Jairus standing there. “Come in, sir. Or better yet, let’s go to my house. It’s not far from here and it’s much quieter. Just let me tell my foreman that I’ll be out.”

Ruler Jairus followed Zachary through the plant and out the door. “You can leave, just like that?”

“Yes, sir. I’m in charge, but Malachi is quite capable of taking care of things if I need to be out. My home is just around this corner and it will be a quieter place to talk.” Ira came out to see what was needed and Zachary asked him to bring them juice. “Won’t you have a seat. I’m sure you are tired from your hike,” said Zachary.

Jairus seemed to slump onto one of the benches and took a sip of the juice. Zachary knew that whatever he had to say would not be easy or pleasant for either of them, but he was praying that Jehovah would give him the right response or tell him to be quiet. So, he waited for Jairus to speak.

“Zachary, I need to know your intentions concerning my daughter,” said Jairus firmly.

“Sir, I have no intentions concerning your daughter. I don’t mean to be rude, but I have no intentions toward marriage to anyone at this point. I am most interested in determining Jehovah’s plans for my life and until I know that, I would not ask any woman to share that uncertainty.”

“So, you are not planning on asking me about marriage to Ariel?”

“No, sir. I’m feeling a very strong leading that I think is from the Holy Spirit to teach others about this peace and joy that I feel. Ariel and I were talking about that on Sabbath night. I apologize for being so excited about holding the Holy Scriptures that I didn’t notice that we were alone and for that I apologize. I feel a distinct call from Jehovah but I’m not sure what He wants. I would not ask any woman to wait while I figure it out.”

“I, too, have many questions about following Jesus. I apologize for misjudging the situation on Sabbath night. I ask that you will forgive me.”

“Of course. I was certainly in the wrong. I just hope you understand that it was not intentional in any way.”

“I understand now. I will be praying that you will find the answers to your questions. And I hope that you will share them with all of us.” Ruler Jairus stood to leave, and Zachary walked with him back to the main road before returning to work. *I can’t believe I said that out loud. Jehovah, are You leading me?*

## Chapter 17

After the stewards' meeting on Thursday, Zachary asked if he could speak with Uncle Zebedee privately. Once again, he invited him over for Sabbath dinner and Zachary agreed. He was feeling more comfortable in their home. When he arrived, they greeted him and even though he was sad it wasn't just the three of them, he was glad to see Jaden and Jonas and their families again.

The servants called them to the table and brought their plates. The conversation quickly turned to all that they had heard from James and John the previous week. Zachary felt comfortable sharing that he was hearing the Holy Spirit direct his life, because everyone else was sharing the same. It was a feeling of closeness or brotherhood that Zachary had never known. He shared with them that he was wondering if he was being led to travel outside of Capernaum to tell more people about Jesus. He told Uncle Zebedee that that was what he had wanted to talk with him about.

"Are you thinking about leaving permanently?" asked Zebedee.

"I don't even know what I'm hearing. I just wondered what you thought about my training an apprentice so that I would be available to do whatever Jehovah wants."

"It usually takes a couple of years to train an apprentice, but I'm not opposed to you doing it. Do you have someone in mind?"

"I thought Malachi would be the logical choice since he already knows so much about the plant. So, do you think I should move in that direction, or not?" asked Zachary.

"Zachary, I have no idea. This is all so new to me, and I don't know how to determine what is the Holy Spirit and what might be just my own ideas. I think it's going to take some practice to figure it all out. But I'm not opposed to you starting to train Malachi so that you can be available to do whatever Jehovah wants. I don't think it would hurt to have someone to cover your position, but then you'd have to pay him more and that will cut into your profits. So, think about it before you talk with him."

"Thank you, sir. I need to do quite a bit more praying before I do anything," replied Zachary.

It was an enjoyable evening and Zachary felt that he really had found a family. They invited him to join them for every Sabbath dinner whenever he was able to come. "I would like that, Aunt Salome. That would be really nice. Thank you, again, for opening your home to me. Shalom."

"Shalom."



Jesse could hardly believe that it had been three months since he had talked with Talman about marrying Miriam. He had enjoyed getting to know her and her family. He was pleased with the progress he was making getting the Westside Mercantile Store started. He had hired the two full-time clerks, and Elijah helped out after school hours most days. Amos was continually busy with special orders and keeping up with the inventory and accounting, while Jesse was busy with renting and selling properties. The other merchants had contributed to the cost of the well and agreed that it was boosting their businesses and was becoming a popular gathering place for the area.

Tobias was supervising the work at the house and Jesse was pleased with the progress of the masonry crew who had added a stone fireplace to the living room and a stone foundation for two additional sleeping rooms. He had sworn his friends to secrecy so that he could use the fireplace as an espousal gift for Miriam. Jesse felt stuck and had no idea what to give to Rabbi Talman and Mrs. Sarah. He finally asked Elijah for help, and they discussed some options.

Once again Ruler Jairus would be conducting the espousal and Jesse had invited his two close friends to present him. Zachary wasn't sure that that was a great idea and was feeling uncomfortable. On the last Sabbath before the espousal, Jesse and Zachary met at Zachary's home about noon as usual and the two men took a walk along the beach.

"Jesse, I feel it a great honor to be invited to present you for your espousal to Miriam," began Zachary.

"I feel a 'but' coming," said Jesse. "I assure you that you will be welcomed by everyone. We actually discussed it last week and there won't be any trouble. I promise."

"Thank you. But that's not my biggest concern. I don't know how to say this. We have become very good friends, but I really don't know what to say about your relationship with Jehovah."

"Ahh. Yes, I have been a little neglectful to pursue that. You know how busy I've been."

"Yes, I know, and I don't want to push you into anything. I want what I say to be true. I don't want to misrepresent you. I just want to know what you want me to say. Is that a crazy way to put it?"

"I guess it does put you on the spot since we haven't talked about it. I actually haven't thought much about Jehovah or Jesus or the Holy Spirit since we talked last. I mean, Talman is always mentioning it. And Miriam mentions it quite a bit, but I guess I have just ignored it because I don't have time to sort it out. Basically, I believe that Jesus was the Messiah sent from Jehovah. I'm comfortable with that part. But I don't think I feel what you and Talman do when you talk about Jehovah guiding you and being present with you. And basically, I don't know whether I need him or want him to tell me what to do. I mean, Jehovah has given me a brain to figure things out and I feel I should use it well. So, where does that leave me? Am I a Jesus follower? I'm not sure."



“Are you sincerely asking or are you just letting me know where you are comfortable?” probed Zachary.

“Is ‘I don’t know’ an answer?”

“Sure. Should I just say you believe Jesus is the Messiah, and you are still searching for answers about what all that means?”

“Do you think Rabbi Talman and Ruler Jairus will accept that?”

“Well, they’ve had three months to talk with you about it and they still scheduled the espousal. Have you spent any time talking about it with Rabbi Talman?”

“No, it hasn’t come up.”

“Then I suppose that it won’t. But I do encourage you to find time to figure out what you are going to do about following Jesus.”

“Thanks, Zachary. I know you mean well. I guess I’m just too busy right now to think about anything. Do you think Miriam will be pleased with her gifts? They are not traditional.”

“I think she will love them,” assured Zachary. But deep down, he wondered if Miriam would be disappointed when she discovered that the man she was marrying had no time for Jesus. He prayed that that would change when Jesse realized how important it was to Miriam.



Zachary continued to pray about whether he should talk with Malachi about an apprenticeship at the Fish Processing Plant. He decided he didn’t feel strongly either way. He wasn’t sure what Jehovah was saying, but he knew he wanted to be obedient. He was sad to miss the family gathering at Uncle Zebedee’s tonight, but Jesse’s espousal was more important. He wondered how Jehovah would use him there. Friday dawned cold and rainy and seemed to add to his feeling that this marriage might be a mistake. He rehearsed and rehearsed what he needed to say and prayed that Jehovah would guide him carefully. He didn’t want to lie, but he didn’t want to offend anyone again. *What I really want to say is, Jesse, until you make your mind up about Jesus, you are not fit to be a husband and certainly not an abba.* He felt that his dad’s decision to follow Jesus is what finished off his marriage. But he had to admit that if Jesse made that decision later, Miriam would be thrilled. *But what if he doesn’t?* He left work early and headed home to change robes. He didn’t want to smell like fish. He walked across town and even his cloak didn’t keep his robe dry.

He helped Jesse set out the gifts and they waited together for Elijah. Just as Elijah arrived, the rain stopped. A beautiful sunset filled the sky and lifted everyone’s spirits. The men quickly picked up the gifts and headed to the school where the espousal would take place. The rabbis and their families were just arriving, and everyone settled into their respective places. Sarah introduced everyone to her sister Sharon, Miriam’s aunt. Ruler Jairus led the ceremony and called on

the men to present Jesse. Elijah stated that Jesse had been raised as the youngest of five brothers on a farm north of Capernaum. He had attended the Hebrew School and excelled there. He had trained as an apprentice under Mr. Immer and now served as steward of the Westside Mercantile Store. Elijah stated that he felt Jesse would be a good husband who would provide well for Miriam.

Next Rabbi Joel stated that he felt that Jesse was one of the finest students he had ever taught. As he had gotten to know him better during their annual trips at Passover, he discovered that he loved to help others and would make a fine husband for Miriam.

Zachary stood to present Jesse. "Jesse has shared with me that he believes that Jesus is the Messiah but is still unsure of what it means to follow Jesus. My prayer is that he and Miriam will continue to search for answers together."

Ruler Jairus then called on Talman to present his daughter. He talked of her preparation for the marriage, her love for ministry to those in need, and her love for the children of Capernaum. He stated that Miriam was strong in her faith in Jesus and was following Him in obedience.

Jesse presented Talman with a small pocket knife. "I was told that you lost yours during your last trip to Jerusalem." Talman agreed that it was just what he needed. Then he presented Mrs. Sarah with a basket filled with spices from all over the Roman world. Some were familiar, but others were strange and exotic. Everyone assured Jesse that Sarah would love experimenting with this gift.

"We'll all enjoy this gift!" added Joel.

Finally, Jesse turned to Miriam and said, "These are not traditional gifts, but I hope you understand that I treasure your uniqueness and wanted to give you gifts from my heart." He presented her with a large rock. Because it was large, he simply placed it at her feet. She was looking puzzled as was the rest of her friends. "Miriam, my gift to you is a stone fireplace in our home. You won't get to see it until tomorrow because I couldn't bring the whole thing."

"Oh, Jesse, I love fireplaces. I can't wait to see it," her eyes filling with tears of joy.

"And I know of your love for beauty and ministry to others. I hope this gift will allow for both." He presented her with a jar containing the rooting for a rose bush. "It comes from Cyprus, but I was told it would grow here. I hope so."

"Oh, Jesse, I love it. It will be perfect and I'm sure Aunt Sharon can help me keep it alive."

"And finally, because I know you love music, I wanted you to have an instrument all your very own. I hope you will always fill our home with music." He gave her a tiny wooden flute.

"Oh, Jesse. Oh, Jesse." That's all she could say as she received his gifts and was overcome with their thoughtfulness.

Ruler Jairus pronounced them espoused and Talman invited everyone over to their home to celebrate a late Sabbath dinner.

Zachary laughed to himself when he saw the seating arrangement. Three tables had been arranged so that Jesse and Miriam could sit together with her parents. Then there was a separate table for the men and one for the women. *I guess Talman didn't want to take any chances that I would connect up with Ariel.* He decided that he would leave immediately after dinner because he knew that Elijah would want to spend time with Hava, and he would be the odd man out. But as it was, he found himself enjoying the mixed company. Maybe his time with family at Uncle Zebedee's had helped him feel more comfortable making conversation. Miriam's Aunt Sharon told him about Jesus healing her sickness on the same day that He raised Ariel from the dead. He finally said goodnight to his two closest friends and told them to enjoy their Sabbath with their espoused wives. He would be fine and needed to spend some time in prayer. They thanked him for understanding and he left knowing that he was entering a new phase of his life alone.



As spring arrived in Capernaum, the rabbis began to discuss whether or not to travel to Jerusalem. They didn't want to deprive their students the opportunity to experience their first Passover in Jerusalem. So, the announcement was made to the oldest boys that the walk to Jerusalem would happen, and their dads would need to sign up before the end of the Sabbath.

Elijah and Jesse walked over to Zachary's house after the Sabbath was ended to ask if he was going to join them. They very seldom had time together since the espousals and they agreed that the retreat would be a great time to catch up. "I have no idea whether I'll be able to connect with my dad or not, but of course, I'll want to spend some time with him if he's around." Zachary agreed for Elijah to sign him up to travel with the group. He would need to get Uncle Zebedee's permission, but was fairly certain that that would be no problem. The plant would be closed during Passover week, but Zachary would prepare Malachi to cover the weeks before and after so he could walk with the schoolboys.



Zebedee announced that he saw no need to travel to Jerusalem for Passover again this year. Jonas expressed that he had planned to go with them and take Benji since this would be his first Passover as a man. Salome said that she needed to check on Mary and wanted to visit with James and John and their families. Jaden said that he had planned to go with them since he hadn't been in a while. So, Zebedee reluctantly agreed.



Everyone gathered in front of the synagogue on Wednesday and soon the three rabbis were leading a large group of men out of town, eating their breakfast as they walked. The younger boys looked on wistfully, while the mothers and sisters prayed for their safe return in three weeks. It seemed that everyone wanted to know what was happening in Jerusalem. Rabbi Joel reported that there were twelve students plus their dads, and sixteen alumni. The three rabbis had decided to take two donkeys to carry all the food necessary for such a large group.

Zachary, Elijah, and Jesse thoroughly enjoyed catching up and spending time together, even though Elijah often had to attend to other needs. This year their travel would be interrupted by the Sabbath after three hard days of walking.

Rabbi Joel made his standard speech on their last night of camping. He reminded the travelers that they were on their own in Jerusalem but should plan to meet back at this camping area before sundown on Tuesday, the last day of Passover. They would eat together and be ready to travel early the next morning.

After all the students and alumni had dispersed on Tuesday morning, Jesse, Zachary, and the three rabbis went into the olive grove and found a camping place near the back. Zachary decided that he would enjoy some time with them before trying to locate his dad since he probably had plans for the evening. The men staked their donkeys and laid out their blankets, then the three younger men hiked to the market to buy supplies for their Seder and breakfast. Jairus and Joel rested at the camp and talked of past Passovers spent with Nicodemus and all their friends. It was a hard Preparation Day for them. But as the sun began to set and the grove filled with Jewish Psalms of celebration, they felt a oneness that covered their sorrow. The grove was filled with both traditional Jews and Jesus' followers, but it seemed the whole world had come together to celebrate Passover on this special night.

A couple of other young men were invited to join them as Ruler Jairus led them in their Seder meal. After the meal, Jesse encouraged them to wander around the grove and meet other groups. They could return to their blankets whenever they chose. Zachary said that he would probably be gone before they woke in the morning. He wanted to search for his dad.

## Chapter 18

Noah had the oxen and oxcart packed and ready to leave at sunrise on Thursday. Zebedee rode on the driver's seat with Noah, while his family, Jaden, Jonas, Benji, and Salome, rode in the cart with Jeshua the kitchen slave. After two days of bouncing in the oxcart, everyone was ready for a Sabbath break. They stopped early to find a good camping area and built a large bonfire to share with other travelers. Two families joined them. After dinner, Jonas led them in singing some Psalms and worshipping Jehovah together. On the Sabbath as the men talked, Zebedee shared with them what he had learned about Jesus. The others listened politely but didn't seem interested. Yet, because they were all Jewish and worshipped the same Jehovah, the different beliefs were tolerated, and they enjoyed eating together and singing Psalms. Early Sunday morning, the three families were entering the road at the same time — all headed to Jerusalem for one celebration.

By midafternoon on Monday, Noah was pulling up to Anna's house. After hugs were given all around, she announced, "James and John have invited us to dinner at their new home and they are expecting you to stay with them." Zebedee helped her onto the driver's seat of the oxcart, and she directed Noah to James and John's new home. When they arrived, Jonathan and Jenay ran out to greet them. Servants came to help them unload their cart and everyone gathered in the courtyard to greet them. "Just hug us gently; we're a little banged up," said James. Salome had already detected that they were moving gingerly.

"What's wrong?" she demanded to know.

John explained, "We were punished for preaching about Jesus, but we count it a privilege to suffer as He suffered for us. It's nothing to worry about, Mother. We just haven't fully recovered yet."

"Oh, my. Sometimes we forget how dangerous it is for you to be in Jerusalem. Yet, you've bought a home here? Why don't you move back to Capernaum?"

"Because Jesus has not called us to Capernaum. You know that we try to be obedient even when it's not always pleasant."

"I'm so proud of my sons," said Salome. "And where is Mary? I thought she would be with you, Anna."

"She's inside taking a nap. I'm sure she'll join us shortly. She wanted to be rested for your visit," said Kayla, James' wife. "She lives with us now. Remember, Jesus asked John to watch over her and she's been staying with us once we got settled."

"So, you both live here?" asked Jaden.

"Yes. We felt it would be easier since we do a lot of traveling, and Marta and Kayla could support each other."

The servants brought juice for the travelers and Marta invited everyone for a tour of the house. It had a gracious living room that

would probably seat twenty, and then a smaller living area near the back that was just the right size for their family of seven. The inside kitchen was large and even had a stone fireplace for cooking bread inside. There were five sleeping areas for the family and two extra guest rooms. But they suggested that they would rearrange things so that everyone would fit comfortably. Jaden said, "Sounds like a brothers' reunion to me!"

"And maybe a sisters' reunion for me and Mary."

"That's who I thought I heard!" exclaimed Mary as she hurried to give Salome a hug. "And yes, we've already put a mat for you in my room so we can talk all night if you wish."

The adults all sat mixed together for dinner at tables set in the living area. Benji, Jonathan, and Jenay ate in the family room so they could catch up with each other. After dinner, Anna and her husband left, and Zebedee and his four sons gathered on the rooftop to talk. Zebedee was so glad that he had decided to come. He asked James and John again what had happened to them, and they said that all the apostles were scourged about a month ago. They were still sore and healing. "Most of the apostles are recovering slowly like us, but we are all concerned about Andrew. He is not healing. We're all praying for him, but honestly think that he will join Jesus in Heaven soon. You will probably want to visit him while you are in Jerusalem."

"Certainly," agreed Zebedee.

Everyone was quiet for a while as they processed the sobering information.

"Okay, I'm the nosy big brother, but I want to know. How in the world can you two afford such a mansion? I'm thrilled, but it doesn't seem quite consistent. You aren't charging for your preaching, are you? Temple taxes? What's the deal?"

"Well, the deal is that Jehovah provided the house for free, and the servants came with the house. They are all bondservants, so we don't pay them anything, we just have to provide food and shelter for them and take care of their needs. This is the home of Joseph of Arimathea. He had this home and full staff here in Jerusalem because he was often in the city for business. After he was killed for following Jesus, his sons asked us if we would take the house and use it for our ministry and accept the bond for the servants. It was an incredible gift from Jehovah's hand. It's large enough for all the apostles to get together, and we have a home group that meets here weekly. Kayla and Marta lead that when we aren't available."

"That's amazing. And Aunt Mary lives with you, too?"

"Yes, and we've had several followers living with us at various times while they were going through hard times. It has indeed been a place of ministry," said John.

"I think we should call it a night. Tomorrow is Preparation Day, and we'll have all day to talk." Zebedee gathered all four of his sons together and prayed a prayer of blessing on them.



Zachary decided to start looking for his dad, the Apostle Andrew, at the temple. He saw two men preaching on the temple steps and one by Solomon's Portico. He didn't recognize any of them, but since they were preaching about Jesus, he hoped they could tell him where to find his dad. He stood and listened to them preach. "Jesus said that in this world we would experience trouble, but He promised to overcome the world. He promised to never leave us as orphans and sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within us so that we would never be alone. The Holy Spirit guides us and reminds us of all that Jesus taught. He tells us what to say and when to say it, and He tells us what will happen in the future as we need to know. He is the dynamo or energy to enable us to do Jehovah's work. He is our constant companion who will escort us to Heaven to be with Jehovah for all eternity. If you have questions, or are ready to accept Jesus as your Messiah, please kneel right where you are, and we'll come and explain further." Zachary noticed that several were kneeling, and the men were moving around to minister to them. He waited while the crowds dispersed and then approached the men.

"Hi, I am Zachary from Capernaum. I'm wondering if you can help me locate my dad, the Apostle Andrew."

"Oh, Zachary, we're so glad you've come. Your dad needs you very badly. Let us take you there now."

"What's going on?"

"All the apostles were scourged about a month ago. It was terrible. By the way, my name is Nicanor, and this is Timon. We're followers of Jesus and are teaching while the apostles are recovering. Most of them are doing better, but your dad seems to be getting worse, and even though we've prayed and prayed for him, I'm afraid he's in really bad shape. We don't know how much longer he will be on this earth."

Zachary felt his world shaken, yet there was a strong feeling of peace and an assurance that the Holy Spirit would support him through this. The men guided him to a very poor section of town. As they approached the tiny one-room house, the smell was overpowering. It reminded Zachary of spoiled fish. He wondered if it was the smell of death. The men knocked gently and quietly introduced the Apostle Thomas who pointed to the mat where his dad lay unconscious. The men returned to the temple to teach. Zachary quickly knelt beside his dad and began to pray. He felt an incredible peace and heard very specific directions inside his head. He told Thomas that he would be back shortly. What he had heard was to go back to the market, buy seven cotton kitchen towels, a large soup pot, and a jar of goat milk. All Zachary knew to do was to follow the instructions he was being given. When he returned, he asked Thomas where to find the local well. He filled the pot with water and put it over the firepit in the back yard. While he was waiting for the water to boil,

Thomas came outside. He told him that after the apostles were scourged, followers had carried them to their homes. The women in the various home groups had delivered food each day and checked on them. He began to heal, but Andrew seemed to get sicker. Everyone was praying for him. They couldn't understand why Jehovah had not healed him. But now, he seemed to be very near death.

"How long has he been like this?" asked Zachary.

"He's been unable to eat or drink for three days. I don't think he can survive much longer," replied Thomas.

"As I've prayed, Jehovah has given me very specific instructions for his healing. So please pray for my wisdom to listen carefully because I've never taken care of someone who is sick. This is very, very new to me. Jehovah will have to guide me, and I need to pray for the next step."

Zachary very clearly heard that he should put the towels in the boiling water and lay them on his dad's back to soak off the infected skin. He was instructed to start at the neck and work his way down. He was not to rub it or touch it in any way. Just lay the hot wet cloths on him until they were cool, and then start all over.

"I thought with a fever, you were supposed to put cool rags on them," commented Thomas. "I've been putting some cool rags on his face to try to get the fever down."

"Thanks. I'm sure that helps. But as I said, I'm just following what the Holy Spirit is telling me. I have no idea what I'm doing, so please pray."

All afternoon he placed the hot towels on his dad's back. When they were cool, he would empty the pot, get fresh water, bring it to a boil, and start all over. Near sunset, a woman from one of the home groups brought a dish for their dinner. Zachary took a few minutes to rest and eat. He poured Thomas and himself a cup of goat milk and then placed a spoon of goat milk in his dad's cheek and hoped that he would be able to swallow it. Instead, it just seemed to run down his chin and into his beard. Zachary continued to put the hot cloths on his dad's back until it was too dark to see. He pulled out his travel bag and slept in the grass in the backyard.

The next morning, he ran to the market and purchased unleavened bread, olives and olive oil, another jar of goat milk, some goat cheese, and pickled fish. He filled the pot with water and started the fire. He set out breakfast for himself and Thomas. All day he applied the hot towels and continued to put spoons of milk in his dad's cheek. By the end of the day, he noticed that his dad had begun to swallow the milk and he and Thomas rejoiced at the progress. All day on Thursday, Zachary placed the cloths on his dad's back, while Thomas fed him spoons of milk and fresh water. It seemed to Zachary that his dad's back might be a little better and he was getting a little nourishment.

On Friday, Zachary was surprised by a visit from Uncle Zebedee and his four sons. They visited shortly with Zachary in the courtyard and one by one entered the house to pray over Andrew. James and



John commented that he looked better, and Zachary explained that the Holy Spirit was telling him what to do and he was simply obeying. They all promised to continue praying. Zachary felt tempted to suggest that maybe Uncle Zebedee could send Noah or Jeshua to help him but felt that nudge to keep his mouth shut. Later the Holy Spirit reminded him to guard his heart against bitterness. “I have called you to this task, not anyone else.”

Between running to the market, constantly fetching water from the well, and preparing the towels, Zachary was getting exhausted. But day by day he continued to minister to his dad’s needs. He felt a strength he didn’t know was possible and woke up renewed and refreshed each morning. Occasionally, other apostles and followers would visit and pray for them, and Zachary enjoyed getting to know them.

As Zachary was at the market on Tuesday, he encountered Ruler Jairus, Rabbi Joel, and Rabbi Elijah shopping for food for their return trip. Zachary quickly explained the situation and that he was not returning with them. He had not thought about it — it just came out of his mouth. “We will be praying for your dad, but also for you. It’s a big job to care for someone who is that sick. We will miss you on the trip home.”

“Thanks. I don’t know when or even if I’ll be going back to Capernaum. I’m just trying to live one day at a time listening to the Holy Spirit leading me.”

“That’s all you can do,” assured the men.

As Zachary returned to his dad, he praised Jehovah for working out the details. He had no idea what day it was, and he knew that it was a miracle that he had encountered the rabbis in such a crowded and large market. Now, he asked for wisdom to know how to find Uncle Zebedee and for him to be receptive to his staying.

Zachary filled the water pot and started it boiling, set out breakfast, and felt led to soak a piece of bread in the milk to put in his dad’s cheek. That would give him a little more nourishment if he could swallow it without choking. When his dad successfully swallowed it, Zachary showed Thomas what he had done, and Thomas started adding bread to the milk.

Midmorning, James and Uncle Zebedee arrived to visit. Zachary felt a warm glow inside of him as he realized that Jehovah was indeed working out the details. “I assume that you will need to stay here and care for your dad for a while longer.”

“Yes, sir. That’s what I feel led to do and I want to be obedient.”

“Here’s a bag of silver that will help you. Your job will be available whenever you return. If you would like, I’ll send Noah back for you at Shavuot.”

“I don’t know when Dad will be able to live on his own. So, I don’t want you to waste a trip. Jehovah will provide for my return, but I genuinely thank you. Jehovah has been faithful to guide me every step so far, and I’m learning to be obedient even when it doesn’t feel right to me. I think I’m learning valuable lessons.”

“Jehovah bless you, my son. Shalom.”

“I’ll be back to check on you both in a few days. You are doing a great job caring for him. Shalom,” said James.

Days turned into weeks. Zachary only noticed that time was passing because the market was closed on the Sabbath, and he couldn’t get goat’s milk for his dad. Thomas was finally able to return to his teaching and was often gone. When he was available, he helped Zachary with the feeding. But day after day, Zachary ministered to his dad. He was grateful for the dishes that would appear each evening so that he could just focus on his dad’s needs.

About a month after Zachary’s arrival, he felt the Holy Spirit guiding him to check and see what infection might still be lurking on his dad’s stomach. He had still not returned to consciousness and Zachary felt that he couldn’t just flip him onto his back. He needed someone to help him. After dinner that night, there was a knock on the door. A young man entered, and Thomas introduced him as Yanis. Once again Zachary felt that Jehovah had sent just who he needed. Yanis had traveled with the followers of Jesus and was good friends with the apostles. When Zachary told him what he needed, Yanis was eager to help. Zachary got the pot of towels ready to apply and Yanis helped Zachary lift his dad into a sitting position. Yanis held him in his arms, while Zachary applied the hot cloths to large pockets of infection on his chest and stomach. Then the men worked together to get him back onto his stomach. Zachary fed him one more time and told Thomas and Yanis goodnight. He took his blanket to the yard and was quickly asleep. When he awoke the next morning, he discovered Yanis stirring on a blanket nearby. “You are still here!”

“Yes, I just sleep wherever I can find. I’m trying to save up my money to get out of here. But I thought maybe I could help you before I go to work and then again in the evenings if you need me.”

“Jehovah’s provision is beautiful. That would be a great help.”

Zachary quickly got the pot of rags boiling and Yanis helped Thomas set out the bread and olive oil. The three men ate quickly and then Yanis and Zachary lifted and cared for Andrew together. “I’ll return after dinner tonight, and we can do it again.”

One afternoon, Zachary distinctly heard that he should go to the market and buy his dad two new mats. Zachary realized that the old one was very soiled and filled with infection. After Yanis helped Zachary with his dad, they removed the old mat and laid him on the fresh one. Zachary told Yanis, “Tomorrow morning, we’ll place the other mat in the backyard and carry him out in the sunshine. I don’t know why, but that’s what the Holy Spirit is saying.” So, that’s what the men did in obedience. Another time, Zachary felt led to begin slipping pickled fish into his dad’s cheek. He chopped it finely and his dad seemed to swallow it eagerly.

Week after long week, Zachary cared for his dad. Yanis helped on the Sabbath and each morning and night. The two men became good friends. Yanis was a butcher and often brought scrap pieces of

meat or bone home to make soup for Andrew. They would soak pieces of bread in the broth and feed it to him.

Fifty days from Passover, Yanis encouraged Zachary to take a break and join him for a few hours during Pentecost. Zachary agreed to leave his dad alone for just a short time. Thomas was preaching on one of the street corners and there was dancing and singing in the street as many followers of Jesus celebrated the day that the Holy Spirit had arrived. *Was that only a year ago?* thought Zachary. *It seems like ten years.* He enjoyed the celebration but felt the need to return to his dad. He started the pot boiling again and hurried inside to feed his dad some pickled fish. When his dad had swallowed the fish, he mouthed the word "Good."

"Dad, it's Zachary. I'm so glad you like the fish. I'm taking care of you, and Jehovah says that you are going to be fine. Just rest and I'll get you another bite." He fed him another bite of fish, and then some bread and goat milk.

He didn't want to overdo it, but after a while his dad clearly said, "More." So Zachary gave him more fish and more bread and milk. He couldn't wait for Thomas and Yanis to get home to hear the news.

On Thursday, after Zachary and Yanis had carried him to his mat in the backyard, Andrew said, "Thank you."

Daily now, Andrew began to show progress. He opened his eyes a few days later. He was able to eat more and actually chew so they were able to increase his food intake. He began to answer yes or no to their questions and let them know when he needed something. It was very satisfying. Day by day, Andrew began to be able to sit up and eventually to walk. There were only a couple of spots of infection that Zachary was still treating. He was able to feed himself, and Zachary began to encourage him to move around more during the day. His dad was becoming more and more able to take care of himself. They talked about the future and looked forward to what Jehovah had planned for them.

Zachary tagged along with his dad visiting the various home groups in Jerusalem, listening to his dad teach at the temple, and attending special gatherings with the apostles and other leaders of the Jerusalem groups. He learned much about following Jesus and made many good friends, but no one could tell him what Jehovah's plans were for his future. They just encouraged him to keep praying and wait until he knew for sure. He had had such a close walk with the Holy Spirit guiding him each step of the way during his dad's crisis, yet, now, everything seemed vague and uncertain. All he knew was that he needed to return to Capernaum and see what Jehovah had planned for him.

Every year after Sukkot, the Apostle Thomas and Yanis had returned to Thomas' farm northwest of Capernaum to help with the harvest. It was decided that Zachary would journey with them to Capernaum.

## Chapter 19

Yanis knocked on the Apostles James and John's door after dinner on the night before Sukkot began on Thursday. Sukkot was a busy time for Yanis as a butcher. So, he had settled on this night as his last chance to talk with James. At the end of Sukkot, he and Thomas would leave Jerusalem. A servant opened the door and Yanis asked if he could speak privately with James. Although Yanis had traveled with James as they followed Jesus, they had not kept in close contact since the crucifixion. They exchanged greetings and James wanted to know if Yanis was still helping with Andrew's care. "Yes, and no. I'm still living there, but Andrew is mostly healed. I have made good friends with Zachary and we'll both be leaving with Thomas at the end of Sukkot. Zachary will return home, but I have helped Thomas and his sons with the harvest at his farm for the past few years."

"How can I help you, Yanis? You look like a man with a question."

"Yes, sir. I have a big decision to make, and I wanted your input."

"Certainly, you know that I'm always available to help you."

"After the harvest, I need to decide whether to settle down closer to Capernaum or return to Jerusalem."

"That is a big decision. Is Jehovah leading you to relocate to Capernaum, and what would you do there? I thought you were fairly settled here in Jerusalem."

"For many years, I have felt led to start my own business in Capernaum whenever I was financially able to relocate. But my question for you is whether ... well, sir, my decision to stay and establish my business there is dependent on what you decide. I'm not saying this very well. I have loved Jenay since I first met her. Her passion for Jesus and the way she cares for people — I can't express how much I want to be the one to journey with her. It's been agony to not see her these past two years. I used to see her every day before things changed. I know that she is too young to marry, but I'm asking you would pledge her to me for a future marriage, whenever the time is right?" With that, Yanis gasped for breath as he realized that he had finally said what he had wanted to say for two years. Now, all he could do was wait for James to respond, and it was excruciating.

"I see," said James. Then absolute silence. After what seemed like an eternity, he finally spoke again. "Yanis, you are a good man and I know how faithfully you have followed Jesus, but Jenay is too young."

"I know that, sir. I guess what I want to know is whether I should continue to hope and dream that one day she will be my wife, or if I should try to kill this hope," said Yanis honestly.

"I see," said James. Again there was an interminable silence. "What would you do if I said that I would not pledge her to you? How would you spend your time differently?"

This time it was Yanis who had no words. He honestly had never thought about life without Jenay. Finally, he spoke. "I guess I never considered that you might say no. I guess Jehovah would give me strength to figure something out. I know He has a good plan, but I just assumed it would be with her since He's put such a strong love for her into me. I can't honestly answer you because I don't know. I guess I could stay on with Aaron on the farm and maybe just remain unmarried. I'm sorry, but I can't tell you. I guess that was presumptuous of me to assume that she was the one that Jehovah intended for me. I'm sorry." Yanis rose and prepared to leave. He felt that his heart would break into a thousand pieces, and he wasn't sure that he could safely walk down the stairs.

"Give me a few days to pray about it and I will get back with you before you leave on Friday," said James.

Yanis turned to look at him. "So, your answer is not no?"

"No, it is not. But it is not yes, either. I will need to pray and also to speak with Kayla. Please pray for me as it is a big decision."

"Yes, sir. I will, and I have been. Thank you, sir, for considering my request. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Yanis made it down the stairs and out the front door before he fell to his knees and begged Jehovah for mercy and favor with James regarding Jenay. He walked around Jerusalem until it was very late. He couldn't pray. He couldn't think. He just felt totally devastated that the dream had been shared and then shattered. He hated himself for speaking to James before Jenay was old enough. He analyzed what he could have said differently. He repeated the conversation over and over in his head. Finally, he realized he had to get some sleep in order to work tomorrow, but the night was spent fitfully and his misery spilled over into his work the next day.

As he talked with Andrew, Thomas, and Zachary the following night they all assured him that every man had to go through this waiting and wondering period. If this was Jehovah's plan, then all would be well, and if the door was shut, he would survive and discover that Jehovah had better plans. He was glad that his work was extra busy during the festival week. So, he focused on his job and his boss was pleased.

On the Sabbath, James and John both stopped by to visit with Andrew and Thomas. James asked Yanis to take a walk with him. The market was nearby, and James suggested they go there since it should be empty. They found a bench and sat down. "Are your intentions to establish a business in Capernaum and to take Jenay to live with you there?"

"Yes, sir. That has been my dream ever since I first saw Capernaum while traveling with Jesus. I know that Jenay is happy there and I loved it. I feel that it would be a safer place to establish a home and family than here in Jerusalem."

“What would be your plans for the espousal period? There would be no way that you two could work together to establish a home and get acquainted.”

“I’ve often wondered about that. I suppose I could check with you in a year and see if Jenay is ready to be espoused and then come back for her whenever you allow. It’s really not ideal since once I establish my business, it will be hard to get away. But ....”

“And what is this business that you hope to establish?”

“I am certified as a butcher, so I could always support Jenay, but it is my dream to establish a goat farm and sell the milk and goats and possibly the meat — but I have not checked out what is possible around Capernaum. I guess I was waiting until I knew for sure whether Jenay would be interested in such a life. If she would prefer I stay a butcher and have more set hours, I would be willing to do that. A farmer’s life is not for everyone.”

“I believe that Jenay is still too young to know what she wants in life and will not be ready for marriage for at least two years. Are you willing to wait until I feel that she is ready for marriage?”

“Oh, yes, sir! I only spoke to you because Andrew and Thomas encouraged me to make sure that I had let you know of my intentions before I started making further plans that included her.”

“I understand. Yanis, my pledge to you is that I will not espouse her to another man unless you decide to not wait for her or prove yourself unworthy.”

“It will be pure joy to wait for her, but I promise you to wait and see where Jehovah leads me.”

“Whenever you are back in Jerusalem, plan to visit with me and let me know your progress. We will talk each time you are in town and get better acquainted.”

“Yes, sir, and thank you, sir. I assume you have not mentioned this to Jenay.”

“No, at nine she is too young to be thinking of marriage. She is just a child,” said James. The men returned and everyone could tell without asking that they had agreed.



An hour before dawn, the three men were saying their goodbyes to Andrew and leaving Jerusalem. Unlike the schoolboys that Zachary had traveled with, Thomas and Yanis took very few breaks. Zachary had a hard time keeping up. He was grateful that it was mostly downhill. He was glad they were approaching the Sabbath since his feet were not accustomed to such hiking. He had helped Thomas shop for food at the market before they left and was surprised at how little each man carried in their travel bags. As the sun neared the horizon, the men built a bonfire and Thomas started fishing. Yanis showed Zachary some wild berries to pick while he continued to search for greens. Yanis had a skillet in his travel bag and quickly fried the

greens in some olive oil while Thomas taught Zachary how to roast his fish on a stick over the fire. Zachary expressed his admiration of their camping skills. Both men laughed and Thomas said, "When you travel with the Creator, you learn what is edible and what is not. He was a great teacher." After dinner, there was still enough daylight to soak their weary feet in the stream before throwing their blankets down for the night.

On Sabbath morning, Zachary woke with the sunrise and moved away from the other two men for some time of prayer. He was still troubled about what the future held for him. He did not know a clear direction. All he knew was to return to Uncle Zebedee and see if he still had a job. He spent some time in worship and realized that one benefit to his time in Jerusalem was remembering the Psalms from his childhood. He sang a few quietly and enjoyed being alone for the first time in many months. By midmorning the other two men were stirring, and Zachary joined them for breakfast. They spent the day mostly talking about Capernaum and where Yanis would most likely find work. Zachary assured Yanis he would be welcome to stay with him as long as necessary to get settled. Yanis agreed to look him up when the harvest was over. They spent some time in worship and enjoyed the peaceful quietness of the day. Zachary loved that every time a new subject was introduced, one of the men remembered a story about Jesus or a parable that He taught them. Zachary wished that he had had that privilege of traveling with Jesus and knowing Him the way they did. *I wonder how much Jehovah can use me in Damascus when I know so very little about Jesus. Maybe I should just settle down at the Processing Plant.* Suddenly he realized that he had thought about Damascus, but he didn't know why. He just had. He was determined to not fret about the future. He was certain the Holy Spirit would guide him one step at a time. He asked Thomas to tell him about his family. Thomas was glad to talk about heading home to see his eldest son, Aaron, who was now seventeen and had taken over the farm when Thomas started following Jesus. "My two younger sons are Gideon and Daniel. They are twins and are turning fourteen this year. I think Gideon is a natural farmer, but Daniel was pretty undecided last year. He's wanting to come to Jerusalem and see what I'm doing. I don't know what he's going to do. Yanis has been helping us out for the harvest. Will this be your third or fourth harvest?"

"Fourth."

"He's a pretty good farmer and a great help to Aaron. He's also helped Aaron grow in understanding how to follow Jesus. For that, I'll be forever grateful."

"Aaron is a good man and a good friend. I'm glad to help," replied Yanis.

On Sunday the men were up before dawn and ate as they traveled. Yanis always had his eyes alert for wild berries or fruit trees along the way. He seemed to know all the right places to look. "We walked this route many times over the three years. Not much has changed since then." Again, Zachary had a hard time keeping up with

the men who were eager to reach the farm. They sat down for a rest while they ate a quick dinner of dried fish and nuts, and Zachary asked them when they expected to be in Capernaum. "I hope you'll at least stop and eat a hot meal and spend a night in my guest room before you continue your journey."

"Nope. We'll be in Capernaum by noon tomorrow and if all goes well, we'll be home by dark on Tuesday. The harvest won't wait, and Aaron will be expecting us," said Thomas. Just as soon as they had finished their meal and washed it down with water from the stream, they were back on the road striding toward Capernaum. *Remind me never to travel with Yanis or Thomas*, Zachary told himself.

At noon on Monday, the men stopped at a well on the west side of Capernaum. Zachary had earlier given Yanis directions to his house and told him to look him up when harvest was over, and he would show him around. Yanis agreed that he would see him in about three weeks. The men gave quick hugs and, after a cool drink of water from the well, continued their journey. Zachary sat back down and rested. He wasn't sure he had the energy to walk home. He ate some raisins and nuts from his travel bag and drank some more water and then began the walk into Capernaum. He realized that he would be walking right past Jesse's Westside Mercantile Store, so decided he would stop in and say hello. Jesse was ecstatic to see him. Both men were trying to ask questions all at the same time while Jesse pulled Zachary back to his office. "Come in and tell me everything. Ruler Jairus said that you were caring for your dad. Is he okay?"

"Yes, thank you, he has recovered, but it was rough for a while. I wasn't sure he would make it. And how is the espousal going?"

"Espousal! Hey, I'm a married man. The wedding was a month ago. And Miriam is wonderful. When did you get back?"

"I haven't. I walked with friends who just continued their journey. We parted at the western well and I'm on my way home now. I just stopped to say hello. So, is Elijah married, too?"

"No, he's renting my old house and he and Hava are just now getting it ready. They really don't have any furnishings or anything. They'll be married just before Passover next year."

"I hate to run, but I need to get home and see if I still have a house and a job. I'll catch up with you later."

"Well, I know you have a house and a servant because Ira really helped us out with the wedding."

"That's good to know. Shalom."

"Shalom."

*Already married. Have I been gone that long?* He realized that it had been almost four months. He wearily walked the rest of the way across town. Capernaum seemed to have grown. As he got closer to the beach, he could see the Sea of Galilee gleaming in the afternoon sun. It felt good to be home. As he climbed up his stairs, Ira ran out to greet him. "Master Zachary! You're home. Sit here in the courtyard and let me bring you some juice. I know you enjoy this view. I need to



run to the market to get something special for dinner and I'll be right back."

"Okay, Ira. I'm exhausted, so you may have to wake me up to eat."

"That's okay, sir. Stretch out and rest. I'll have your dinner ready by sundown." Zachary decided to just rest and deal with Uncle Zebedee tomorrow. He slept soundly until Ira called him for dinner. They sat together to eat the delicious meal and talked about all the news of Capernaum and Jerusalem. Zachary asked Ira about Jesse's wedding and he said that Tobias had asked if he could help him cook. "The wedding was held in Jesse's back courtyard and was just nineteen guests. It was a two-day affair. So, we cooked the wedding night dinner and then breakfast, snacks, and dinner the second day."

"I've got to get some sleep. It's been a long walk and I may sleep a little late in the morning. I won't be able to see Uncle Zebedee until noon anyway — so just let me rest."

"Yes, sir, and goodnight."

"Goodnight, Ira. Looks like you've done a great job managing everything here. We'll talk more tomorrow, and I want to hear how everything is going with you."

"Thank you, sir."

Zachary threw his blanket down on his own mat for the first time in four months. But his nap had taken the edge off his fatigue, and he couldn't help wondering what Uncle Zebedee would say about whether he had a job or not after taking so much time off. It would be awkward to demote Malachi back to being the foreman and whoever the foreman was back to being just a worker. And he wasn't sure what you did with two stewards. He fell asleep wondering if it would have been better for him to stay in Jerusalem.



"Zachary, you're back! Welcome home, Son." Zebedee got up from his desk in the little shed that he called his office and hugged Zachary while asking, "How's your dad?"

"He's doing great. Back to teaching and pretty much back to normal. I stayed an extra week so that I could travel with the Apostle Thomas. He was coming right through here and he didn't want me to travel alone."

"He's a good man and I'm glad you listened to him. Will you plan to share on Sabbath night and catch us up on what you learned while you were in Jerusalem? I know you must have met a lot of followers of Jesus, and we'll all want to hear the news."

"Uncle Zebedee, I'll be glad to share on Sabbath night, but I was wondering what my status is at the plant."

"Malachi is doing great. And he's promoted David to foreman, and as far as I can tell, he's doing a good job also," said Zebedee.

“That’s good, but it poses a problem, and I need you to be honest with me. One thing I learned in Jerusalem is that the Holy Spirit is always one step ahead of us, so, don’t hesitate to tell me that I don’t have a job. I didn’t have a job in Jerusalem, and never missed a meal. Thank you for your help with that. Please, be honest with me about what you want me to do.”

“Well, when you didn’t come back after a month or so, Jaden and I had a long talk. He’s stopped bossing the fishing crew and is apprenticing under me to take over the whole operation. The last time we talked about it, he was not enjoying some of the aspects of the job and stated that he would be happy to share the top position with you. I need to arrange a meeting with him and talk again, but I think he would gladly let you take over the financial accounts and maybe the Processing Plant, and let him cover all the fishing, boat building, and net preparation. It’s too big of a job for one man. Why don’t you take a few days to settle in and I’ll meet with Jaden before the stewards’ meeting on Thursday. Meet me there and we’ll talk afterward.”

“Do you think that would be too awkward for Malachi, for me to show up for the meeting?” asked Zachary.

“I’ll warn him you are back and assure him his position is safe,” said Uncle Zebedee. “Of course, it might be fun to watch him squirm.”

“I don’t think so. Not after him stepping up to such a big job on such short notice,” scolded Zachary. He hugged Uncle Zebedee and assured him he would see him there and plan to join them for Sabbath night.



Zachary was amazed at the perfect peace he felt about attending the stewards’ meeting that afternoon. He realized that it was because he could honestly say that he didn’t know Jehovah’s clear direction and was willing to be led wherever and however He chose. He had enjoyed his time catching up with Ira on Wednesday and letting his body rest. Now, he was ready for some decisions to be made and direction to be given. He left just before noon and walked over to the stewards’ meeting. Everyone greeted him heartily and it felt good to be back with men he had worked with for more than half his life. He respected them and had their respect. Uncle Zebedee and Jaden were the last to arrive and they welcomed Zachary back to the group. The meeting began and every steward reported from his area. It was strange to sit and listen to Malachi’s report on the Processing Plant, but at the same time, it felt right and good. After some questions and assignments, the meeting was adjourned and Uncle Zebedee, Jaden and Zachary remained to discuss his future. Uncle Zebedee asked Zachary if he had thought about whether learning the financial side of the entire operation would be a good fit for him. “I am comfortable and would consider it an honor to serve you this way. I assume I would be training directly under you?”

“Yes. Right now, I’m the only one who knows the set-up and as Jaden has pointed out to me, that’s dangerous for the business.”

“Yes, sir. I agree. I have only done accounting for the Processing Plant, but I enjoyed it.”

“Also, you would oversee the Processing Plant and would be responsible for covering if anything happened to Malachi or the foreman.”

“Yes, sir. I’m comfortable with that.”

“Do you have any questions?”

“Would Malachi do the weekly report, or would I?”

“That would still be Malachi’s job. You would attend the stewards’ meeting but your and Jaden’s job would be to listen, advise, and answer questions. Then I suppose you two would need to meet occasionally to make sure you are both headed in the same direction for the business. I would like to be included on those meetings, but I’ll drop out of the stewards’ meetings once you two are introduced.”

“So, when do I begin?”

“You already have. We’ll let Jaden get back to his work and I want to show you how I prepare the payroll for tomorrow.” Zachary promised to see Jaden on Sabbath night and Jaden once again welcomed him home. Zachary was pleased that Jaden seemed relieved that he was taking over the finances. He didn’t want there to be any resentment or problems. Uncle Zebedee went over the payroll with Zachary and explained that the fishermen would be paid first thing in the morning each Friday, the net cleaners and Fish Market workers would be paid before noon, and the rest of the workers would be paid before sundown. Fridays were always strenuous days. The men worked together until sunset, and Zachary could see that it was a job he would enjoy. He would need to arrive by sunrise tomorrow because the fishermen expected to be paid at dawn so they could head home.

Ira agreed to make sure he was up and ready to go an hour before sunrise. Zachary ate a quick breakfast and reported to Uncle Zebedee. All day Zachary tagged along and observed. He was amazed at the energy of the old fisherman and felt honored to get to spend time with him.

At the end of the day, they walked to Zebedee’s home together and joined the other men who were gathering at the ceremonial washing pots. How good it was to be surrounded by family. Aunt Salome clung to him and asked how his dad, James, John, and Peter were doing when he left. He assured her they were healed and back to full strength. “I love all the apostles, but those are my babies,” she admitted.

“I’ll give you a full report on all the apostles after dinner. But everyone has recovered and is doing fine,” assured Zachary.

There was much laughter and teasing and sweet, sweet fellowship as this family gathered together. After dinner, Uncle Zebedee asked Zachary to come to the front and share. He began by assuring them that the apostles had all fully recovered and shared about his dad’s longer ordeal and fight with death. “But as I was

praying about what to share, I realized that the Holy Spirit was telling me three important facts that I learned while I was in Jerusalem and visiting with the other followers. The first one seems simple, but it is profound. The Holy Spirit will at times give very specific instructions for us to follow.” He told about his first day there and how the Holy Spirit told him exactly what to purchase at the market. “I believe that if we all followed these instructions exactly as He directs, we would become a great army under a single Commander and would get much work accomplished. So, my first challenge to you is to obey quickly and exactly as the Holy Spirit instructs even if you don’t understand it.

”The second thing I learned almost sounds contradictory and I may have trouble explaining it. But often, I would hear an instruction but knew that I didn’t understand it, or wasn’t strong enough to do it, or couldn’t do it by myself. For example, one morning the Holy Spirit told me that I needed to turn my dad over to treat the infection on his stomach. When I thought about it, I knew that I couldn’t do it, and Thomas was in no shape to help me. So, I just prayed again and told Jehovah that I was willing, but I didn’t know how. I fretted about it all day, but felt Jehovah was saying to wait on Him. That evening, a friend of Thomas’ stopped by and agreed to help me turn my dad. Yanis threw his blanket in the yard and stayed with us for the rest of the time so that he could help me turn Dad before and after his work every day. Over and over, I saw this happen. I think the lesson is for us to wait on clear direction. I heard this in the testimony of many different followers. Jehovah would give them an assignment and then He would wait and see if they would attempt to do it on their own or if they would obediently wait on Him. If I had attempted to turn my dad by myself, I probably would have done irreparable damage. Now, point one to obey quickly is the exact opposite of point two to wait for clarity. I don’t know how to explain it. But I can promise you this: Each time it happened, I knew for sure which one I was supposed to do — immediate obedience or waiting. We can’t obey Jehovah in our own strength. We must wait on Him and fully rely on Him to provide what we need to accomplish the task. I’m sorry if that is confusing.

”Finally, I learned that Jehovah doesn’t give His instructions necessarily when I want them. Many, many times I asked him what to do, or when, or where, and I got no answer. I believe that Jehovah was giving me the opportunity to run ahead of Him and do things my own way. But I found that if I would spend that time of waiting on Him in worship and trust, He would eventually guide me. It seems to me that He was more interested in me getting in the right place than He was in answering my questions. A lot of times, He waited until my heart was ready to obey before He gave the direction.

”I hope that this has helped you tonight. That’s all I’ve got to report.” When he sat down, he realized that his knees felt like water and he felt totally wrung out. But there was also a peace that filled his entire being, and he knew that he had said what he had been told to say.

## Chapter 20

Zachary's life fell into a predictable pattern as he trained for his new position under Uncle Zebedee each day, ate dinner with Ira, then walked along the beach each night worshipping and drawing near to Jehovah. He felt he could worship more freely and sing as loud as he wished as the sea drowned out his voice. He had been home for a couple of weeks, when he clearly heard Jehovah's voice telling him that he needed to talk with Saul and forgive him. It took Zachary's breath away. "Why should I forgive him? The hurt is too deep!" Zachary argued.

"Because I have forgiven you." That was all he heard. For several nights he continued to pray that the Holy Spirit would give him step by step instructions. He prayed that Jehovah would orchestrate a meeting. He knew that he was being disobedient, but he couldn't bring himself to even think about Saul without becoming angry. Finally, Zachary began to pray that Jehovah would help him to not be so angry. He was amazed at the change deep inside. Instead of anger, he began to feel nothing but pity for Saul. The Holy Spirit opened his eyes to see the hurt that Saul carried and the rough life that he had experienced. Week after week Zachary prayed for Jehovah to prepare his heart to forgive his brother. One night in the sand along the Sea of Galilee, Zachary fell to his knees and prayed, "Jehovah, please forgive me for the pain I have caused my brother. I fully forgive him for the pain he has caused me." Now he knew that he was ready to encounter Saul and prayed that the Holy Spirit would direct him to know how to make it happen. The very next week, Uncle Zebedee told Zachary to take care of payday as he would not be available. Usually, Saul was surrounded by his fishing friends, but he had had trouble with a net and was late getting into line for his pay. Zachary knew it was no accident. Saul refused to look at Zachary as he stepped up to receive his pay, but Zachary said, "Saul, I need to speak with you in my office. Would you mind waiting for me to finish up here?" There were only two others behind Saul. Zachary knew it wasn't exactly fair since he was now Saul's boss and Saul had no choice but to obey.

"Sure," said Saul tiredly. "Sure, I'll stay." There was a look of resignation and Zachary wondered if Saul felt that he was going to be let go. He was sorry that he had pulled rank on him and prayed again that Saul would listen to what he needed to say.

The two brothers walked into Uncle Zebedee's office and Zachary shut the door and offered Saul a seat. "I'll stand, thank you," said Saul defiantly.

"I need to ask you to forgive me for making your life so miserable as a boy and for avoiding being the brother you needed as we grew up," said Zachary.

"You sound like Dad!" Saul said bitterly.

Zachary continued, undeterred. "I want you to know that I've forgiven you and I pray that you'll find the peace that I've found in following Jesus."

"I don't need your forgiveness, but since you are Mr. High and Mighty, I will say thank you and please let me get some sleep," spat out Saul.

"I love you, Saul. You will always be my brother. Have a good Sabbath rest. Shalom." Saul turned and barged out the door of the shed right into the arms of Jaden.

"Whoa! Slow down, Cousin. Is everything all right?" asked Jaden.

"Yes. Yes, sir. I'm just in a hurry to get home," replied Saul who was accustomed to Jaden being his fishing crew boss. Jaden had warned him many times about his behavior and Saul didn't want to anger him.

Jaden watched as Saul practically ran across the beach toward his home. He entered the shed and saw Zachary sitting at Uncle Zebedee's desk staring into space. "What was that all about?" asked Jaden as he took a seat. Zachary shared with him what had just happened and apologized for doing it on company time. Jaden assured him that he had done the right thing. "You never know when Jehovah might soften his heart. I'm proud of you, Zachary."

"Thank you, Jaden. I'm just trying to be obedient."

"May I suggest that you not push on it. Be patient and wait on Saul to make the next move," said Jaden.

"I agree. I've been obedient and that gives me incredible peace."

"So how did your pay session go?" asked Jaden. "Dad said I should check and make sure everything went smoothly."

"It went fine. I'm recording it now and then I'll be ready to pay the net staff. Is Uncle Zebedee okay?"

"Yeah, I think he just wanted you to handle it on your own."

"He's a wise man."

"Gotta' get busy. Let me know if you need anything. Otherwise, I'll see you tonight. Shalom."

"Thanks. Shalom."



That Sabbath day, Zachary had been invited to visit with Jesse and Miriam and so, about noon, he walked across town to their house behind the Mercantile Store. He was surprised to find that Elijah and Hava were also there. It was wonderful to see his friends again, and they spent a fun afternoon catching up on everyone's news. But most of the conversation centered around Elijah and Hava's upcoming marriage and ideas for furnishing their house. They enjoyed a post-Sabbath meal prepared by Tobias and then Zachary started home. He had enjoyed the day, but there was dissatisfaction. He felt that it had been fun — but missing depth. He wanted to be able to talk about following Jesus. He realized that he hungered for that. He missed

Jerusalem where he was surrounded by serious followers of Jesus. Once again, the thought of traveling to Damascus crossed his mind. *Why? I've got a house and job here. Why should I go to a place where there will be even less fellowship?* He didn't get an answer.



It was almost a month later on a Tuesday when Yanis showed up on his doorstep just before dinner. Zachary welcomed him to his home and Ira quickly put together a plate for him. The men talked, but Zachary realized that Yanis was falling asleep at the table. Ira showed him to the guest room and Zachary encouraged him to take a day to just rest. He would try to be home early so they could visit. Zachary worked all morning and then let Jaden know that he had a guest from Jerusalem and would be available at home if needed. Yanis was awake and ready to explore Capernaum. Zachary explained that he needed to remain home until sunset just in case he was needed at the Fish Shop. Yanis said he wanted to look around the market and was eager to get started. So Yanis left and Zachary returned to the Fish Shop.

At dinner, Yanis reported that there were no butcher positions available at the market. Zachary offered him a job at the Processing Plant, but Yanis wasn't sure that would be a good fit for him. They discussed the farm that Yanis was dreaming of and Zachary suggested that Ira take him tomorrow morning to meet Jesse. Jesse would know about farms in the area and the price of land. Zachary offered Yanis his guest room and meals until he got settled. "I need the fellowship. And I'll take you to Uncle Zebedee's on Sabbath night so that you can meet the family."

At dinner on Thursday night, Zachary could tell that Yanis was really down. He had talked with Jesse about purchasing property and found that he did not have enough money saved. He had decided to return to Jerusalem to work for another year or two as a butcher before moving to Capernaum. He was grateful that he still had a couple of years before Jenay would be ready for marriage. They also spent quite a bit of time talking about the lack of spiritual activity in Capernaum outside of Zebedee's family. Yanis shared with Zachary that his feeling that God was calling him to minister to the people of Capernaum was still very strong. But he knew the time was not right. Yanis headed to Jerusalem early Friday morning.



Elijah had everything planned for the wedding. He had secured permission to hold the wedding ceremony and dinner at the girls' special hideaway behind Ruler Jairus' house. Then Jesse and Miriam

were hosting the second day celebration in their back courtyard. It was a little unusual to move the wedding in the middle, but it would make it easier for the cooks. Zachary had assured Ira that he could volunteer to help if he wanted to, and Elijah had hired additional help to get everything set up and ready for the wedding, which coincided with the school break for Passover. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of Nisan dawned clear and perfect weather for the wedding. Jesse walked with Miriam to the hideaway. When they met Zachary, he was startled to notice that she was with child. "I see congratulations are in order. I guess we haven't talked much lately."

"It's been a while and the store keeps me busy. How is it going with you?" They found Elijah who welcomed them. Soon it was time for Elijah to go and claim his bride. He walked to Rabbi Joel's house and led Hava to the music studio in Ariel's back yard. Ruler Jairus presided over the ceremony and announced that the wedding could commence. A small group of musicians were enjoying the acoustics of the girls' hideaway and the wedding music was lively. Everyone was enjoying themselves. Dinner was served and then there was more dancing and singing.

Zachary made it a point to avoid Ariel and while he enjoyed being at the wedding, he just kept wishing it was over. He was asking himself, *Where would I rather be? Why can't I relax and have fun?* He couldn't really answer those questions except that it all just seemed so shallow and unimportant. He struggled with that answer and wondered if his dad's near-death experience had changed him to the point of not being able to enjoy life. He was trying to sort it all out when Ariel approached him. "You look deep in thought. Are you having a good time?" Zachary startled and stood to greet her. "Please sit down," said Ariel, "I don't want to bother you. I was just watching your face and felt you looked troubled."

"I'm so sorry. I was just chiding myself for not really feeling present. My mind is always somewhere else. I need to remember where I am and enjoy the moment. How are you?" he asked.

"I'm fine. It's a bittersweet day when your best friend marries. I assume you are feeling that, too," said Ariel.

"Not really," said Zachary. "I guess I got used to the idea when they became espoused. But I do understand your feelings. It must be hard since you three were so very close. I know you are happy for them."

"Happy for them, sad for me. But I shouldn't be saying such things to you. I'm not trying to be bold. I ...."

"It's okay. I understand and I didn't take it that way," Zachary assured her. "But let's make sure we stay with the group and not get accused of indiscretion." Zachary was glad that she smiled and agreed.

"So, if you weren't thinking melancholy thoughts, what were you thinking? I could use some stimulating conversation," continued Ariel.

"Well, I don't know whether you know that I stayed in Jerusalem for four months last year and met a lot of followers, spent a lot of time



with the apostles, and feel that I grew a lot. The people I met there seemed to be much more serious about their obedience and following Jesus than the people here in Capernaum — maybe because it's a matter of life and death. They are under severe persecution. I was wondering if that is why I can't seem to enjoy parties and fun anymore. Maybe I became too serious about life." Zachary appreciated that she was a good listener.

"Or maybe you found something very special that we are all missing. Sometimes I feel alone — not because of my marital status — but because I feel an intensity to find truth and follow it diligently. Sometimes, that sets me apart," mused Ariel.

"Ariel, come dance with us!" called Hava as she and Miriam swirled by them.

"Go ahead. Enjoy the moment," said Zachary, grateful for the interruption. He watched the ladies dance for a while and went over to check on Elijah and Jesse. They were laughing and singing the wedding songs with Ruler Jairus and the two rabbis. Zachary joined in and tried to enjoy the fun. He certainly didn't want anyone thinking that he was yearning for a wife!

Rabbi Joel asked if he was planning to travel to Jerusalem with them for Passover this year. Zachary said he couldn't take the time off from work and would be needed to supervise the plant while his uncle was away. After Elijah and Hava slipped away to their own home, Zachary felt it was an appropriate time to call it a night. He walked along the beach to spend some time in prayer before crawling into his blanket. He was grateful that no one seemed to notice his talking with Ariel today. *I must admit I did enjoy talking with her and she seemed to be interested in more serious matters than most people — men or women. But I must be very careful.*

The next morning, Ira was already gone, and Zachary decided to check the shop before walking across town. Jaden assured him that all was under control, but he'd have lots to do when he returned tomorrow. "Now, go have a good time. Shalom."

"Shalom"

Zachary walked slowly across town. *Go have a good time.* It reminded him of King Solomon's writings when he said that all was vanity — all a waste of time. *What is this strange feeling that I keep having? I have a house, a great job, plenty of silver. Where is this restlessness coming from?* And suddenly he knew the answer. He had been called to Damascus, and he was not walking in obedience. He knew it with every fiber of his being. He didn't hear a voice. He didn't see a vision. He just knew that the Holy Spirit was directing him to Damascus. He couldn't explain it because he didn't understand it. But, all of a sudden, his world seemed right-side-up. He knew where he was headed. He didn't know how or when, but he knew where and that was enough.

When Zachary arrived at Jesse's house, the other guests were already celebrating. The bride and groom were glowing with joy, and Zachary felt ready to join in the merriment. Jesse had a lovely

courtyard and Miriam had planted flowers all over the backyard. Benches were scattered around, and everyone had room to dance and sing and celebrate. The wine flowed freely, and food was available all day. Zachary found time to talk with Rabbi Talman about what an accountant would cost for the Fish Shop. He gave him an estimate and told him who to contact. He apologized for talking business, but it would save him a walk across town, and Rabbi Talman was happy to help. Tobias and Ira served another lovely dinner, and Zachary only stayed long enough to look polite. Zachary went straight to his blanket and was quickly asleep.

He arrived at work early on Tuesday and started catching up on the books that were behind because of his two days off. When Jaden stopped by in the early afternoon, Zachary asked if they could schedule a meeting for tomorrow afternoon with both him and Uncle Zebedee. Jaden said he thought it would be fine, but would check with his dad. Zachary found himself humming Psalms of praise. *I haven't felt this happy in months. I know that I'm on the right track.* He refused to think about all the details. He trusted Jehovah to guide him one step at a time.



“Thank you, Uncle Zebedee and Jaden for meeting with me. I have been doing some thinking and wanted to update both of you at the same time. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for all that you’ve done for me. I have enjoyed learning all the accounting, but I am feeling Jehovah’s call to go to Damascus. I can’t explain it, but it’s been there ever since I returned. I’m grateful that I have been able to help you out for this period. And I have some suggestions that I think will be good for your business.” Zachary didn’t give them a chance to comment. He just continued outlining what he knew so far. “Jaden is happy being in charge except for two areas. You have Malachi trained as a steward for the Processing Plant, and he could report to you just like all the other stewards. If an emergency occurred, you could easily move the foreman into that position with little difficulty. I suggest that you might want to train a second foreman so that you’ve always got a backup. Then we have the finances. I checked with Rabbi Talman yesterday and found that the average salary for an accountant for this size of business would be less than my current salary. My suggestion is that you hire an accountant. I will be glad to train him and will also train you, Jaden, so that you won’t be cheated. I am submitting my resignation and will be traveling to Damascus just as soon as I am assured that your business is in good hands.”

“How long will you be gone, Zachary?” asked Uncle Zebedee.

“I have no idea. To be honest, I don’t know whether I’m supposed to sell my house, or whether I’m supposed to take Ira or leave him here. I may be back in a few months and totally regret this decision. All I know is that I am sure that the Holy Spirit is telling me to travel to Damascus and that He will direct my path.”

“What will you do there?” asked Jaden.

“I have no idea, but I can tell you this: I have been restless ever since I returned from Jerusalem. I tried to cover it and pretend that all was well. But when I said yes in obedience to the call on Monday morning, I felt an incredible peace and joy that I can’t explain. I feel that somehow, I am right in the center of Jehovah’s plan for me.”

“Okay,” said Uncle Zebedee. “You outlined some changes for the business, and I missed most of it because I was trying to figure out where this was all heading. Tell us what you need us to do to help you get ready to go.”

“I agree. I think,” said Jaden.

“Okay. First question. Do you want me to hire an accountant or would you prefer to do that yourself?”

Jaden said, “You hire someone since you know the ropes now. I wouldn’t know what to look for.”

“I agree,” said Uncle Zebedee.

“Jaden, can you spend a couple of hours with me this week so I can show you how to check the books?” asked Zachary.

“What about tomorrow afternoon after the stewards’ meeting?”

“That would be perfect. Then you need to instruct Malachi to train his foreman to cover for him when he’s away or out sick — including the record books. You’ll also need to have him train a backup foreman. You’ll have to pay him just a little more than a regular worker, but not much, and he’ll be available if you need him. That will keep Jaden from having to learn a whole new business.”

“I appreciate that,” said Jaden.

“Okay, I’m taking off the rest of the afternoon to talk with an accountant who trains apprentices. I want to see who is available and how soon they can start.”

“Are you sure you aren’t moving too quickly on this?” asked Jaden.

“I promised Jehovah that if He ever gave me clear direction, I would not argue. All I know to do is obey to the best of my ability, and I can’t describe the peace and joy that comes with that decision. I’ll meet with you tomorrow, Jaden. And Uncle Zebedee, I hope you don’t think I’m deserting you after all you’ve done for me. I am so grateful for all your help. But your most valuable help to me has been to point me to Jesus. There’s no way I can stay here and be obedient.”

“I understand, Son. Go with my blessings, but know that you are always welcome back,” said Zebedee with tears in his eyes.

“I need to run. Shalom,” said Zachary.

“Shalom.”



Zachary and Ira sat down to dinner together on Wednesday night as usual. “Ira, refresh my memory on your freedom date.”

“I still have six years, sir.”

“You have become a good friend, and I want to talk with you about something as a friend and fellow follower,” began Zachary.

“Okay.”

“I’ve made a decision to follow what the Holy Spirit is leading me to do. I don’t want to order you to go with me, nor order you to stay. I want you to make your own choice, and I will support you either way.”

“You are leaving again?”

“Yes, I am traveling to Damascus. I don’t know what I will do there. I don’t know how far it is. I don’t know why Jehovah is sending me there, but I am going out of obedience to what I believe He is leading me to do. I will be selling this house. That means that I either need to find you another location to work or invite you to travel with me. I don’t know which is best. I need you to pray and let me know what is best for you.”

“I see,” said Ira, slowly.

“There’s a possibility that Elijah and Hava would purchase you and you could stay close to Tobias and your other friends here. But I have not talked with them, because I wanted to talk with you first.”

“I see,” said Ira again, without giving any indication of his thoughts. “And if I traveled with you, it would be an adventure of not knowing anything about the area, or how long we would be there, or what we would encounter along the way.”

“Exactly,” said Zachary. “I don’t think it’s fair for me to ask you to embark on such a risky adventure unless it is something that you desire. If it’s something you’ve always wanted to do — then great. Let’s do it together. But if you don’t feel good about it, I would never want to force that upon you. I know that you have a lot of friends in Capernaum, and I’m certain, with your reputation as a well-rounded servant, I can locate you a good position.”

“How long may I take to decide, sir?”

“I talked with an accountant today, and I need to wrap up some things at work. I’ll probably be ready to leave just as soon as Passover ends. In the meantime, I’ll need you to get this house ready to sell. Do you know of any repairs that it needs?”

“I imagine just a good deep cleaning and it would be ready, sir.”

“Okay, so start on that tomorrow while you decide what you want to do. If you need to take some time off to pray it through, then just do so. You have been a good and faithful servant to me.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And Ira, I’ll be praying for you to know where Jehovah is leading you. Please pray for me to accomplish whatever He wants in Damascus.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m going to take a walk on the beach. I’ll be back shortly. Goodnight,” said Zachary.

“Goodnight, sir.”

On Thursday afternoon Zachary showed Jaden the books and taught him the questions to ask the accountant so that he could keep up with the expenses and profits of the business. On Friday he

interviewed three different accountants and decided which one would be best suited for the complex business.

By Sabbath night, he felt certain that he was making good progress. As the family gathered at Uncle Zebedee's, word had already leaked out that Zachary was leaving on a ministry trip. As they visited around the table, Zachary insisted that he had no idea why he was being called there, what he would be doing, and certainly not when he would be back. He assured the family that he felt perfect peace and was excited to get started.

On the Sabbath, about noon, Ira asked if they could talk. "Zachary, I've prayed and prayed about this, and I don't know how to tell you, but I just don't want an adventure. I really don't think I would like cooking without a stove and throwing my blanket under the stars. If you can find me a good position so that I can stay in Capernaum, I think I would much prefer it. But I will do whatever you wish. I will accompany you and not complain."

"Ira, thank you for being honest with me. I have not changed my mind; I want you to choose. I will secure you a position before I leave. I will be sad to leave my best friend here, but God knows what is best. It will free me to be completely obedient without worrying about your safety or provision."

"Yes, sir," said Ira.

"I'll be out for a while," said Zachary. "I don't know whether I'll be back for dinner or not. Shalom."

"Shalom."

## Chapter 21

Zachary walked quietly across town. It was still the Sabbath, but he needed to talk with Jesse. He was pleased that Elijah and Hava were visiting Jesse and Miriam. He joined them in the living room and congratulated them again on their wedding. “I came over to let you know that I will be leaving Capernaum soon. I was hoping to catch both of you and let you discuss a matter that is on my heart. I plan to sell my house and I’ll be talking to Jesse about that tomorrow if you are available. But I also need to find a position for Ira. He still has six years to serve to pay his debt to Rome. I don’t intend to talk business on the Sabbath, but I wanted to give you two some time to think about it and see if either one of you wanted to procure a new servant. You both know how extremely helpful he has been to me, and I hate to part with him. I gave him the choice of traveling with me or staying in Capernaum and he has indicated a desire to remain.”

“Zachary, stay and visit. Tobias will gladly set you a plate for the post-Sabbath meal, and we haven’t had time to talk in forever. The wedding day was so busy, and we haven’t had time to catch up. Are you headed back to Jerusalem?” asked Jesse.

“No, I have felt the Holy Spirit calling me to Damascus. I have no idea why or what I will find there, but I must be obedient.”

“I don’t understand you at all these days. You’ve got the best paying job, and the best boss in all Capernaum, and you are just walking away,” said Jesse.

“But obedience to Jehovah brings me the deepest satisfaction and joy that I have ever known. And like the apostles, I would gladly face any hardship, even death, to be obedient to Him.”

“I guess that’s the part I don’t understand. How do you know what Jehovah wants you to do? I just try to do what I think is best and it works for me.”

“Yes, it works for most people. But I keep trying to tell you that there is something more that will bring even more joy and satisfaction to your life. But I don’t want to bore you with it. I should be going,” said Zachary as he rose to leave.

Miriam spoke up and said, “Zachary, I would like to know why you would give up everything to pursue obedience. Please stay and explain it one more time. I will listen, even if the others don’t want to. I know my dad has found that same passion for following Jesus and I want to understand.”

Zachary struggled to know what to do. He didn’t want to offend Jesse, and he knew it would do no good to push him. But he felt certain that the Holy Spirit was saying to give Him a chance to work. “Miriam, I would love to honor your request, but I don’t want to ruin everyone’s evening. Jesse, it’s your house. It’s your call. I’m just an uninvited guest. I simply came to give my best friends dibs on my personal servant. I didn’t come to preach at you.”

“You’ve changed a lot since you were in Jerusalem. I’d like to hear what you learned there. I told you that I was open to learning, and I am. So, I’d like to hear what you have to say — but only if you will stay for dinner,” said Jesse.

“Okay, if you are sure I’m not intruding.”

“Of course not,” said Jesse emphatically.

“I don’t know whether you all know that I stayed in Jerusalem for four months to take care of my dad. I spent those four months caring for him, but also learning from the apostles and followers of Jesus. It was an incredible experience and one that has forever changed me. In the first place, you need to know that following Jesus in Jerusalem can get you killed, so the followers there are pretty serious about their commitments. When I arrived, I found that all the apostles had been scourged about a month earlier for teaching about Jesus. My dad was near death and living in a tiny hut with the Apostle Thomas who was slowly recovering. Both men needed my help, but I didn’t know what to do except pray. I had never cared for someone who was sick. The Holy Spirit began to give me specific instructions and I obeyed them completely. My dad totally recovered. The entire time I was there, I don’t think there was a single day that Jehovah didn’t teach me something about trusting Him and depending on Him to provide for me. Now I feel the Holy Spirit wants me to travel to Damascus, and that’s what I intend to do as soon as possible.”

“You make it sound so easy. But I’ve asked the Holy Spirit to guide me, and I can’t hear Him,” replied Hava. “At least not like you are talking about.”

“I agree that it takes practice. I gave you examples of very specific instructions, but sometimes, like this move to Damascus, it’s much more vague. Let me see if I can explain that one. As I was walking with the Apostle Thomas and a friend back to Capernaum after being away for four months, I really didn’t know if I would have a job. This crazy idea popped into my head. I thought to myself, ‘Well, if I don’t have a job, I’ll just go on to Damascus.’ Now, I’ve never thought of Damascus in my life. I had no desire to go there. I’m not basically an adventure seeker, and it struck me as a really strange thought. When I got back here and found that Uncle Zebedee had arranged a job for me, I got busy and forgot all about Damascus. But one night I was praying and was really missing my friends in Jerusalem. I said to myself, ‘I probably should have just stayed in Jerusalem.’ Immediately, I had that strange thought again, ‘Maybe I should go to Damascus.’ That was several months ago. The next morning, I got busy at work and forgot all about it. Then last week, I was at your wedding and all day on Sunday, I felt out of sorts. I felt frustrated because everyone seemed to be having fun except me. I was wondering if seeing death up close had somehow scarred me so that I couldn’t have fun. On Monday morning, as I was walking here, I knew that Jehovah was asking me to go to Damascus. Now, the very minute I made up my mind to go, I was filled with an incredible peace and joy. I really enjoyed your wedding that second day and was able to laugh and

dance and sing and enjoy myself. I felt whole and that I was right in the center of Jehovah's plans for me. I can't explain to you how good that feels. It's the first time I've felt that peace and joy since I was in Jerusalem. Now, I have not heard any specific instructions. I have just been moving toward obedience. The more I obey, the more peace and excitement I feel. When I drag my feet and delay, I feel out of sorts again. Does that help? I think the Holy Spirit speaks to us in many, many ways. We don't all hear Him the same. Sometimes He speaks through The Law and The Prophets. Sometimes He speaks through other people. All I know is that when He is speaking and I obey, there's an incredible joy. I want to share that with everyone. But the most important thing that I want to share is that you can't be in a right relationship with Jehovah if you are not following Jesus. And you can't say you are following Jesus if you are just doing what you've always done and trusting yourself to guide you. That's not obedience.

"I remember my first struggle with that was when the Holy Spirit told me to put hot rags on my dad. The Apostle Thomas told me that because he was running a high fever, I should put cold rags on him. I remember the dilemma I felt. Do I do what is logical, what others are telling me is best, or am I going to obey what I know the Holy Spirit said? I'm always struggling with that. And I think it's probably one of the hardest things for a follower to do. It's so easy to just trust ourselves. But Jesus calls us to follow Him and do things His way. I admit it doesn't make sense for me to sell my house and leave my job, my friends, and everything familiar. But I'm certain that that is what He's asking me to do and I'm certain that when I arrive in Damascus, He'll show me what needs to be done."

When Zachary paused, Tobias called for the group to come to the table and eat a post-Sabbath dinner. The five friends gathered around the table and continued to talk. Zachary answered their questions as honestly as he could. Hava shared, "I was hearing the Holy Spirit speak to me right after I asked Him to be my Messiah. Then it just stopped. It's like it's not working."

"Hava, I don't know all the answers in your case, but one of the most common reasons that the Holy Spirit quits speaking is because we are not spending time listening, or because we have already predetermined not to obey. I imagine you have been distracted by the wedding and learning to be Elijah's wife. You may find that as you have more time to spend seeking Him, you'll hear Him more."

"That's true. I haven't had a lot of prayer and worship time."

"I really need to get back to the house. Jesse, will you be working tomorrow? I won't be able to meet with you until late afternoon. Will that be okay?"

"Yes, I'll be available until sunset."

"Okay, I'll see you as soon as I can, but I've got to train a new accountant tomorrow and it may take a while. I imagine this will be my farewell to the rest of you. May Jehovah bless you and your homes and the arrival of your little one. Shalom."



“Shalom.” Elijah got up and gave Zachary a hug. “Thanks for being a good friend.”

“You’ve been a good friend to me, too. Shalom.”

As Zachary walked home, he felt a peace that he knew was from getting the privilege to teach about Jesus. How he longed to be doing that daily. He prayed that in Damascus he would be able to teach someone to follow Jesus and he hoped there would be more than one.



On Sunday morning, Ruler Jairus and Rabbi Joel met the schoolboys and their dads and three alumni in front of the synagogue to begin their trek to Jerusalem for Passover. It was a smaller group than last year. Only four of the schoolboys and their dads were traveling with them, so there was a total of thirteen men and boys. Ruler Jairus wondered how many more of these trips he would be making if there was so little interest in the retreat. But he always enjoyed getting time away from school to really get to visit with each student and alumnus.



On Sunday morning at the Fish Shop, Zachary began training the new accountant, who quickly caught on to the system that Uncle Zebedee had used for years. He recommended some changes that would make it easier to figure their taxes, and Zachary authorized the changes. Zachary felt comfortable leaving the accountant to look over the books while he left to talk with Jesse. Jaden agreed to check on the accountant and see if he had questions while Zachary was gone.

When Zachary arrived at the Westside Mercantile Store, Jesse was helping a customer, and Zachary patiently waited. “Sorry about that. Come into my office and let’s talk.” Zachary followed him into his office and Jesse shut the door. His two clerks could handle the customers and he was free to concentrate on Zachary’s needs. “I’ve been checking the numbers, and it looks like you should be able to sell the house for this amount of money. Now, are you wanting to also sell the furnishings?”

“Yes, I can’t carry them with me. So, all I’ll be taking is a travel bag and blanket.”

“Okay. I remember your house well. I spent many a happy Sabbath afternoon there. I would suggest that that would bring the total to this amount. Is that what you were expecting? Now, about Ira. You said that he had six more years of debt as a slave. That means that other than the purchase price for a six year slave, you would not expect anything above that. Am I right?”

“Actually, I was thinking that if either one of you couples wanted him, I would just give him to you for free, since I can’t take him with

me. I wouldn't charge a purchase price if you'll provide him with good care," said Zachary. "Of course, if I must sell him to a stranger, that would be different."

"Okay. Let's talk about that separately. Is this an agreeable price for the house and its furnishings?"

"Jesse, you know better than I do. I bought the house four years ago and I don't know anything about prices. I trust you completely to set the price, but it looks great to me."

"Well, if you agree, then we can set up a sale on Tuesday or anytime after that."

"That quickly?"

"Yes. You see I know a good property when I see it. I think I will purchase that house and use it as a rental until Elijah can afford to buy it from me. And I will take care of Ira until they can house him."

"That sounds perfect, Jesse. Thanks."



On Monday afternoon, Zachary walked over to eat dinner with Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome. It was a special time, as Zachary had them all to himself. He was able to thank them for providing him a place to belong and blessing him with so many good things. After dinner, Uncle Zebedee prayed a special prayer of blessing over Zachary. It was a somber night as they all realized that he might not see them again. But it was a joyful night because Zebedee and Salome both knew that Zachary was following Jesus. They were glad that they had invested in his life and had watched him grow into a fine young man ready to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Early Tuesday morning, Zebedee and Salome; Jonas; Benji; Benji's brother, Joseph, who was eleven years old; and two of their slaves began their journey to Jerusalem in the oxcart. Passover began on Sunday, so they hoped to be at James and John's house before the Sabbath.



On Tuesday, Zachary asked Jaden if he could come over to witness the sale of the house tomorrow morning. Jaden agreed and the men discussed what needed to be done since this was Zachary's last day at work. Jaden had some questions about the Processing Plant, and they walked through the entire Fish Shop together. About noon, Jaden paid him for the half-week's work and then asked if they could pray together before he left. Zachary appreciated the loving way that Jaden prayed for his safety and clear direction on this journey. As he walked toward the house, he was overcome with the desire to purchase some pomegranates for his mother. He had a vague memory of her loving to eat them. He walked to the market and

purchased a basket and filled it. He walked quickly to Saul's house. He thought about leaving them on the porch but felt led to knock quietly on the door. His mother answered the door but indicated that Saul was still asleep. She seemed nervous about him being there. So, he just handed her the basket and said, "I love you, Mother. I just wanted you to know that." Then he turned and left. He walked home and told Ira that he had changed his mind. He had decided to leave immediately after the sale of the house tomorrow. He saw no reason to wait. Ira assured him his food sack would be ready. Zachary began to pack his travel bag. He packed an extra robe, a cloak, a fishing line, a flint, and a knife. He decided against a skillet and would trust that Jehovah would guide him.

After dinner, Zachary walked along the beach and spent the evening in prayer. Everything felt right even though there was sadness about leaving his home, friends, and family behind. He still felt that he was on the right track. He had talked with friends who had traveled to Damascus and was planning on approximately six days of walking. Ira would pack him plenty of food. He didn't know what to expect but was looking forward to getting started.

Wednesday morning, Zachary and Ira ate breakfast together. There was really nothing left to be said. Jaden and two men from the Processing Plant arrived just before Jesse, Elijah, and his other two witnesses. Jesse described the property to be sold. Zachary named his price. Jesse counted out the silver. Zachary recounted the silver and handed Jesse the key. This was the traditional sale transaction, and all went smoothly. All the men wished him well and said goodbye except for Jesse and Elijah. Ira retreated into the house and left the three friends alone. Jesse and Elijah helped Zachary balance the four bags on his back and watched him begin his journey along the beach.

Jesse told Elijah, "I need to talk with Ira and then I'm not headed your way so you might as well get back to your bride. Shalom, and thanks for coming."

"Shalom," said Elijah. Jesse pretended to be checking the courtyard gate, but once Elijah was gone, he walked down the steps to the beach area. He walked along the beach headed south where he was pretty sure it would be deserted. He found some rocks to sit on. He and Zachary had come here often on Sabbath afternoons to talk. He needed to be alone. As he sat and thought about Zachary, and life, and all the things that Zachary had said last Sabbath, Jesse slipped to his knees in the sand and cried out, "Jehovah God, I know that You sent Jesus to be my Messiah. But I've been resisting being obedient, or listening, or surrendering to You. I'll be an abba soon and will need Your help more than ever. Zachary says I'm missing out by not asking for You to guide me by Your Holy Spirit. I want to ask You to do that right now. Jehovah, I not only want Jesus to be my Messiah and pay for my sins, but I want You to send Your Spirit inside of me and fill me with Your direction. I am willing to obey whatever You show me. I'm willing to set aside time to listen. Please guide me. Please guide me. I want this so badly."

“Be still and know that I am God.” Jesse heard the verse from Psalms clearly in his head. He just sat still and waited. He didn’t know what else to do. As he sat, his head began to be filled with an idea that was foreign to him. He had always loved helping people, but he had never been generous with his money. He felt that Jehovah was giving him clear directions on what to do with Zachary’s house. But he continued to wait and listen. When he was certain that he understood the plan, he began to sing a Psalm of praise. He worshipped and felt closer to Jehovah than he had ever felt. He felt one with Him. He felt the Holy Spirit inside of him and knew that this was the feeling that Zachary was trying to explain. He thought about trying to catch up with Zachary and tell him, but Zachary was already too far to catch. He prayed again for Zachary’s safety and thanked Jehovah for clear direction, then he began his trek back to the Mercantile Store. He wanted to share his special time with Miriam before he shared it with anyone else. But when he arrived home, Tobias said that Miriam had gone to visit with Ariel and wouldn’t be home until dinner. Jesse discovered that the store was busy because it would be closed during Passover week. Everyone was stocking up on supplies. He helped wherever he was needed, and it was sunset before they had any breaks. He sent his clerks home and closed up for the night. Miriam and Ariel had had a happy visit and Miriam wanted to show him some new songs that they had written. After dinner, he asked her to join him on the rooftop. He told her about inviting Jesus to be his Messiah and his feeling that the Holy Spirit was speaking to him and guiding him. “Oh, Jesse, I’ve been praying for you. I know it’s real, but I’ve been trying to hide my obedience to Him because I didn’t want to offend you.”

“I don’t want you to ever hide your obedience to Jehovah. Please promise me that we will journey together from now on.”

“Yes, I promise. I want Jehovah to be in charge of our home.”

“And our business?” asked Jesse.

“Of course. I want Him to guide us in everything,” agreed Miriam.

“What if He tells me to do something that will lose money?” asked Jesse.

Miriam was quiet for a few minutes. “Then I would want you to make sure that you are hearing clearly, then be totally obedient. Jesus paid a terrific price for us. I don’t really think that obedience will be without cost. Didn’t King David say that he would not offer Jehovah what does not cost him dearly?”

“Okay, well, this is what I heard and I’m certain it’s from the Holy Spirit. It was so clear,” said Jesse. “First of all, you know that I bought Zachary’s house this morning. It is beautiful and just the perfect size for Elijah and Hava, and there’s a room for Ira. At first, I thought I would rent it out until they could afford to rent it, but Jehovah has asked me to rent it to them right now at the same price as they are renting their current house. Their only other expense will be to provide food and care for Ira – but in exchange they get a well-trained servant and a beautiful place. I would allow them to rent it until they are able to

buy it, and then they could add more rooms to it as they desire. What do you think?"

"Isn't it a little far from the school?"

"Yes, and it's a little far from us. But you girls generally meet at Ariel's house and that is halfway. So, I don't think it is too far," said Jesse.

"Oh, wouldn't it be fun to have them settled? And it would be a gift from us and Zachary and Jehovah. When can we tell them?"

"Actually, we need to tell them as soon as possible so that they can get moved before Passover."

"So, first thing tomorrow?" asked Miriam. "Let's tell them we have a surprise and ask them to walk over there with us. I've never seen his house and I'm pretty sure that Hava hasn't either. Then what if they don't want to do it?"

"That's okay. I'll just rent it out to someone else. But Elijah has already said that he'd like to buy it someday when he could afford it. So, I know he likes it."

"Oh, it's going to be hard to sleep. But this baby is getting so big, I don't get much sleep anyway. It won't be long now."

On Thursday morning, Jesse went to check on the store and worked there until Miriam came over and asked if he was ready to go. They walked to Elijah and Hava's, and Jesse invited them to take a walk with them to see a different house. Jesse emphasized that it would be the same rental price as their current one but had more space and was fully furnished. They agreed and began their walk. After a while, Elijah asked, "Are we going where I think we're going?"

"Probably," said Jesse mysteriously. After a few more minutes, he waved his hand toward the house. The two girls looked around and Ira came out to greet them.

"What's going on, Jesse?" demanded Elijah.

When Ira had given both girls a tour of the house, he invited them to sit in the courtyard and enjoy the view while he prepared some juice. The men joined them, and Jesse spoke. "I want to tell all of you that I've accepted Jesus as my Messiah and I've heard the Holy Spirit speak in my life. I'm just trying to be obedient. Zachary wanted you to have Ira and gave me his paperwork. All you'll need to do is take over his documents. Pay me your normal rent, and it is yours until you can buy it. But we need to get you moved before the Sabbath because it's Passover. That will give you a couple of weeks to get settled before school starts again."

"Will it be too far to walk to school?" asked Miriam.

"No, it will be perfect. I will enjoy the walk," said Elijah, still in shock.

"Let's see if Ariel and Mother want to help us get moved today. Can we move in right now? Today?" asked Hava.

"Certainly. I've got to get back to the store, but I'll send Tobias and Ira to help. And you can check with all the moms and Ariel. I imagine you'll be moved in before sunset!" declared Jesse.

"Let's get busy. Ira, are you okay with this?" asked Elijah.

“Yes, sir. I’m excited to be serving you. You’ll just have to let me know if you need anything.”

“Right now, we need help getting moved and settled. We’ll talk about schedules later, but we won’t need Sabbath dinner or Passover. We’ll be eating with Talman and Sarah,” said Hava.

“Then I’ll have plenty of time to help with the move,” agreed Ira.

Elijah signed the papers regarding the slave purchase and laid them in the house. The five of them walked back across town, planning who to tell first. Jesse walked to the store while the others headed to the rental house. With the three mothers’ help and Ira and Tobias, it only took one trip to carry everything. The mothers were all impressed with the house and amazed at what Jehovah had provided for Elijah and Hava. Before sunset, everyone said their goodbyes and the young couple realized that a new chapter of their married life had begun. They would have to learn how to accept Ira’s help, but Hava didn’t think that would take her long at all!

## Chapter 22

Zebedee and his family arrived in Jerusalem and stayed with James and John. Mary seemed quite frail, and Salome spent as much time as possible just sitting by Mary's bedside. Together the sisters talked of spending all eternity with Jesus. Since James and John's house was a hub of activity for the followers of Jesus, they got to visit with most of the other apostles while they were there. They talked with Andrew, Zachary's dad, and told him of Zachary's call to Damascus. Andrew did not seem surprised but got a faraway look in his eyes.

They spent an evening with Salome's brother Zeke and several nephews and their families. Salome's other brother, Kenan, was a follower of Jesus. Because Kenan lived in Cana, they visited together more frequently and were close. But Zeke was a Pharisee and not happy with Kenan, Salome, or Mary's belief that Jesus was the Messiah. It was their family tradition to gather three days after Passover to celebrate family with whoever could come. It was a special time and Zeke, the eldest brother, always hosted and provided an elaborate meal. Zebedee and Salome and their family returned to Capernaum late on Wednesday.



The schoolboys' trip was uneventful but strenuous for Jairus. They returned to Capernaum just in time for the men and boys to hurry home for the Sabbath. The wives greeted them with the news of Elijah and Hava's move. School started immediately on Sunday since they had taken an earlier break for the wedding. All the rabbis knew that it was time for Rabbi Meshullum to pay them another visit. They were still in total compliance with the Sanhedrin's rules, but it was always stressful to have the inspection. So far, everything had gone smoothly.



Miriam gave Jesse a healthy first-born son soon after Passover and they decided to name him Zach. Ariel and Hava spent as much time with the new little one as possible and by Shavuot, Hava announced that she was carrying Elijah's baby. Life fell into a predictable pattern. The five couples and Ariel got together each Sabbath evening.



Zebedee was sleeping late, and Salome was enjoying a quiet Sabbath morning when a messenger arrived from Jerusalem. He told Salome that her sister Mary had died on Thursday. She knew when she left at Passover that Mary wouldn't last long. She and Zebedee debated whether to make the long trip since it had only been a month since they had been in Jerusalem. They finally decided to go because they felt that Mary's family needed the support. Zebedee said he would check with Jaden and Jonas and see if they or their families wanted to go, too. It was agreed that they would leave at dawn tomorrow. On Sunday, Zebedee and Noah sat on the driver's seat while Jonas and Benji sat in the back with Salome. Jeshua, their kitchen servant, and the messenger from Jerusalem were also in the back. Since they were in a hurry, everyone was trying to juggle breakfast as they bounced along in the oxcart. They finally arrived in Jerusalem midmorning on Wednesday.

Everyone had gathered at James and John's house and their servants helped them to get settled into guest rooms. Most of Mary's children still lived in Nazareth and were raising their families there. Salome especially enjoyed visiting with Rachel and Ruth, Mary's twin daughters who were grown and had grandchildren. *Where has time gone?* Even though they were Jesus' earthly half-sisters, they did not believe that He was the Messiah. They were grieving the loss of their mother and Salome felt the Holy Spirit's direction to just love them and be available. Kayla and Marta were encouraging them to look through Mary's things to see if there was anything that they wanted to keep. But in actuality, there was only her one extra robe and a cloak. Ruth and Rachel took those and cried because they still smelled like their mother.

Thursday was the final day of mourning and was limited to just family. Up until then, the house had been constantly filled with followers of Jesus who were bringing food and recalling wonderful stories about Mary. The professional mourners and musicians were sent away, and the family could just be quiet and remember their sister, and mother, and grandmother. There were a lot of tears, but also laughter as they recalled private family stories. The servants carried the dinner out to the courtyard since it was such a large family. There were probably sixty people counting all the babies and toddlers. *How Mary would have loved this reunion. We should have done it while she was alive.* But as dinner was almost over, the temple guard stormed into the courtyard and ordered everyone to be still. It was a horrible experience. The guards ripped the babies from their mother's arms and handed them to servants. The slaves were ordered to stay inside the house and the fourteen ladies were tied together with ropes that cut into their wrists. The men were being shoved to the back of the yard and Salome couldn't see what was happening to them. She suspected that the guards thought that this was a home group meeting. She recalled that when they were here a year ago, James and John had recently been scourged. *I wonder if they scourge*



women? She wasn't sure. She didn't want to think about it. The guards were pulling the women like fish on a line toward the temple. It was getting dark, and they were taken to one side of the temple and shoved into an underground dungeon. The stench was unbearable. The door was slammed and locked. There was no light to see where they were or what else was in the room.

Kayla seemed to take charge. "Ladies, we can't do anything until we get these ropes off our arms. I can't untie my own wrists, but we can untie each other's, so find someone's arm and start untying it." That gave everyone something to think about besides what was happening. Again, Kayla's voice was comforting. "Now, if you are like me, you are wanting to figure out whether it's safe to sit down. I think this floor must be filthy, but we have no way of cleaning it. I suggest we all spread out our robes and take a seat the best we can. I've got a feeling we'll be spending the night here. We'll use each other's robes to protect our faces since we don't have pillows or mats."

Several of the women were still crying for their babies and asking what would happen to them. Marta spoke up, "Several friends of ours are nursing their own babies; they will take care of yours. Our servants will see to it that they are well cared for."

"Jenay, are you here?" Kayla called. When there was no answer, she stated, "That's what I expected. Usually, they only take women over the age of thirteen. So, I'm sure Jenay is busy entertaining the children. You know she'll keep them as happy as possible."

"What do you mean, usually?" demanded a scared voice in the darkness.

Kayla responded gently. "I'm afraid that this has been happening quite regularly in Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin order a home to be raided and searched and then they quickly release them unharmed. I suspect that they arrested us because they noticed a large crowd gathered and they just want to know what is going on."

"It seems they could ask us! This is my mother's passing. This is not the way I wanted to remember her," said another voice in the dark.

"No, I'm sure it's not. Hopefully, it will be quickly settled in the morning, and we will be released," said Marta.

"There have been arrests all over Jerusalem and all because of the Jesus followers like James and John," said a harsh voice that everyone recognized as Zeke's wife, Eden.

"Yes, I should have added that the arrests are primarily for the purpose of identifying followers of Jesus," said Kayla. "Now, can we all try to find a comfortable position to lie in and try to get some sleep?" She began to quietly sing from Psalm 57.

Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,  
for in you I take refuge.  
I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings  
until the disaster has passed.  
I cry out to God Most High,  
to God, who vindicates me.

He sends from heaven and saves me,  
rebuking those who hotly pursue me—  
God sends forth his love and his faithfulness.

Some of the ladies joined in singing quietly, since this was a familiar Psalm. They began to try to find comfortable places in the filthy dungeon. When morning dawned, the women discovered that there was enough light coming in from around the door to be able to see the faces of those around them. The guard opened the door to allow the servants from James and John's house to serve the women breakfast. They assured the young mothers that their babies were being cared for by nursing mothers who had come to help. The house was filled with friends who were helping with the care of the children. They had contacted Andrew and Peter who were trying to secure their release as quickly as possible. They were sure it was just a misunderstanding. Some of the women ate heartily, while others just sat and cried for their babies. Others felt unable to eat because of the smells around them. None of them had ever experienced anything so vile. All day they tried to comfort and encourage one another. But everyone was anticipating a quick release. Late in the day, the door opened once again, and the servants were allowed to bring more food. They had also managed to include blankets. They reported that the men had been taken to three separate dungeons. They reminded the ladies that since this was the beginning of the Sabbath, they had brought enough food for tomorrow also. They could not return to check on them until the Sabbath was over.

"So, we'll be here another night?" asked Salome.

"At least two more nights! The Sanhedrin won't meet until Sunday to discuss our release, even though we are not involved in this heresy," said Eden bitterly.

"Yes, it will probably be Sunday," said Kayla as gently as she knew how. "You need to eat to keep up your strength. I don't want you getting sick in here." The women who had resisted earlier had gotten somewhat accustomed to the terrible stench and were feeling tempted by the dishes that had been brought to them. Marta sang the Sabbath prayer of blessing over the ladies and then prayed for their families. It seemed that once everyone had eaten, a little bit of the tension eased. As the ladies tucked their blankets under their heads or wrapped them around their shoulders, Kayla began to sing more Psalms of comfort. Several of the ladies joined her in the songs that they had sung since childhood.

On Sabbath morning, the ladies opened the box filled with delicious breakfast foods: rolls with butter and cinnamon, and lots of fresh fruit. "It seems so unreal to be remembering my mother in this way. I mean, she would be so shocked to see us here," said Rachel.

"Your mother was a very strong lady. She knew a lot of pain and suffering yet was always trusting Jehovah to guide her. I personally believe that she is watching us from Heaven. And I feel Jesus is right here with us making sure that we'll be safe," said Marta.

“Okay, I don’t understand that at all. My brother is dead. We all know that. How can you say he is here? I don’t get it.”

Marta quickly prayed before she spoke carefully. “Ruth, I believe that there are a lot of things that you don’t know about your big brother. And I don’t know how much you want to know. But I can assure you He is not dead. He is very much alive, and I talk with Him almost daily.”

“Okay, that’s going just a little far when we all know he was crucified. My husband Zeke watched the crucifixion. He’ll tell you. He’s dead,” challenged Eden.

“Yes, He was crucified as the Lamb of God. He was Emmanuel, God with us. He was the Messiah sent for each one of us. Then three days after the crucifixion, He conquered death, came back to life, and traveled with the apostles and other followers for forty days before He returned to Heaven. During that time, He gave them instructions to tell everyone the truth. Do you know that there are over a half-million people who believe that Jesus is the Messiah and as a result, the Holy Spirit lives inside of them and guides their lives daily?” asked Marta.

“But he was just my brother.”

“No, Rachel, He was sent to Mary from Jehovah. He was no ordinary man. He proved it by the miracles He did. He proved it by fulfilling The Law and The Prophets. And He proved it by dying for our sins and then by conquering death and Satan and rising again,” said Marta.

“I talked with Him after He came back from the grave. I hugged Him. He was very much alive. My children hugged him and then watched Him rise up into Heaven forty days after His death. And then ten days later, He sent His Spirit to live inside of me and all the other followers, so that He could talk with us and tell us what needed to be done,” said Kayla gently but passionately. “I know what I saw. I know what I feel deep inside. Your brother is not an ordinary man. He is God in the flesh.”

Everyone became quiet as they could tell that Kayla was speaking from her heart. “Then why were we arrested? Tell me that!” demanded Eden.

“I believe it was a mistake. I believe that the Sanhedrin thought they had caught us with a houseful of Jesus’ followers, and they intended to punish us. But I believe that once they discover that we were gathered for a family death, they will release us without problems. I don’t know that, but that’s what I feel is happening,” said Kayla.

“So this group of people that keep bringing food and blankets and taking care of our babies while we are here, are followers of Jesus?”

“Yes. They, too, are being led by Jesus’ Holy Spirit to take care of our needs,” said Marta.

“That’s pretty amazing. I didn’t realize that Jesus had such a following. I assumed that once he died, then that was all over,” said Ruth.

“Oh, no. There are over a hundred different home groups that meet in Jerusalem. Ours is just one. Your brother, James, informally oversees all the groups. Then there are groups all over the Roman world that were started by people who took the truth back to their own cities. The apostles, and many of the disciples that traveled with Jesus, try to help others discover the truth. James and John preach at the temple most days, but they also travel all over the Roman world to teach others about the New Way that Jesus taught. He said that once He died, His blood would pay for our sins. One time Jesus said that He was eager to die so that the wildfire could begin,” said Marta.

“I know that He is God because I heard Him tell us that He was going to be crucified, then resurrected three days later. Then He told His apostles to meet Him in Capernaum afterward. I know for a fact that He met with them just north of our place,” said Salome.

“I know we are in a locked room, and I’m not forcing my beliefs on anyone, but I know what I have seen, and heard, and experienced. I want to encourage you to ask Jehovah to make it clear to you who Jesus was and is. John the Baptizer said that He was the Lamb of God Who would take away the sins of the world,” said Kayla.

The group seemed to be deep in thought, other than just some quiet whispering, and everyone seemed to want it that way.

Kayla noticed that the sun was getting low and soon the servants brought boxes of food for the ladies. They assured Kayla and Marta that all the groups in Jerusalem were praying. Everyone filled their plates quickly before it was too dark. Afterward, Kayla began leading the ladies in more Psalms as they stretched out on their blankets and robes and tried to get comfortable for yet another night in the dungeon.

The servants brought breakfast and assured the women that their children were all fine and well cared for. They were missing them but were enjoying the entertainment of being together with their cousins and new friends. They had barely finished breakfast when the guard stomped to the door again and opened it wide. “You may go,” he said. The ladies all looked at each other and then gathered up the boxes of dishes and left the dungeon as quickly as possible. Marta led the way back to the house as the other ladies followed, blinking in the bright sunlight. They had been in the dark dungeon for three days and their eyes had to adjust, but it was all they could do to keep from running toward their children. Their only sadness upon arrival was that the men were still in prison. Throughout the next three days, the men were gradually released. Each man gathered up his wife and children and headed home as quickly as possible. The others waited expectantly with Kayla and Marta. The Nazareth group left on Tuesday just as soon as everyone in their group was accounted for.

It was Wednesday midmorning when the group from Capernaum was released. They stayed until they knew for sure that James and John were safe before starting back to Capernaum early on Thursday morning. It would mean having to camp for the Sabbath, but they needed to get back to work. Zebedee asked Jeshua to ride on the wagon seat with Noah so the family could be together. He just wanted

to hold Salome's hand and make sure that she was okay. At each stop they shared more about their experience until they had thoroughly processed it. They finally agreed that Jehovah had orchestrated each dungeon to be filled with just the right people so that all could hear the good news that Jesus was the Messiah. They camped early for Sabbath and enjoyed a day of rest before continuing to Capernaum.



Shavuot came and went and while Ruler Jairus encouraged any who wanted to travel to Jerusalem, he stated that he would be unable to travel this year. He knew that wouldn't be popular with the synagogue, but he didn't feel up to walking it twice a year. And Talman was adamant that he was not stepping foot inside Jerusalem. They would celebrate it the way most of the other Jews in Capernaum celebrated — enjoying their time off work and relaxing. Jairus and Rachel decided to host a special Pentecost celebration to remember the day that Jehovah had sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles and followers of Jesus. The three original rabbis and their wives, the three daughters and their two husbands, were all invited. Jesse and Miriam would be bringing their son who was almost four months old. Hava was carrying Elijah's baby and they were preparing for an autumn birth. Arial smiled and enjoyed playing auntie to little Zach and she was learning to be content living in her abba's home and staying single. Life was good and they were blessed, but Arial felt her life was incomplete.

## Chapter 23

Hebrew School began again in the fall and the three young ladies started to teach the preschoolers twice a week. That was satisfying for Arial, but soon Hava would need to drop out because of the baby. Rabbi Meshullum visited the school about a month after it started. As usual, he just made a cursory visit and was quickly on his way.

One night in late fall, just as Elijah and Hava had finished dinner, there was a knock at the door. Since Ira was busy in the kitchen, Elijah went to the door. A nice looking young man stood before them looking puzzled. "I'm sorry, sir, I was looking for Zachary. I'm a friend of his from Jerusalem."

"Oh, Zachary doesn't live here anymore. Yes, he was the former owner." Hava insisted that they invite him in, and Elijah issued the invitation.

"Can you tell me where he is? My name is Yanis, and I just wanted to visit with him for a few days before I continue my journey to Jerusalem."

"Were you the one who helped him with his dad?" asked Hava.

"Yes, I was. So, you know him and can tell me where to find him?"

"I'm sorry, but we don't know. He felt Jehovah's call to travel to Damascus before Passover and we have not seen him since."

"Oh, I'm sorry to bother you. Could you direct me to Mr. Zebedee's? I'm sure he would provide me lodging and I need to get some rest. I've walked for two days and I'm exhausted."

"It's not far, let me walk with you." Elijah grabbed his cloak and a lantern and promised to be right back. He guided Yanis to Mr. Zebedee's and left him at their door.

Hava was giggling when he returned. "I have been praying that Jehovah would send a man for Arial. This is perfect. Now how do we get them together?"

"Well, for starters, we know nothing about him and it's past time for you to be asleep," said Elijah who still needed to prepare lessons for tomorrow.

"You are no fun." He kissed her goodnight and tucked her into her blanket, shaking his head at her silliness.



Yanis knocked on Mr. Zebedee's front door and servants quickly responded. When he identified himself, he was invited inside to wait in the living room. They notified Mrs. Salome and she dressed and came to greet him. She remembered him as being one of the young men who traveled with Jesus. She explained that Zebedee was out fishing, but that any follower of Jesus was welcome in this home. "Thank you

so much. I was expecting to stay with Zachary, but I've been told that he is no longer in Capernaum."

"No, he's not. But let's visit in the morning. Arah will attend to your needs." Salome returned to her room knowing that Yanis would be well cared for.

The next morning, he woke feeling much better and joined Salome at the table. "Mrs. Salome, I'm sorry I woke you last night, but I could not think what I should do when I didn't find Zachary."

"You did exactly the right thing. What brings you to Capernaum?"

"I'm actually just passing through. I live in Jerusalem, but I help the Apostle Thomas with his harvest every year on the farm. I am just now returning, and I promised Zachary that I would stop and visit for a few days. I would like to eventually marry and relocate to Capernaum. I feel that Jehovah has called me to be here."

"What would you do in Capernaum?" asked Salome.

"Ever since I was here with Jesus, I have felt that Jehovah wanted me to help the people of Capernaum understand more about Him. But I also hope to establish a goat farm here and produce milk and possibly cheese and butter. I'm a certified butcher in Jerusalem, but I don't enjoy that as much as raising goats. Could I possibly stay with you another night before I start on my way to Jerusalem? I would like to spend today investigating my dreams and seeing where the Holy Spirit leads me."

"You are welcome to stay as long as you wish. Zebedee will be home soon — but he will be ready for sleep. You'll have a better chance of visiting with him after noon."

"Shalom, and thank you for your hospitality."

"Shalom."

Yanis walked back toward the market. He needed to stock his travel bag if he was going to travel tomorrow, but first he wanted to check at the Mercantile Store and see if he had saved enough silver to buy a small farm.

He walked to the Westside Mercantile Store and asked for Jesse. When he reminded Jesse that he was looking for a goat farm, Jesse remembered him and took him back to his office. He told him that he thought he might have one that he would be interested in. It was an existing goat farm, but the owner was ready to retire. Yanis said he was not sure he was ready to buy. *What if James says I must wait another year?* He honestly told Jesse that he wasn't sure, and why.

"So, her dad has pledged her to you, but not given you a date?"

"Yes, she is very young and not ready for marriage."

"What if you bought it now and got it all set up for her so that when she is ready, you are prepared?" asked Jesse.

"If the farm is up and running, then I could not take off two weeks to travel to Jerusalem to get her," explained Yanis.

"True. So, you need me to find a farm that will be ready to start just as soon as you arrive with your bride. And you don't know when that will be," said Jesse shaking his head.

“Exactly!” Both men laughed together. “Could you at least tell me what the asking price is? And I would like to walk out and look around some.” Jesse told him the price and Yanis agreed that he had enough saved if that price included the goats.

“It does. He wants to sell it complete. But you should know that he is in a hurry to get it settled. He’s getting older and his sons are not interested in keeping it in the family.”

“I will be traveling to Jerusalem tomorrow and will return as soon as I’m married. Now, where is this farm?”

“I’ll walk out with you and show you around. The house is quite small, but the barn seems ample to me. Your wife may prefer to live in the barn — it seems better cared for.” They looked around and visited with the owner who was happy to show Yanis the farm. Yanis agreed that he was ready to make the purchase, but couldn’t until the abba was ready to release his daughter. The men laughed together and said that Yanis would understand when he had one of his own to protect. The farm was almost a mile out of town, but still walking distance to the busy westside of Capernaum. Yanis, thanked both men for their time and said he planned to return before Passover. He walked through the market and noted that the only Meat Shop was not kosher. His heart was filled with hope for the future and his plans for Jenay.

He purchased what he needed for his hike to Jerusalem and then hurried to Zebedee’s to visit. Yanis listened as Zebedee told of his time in jail during Mary’s funeral and agreed it was awfully dangerous. When Zebedee left to meet his fishing crew, Yanis joined Salome for dinner and learned more about Zachary’s leaving. He retired early and began his journey long before the sun was up. He should arrive in plenty of time for the Sabbath if the weather would cooperate. His mind was so filled with plans that the time sped by, and he allowed little time for rest.



Yanis arrived in Jerusalem late afternoon on Friday and stopped by the market to replenish his food bag. He found Thomas’ wife busy preparing the Sabbath meal. She greeted Yanis warmly and invited him to join them. He asked if he could throw his blanket in the yard. “I’m sure that will be fine with Thomas, but you may not enjoy Daniel’s snoring.”

“Has Daniel found work?” asked Yanis.

“Yes, he’s working as a helper for a stone mason. You stayed at the farm longer than usual, didn’t you?”

“Yes, Aaron needed to figure out how to divide the jobs between just him and Gideon. Aaron’s new wife is a pretty good cook and both men were doing fine when I left.” When the sun began to set, Thomas and Daniel joined them.

Early on Sabbath morning, Yanis walked to the temple and was pleased to see James and Andrew preaching on the steps. James the



Just was preaching near Solomon's portico. The recent persecution didn't seem to be diminishing the crowds. Afterward the four men walked over to the market benches to sit and catch their breath, even though the market was closed. After James the Just returned to the temple, Yanis talked with James and Andrew about the progress he was making to prepare for Jenay. "After leaving Thomas' farm, I stopped in Capernaum and discovered a local goat farm for sale. The owner is getting too old to run it and his sons aren't interested. He's willing to sell it to me as a complete package at a price that I can afford. I'm trying to not fret that it might not be available later as he wants to sell it as soon as possible. If he sells it to someone else, it would be almost impossible for me to start a similar business in Capernaum. I want to trust Jehovah to work out all the details, but I can't decide what I should do. I don't want to run ahead nor lag behind what I feel He is directing me to do."

"That's often hard to do," agreed Andrew.

"If I purchase the farm now, it will be several years before I would be able to leave it to travel back here. I would not be able to leave the animals or my customers. But if I wait, I may lose the farm."

"And you are sure about your decision to take Jenay as your wife?" asked James.

"More sure than ever. I would rather lose the farm than to have to leave Jerusalem without her again," said Yanis emphatically. Andrew and James exchanged glances, then asked where Yanis was staying.

"Last night I stayed with Thomas' family. I suspect I'll be welcome there at least for a while. I'll probably see if I can get my butchering job back tomorrow morning. It pays good and he's usually looking for help. Then I can contribute to the meals and won't be a burden to them."

"We need to get back to preaching. We'll see you around," said James noncommittally.

Yanis felt he had been kicked in the stomach. *I know James asked for a report, but I resorted to begging. I will never do that again. I love Jenay, but I will wait for her until her abba is ready, even if it takes forever. Of course, by then I'll lose the farm and have no way to support her.* He walked over to Mary's house to see if there was anyone to visit with. He was welcomed and sat and visited with her for a short time to let her know he was back in town if she needed anything. But he didn't mention the farm or Jenay. He asked her to pray for an opening at the Butcher Shop tomorrow. By the time he had reached Thomas' little house, he had made up his mind to let the farm go and to just stay in Jerusalem until James was ready to release Jenay to him. He felt certain that he could not leave town without her again. So, with a heavy heart, he crawled into his blanket in Thomas' yard.

Early on Sunday he talked with his old boss who was eager to hire him. Every day he butchered goats for the market. Every night, he took Thomas' wife a bundle of bones and scraps of meat to make broth. They welcomed him to their table and day after day he watched the winter pass. He and Daniel moved their blankets up under the

eaves of the house to avoid as much rain as possible, but it was wet and cold most nights. Yanis thought about buying a second blanket but wanted to save every penny for Jenay. He occasionally ran into James, but neither mentioned Jenay.



As the rabbis and their families gathered for their usual Sabbath meal, Joel mentioned that there were only four schoolboys and their dads signed up to travel to Jerusalem for their annual retreat for Passover. "Are there any alumni going?" asked Jairus.

"Just two, Jesse and an older brother of one of the students. The deadline was today since we will need to leave on Monday." Elijah would not be making the trip because of the new baby.

On the last night of the trek, Rabbi Joel made sure that all the travelers had family or friends to stay with. The three stayed in the olive grove and enjoyed sweet fellowship, but there was a different feeling this year. It seemed the grove was divided. The front half, closest to the temple, seemed to be filled with Jewish campers who sided with the Pharisees, while the followers of Jesus found themselves closer to the back of the grove. There was no rule or delineation, but after the first night, groups seemed to migrate closer and closer to each other until it almost seemed that a line had been drawn. The Seder was celebrated both nights as usual and the three men enjoyed getting to know Jesus' followers from all over the world. It was a time of renewal and prayer for them. They often met at the temple to hear the apostles or James the Just preach, and they felt refreshed and ready to return home. All three wondered if it was time for them to speak more boldly about their decision to follow Jesus. They would wait for clarity, and committed to being obedient. They began to pray that Jehovah would send someone to teach them more about following Jesus.



In Jerusalem, winter was beginning to show signs of passing. One week before Passover, Yanis was surprised by a visit from James after dinner. He visited with Thomas and Daniel for a few minutes and then asked to speak to Yanis alone. Yanis followed him outside the yard, and they walked toward the market. "I simply wanted to invite you to our home for dinner on the Sabbath if you are available."

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. I will be there," stammered Yanis. James left him standing in the street beside the market and Yanis wandered around for a while before heading back to his blanket. He stared up at the cloud-covered sky and began to think about all the plans that he had laid aside. *Is Jehovah bringing them to pass? I don't know.* Friday was a busy day as people prepared for the Sabbath. Yanis left as quickly as he could and changed into his clean robe before running to

James and John's house. He didn't know what to expect and had never been a guest at their table. He knocked and servants escorted him to the living area. There he was greeted by James and Kayla, John and Marta, Jonathan, and Jenay. All the time that they had spent together traveling with Jesus came rushing back and it felt so natural to be with them. The laughter and fun made him totally relax. He went with the men to wash at the ceremonial pots, watched Kayla light the Sabbath candles, and James lead the prayer of blessing. Tears came to his eyes as James asked Jehovah to bless him. A servant set a plate before Yanis, and he tried to keep from focusing on the food. After a hard day at work, and very little to eat for the last six months, he had a hard time focusing on anything else. He was extremely grateful for the food but didn't want James to know how hungry he was. That wouldn't look good as a provider for his daughter. Jenay talked about spending a day with Mary last week. She had visited in four different homes and delivered food to the needy. "It reminded me of things that we used to do with Jesus. How I miss those days of ministry."

"I'm very glad you are still getting to do that kind of ministry. If you had your choice, would you prefer working with the adults or the children?" Yanis asked.

"Oh, definitely the adults. I mean, I love children, but I feel that if I teach the adults to follow Jesus and depend on Him, then the children will be cared for. A lot of girls prefer working with children, but I feel that I have something to offer to the adults — even though I'm young."

"Well, I'm proud of you for knowing where Jehovah will use you in the future. That's an important step. And I'm pleased that you are still the same Jenay that I remember. You always spoke your mind and said what you meant. I've always admired that about you," responded Yanis.

"I'm just grateful that Mary has time to help her. She is so busy these days ministering to so many people. It seems that everyone is eager to mentor the young men, but I am working to try to find mentors for older girls who want to minister like Mary," said Kayla.

"What a great idea. And as it multiplies, there will be more and more women prepared to help with the ministry, just as Jesus intended."

"Thank you, Yanis, for your understanding. Not all the men in our groups are as supportive of my work — or Mary's," said Kayla.

"They may not be supportive, but they certainly enjoy her cooking!" laughed Yanis.

"Yes, she's won over many an opponent with her cooking!" agreed James.

"Now, I would like to spend some time with Yanis on the rooftop. Will the rest of you excuse us and say your goodnights?"

"Goodnight, Yanis. I hope you will visit again soon," said Jonathan.

"Goodnight, Yanis," said Jenay, shyly.

Yanis thanked the others for the wonderful meal and the sweet fellowship. "It brought back great memories."

Yanis followed James up to the rooftop. "Thank you, sir, for letting me spend the evening here. It reminded me so much of our time with Jesus."

"You are welcome, Yanis. Now, there's a matter that we need to discuss. My daughter became a woman a couple of weeks ago and Kayla and I have been praying about how to deal with it. We decided that Kayla would talk with her about marriage in general before we mentioned you."

Yanis' heart fell all the way to his feet. *So, this is the end. I'll never see Jenay again.*

James continued, "When Kayla mentioned marriage, Jenay made her wishes very clear. She said that she was ready for marriage, but there was only one man in the whole world who she would consider marrying, and that is you." Yanis' mouth fell open, and he could not hide his surprise and delight.

"I have loved her since the first day I met her. But I knew she was too young, and I have refrained from ever approaching her. I hope you don't think that I have placed those ideas in her head," Yanis began, defending himself.

"No, she told Kayla that she had always admired and looked up to you, but on the night of the last Seder with Jesus, you apparently led the disciples' Seder while Jesus was alone with us. Jenay says that that is the first time that she imagined being your wife. Then apparently, after we had gone to the garden with Jesus, you stayed to help clean up and protected Kayla as she walked to the olive grove. Jenay said that she recognized that you were what she wanted in a husband, someone who would protect her and care for her. She says that ever since that day her love for you has grown, and she has hoped that someday she would become your wife."

"I am in awe that Jehovah was working in her heart."

"I feel the same way. Now, I need to ask. Do you still desire to take Jenay as your wife, and shelter her, and protect her, and love her the way Jesus taught?"

"Oh, yes, sir. If anything, my love for her has grown with each year I've had to wait," said Yanis.

"Let me call Kayla." When they returned, James asked Yanis to explain about his farm in Capernaum and his plans for Jenay.

"Well, I have saved up as much silver as I can, and when I checked in Capernaum in the fall, there was a goat farm for sale that would be a perfect place for us to start our marriage. The house is just one room with a small preparation space and an outdoor oven and firepit. We would start saving to either enlarge it or move to a larger location once we are established in our business. But the farm has a large milking barn, with all the necessary accoutrements, including an established herd of goats. I talked with the owner, and we agreed that I would return as soon as possible and let him retire after he showed me the ropes. There is a pasture out back, and woods all around the

property that I hope to purchase in the future for further expansion. I don't know what else to say. Oh, it's on the west side of Capernaum, but about four miles from your parents."

"Yanis, it sounds like you've thought that part out and have a good plan for supporting Jenay. I assume that you are certain that Jehovah has called you to Capernaum?"

"Yes, I feel that He has some plan for me to help the followers grow and to lead others to Him. Each time I've visited recently, I have met people I feel certain will be part of that ministry. I believe that Jenay and I can work together to minister to the people of Capernaum."

"Okay. This may be a harder question. What do you have planned for the espousal and wedding?" asked James.

"That is a harder question because I essentially have nothing to offer. I do not want to present her with gifts that we would have to carry down the mountain, and I would rather be able to feed her and care for her by getting the business established than to have a fancy party. It would take me another year of work to save enough money for a wedding and by then, I'm certain, I would lose the farm. I have no idea what I should do or what I can offer to you." Yanis hung his head in shame.

"Yanis, our daughter is a valuable jewel. There are many young men who would offer us incredible riches in order to marry her. However, our daughter is not for sale. Let us talk with her about her willingness to give up a wedding celebration and see what her reaction is. I will get back to you within the week. Will that be acceptable?"

"Yes, sir. And what about the espousal?"

"Among the followers of Jesus, we have not always kept tradition. I will bring you that information at the same time. Are you still staying with Thomas' family?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you both for considering me."

"Yanis, we'll try to get something worked out soon since there is some urgency concerning the farm," promised James. "Shalom."

"Shalom." Yanis walked to Thomas' home in a daze. He kept wondering if it really happened or if the evening had been just a dream.

## Chapter 24

On Wednesday before Passover, James met Yanis at Thomas' house just before dinner. "May we talk in private?" asked James.

"Certainly, would a bench at the market be okay?"

"Sure, it won't take long. Yanis, this goes against everything that I feel as an abba, but I believe the Holy Spirit is making it totally clear to all of us that it is the right thing to do and the right time to do it. Here is my suggestion: We can arrange for one of the priests who is a follower of Jesus to meet us at noon tomorrow to conduct the espousal ceremony. He understands why there will be no exchange of gifts. He will ask you some questions about your intentions toward Jenay and then you may return to work. I know that Passover is a really busy time for you as a butcher and so we will not expect you to be around much, but you are welcome to come and visit if you get the opportunity. Will that work for you?"

"Yes, sir, I'll make it work. At noon tomorrow. At your house."

"Correct. Then, if this meets your approval, we would like to spend the two weeks after Passover supervising your espousal and saying our goodbyes. You will need to work together to prepare for your trip down the mountain. At the end of those two weeks, we'll have a private wedding ceremony at dawn with just family present, and you two may start down the mountain to Capernaum. It should be warm enough for a pleasant journey and allow you time to arrive before the Sabbath. You two could stay with my parents in Capernaum until you can make all the arrangements to purchase the farm."

"So, it's really happening? Tomorrow?" asked Yanis again.

"Yes, but only if this is what you want. It is generally the man's decision, and he lets the abba know. But in this case, I know that you want to get on the road as soon as possible. This is just my suggestion. Does it sound like a good plan to you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It's a wonderful plan. I'm just thinking of all that needs to be done, and I can't wait to get started."



Yanis informed his boss that he needed to take off work just before noon to deal with some business but would return as soon as possible. His boss reminded him that he needed him to be ready for the crowds who would start arriving for Passover and grumbled about his taking off. Yanis assured him it would not take long. He changed out of his bloody robe and put on the only spare one he owned. He ran all the way to James and John's house and found everyone gathered in the courtyard. James introduced him to the priest, and Yanis tried to slow his racing heart. He looked shyly at Jenay and saw her eyes wide with wonder. The priest assured him that James had explained

everything and that in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit, he felt at peace conducting this service. “First of all, I want you to state when you became a follower of Jesus.”

“I began following Jesus just after my thirteenth birthday. I became convinced that He was my Messiah after the crucifixion. I was present on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled my heart and has been directing me ever since. It is out of obedience that I am relocating to Capernaum, and I believe He has instructed me to take Jenay as my wife. It is my desire that we can continue to serve Him side by side as we did when He was on earth.”

“Apostle James or Mrs. Kayla, do you have any questions you would like to ask?”

“No, sir,” said James.

“Then I declare that the two of you are espoused and will be married when Yanis has completed the requirements for taking a bride.” The priest then led in a prayer of blessing over the two of them and they were allowed to speak privately in the yard within sight of her parents.

Yanis led Jenay into the yard and told her that this was the happiest day of his life. She whispered back that it would be happier if he didn’t have to return to work. “Just as soon as Passover is complete, we will begin planning to spend the rest of our lives together. But right now, I must get back to work.” He touched her cheek and lifted her chin to meet his eyes. “For the very first time I get to say: Jenay, I love you and I will do anything I can to please you.”

“Run back to work but be careful. I’ll see you on the Sabbath for dinner.”

“Shalom,” Yanis called as he left. He heard them calling shalom in the background. Of course, his boss fussed, and he forgot to change out of his good robe. Now he would need to find time to wash it before the Sabbath. He worked like a mad man filled with new energy that pleased his boss. He whistled while he worked and hurried home to tell Thomas’ family what had happened. He washed his bloodied robe at the well trough and hoped that it would be clean enough to be presentable. He’d never worried about such things before, but he didn’t want to displease Jenay or her parents. On Sabbath evening, Yanis enjoyed the fellowship of visiting with the family again. They could tell that he was exhausted and encouraged him to get some much-needed rest tomorrow before the busy week ahead. He was glad that they understood, and he hoped that Jenay did. She looked sad that he wasn’t going to come back and spend the Sabbath with her. He promised that he would next week.

He tried to spend the day in worship after Thomas and his family left to visit a home group, but Yanis found his mind focused on planning for the trip. *How much food do we need to carry? How fast will Jenay be able to walk? Could we be there by Wednesday? I’m just not sure. And what should I plan to do for the two weeks after Passover? Maybe I should work part time. I’ll talk to my boss about it. I could work mornings and visit with Jenay and her family for the*

*afternoon and evenings.* He crawled into his blanket and quickly fell asleep. He would need to be at work before dawn tomorrow to get ahead of the crowds. It would be Galilean Preparation Day and the markets would be packed.

On Sunday, Yanis' day was nonstop work. It meant good money for him, but after the market closed at sunset, Yanis still had to get the area cleaned for tomorrow. By the time he was finished and set up for the next day, it was too late to join Jenay's family. He hoped they understood. He took some time to pray and remember portions of the Seder. He especially wanted to commemorate Jesus' death but fell into an exhausted sleep. Once again, he began work an hour before dawn. Today would be an even busier day as the Judeans prepared for their Seder. At least his boss brought them breakfast when he arrived at dawn. All morning Yanis butchered lambs for the Passover meal. *Soon I will be out of Jerusalem and back in Capernaum where there will be nothing but peace and safety. And I'll be with the woman that Jehovah has prepared for me.* Each time he thought of Jenay, he worked harder. All week the butchers prepared meat, but now the customers wanted their meat chunked to roast quickly over open fires. Jerusalem was filled with travelers who needed quick meals. While many of them could not afford meat as part of their regular diet, they generally splurged while they were in Jerusalem.

Finally, the sun set on Friday and the boss ordered them to clean up for the Sabbath. Yanis told him that he would like to reduce his hours to only mornings for the next two weeks and then he would be leaving. "It's not the harvest. Where are you going?"

"I'm getting married and relocating to Capernaum," explained Yanis.

"I'll miss you. You are a good worker. Be here at sunrise and work until noon, I'll pay you accordingly."

"Thank you, sir, and goodnight." Yanis ran quickly to Thomas' house and delivered a bag of fresh lamb chunks to them. He quickly changed his robe and ran to James and John's home.

They celebrated the Sabbath and the last day of Passover together as they ate. It was a happy time, but Yanis was so tired he could hardly follow the conversation. James insisted that Yanis get some rest and suggested that he join them about noon tomorrow.

On the Sabbath, Yanis and Jenay were allowed to wander around the yard alone and talk about their plans for the trip and Capernaum. Jenay wanted to hear all about his plans for the farm and was excited to be a part of his life. He told her that he had decided to work mornings until they left because every piece of silver he could make would help them expand the business.

"And once we learn the business, we can get busy ministering to Capernaum," added Jenay excitedly. "Oh, Yanis, I wish we could leave tomorrow."

"I know, but your parents need this time to say goodbye. We must show patience and trust that Jehovah has good plans. I'm glad that you have such loving, caring parents."



They rejoined her parents and twin brother, Jonathan, in the courtyard and enjoyed a relaxing Sabbath together. James invited Yanis to meet him at the temple tomorrow afternoon and asked if he wanted to teach. "No, but I will enjoy listening and being replenished spiritually." After the post-Sabbath meal, Yanis returned to Thomas' home.

Each morning he worked at the Butcher Shop, then he would change his bloody robe and join James at the temple. Sometimes James would call on him to tell one of Jesus' parables. Yanis enjoyed teaching and he enjoyed fellowship with the other followers. Each night, Yanis joined James and John and their families for dinner. Jenay always caught him up with what she had been doing in preparation for the trip. She and her mother were weaving full-length robes for her since she was now a woman. Yanis warned them that they couldn't carry a whole wardrobe and suggested that two very practical robes would be all she needed. He would get her a loom and she could make fancier ones after they were settled. Kayla insisted she would need a cloak because the nights were still chilly. Yanis and James exchanged looks and James just shrugged. "Traveling light means different things to women," agreed John. "Just be glad they haven't started furnishing the house or you would be needing a team of oxen. Many girls work a whole year preparing stuff for the house."

"John, hush. Kayla is hurting bad enough without you making it worse," said Marta.

"I'm sorry, Kayla, I didn't mean to hurt you. I was just agreeing with Yanis that women and men have different ideas about what constitutes a need."

"I'm just glad you are moving down the mountain and not up it!" said James.

They spent Sabbath evening with Mary's group. The Apostle Matthew was teaching the lesson and he had brought Joel and Janika with him. Janika, who was newly espoused, and Jenay had much to catch up on. Yanis enjoyed seeing Joel again since they had been best friends while traveling with Jesus. It was a sweet reunion.

The second week was spent much the same except that on Friday afternoon, Yanis and Jenay walked to the market together and purchased the food supplies for the trip. Kayla had promised to send a bag of bread. They worked together well to determine what was essential and agreed to fish and to eat from the land to save money.

John and Marta were out for Sabbath evening which left just Yanis and Jenay's family to celebrate the Sabbath together. Kayla cried as she lit the candles and James became choked up as he tried to pray the prayer of blessing. Even Jonathan could not hold back tears at the thought of being away from his twin sister. But instead of feeling uncomfortable, Yanis was just filled with gratitude at the way Jenay had been cherished and nurtured. He felt humbled to be chosen as her husband.

Sabbath day seemed to last forever, but the family didn't want to waste a precious second. After the Sabbath had ended, Yanis laid out

all the sacks that they intended to take. Kayla removed Yanis' old, ragged blanket and gave him a fresh one to tuck in his bag. He had his spare robe, a skillet, knife, flint, and fishing line in his travel bag. He had a food bag that included raisins, almonds, and apricots. Kayla would give him a second bag filled with bread tomorrow morning. He had a skin of olive oil and Jenay had her travel bag. It looked a little heavy to him, but he decided to let her decide for herself. Kayla had given Jenay a Sabbath candle holder and candles. When all was in readiness, James called for them to gather in the living room and pray together as a family one last time. Each one prayed for the upcoming adventure and for those who would be left behind. James prayed for Jehovah's blessing on the marriage.

Yanis walked back to Thomas' and thought that sleep would never come. But soon he was awake and on his way to his wedding day. He joined Jenay and her family at the breakfast table. They had just finished when the priest arrived. They stood in the courtyard and the priest simply asked if James was satisfied that Yanis could provide for his daughter. James said, "Yes, I am."

The priest announced, "The wedding may commence." He then prayed a prayer of blessing over all of them. The family hugged and Kayla handed them a bag filled with fresh bread. Yanis began to strap bags on both his front and back. He looked and felt like a pack mule with the five bags strapped on. Everyone was laughing as some rearranging was made, and Jenay ended up carrying the largest, but lightest bag — the bread. Her mother placed it on her back and kissed her one last time. Yanis took her hand and led her from the courtyard. He was so proud of Jenay. They walked resolutely out the front gate, and then Yanis told her to turn and wave. Her family was forever etched in her mind, waving and bravely smiling as she took her first steps with her husband.

Both Yanis and Jenay knew this road well and they spent the morning walking and putting distance between them and Jerusalem. They were both eager to begin their new life. At noon when they stopped to rest, Yanis explored an area behind the stream and found a quiet place while Jenay found a couple of apricots. Yanis returned, picked up the bags and took Jenay by the hand. "Come," he said. They walked silently into the woods where they became man and wife. Afterward, Yanis prayed that Jehovah would bless their marriage, their home, and their journey. All afternoon, as they walked, there was a quiet and satisfying peace. They stopped in time to fish before sunset. How fun it was to do everything together. They rose at dawn and continued their journey. Occasionally, they stopped and gathered spring greens to munch on as they walked. They felt an urgency to arrive in Capernaum, yet they both felt a hesitancy for the journey to end. It had been a dream come true for both of them.

As they approached Capernaum, midmorning on Wednesday, they were both eager for Jenay to see the farm and they were sure the owner would be agreeable to their looking around again. They stopped at the well to rest for a few minutes. They had emptied most of their

food bags, so their loads were much lighter. They were eager to get settled and bake fresh bread. Yanis assured her it wasn't much further as the well was only a mile from the farm. They eagerly watched as each step brought them closer. Jenay saw Yanis' face drop and his look of horror. "What's wrong?" she demanded.

"Jenay, this is the farm, but where are the goats? And why does it look so empty and run down? Let's go find Jesse." He took her by the hand and led her back into town. The walk seemed incredibly long. Yanis' head was exploding with questions and anger and confusion. Jenay quietly tried to keep up with his strides. He burst into the Mercantile Store and Jesse was summoned.

When Jesse recognized Yanis, his face also fell. "Come back to my office. Is this your lovely wife? I'm Jesse."

"Jesse, what happened? I thought we had a deal!" Yanis demanded.

"Yes, but Mr. Bart died near the first of winter. His sons didn't want to care for the goats even though I told them that I thought you would return by Passover. They have been trying to sell the property, but it is still available. I don't know what all they've sold of the equipment and supplies."

"Can we go and see?" asked Yanis, pleadingly.

"Certainly. Could I bring you two some juice? You have had quite a shock and I assume you have just arrived."

"No, thank you," said Yanis as he stood ready to go. Jesse told his clerks that he would be out. He walked with them back to the farm. He unlocked the gate and let them in to explore. Yanis went straight to the barn and Jesse felt sorry for Jenay. The goats were gone, but there were several large milk jars, and the milking pans were still there. There were several carts that looked like they may have been used to deliver the milk jars. Everything was dusty and there were some boards missing on one corner. Yanis wanted to see the pasture and agreed that the fences still looked good. As they walked back toward the yard, Jenay asked if she could see the house. Yanis had told her that it was totally furnished, but instead there was nothing usable remaining. Someone had taken everything of value. Other than some broken furniture pieces and cracked pottery, the entire house had been stripped, and there was nothing but spider webs and rodent droppings.

Jesse led them to the gate as they tried to process what they had seen. They walked back to town in silence. Jesse led them to his office and invited them to sit down. A clerk brought them some juice from Jesse's house and Jesse gently asked them if they were still interested in buying the farm, or if they wanted to look around. Yanis just said firmly, "We need to pray." Then he and Jenay stood to leave.

"Should we go to my grandparents'?" she asked.

"No. I don't want them to know about this. We'll pray and decide what to do."

"Where will we spend the night?" she persisted.

“I don’t know, Jenay. Leave me alone and let me think.” It was the first time Yanis had spoken harshly to her, and it broke her heart, but she trusted him to figure out what needed to be done, so she waited quietly. They walked around the town a little, and Yanis led them to the market. “We need to buy something for dinner.” They purchased a jar of olive oil and some bread rolls since they had no place to cook. They walked back to the western well and sat to eat their bread and oil. “You are being awfully quiet,” commented Yanis.

“You asked me to leave you alone so you could think,” replied Jenay quietly.

“I’m sorry, Jenay. I do need to think — but I need you to help me decide what to do.”

“Yanis, I know this is not what you expected and we’re both disappointed. But I know that Jehovah will guide us. I want to hear what you are thinking.”

“First of all, has Jehovah shut this door for a reason? Should I walk away and find something else to do or somewhere else to do it?” Yanis spoke carefully.

“I’m listening.”

“If Jehovah wants us to stay here, where do we start?”

“Can’t you just buy more goats?”

“Yes, and no. There was a really good herd of goats here, and Mr. Bart had spent years building up a good customer base. He had a thriving business. It will take us years to get back to that same level. I don’t even know where to buy one goat — let alone a whole herd.”

“The house is really dirty, but I know I can get it scrubbed out while you work on the farm. I’ve had fun camping out with you this week and it won’t be fancy, but I think we can stay fed. We may be able to forage in the wooded areas around the farm. Hopefully, we won’t have to buy much at the market.”

“You are an amazing woman. So, you don’t think it’s crazy if we move ahead with the dream?”

“I think they should certainly lower the price, but as long as we have a place to throw our blankets, we’ll make it just fine.”

“Speaking of which, we need to find a place to throw our blankets tonight. Let’s walk back out toward the farm and look for a place in the woods.”

They walked slowly, hand in hand, back to the farm and then kept walking. They were pleased to find that their farm was the last developed area. Past them the woods were all uncleared. They found a grassy spot away from the road and threw their blankets down for the night.

Long after Jenay was asleep, Yanis lay awake and prayed, and fretted, and prayed some more before he was able to relax enough to sleep.

The next morning, they hid their travel bags and covered them with their blankets deep in the woods. They hoped they would be safe. They walked back to the Mercantile Store and asked Jesse where they would start looking for goats. Yanis wanted to make sure that he could

find some goats locally before he bought the farm. Jesse promised to walk around with him to locate some farmers who might have new goats for sale. "If we can find at least eight females and one male in the next few days, I'll purchase the farm, but at a greatly reduced rate. It is not nearly as valuable now that it is not operational."

"I agree. I'll talk with the sons just as soon as we find you some goats." All day they walked around the outskirts of Capernaum. They managed to find six weaned female kids for sale and one weaned male. Yanis paid for them and arranged to pick them up next week. Yanis explained to Jenay and Jesse that the does would need to mature for about eight months before they could carry kids. Then it would take another two months to wean the kids enough to get any milk from the mothers. So, they would be at least ten months without any income and approximately three years before the farm would be producing what he had expected. He would need to find employment in the meantime, and he needed to repair the house and barn. He told Jesse the sons had better be reasonable about the price of the farm. Jesse assured him he would negotiate as best he could for a good price, and he knew the sons were ready to sell.

"Are you ready for me to talk with the sons, or are you waiting on the last two kids? How hard and fast was your limit?" asked Jesse.

"Go ahead and talk with the sons, but don't let them know that I've already purchased some kids!" laughed Yanis.

"I know, my friend, I know. I need to get home before sunset and then I'll talk with the sons after dinner tonight. I should have an answer for you in the morning."

"We'll meet you at the store in the morning. We need to head to the market before it closes." Once again, they bought some rolls and splurged on an onion. They still had plenty of oil in the skin. They sat at the well and ate their dinner before they returned to their place in the woods and settled down for the night. They both felt excited about the progress they had made.

Apparently, Jesse was a good negotiator because he had gotten the price of the farm down to less than half its previous price. Yanis was very pleased and agreed to settle it at noon today at the Mercantile Store.

Yanis and Jenay walked further west of Capernaum to see if they could locate more goats. The very first farm had six female kids weaned and more that would be weaned in two weeks. Yanis agreed to buy the six and would pick them up next week. He also assured the owner that he would like to purchase as many kids as possible until he could get his herd built up. As they walked back to the Mercantile Store, Yanis asked Jenay to begin thinking about what they would need from the market to live in the house. "I would just like to have some flour and yeast so that I can make Sabbath bread."

"But we'll also need a lamp and a water jar," said Yanis.

"Oh, my. I don't have a pan to cook bread on, or a bowl to mix it, or a spoon to stir it. I think we'd better camp out a while longer."

“Jenay, I’m so sorry. We’ll get this worked out. Can you wait at that well while I take care of business? There will be a bunch of men.” Jenay walked across the street and sat and waited for Yanis. When he emerged from the store, he was grinning from ear to ear. He held the key in his hand, but quickly put it in his pocket. “Let’s go to the market and see if we can decide on something for dinner.” He bought them several rolls of bread, some pickled fish, and a large bag of cucumbers. He also bought a water jar, a couple of large bowls, a wooden spoon, and some rags. Together they carried their stash to the farm and opened the gate. Neither one of them could quit grinning, but both knew that there was a lot of work ahead. They retrieved their travel bags from the woods and began examining their property. They decided they would sleep in the yard. Then Jenay walked back to the well to fill the water jar while Yanis inspected the barn. He found five small carts that he assumed Mr. Bart had used to deliver the milk to his customers. Each cart would hold two large jars. Yanis loaded a couple of milk jars onto a cart and pulled it to the well. He filled each jar with about five gallons of water and discovered how heavy water could be. As he pulled it back to the barn, he said, “Someday, I’ll buy a donkey!”

As the sun was setting, Yanis stopped his cleaning and came to check on Jenay. She had a picnic laid out on their blankets in the back yard. She set the Sabbath candle in the center and began to light the candles with the flint. Yanis prayed the prayer of blessing over them and their new farm and Jenay’s family back in Jerusalem. They enjoyed the pickled fish as a special treat and ate one of the cucumbers sliced on a roll.

They weren’t sure how to spend their Sabbath day. They lay on their blankets and talked about their future. They sang some Psalms and remembered their time traveling with Jesus. They wondered what the status was with the synagogue in Capernaum. They remembered that Jesus wasn’t allowed to teach here, and they didn’t know whether that had changed after He had raised the ruler’s daughter from the dead. They wondered where they would fit in and how many followers they would find. “I’m pretty sure Jesse and his wife are followers of Jesus, but I’m not sure.” The day passed slowly, and both were grateful for the rest, but also eager to get back to work building their dream.

## Chapter 25

On Sunday morning, Yanis and Jenay walked to the Mercantile Store and purchased two lengths of rope before going to the farm to collect the six kids. Yanis had brought along several cucumbers to entice them to follow him. The farmer helped them get ropes around their necks, but it seemed like there were a hundred of them instead of only six. The goats soon were hopelessly tangled in the ropes and Yanis decided it would probably be a better idea to carry the kids home two at a time. He gave one to Jenay and carried one, promising to return for the other four. Yet, when they arrived home and put those two in the pasture, they immediately jumped out to follow them back. Yanis instructed Jenay to sit in the yard and talk with them. By the time Yanis returned carrying two more, she was madly in love with baby goats. She was scratching their ears and bellies, and they were cuddled up around her like they had found their mother. Yanis gave her the two new ones and went back for the third load. When he returned, Jenay was singing Psalms to them, and they were calmly grazing in the yard. He added the two new ones and soon she was able to lead them around just by singing to them. She quickly became their shepherdess, and he asked her to lead them to the pasture while he worked on repairing the barn. He needed to make sure it was secure for the night because he didn't want wild animals to steal his investment. After a while Yanis returned and said he felt the barn would be secure once they shut the doors for the night. She reminded him that they would need a source of water and that was troubling to both of them. Yanis loaded the milk jars back on the trailer and pulled the trailer to the well. He found a trough inside the barn but would need to install a well someday. He would have to haul water for now. Jenay called for the goats, and they followed her to the trough. They thirstily drank most of the water and Yanis realized he would need to return to the well for more. When Yanis returned and started refilling the trough, Jenay went inside and tried to get a little cleaning done in the kitchen prep area. She remembered that she wanted to check the oven and see if it worked. She took the skillet and flint and went out to start the fire only to discover that there was no firewood. She walked back to Yanis and asked where she would find firewood. He just put his hands over his face and mumbled something incoherent. "Well, the oven looks good. I didn't see any cracks, so I'm hoping it will work once we find some wood." He said he would take the trailer and gather firewood from the area where they had spent the night. But right now, he was going to collect some more goats. He instructed her to stay in the yard and call to the kids periodically to make sure they stayed close. He assured her that once they learned their territory, they wouldn't have to be watched so closely. Yanis added two more kids to the mix and wanted to go get the others, but Jenay convinced him to sit and get acquainted with them while she got a little more scrubbing

done in the kitchen. She wasn't sure what they were going to eat for dinner. She scrubbed for a while and then set out everything that she had. There were a few raisins and almonds left from the trip, and she grabbed a couple of cucumbers. The bread was gone, but it was too late to go to the market. She would have to get better organized. She needed to talk with Yanis about some basic supplies for the kitchen and she was wondering how one planted a garden. But deep down, she knew that she shouldn't bother him tonight. She carried the food out to the blanket and began to slice the cucumbers. Suddenly she was totally surrounded by goats, and Yanis was yelling for her to take them into the barn. She ran into the barn, but by the time all eight kids were locked in, the two cucumbers were gone. She went back to the kitchen to get more and discovered that there was only one left. Tears were streaming down her face as she apologized for wasting the cucumbers. "I didn't even think about the goats. I was just trying to prepare our dinner." Yanis took the cucumber and sliced it and gave her half of it.

After they finished the almonds and raisins, Yanis said, "We just need to make a plan. This is a lot of work. I need to figure out how much we can spend until these goats start helping us out. It's not your fault that you don't have food to prepare." He took out his bag of silver and began to count what they had left. He very quietly picked it up and stuffed it back into the bag. "I'll fill the water trough tonight, then we'll walk to the market tomorrow.

"When you get home, let the goats out to drink and forage. You'll probably need to keep an eye on them and not let them wander far. I need to take care of some business and then I will start bringing home the rest of the goats. Don't worry. I'll be home by early afternoon so that you can make bread. I'll find you some firewood just as soon as I get home. Your homemade bread would be perfect for dinner tomorrow night and maybe I can find some greens while I'm looking for firewood."

"That sounds like a really busy day."

"Yes, it does, but it starts by my going to the well tonight."

"May I go with you?" asked Jenay.

"Only if you want to."

"I do if the goats will be okay. I won't sleep until you are back anyway, and we can be together."

"It makes me happy that you still want to be with me," said Yanis.

"Did you think I would grow tired of you so quickly? Not a chance! I love you, Yanis."

"And I love you, my beautiful bride. Come on, let's get the wagon and jars." They opened the barn door and discovered the goats were playing and climbing all inside the barn. Yanis was glad the storage room where the supplies were kept was separate from the rest of the barn. He loaded two large jars onto the cart, and he pulled while Jenay pushed. They filled the jars and pushed and pulled it all the way home. Jenay headed to her blanket while Yanis poured the heavy jars of water into the trough. Jenay was tired, and hungry, and missing her



family, but as she lay watching the stars, she could hear Yanis' rhythmic breathing beside her, and she slipped into a contented sleep.

Yanis and Jenay walked to the market together and then he sent her home carrying as many bags as she could. He promised to be home with more goats by midafternoon.



Yanis approached the man at the Meat Shop who had been helping a customer. He introduced himself and asked if he might need a certified and experienced butcher. "I might and I might not."

"I need a job and I've worked for the past three years at the Jerusalem market as a butcher. I am certified to prepare kosher meats, but I am willing to butcher anything except pork anyway you want it."

"So, a Jewish boy wants to work for a Roman?"

"I might and I might not," replied Yanis firmly.

"How did you know that my second butcher quit yesterday?"

"I didn't."

"When can you start?"

"Today, if we can work out the pay and the hours. I believe that we can mutually help each other."

"How's that?"

"Well, I'm starting my own goat farm and it requires a lot of work. But I know that Meat Shops need the most help first thing in the morning, so my proposal is that I work for you from dawn until noon and then I work for me, and you can save a substantial amount of silver — especially if you are only looking for a second butcher."

"I think we could work something out, Jewish boy."

"And sir, my name is Yanis."

"And my name is Alex. Let's see what you know." They walked to the back and met the head butcher. He was the biggest man Yanis had ever seen. "Quintus, this is Yanis, and he wants to help you out. He says he'll do anything except pigs."

"What's wrong with pigs?"

"I'm Jewish."

Quintus just grunted. "Do you do goats? I hate goats."

"Sure, do you have a system?"

"No, just catch one and prepare him for roasting." Yanis knew exactly what was required and within a quarter of an hour he presented the carcass to Quintus for inspection. Quintus called for Alex. "The guy knows what he's doing."

"So, you only want to work from sunrise 'til noon. I'll pay you in silver at the end of each week. Will that work for you?"

"Yes, sir. It would be great." Inside Yanis was saying thank You to Jehovah for providing an income that would carry them over for the next year until the farm could become productive. Yanis worked until the sun was overhead. He cleaned up his area and told Quintus and

Alex he would see them in the morning. He realized that his robe was bloodied and decided that tomorrow he would bring his extra robe to change into before walking home. He didn't want to offend people. He quickly bought a large bag of flour and lugged it home.

He changed his robe before going out to look for Jenay. She and the goats were gone, and he assumed she had taken them into the woods around their camping spot. He took the wagon and walked up the road looking for firewood, goats, and Jenay. When he came to the clearing in the woods, he began to load dead branches onto his cart. He would need to purchase an ax to be able to use most of it. While he worked, he called Jenay's name and moved farther and farther back into the woods. He found Jenay on her hands and knees picking edible spring greens that they had often eaten with Jesus. She called to the goats, and they walked back home together. He told her that he still needed to pick up the other four goats but could work around her bread-making schedule.

"Okay, let me mix up a batch of bread." Just as soon as she had the bread rising, she told him she could handle the kids if he wanted to go get the other ones. He said he needed to purchase an ax at the Mercantile Store and would be right back, and then he would go get the goats if he had time. When he returned, he chopped the firewood and started the oven. He ran to pick up two more goats and carried them back to the herd, and then went after the other two. How she looked forward to the day when she could churn butter. How good that would be on the bread. But tonight, she was grateful for the bread and greens. It would be a special treat. She began to sing praises to Jehovah and peeked out the door to make sure the goats were nearby. The two new goats were fitting right in, and all was peaceful. When Yanis arrived with the last two goats, Jenay slid the bread into the hot oven. He locked the goats in the barn and then he helped her get the fire going in the firepit to fry the greens. She had cleaned them and seasoned them with salt and olive oil. They poured the greens onto the fresh, hot bread and thoroughly enjoyed their feast. Yanis was so proud of Jenay and kept telling her how good the bread was. He asked if she wanted to walk to the well, or if she needed to rest after such a busy day. "I want to be with you, and I don't mind pushing." So, she pushed, and he pulled the jars all the way to the well, filled them, and then returned. As they lay on their blankets in the yard, Yanis told her that he had landed a very good job as a butcher and would be leaving before she woke up in the morning.

"Oh, Yanis. How will you take care of the goats? I don't know what to do with them."

"I know. But all you need to do is make sure they don't decide to run off. I will only be working from dawn until noon — then I will come home and water the goats again. I noticed they ran out of water today. That's not good. So, I'll take care of that from now on. And I'll be around while you need to be making dinner. Will you mind going to the market alone after I get home from the well?"

“That should work, and if there’s something heavy that we need, then you can pick it up on your way home. We’ll figure this out.”

“Yes, we will. You need to be thinking about what you would like to purchase next in the way of food and kitchen needs. I’ll get paid on Friday.”

“Okay. But until we need a churn, I don’t know of anything. I should probably get some more onions and cucumbers to eat with the bread, and I don’t mind foraging for greens. We’re going to be fine.”

“I’ve got to get some sleep. It will be an even longer day tomorrow. Good night, Jenay. Thanks for all your help.”

“Good night, Yanis. I love you.”

He was asleep before his head hit the blanket. She lay awake thinking of mats, pillows, kitchen towels, and looms. But she knew that Jehovah would take care of all their needs.



Jesse and Miriam were walking home from the synagogue when they decided to take a walk and meet the new couple from Jerusalem. Miriam packed a travel bag for baby Zach and Tobias packed a bag of fruit as a welcoming gift. As they arrived at the farm, they saw baby goats running everywhere and the young couple sitting on a blanket in the yard laughing and talking together. Jesse called for Yanis and Yanis ran to greet him.

“Welcome to our chaos. We got some of the new goats last week and they think they own the place. Please come and visit.” He led them to the blanket in the yard and invited them to sit. Jesse and Yanis introduced their wives and of course, baby Zach. “Was he named after Zachary?” The two couples began to chat and get acquainted.

“Excuse me, but these kids are obnoxious. Let me put them in the barn.” Jenay began to sing a Psalm, and the goats followed her. She quickly shut them in the barn. “Now, we can talk in peace without being eaten alive by goats.” Jenay returned to the blanket and admired baby Zach. He had just turned one year old and was beginning to walk from Mother to Abba. With a mischievous grin on his face, he walked to Jenay, and she was delighted. She hoped that Miriam would be a good friend. Jesse and Yanis seemed to have already established their friendship. Miriam asked Jenay to visit her whenever she came to the market and told her the house was just behind the Mercantile Store. Jenay promised that she would visit soon. When they stood to leave, Jesse picked up the baby’s travel bag and realized he had forgotten the fruit. As he handed it to Jenay, he noticed her look of amazement and remembered what his first few years on his own had been like. He resolved to visit more often. On their walk home, he talked to Miriam about what it was like for him when he first started out. He explained that Yanis and Jenay had been put in a bad situation when Mr. Bart had died. He also told her that he suspected

that they were followers of Jesus. He thought it was strange that it hadn't come up today as they talked.



After work on Sunday, Yanis spent the afternoon carrying home the six new baby goats to add to the herd. Now they had eighteen does and one buck. He felt like that was a great start.

Their days flew by and the kids grew. Yanis and Jenay fell into a pattern of work that left little time to think of anything else. She kept her eyes on the goats in the morning while she and they foraged for food in the woods, and Yanis worked at the market. At noon, he purchased what they needed at the market or Mercantile Store and spent his afternoons repairing the barn.

After work on Friday, Yanis stopped by the Mercantile Store. They were really busy and when Yanis asked for Jesse, they told him to just go back to the warehouse. Jesse greeted him and Yanis grabbed one end of the box he was trying to lift to a cart. "Thanks! Now how can I help you?"

"Well, I don't need to make any purchases, but I had a question for you. I've been letting the goats graze in the woods north of my farm. Then I got to thinking that that land probably belongs to someone, and he should be compensated for providing food for my goats. I was just wondering who owned the land and I figured you would know."

"I don't think anyone owns it. From the town of Capernaum north — everything is woodland. Some people have cleared it to make farms, but for the most part it all belongs to everyone. A lot of people pick up firewood or cut down trees for lumber up in that area, but it belongs to all of us. I don't think you would ever run out of woods — but you might lose your goats!"

"Oh, Jenay goes with them and keeps them close by. But that really helps. We've been picking up firewood in that area, too. I was just wondering if I needed to purchase some of the land for grazing."

"I would have to check with Ruler Jairus to be sure. I'll see him tonight and I'll find out. But for now, I would just say enjoy the woods and take whatever you need."

"Jesse, what are you going to do with that pile of lumber?"

"It's not really lumber, it's just the wooden boxes that my supplies come in. I usually sell it for firewood."

"How much would that entire pile cost?" Jesse gave him a price and offered to have it delivered. "Would that cost extra?"

"Nope. But you just said you were collecting firewood from the woods. Why would you buy more?"

"I need wood for some projects, and I can't afford good lumber. I've got to run. Shalom and good Sabbath."

"Shalom, and good Sabbath to you and Jenay. The wood will be delivered on Sunday."

Yanis hurried home and quickly watered the goats again. Jenay was making Sabbath bread, and he could hear her singing in the kitchen as she worked. When he was finished with the watering, she left to walk to the market and purchase food for the Sabbath. She would need to hurry to be back in time to bake the bread. They enjoyed their Sabbath dinner on the blanket in the yard and tried to figure out when Shavuot would be. They had not been keeping up with the passing of time, but they thought it should be soon. He made a notch on the side of the barn to indicate Passover and then they tried to fill in the weeks. According to their calculations, they had been married for one month and next week would be Shavuot. Jenay hesitantly asked if they could possibly visit with her grandparents. "I love your grandparents, but I don't want them to know our situation. I'm afraid they will feel compelled to help us, and I don't think that's right. I promised your dad that I would take care of you, and I will."

"I understand. I just thought you might enjoy visiting with them. But it's okay. Pentecost will be on Monday. I suppose you'll have to work as usual."

"Yes, probably. My boss is Gentile."

"I'll try to make it a special day and we'll celebrate after you get home."

"After I get home and water the goats."

"And I go to the market to get supplies. But we'll make it special somehow."

"Jenay, the only thing I need to make it special is to be with you. Let's just spend some time remembering Pentecost. On Sunday, there will be a delivery of lumber. Have them put it in the courtyard of the house. I'll try to get us a table and some benches built soon. I've never tried building anything, but I think I can make something that we can eat off of instead of you having to sit on the ground."

"I don't mind," said Jenay.

"I know. But I want to provide for you."

They were pleasantly surprised that the Meat Shop and entire market was closed three days for Shavuot. They enjoyed the time together. Yanis built a table and two benches for the courtyard. He said he would build additional benches as Jesse collected more wood. The next few weeks were busy ones for both of them. Sukkot came and went without notice. Yanis was spending his afternoons felling trees, trimming them, cutting them into logs, and then Jenay would help him balance them on the little milk cart and drag them home. He would soon separate the buck from the does and needed to build him a shelter in one corner of the pasture as protection from the heat and cold. Jenay asked how he would get water. "I guess I'll have to carry water for him just like I do the others." Jenay tried not to cry as she realized that this goat-raising work was multiplying. Each Friday, Yanis gave her money to spend at the market and she began to set aside a little for other things that she needed like plates, bowls, cups, and a loom. Their robes were falling apart. Of course, then she would need thread. She took the goats foraging in the woods every morning while

Yanis worked at the market. She intended to visit with Miriam, but never seemed to have time. She was always rushing to get started with baking or helping with one of Yanis' projects.

She bought a small lap loom to start weaving their new robes and she picked out the least expensive thread – an unbleached khaki color. She had always loved to weave.

On Thursday night, Jenay asked Yanis if he could purchase two mats at the market since she would be unable to carry them. He responded, "It is getting colder and looks like rain. That would probably be a good idea. I don't want you getting chilled." She breathed a sigh of relief, but wondered how she was suppose to watch the goats in the rain. She decided that Jehovah had watched over shepherd girls for centuries and they had survived, so she determined to not complain.

On Friday he brought home a couple of mats and placed them in the living area of the house just as the rain started. They had their blankets and the house would protect them from the rain and cold. They ate their dinner on the mats and then realized that the goats' would still need water even though it was wet and cold outside. Yanis insisted that she stay inside and he took care of filling the trough in the barn. Jenay knew that Yanis was just as exhausted as she was and she prayed all the time he was gone

On Sunday, Yanis brought home a small lamp with a jar of lamp oil. Now, they wouldn't have to eat in the dark. He reported that the ruler had said it was okay to graze the goats on any of the wooded land north of town. It would help to keep the woods clean. Jesse said to tell her hello and that Miriam was carrying baby number two.

## Chapter 26

The winter was hard and long. Each morning, Jenay would cover her head with her cloak and take the goats to the woods to forage. Yanis had built a lean-to for her and she sat inside it and wove on the new robes. *I wonder how different it will be when the goats are ready to produce milk? Will life just keep getting harder, or is there really hope that someday we'll be able to minister and serve Jehovah as Yanis and I had planned? I should be grateful that we haven't starved to death. Jehovah has been so good to us. We are blessed — exhausted, but blessed. I know He has a plan. I've just got to be patient.* She began to sing Psalms again and the goats gathered around her lean-to. She scratched their ears and noticed how much bigger they were getting as they pushed against the frame. It wouldn't be long before the kids would be full-grown.

They both were able to sleep a little late for the Sabbath morning and enjoyed a leisurely day. Yanis told her that tomorrow he would purchase some cucumbers at the market before coming home, and then he would lead the eleven older does into the pasture. She would need to help him keep the six younger ones outside. "Will they be all right with the buck?" Jenay asked innocently.

"Yes, my love. They are grown up ladies now and will soon be carrying his kids."

"Oh, Yanis," her eyes were filled with wonder as she realized his meaning.

When Sabbath ended, they began to push and pull the trailer to the well. "Someday we'll put a well on the property and not have to do this."

"Then when would I get to stroll with my husband in the dark?" asked Jenay cheerfully.

"You call this strolling?" he said as he struggled to pull the heavy wagon filled with water jars. He emptied the water into the troughs and they quickly crawled into their blankets.

Sunday after work, he pulled the trailer back to the well then they tried to separate the six younger does from the older ones. It took them over an hour and they both were exhausted. She stayed in the barn with the younger ones while he led the older ones into the pasture and shut the gate behind them. He hoped the rock walls would be high enough for them to not try climbing out.

Yanis refilled both water troughs twice each day and left the buck and does together. The pasture foliage was getting thinned out by Wednesday and he decided it was time to remove the does. He stood guard with a large pole to keep the buck from escaping and opened the gate while Jenay sang and called for the does to come to her. One by one they came out into the yard and greeted Jenay. They added the younger does to the group and Yanis watched over them while Jenay began to make bread. Two weeks later they separated the

younger does from the older ones and led them into the pasture. Jenay eagerly watched her does growing bigger. Around Passover, they should have new kids to care for. Each day she led the eighteen does to the woods and she began to forage for spring greens again. She could make a simple but very nourishing meal for the two of them without having to purchase vegetables. She even found two wild plum trees that would soon have ripe fruit.

One Sabbath afternoon near the end of winter, Jesse and Miriam brought their almost-two-year-old son Zach to visit with them. They also brought a friend named Arial. They visited and thoroughly enjoyed getting to talk with young adults.

“Are you still working at the market, Yanis?” asked Jesse.

“Yes. Jehovah has provided for us during this time of waiting. All eighteen of our does are now carrying kids. We should be very, very busy about Passover time, and then around Sukkot we should have the babies weaned and we can start our milk business. It’s been a hard but good year and we are happy.”

“I’m looking at the table that you built out of my scrap wood. You are a good carpenter,” said Jesse.

“Well, a farmer has to do a lot of different jobs. I don’t necessarily do them well, but I’ve had to do a lot of things that I don’t really understand. I’m grateful that the Holy Spirit is available to guide me through.”

“Are you a follower of Jesus?” asked Miriam.

“Yes, we both are,” replied Yanis. “I don’t think we would have survived this first year without His guiding us step by step.”

“Are you followers?” asked Jenay.

“Yes, we’ve known that Jesus was the Messiah for a long time, but we are struggling to figure out how to obey the Holy Spirit. Our dads heard about Him at Pentecost in Jerusalem, but I’m pretty confused and don’t really know whether He’s leading me or not,” explained Miriam.

“Sometimes I think He is, and at others I’m not sure,” said Arial.

“Zachary was the passionate one. And the Holy Spirit led him to Damascus and left us here with a lot of questions,” said Jesse.

Jenay was surprised that Yanis said nothing. He looked deep in thought, but made no offer to answer their questions or teach them. “I would love to help you with any questions and I will be in the woods with the goats every morning if you want to visit. We usually don’t go far, and if you call my name, I’ll probably hear you,” said Jenay.

“Can you stop and visit at my house some afternoon?” asked Miriam. “I would really like that, and the baby usually takes his nap around the seventh hour.”

“I’ll try, but Yanis usually needs me here to help with the goats,” said Jenay lamely. She really wanted to go, but could tell that Yanis was not happy, so she made excuses.

After the guests had gone, Jenay felt that Yanis wanted to be alone. Jenay walked to the barn and let the goats out to graze. They were content to stay near the house since Yanis and Jenay were in



the yard. Yanis didn't seem to want to speak, so she just sang Psalms quietly to the goats, and as the sun began to set, she locked them in the barn again. She went into the kitchen and brought out a tray of bread and onion for their dinner and set it on the courtyard table. Yanis joined her there and they ate mostly in silence. Afterward, he loaded the trailer with jars and left alone. Jenay worried that she shouldn't have volunteered without asking him first. She felt that he was angry at her. She had never seen him this way and wasn't sure how to deal with it. She wanted to run and meet him and help him push the cart back. She knew it was heavy and he would have to make two trips. But she felt he wanted to be alone, so she lay on her mat and tried to wait patiently for his return. He would need to be up before dawn for work, and it seemed an eternity before he slipped into his blanket. Soon she heard him snoring restlessly and she continued to pray that the Holy Spirit would help him deal with whatever was troubling him. But if it was the same thing that was troubling her, she had no idea what the solution would be. They had goats to raise, and it seemed that ministry must wait.

When she woke up on Sunday, he was already gone and she grabbed a bread roll and went to the barn to let out the does. She took her bag to the woods to forage for greens. She had finished Yanis' robe and was working on hers. She planned her afternoon and knew she needed more onions and cucumbers from the market. But she wanted to finish the weaving, too. At noon she led the does home and waited for Yanis. He seemed to still be in a mood, and she told him she needed to go to the market whenever he finished watering the goats.

"Don't tell me what to do!" Yanis complained.

"I wasn't telling you what to do. You always water the goats and I told you I would wait to go to the market until you get back," defended Jenay.

"And you always wait until I get back because someone has to watch the goats. You could have let them forage a while longer instead of coming home early," snarled Yanis.

"Yes, I could have, but I was eager to see my husband and ask about his day," said Jenay with tears in her eyes.

"Well, maybe you should have done that instead of telling me what to do," continued Yanis.

"Yanis, I don't know why you are upset, but please leave me alone. I can go to the market tomorrow. I'm going to go wash these greens." She went into the house and put the greens in a skillet. It was too early to cook them, but she didn't know what else to do. She pulled out the mats and cleaned the floors and then pulled them back in place in the living room. She scrubbed the courtyard table and benches and left him to take care of the goats. She didn't feel like sitting still and weaving. As the sun set, she fried the greens over the open fire. She started to mention that the fire wood was getting low, but decided that she would gather it herself tomorrow morning since she had noticed several broken limbs where she was foraging today.

She wondered if she could pull the milk cart by herself. She wasn't sure, but she could try. Maybe it would please him even if she couldn't pull it home. It didn't. He complained that the cart was much too heavy for her and that she could have hurt herself. If she had just told him, he would have taken care of the firewood. It seemed that she could do nothing right. He asked if she had visited with Miriam. He seemed surprised that she had not. But the mood continued. Everything was wrong, and she cried herself to sleep each night.

For two weeks the moodiness continued with no explanation and no apology. Jenay was beginning to wonder if he even wanted a wife or whether she should just plan to leave. She wove on her robe each morning as she sat with the goats, and prayed diligently that Jehovah would work in Yanis' heart and mind and help her be a good wife.

Passover was approaching on Thursday and there was still no breakthrough in their relationship. On Tuesday afternoon, she could stand it no longer. "Yanis, I would like to go to my grandparents' on Thursday afternoon for the Passover Seder. They may or may not be home. They may be in Jerusalem. But if they are home, I know we would be welcome."

"Jenay, I have goats to take care of who may be giving birth about that time. You are welcome to go if that is what you choose to do, but I will not go."

"I don't feel that you want me here," stated Jenay calmly. "I have worked beside you for almost a year and now you have grown tired of me and discarded me. I am going to my grandparents'."

"I have not discarded you. You are the one who has chosen to leave. I'm staying here."

"If I must go alone, then I will need to spend the night because I can't walk home after dark unaccompanied."

"I'll be off work for the first three days of Passover, so I can take care of the goats while you are gone," said Yanis stoically.

Jenay didn't want to miss the goats' giving birth. She didn't want to go to her grandparents' without Yanis. But she certainly didn't want to back down and give in to his treatment of her.

On Thursday, Yanis came home from work and left to water the goats without speaking to her. When he returned, she put on her new robe and said that she was leaving, but would be back before noon tomorrow to help with the goats. "Shalom."

"Shalom." Every fiber of his being wanted to run after her, but he felt like such a failure he couldn't bring himself to do it. *I deserve her leaving, and I doubt she will ever come back. She shouldn't have to do all this hard work. I promised her abba that I would protect and care for her, and I'm nothing but a failure.*

He watched as she walked with her head held high. She looked much older than her twelve years. He was afraid of what her grandparents would see and hear. He forced himself to get busy. He called for the goats to follow him and pulled the cart back to the woods to collect more firewood. As he pulled the cart home, he noticed that the does were lagging behind more than usual. He had only helped

Aaron deliver one goat, so he hoped that all would go well. If everything went right, there wasn't anything that needed to be done. But if something went wrong, as it often did with does giving birth for the first time, he wasn't sure he would know what to do. *Maybe it is best if Jenay doesn't see us lose everything. She doesn't need to see how stupid I am. And I don't want her to see one of her does die giving birth.* He stacked the firewood neatly between the oven and the firepit. Then he led the does into the barn and loaded the water jars. He would lock them in when he finished. By the time he returned, one of the does was actively giving birth. Yanis watched in amazement as the doe seemed to know exactly what to do. She nudged the baby to its feet and it was nursing within a few minutes of birth. Yanis fell to his knees and let the tears roll down his cheeks. Soon a second doe began to strain and birth her kid. Yanis wished he could share this special moment with Jenay. He went into the house to get his blanket and intended to sit in the barn all night in case he was needed. But next thing he knew, a goat was licking his face, the sun was rising, and there were six new kids running and playing in the barn. The other five does looked ready to give birth. He kept them in the barn, and released the others into the yard. The kids stayed close to their mothers and the entire herd seemed content to graze around the house. He knew that they were missing Jenay and looking for her. He checked on the birthing does, but they seemed to not need his help. As he sat in the yard and tried to determine what needed to happen next, he realized that in four weeks, he would need to hire someone to help him milk every morning and every evening. He would need someone to help him deliver the milk. *Should I deliver it house to house or should I set up a booth at the market?* He hadn't thought that far. He needed to decide a business plan and he wanted Jenay's ideas. She would know where best to sell milk. *Why have I treated her so meanly this past month? She is missing the best part and it's all my fault!* He got up and checked on the does in the barn. One more had given birth and he allowed the doe and her kid to come out in the yard. Now, there were only four remaining.

It was only an hour after sunrise when he saw Jenay walking toward home. He ran to greet her and took the box from her hands. "I'm glad you came back. I didn't know whether you would. But you missed an incredible night. We now have seven new kids for you to meet. And all the mothers are looking for you so they can show off their babies." He set the box down and took her in his arms and kissed her affectionately. Then they both screamed and grabbed to get the box away from the goats. "Have you had breakfast?"

"No, haven't you?"

"No, I told them I needed to return and get back to you. So they packed us a breakfast and sent their love. I told them that you were busy with birthing kids and couldn't leave and sent your regrets. I hope that was okay."

"Of course it was okay. It was the truth. I just don't have time to visit. You set up inside or we'll have help. I'm going to check the barn

and I'll be right back. There's only four more left that are due today or tomorrow — so it shouldn't be much longer.”

“I'll put the box in the house, but I'd like to come see, if it's alright with you.”

“Sure. I'll put it in the kitchen for you.” He sat the box in the house and quickly joined Jenay. He took her by the hand and led her into the barn. Another kid had been born and the last three seemed content to just sleep and wait their turn. Yanis led the doe and newest kid out to the yard. Jenay looked around at all the does and sang them a Psalm. It seemed to reassure them that she was home and would be shepherding them again soon. “Let's go eat. I'm starving.” They unpacked enough food for a week. They ate and talked like old times. Yanis told her about his night and she told him about hers. She said it was great to connect with family and especially Benji, her cousin. Yanis remembered Benji. He didn't travel with Jesus, but he was always around when they were in Capernaum. They had had no word from her parents, but everyone was excited that she and Yanis were doing well getting their milk business started. Grandpa Zebedee had prayed especially for the business to flourish so that it would be a blessing to the town of Capernaum. “It was good to see my uncles and aunts and cousins, but the best part was talking to Grandmother Salome. I'm sorry I left the way I did, but I'm glad I went because I feel certain that I'm on the right track. I was beginning to wonder.” They talked about Yanis' fears that all the does would die giving birth and all their work would be wasted. He was just stressed out. “But that eased last night when the first few births happened without any problems at all. I feel ready to face the future — but only with you beside me.”

“I'm right here and I intend to stay,” said Jenay. “Do you want me to take the goats foraging?”

“No, let's just stay around here today. There's plenty for them to eat. I need to talk with you about some plans. I need to hire someone to help me with the milking. We'll start that in about a month. I thought I might check with Jesse after Passover. He said he kept a list of people looking for work, as well as a list of people wanting to hire. I think we should get on that list as soon as possible.”

“That sounds good,” said Jenay.

“Which reminds me, I made a chart on the side of the barn, but I need to purchase some papyrus to record the dates for these does. Pretty soon we'll have more goats than we can keep up with.” Yanis talked more during breakfast than he had spoken during the last month. Jenay's heart was glad that Jehovah had heard her prayers. She would have to be patient as she waited for Him to deal with Yanis' priorities.

Jenay put away the rest of the food. It would make a great dinner for tonight and she could spend the day with Yanis. They kept checking the barn, but nothing was happening with the final three does. They still looked sluggish and Jenay suggested that they might be hungry. Yanis agreed and opened the barn doors to let them out. All three went to the yard and began to graze close by the barn. Yanis

spent the afternoon building a third watering trough. They enjoyed Grandmother Salome's leftovers for dinner and then walked back to the barn to check on the does. All three were looking close, and Yanis said he would spend the night in the barn again to make sure they didn't have trouble. He loaded the jars onto the trailer and asked Jenay if she wanted a stroll in the moonlight.

"Of course," she replied, even though she knew that it meant pushing a heavy trailer to the well and back. She went to sleep in the house and left Yanis with his blanket in the barn. She laid out some oil and rolls for breakfast and went to the barn to check on Yanis. She was used to him being gone to work. It was nice to have him around. She wondered when he would quit work to focus on the milk business, but didn't want to do or say anything to upset him again. They had two more kids this morning, but the other doe seemed content, so they let all the goats out to forage in the yard while they ate their breakfast. Jenay took the goats and the new kids to the woods so that the mothers would get good food to feed their babies. How fun it was to see the kids run and frolic in the woods, yet quickly run to their mothers' side if anything startled them. *Jehovah, let me run quickly to You and trust You the way these little ones trust their mothers.*

At noon, she took the goats home to get water. Yanis had already filled the three troughs. "Do you realize that next week we will be married for a whole year?" Yanis asked.

"And most couples take that long just to be espoused!"

"I did not know this would be such a hard year, but I'm so glad that your dad allowed you to be here with me. It's been a good year, and I hope that the hardest part is behind us."

"It has been a good year, and we both have grown and learned, and I love you more today than ever before," declared Jenay.

"Do you truly? Even with all the mess ups?"

The last doe finally gave birth around noon and Jenay was available to watch. She, too, was touched by how naturally Jehovah had prepared the doe to become a mother. She and Yanis watched hand in hand as the little one stood beside her mother to nurse for the first time. All day on the Sabbath, Yanis and Jenay watched the does graze and feed their little ones. In only two weeks the next six does should be ready for birth. This time would not seem so scary — at least they hoped. Neither wanted the Sabbath to end, but they knew it was time to get back into the routine. When she woke, Yanis was already at work at the market. Jenay ate a quick breakfast, opened the barn door, and called for the goats to follow her. She took them deeper into the woods to check the plum trees that she had found earlier. She gathered a few that looked ripe and left the others for later. She began to forage for greens and found some early berries. She knew Yanis would be happy with her finds. She needed to get a fresh pan of bread made and decided to put off going to the market until tomorrow since Yanis was late getting home. He had stopped to talk with Jesse and discovered that a man that used to work on this farm with Mr. Bart was looking for a job. Yanis and Mr. Ezekiel had agreed on hours and pay

and a trial period starting on Wednesday afternoon. “He won’t be able to help with the watering, but he’s worked for Mr. Bart all his life and really knows goats. I think he can help me, but I want to check and make sure that he’ll let me be the boss. I don’t want him running my business.” Jenay kept her own hopes and dreams deep inside. They enjoyed their dinner of bread, greens, and fruit. There was a contentment that felt good between them.

On Tuesday, Jenay ran to the market and picked out enough threads for Yanis a second robe. It would help her pass the time while she watched the goats forage. On Wednesday afternoon, Jenay brought the goats home to water them. She met Mr. Ezekiel and immediately felt comfortable with him. She left the goats with the men and went into the house. It had been a while since she had had time to clean. Then she sat on a courtyard bench and began to weave. After dinner, they made two trips to the well. Yanis filled the troughs, while she went on to stretch out on her mat. Soon Yanis was sleeping soundly beside her. Mr. Ezekiel continued to come in the afternoons and helped Yanis with his business plan. He told Yanis that one of their biggest customers was the Capernaum Inn. Mr. Bart had provided them with several jars of milk each week. Yanis promised to talk with them and asked Mr. Ezekiel when he could promise the milk. Mr. Ezekiel suggested that they begin milking the does when their kids were two weeks old. He explained that they could milk the mothers first thing in the morning, and let the kids nurse throughout the day. This would cause their milk production to increase. Then at four weeks, they would wean the kids and begin milking the does twice a day.

“Mr. Ezekiel, I think you are worth your weight in gold. I will hire you to start next Sunday part time, if that’s agreeable with you. And then we’ll move to full time in one month. My wife will take the goats to forage in the woods every morning.”

“That sounds good to me, and I will see you at noon on Sunday. Shalom.”

“That will be fine. Shalom.”

On Sabbath afternoon, Jenay commented that the younger group of does were looking sluggish. Yanis got up and walked around and agreed that they might be getting close to birth. After they had hauled the water and locked the goats in the barn, Yanis took his blanket and stayed in the barn just in case of a problem. He completely slept through the birth of four kids. On Sunday morning, he let them all out to graze, but woke up Jenay and told her to stay close to home because the other two does were due any time now. She agreed. After a quick breakfast, she let the goats out of the barn and just slowly walked, letting them graze along the road. When they reached their usual foraging spot, she turned around and led them home. She let them drink and they grazed behind the barn. The two does didn’t seem to be in any distress, but she would be glad when Yanis arrived. He loaded the milk cart with the jars and headed to the well. She kept the goats with her, and soon Mr. Ezekiel arrived. He examined the two

does that were still in waiting and declared that it probably wouldn't be long. She told him Yanis had gone to the well and would be right back. She headed to the house to start a batch of bread. In only another six weeks, Yanis had said that the goats would forage on their own and would return for milking and to spend the night in the barn. Jenay was looking forward to having some time to really get her cooking and homemaking organized, and she dreamed of the day when there would be enough milk for her to churn butter.

## Chapter 27

Jenay had just put the bread in the oven when she heard a commotion out front. An oxcart with several people had come through the front gate. She hurried to see who had arrived and squealed with delight when she discovered Gabriela, her best friend from near Jerusalem, had arrived with her family. She quickly ran to greet them. Gabriela and Jenay were hugging and crying. Jenay sent Gabriela's older brothers to get Yanis from the barn. Gabriela's parents sat on the benches in the courtyard and enjoyed watching the girls giggle. Gabriela's brothers returned with Yanis in tow and Gabriela explained that they had come from Cana to invite them to her wedding on Wednesday. They had walked all the way from Bethany to Cana and then borrowed an oxcart to come and visit with them. Yanis stated that he would love to attend the wedding, but that it would all depend on whether the new man could handle the goats. He looked at Jenay and suggested that maybe Grandmother Salome would take her to the wedding. He apologized, but said that he had too much work to do and couldn't stay to visit. He thanked them for the invitation, but returned to the barn.

Orly, Gabriela's espoused husband, had never met Yanis, but he had heard about his travels with Jesus through a mutual friend. At the Holy Spirit's prompting, he followed Yanis to the barn. Yanis apologized to Orly for being so busy. "I could bring Jenay for Wednesday. But it would take us a day to travel and another day to travel back, and I'm not comfortable leaving my entire investment in the hands of a man that I only hired last week."

"I understand," said Orly.

Yanis continued, "I thought that I wanted to be a farmer, but I think I'm in the wrong line of work. I mean, I love caring for the animals, but it's just overwhelming. I never have time to breathe. It's constant. I don't even get a real Sabbath and that's really bad. I'm so tired, I decided that even though I couldn't afford it, I hired a man to help. He just started part time last week, but with each passing day, there's just more work to be done."

Orly put his hand on Yanis' shoulder. "I've heard nothing but great things about you, and how you followed Jesus faithfully for three years."

"Yeah, I think that's what is bothering me. I mean, here I am raising goats while other followers are out spreading the New Way. I came here to minister to Capernaum, but I'm off track."

"That's what I was going to ask you. Are you certain that this is where the Holy Spirit is leading you? Are you being completely obedient to everything that you've heard?"

"I think I've been too busy to check lately. Maybe I will take that walk with Jenay to Cana, and just spend some time thinking this thing



through. Jenay has been so patient with me. But it's true, the joy is gone. Something has got to change."

"Why don't you walk in on Tuesday and camp out with Gabriela's family at my place? You two will be welcome for dinner that night and breakfast Wednesday morning. Then I'm going to marry the most wonderful woman in the world. Maybe the walk would give you time to think. Are you sure that your hired man can't handle the goats for those three days?"

"I'll talk to him. I think I need this trip to Cana more than I need to worry about raising goats! Thanks, Orly."

"I need to get back to Gabriela and start home. I hope to see you on Tuesday afternoon."

"Thanks, Orly. We'll plan to be there." Orly, Gabriela, and her family loaded in the oxcart and headed back to Cana.

Yanis went to find Mr. Ezekiel. "Mr. Ezekiel, we need to talk. We talked about you working part time for the next month, but I was wondering if you could possibly cover full time for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of this week. My wife's best friend is getting married in Cana, and we just learned about it. It would make her so happy to get to be there. I'll need to hire someone to take care of the watering, but I was wondering if you felt you could cover the rest. I would pay you for the extra hours and for supervising the water carrier. I don't like to spend the money, but I think my wife needs the break. It's been a really hard first year of marriage, if you know what I mean."

"I know exactly what you mean. I was married for almost thirty years, and we were still working out the details when she passed. It's no problem to take care of the goats, but you will need to hire someone to carry the water. My back just won't do that anymore."

"I'll talk to Jesse tomorrow afternoon after work — oh, I need to take off work, too. Man, this will be an expensive trip. Anyway, I'll find someone to take care of the water, or I won't go."

"Yanis, there's not many people who will hire my grandson. He's full grown, but not right in the head. He's strong as an ox and he loves working with me, and I don't mind supervising him. If you want to, I'll hire him for you to take care of the watering. He'll do just fine and at half the price."

"I don't see a problem if you are sure it won't be more work for you. Jesus loves all the children, even if they are full grown in their bodies."

"Most people don't feel that way. I'll just keep him here with me all day. He'll enjoy playing with the goats and he'll be happy to help."

"Mr. Ezekiel, you are a lifesaver, or at least a marriage saver. What's your grandson's name?"

"Zokur. So, you want me just in the afternoon tomorrow and then both of us full time for three days."

"That's right. I'm going to go tell Jenay. She will be thrilled. Is it okay if I pay you on Friday?"

"It's okay with me, but Zokur likes to get paid each day, so if you could leave me three silver coins, I'll pay him when I take him home each night."

"Sounds great. I'll see you tomorrow. It's already sunset. Shalom."

"Shalom." Yanis ran into the house where Jenay was still bubbling about the visit from Gabriela. When he told her that he had arranged everything so that they could go for the wedding, she was jumping up and down with joy. She promised to pick some plums tomorrow to take with them. They shouldn't need anything else. It made Yanis happy to see her delight.

Yanis informed his boss Alex that he was going to take off work on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, but would be back early Friday morning to help with the Sabbath crowd. Yanis reminded him that he had never taken off and that this was a special trip to keep the wife happy. Alex agreed that he had been a good worker and that they would do fine without him except that Quintus hated to butcher goats. "Yeah, I know. And I'm not going to be the one to tell him!" Yanis laughed.



On Tuesday morning, Mr. Ezekiel arrived with Zokur before Yanis and Jenay were finished with breakfast. Zokur was pulling the cart and Mr. Ezekiel was walking beside him. They all walked together to the well and then said goodbye. Yanis and Jenay carried a travel bag with their blankets and some plums. They walked steadily and without much talking for the first few miles. Both were a little nervous about leaving the goats. But they knew that they needed to get away. After a while, Yanis began to speak. "As you've probably guessed, it's not just the goats stressing me. I mean, it is the goats, but it's more than that." Jenay was a good listener and didn't rush him. They had all day. "Orly reminded me that Jesus made it pretty clear that we needed to be careful about our priorities. We have to work to make a living, but that work shouldn't be what it's all about."

"I agree. We have to be careful that raising goats is not our focus."

"Exactly. But I don't know what that will look like, because it seems that as we develop this business, it gets more time and energy consuming, not less. So, we'll need to hire more people to help us, which means that we need to expand more to afford them, which means we'll need to hire more people to help us. I feel trapped and scared and don't know whether we should even be raising goats."

There was a long silence. "I don't even know why I decided to raise goats. Aaron said I was good at it, and I could probably focus on that and get it started easier than a crop farm. He helped me think through the plan to get started and then when I found the farm with an already established business, I thought Jehovah had provided for us. But, maybe not." Again there was a long silence.

They stopped at a well and got water and rested a few minutes. It was only midmorning. When they started walking again, Jenay asked, "If you didn't have the goats tying you down, what would you like to do with your life?"

"Oh, that's easy. I want to go back to teaching about Jesus."

"When you say 'go back,' are you talking about returning to Jerusalem?"

"No, I still feel that Jehovah has specifically called me to Capernaum. I don't know why, but I'd like to find out." Again Jenay just walked quietly beside him and let him sort and process and think.

"I guess when Jesse indicated that they were uncertain in how to follow Jesus, I knew that Jehovah was saying this was my starting point. I ran from it because I was feeling so exhausted and stressed about the goats. I feel I have to get the business established before I can start any other projects. But since I talked with Orly, everything seems different. I'm remembering more and more what Jesus taught us. I don't think He would be very pleased with my priorities lately." Another long silence followed.

Jenay quietly shared, "My dad taught us that when we were trying to figure out priorities, we should figure them out one at a time starting with the biggest and most important, and then all the little ones would fall in place."

"I know that, but I don't think it's necessarily a little one to be able to put food on the table or a roof over your head."

"Agreed. But how do we do that without focusing on it?"

"I don't know," said Yanis. "That's what I'm trying to figure out."

Jenay kept quiet. Later she began to sing Psalms and Yanis joined in and sang with her. They talked about things that they had done together while following Jesus and just totally relaxed. He told her about some things she had done that had made him notice her and she told him how sure she was that he would be her husband when he led the last Seder for Jesus' disciples. They were holding hands and laughing as they arrived in Cana in the late afternoon. Yanis followed Orly's directions to his house, but they weren't sure it was the right place. It was a beautiful home and they were nervous about knocking. They knocked but no one answered. They thought they heard voices coming from the courtyard and called out. Thankfully, Orly heard them and came to welcome them. Soon Gabriela and Jenay were hugging and Yanis was considered the hero for bringing her best friend to the wedding. Yanis enjoyed visiting with Gabriela's parents and friends who had traveled from Bethany. Yanis felt welcome and comfortable here. They camped out with the family, and it reminded them of their own marriage and happy trip walking down the mountain.

Orly served them breakfast in the courtyard. He didn't seem to have servants, but was doing the cooking himself. Yanis was impressed with his skills. While they were waiting for the women to finish dressing for the wedding, Orly invited Yanis to take a walk. They walked around Cana and got acquainted. Orly pointed out where he

worked at a Metal Shop. He was a blacksmith by trade, but he was also trying to lead a group of about thirty followers, and he had hopes of starting additional groups after he and Gabriela were settled. Yanis felt comfortable sharing with him that his entire first year of marriage had been spent trying to get his business established so that he could start a group. They discussed what that might look like, but Orly had no idea how time consuming goats were! Orly promised to pray for him as he got it all sorted out. All Yanis knew was that it felt good to be in fellowship with a mature follower and that he needed to make some changes. The wedding was held at Orly's boss' house and they were surprised to learn that Orly's boss was Jenay's Uncle Kenan. Jenay was thrilled to be able to visit with family. But they were both surprised that the guests included both Jews and Gentiles. It made Yanis feel a little better to be working with Alex and Quintus since any association with Gentiles was forbidden by the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. He had felt somewhat dirtied by it. It was good to relax and party. He was glad to see Jenay laughing and dancing with the other ladies. He was glad he had pleased her. They camped out with the family again Wednesday night and then walked home on Thursday.

For the first few miles, Jenay chattered constantly about the fun she had had at the wedding. Then the talk became more serious and they shared together what they had learned about the persecution and death of many of the followers in Jerusalem. They talked about Jesus predicting much persecution and hardship before He returned again. It was a sobering thought. They walked in silence for a while.

Finally, Yanis spoke. "I don't know how this is all going to work, but I feel that Jehovah has brought us to Capernaum for a reason. I know that you and I both need to be in a group, and we probably should be leading one for Jesse and his friends. I can't figure out how that's going to work with our goat business, but Orly encouraged me to let the Holy Spirit guide me to get it figured out."

"I agree we need a group. I really enjoyed the fellowship at the wedding," said Jenay quietly.

"How would we manage the goats if we wanted to attend a group on Sabbath night, for example?" asked Yanis. "We would have to milk before the Sabbath and lock them in the barn."

"And haul water," added Jenay. "And then we could leave."

"But once we're milking that many goats, there would also be milk deliveries."

"Will we be delivering milk even on the Sabbath? Won't we get in trouble for that?" asked Jenay.

"I know that we can milk the goats, but I don't think we can use the cart and deliver the milk on the Sabbath. That's a different problem. So, back to our original question; could we free up Sabbath night for a group?"

"I think so."

"That would be a start." They were both quiet for a while, then Jenay asked, "What about Sabbath afternoon? Would that work better?"

“We could meet early, maybe around noon, but we would need to be home by milking time,” said Yanis. “We’ll milk them in the morning and turn them loose. We’ll have to keep water in their troughs.”

On and on they walked and talked and wondered what the future would hold. It was fun to be making plans together. As they entered Capernaum, Yanis asked Jenay if she needed to go to the market. “As long as you are okay with week-old Sabbath bread and onions, I think we can get by.” It was already past sunset when they arrived. Yanis lit the firepit and she began to slice the onions. Yanis checked and found the goats locked in the barn and the water troughs filled. They sat in the courtyard and ate the bread and fried onions, then quickly slipped into their blankets.

Jenay woke and found Yanis already gone, and they were suddenly back into their old schedule. She wondered if anything would change. She quickly poured some oil on the last roll and frowned because it was so old. She would bake fresh bread this afternoon. She hurried to the barn to release the goats and walked with them to the woods. She took her lap loom, but spent most of her time pulling greens and picking a bag of plums. She sang Psalms of worship and asked for Jehovah to continue to work in Yanis’ heart and guide him step by step.

At noon, Jenay took the goats home and greeted Mr. Ezekiel. She started a batch of bread and sat down to work on her weaving. Yanis arrived and left again to fill the water jars at the well. When Yanis returned, he asked her, “Jenay, would you like to go to your grandparents’ for dinner this evening? One of Zebedee’s servants talked with me at the well and invited us to come. It seems that Andrew and a group of his friends are in town, and they thought we might enjoy joining them for dinner.”

“Do you want to go? Because I don’t want to go without you,” replied Jenay.

“I do. I often stayed with Andrew while I was in Jerusalem, and I would enjoy visiting with him. We talked about being free on Sabbath nights and I think we should go.”

“Okay, I just need to bake the bread I have started.”

“Mr. Ezekiel can put away the goats as long as I finish watering them before we need to leave.”

“Guess I better get busy.” Jenay was in shock. Jehovah was changing Yanis’ heart. She was so excited, she almost spilled the bowl of bread dough. She braided the bread carefully and set it on the baking pan to rise for the last time. It would be ready in plenty of time to walk across town.

Yanis made four trips to the well so there would be plenty of water to last through the Sabbath. He sat down exhausted beside her. She carried the pans of bread to the outside oven and Yanis explained to Mr. Ezekiel that they were going out for the evening. Mr. Ezekiel agreed to lock up the goats before he left. As they walked, Jenay felt an eagerness in Yanis that she hadn’t seen in a while.

They arrived with several other guests, and Jenay introduced Yanis to everyone there. He greeted Andrew and quickly joined the men. Yanis knew the men Andrew had brought from Jerusalem. All the men washed at the ceremonial washing pots, and Grandmother Salome lit the Sabbath candles. Grandpa Zebedee prayed a prayer of blessing over his family and guests. The servants quickly served the plates, and the ladies wanted to know how Jenay was doing. They admitted that they had been worried about her and were praying for her marriage. It was good to be surrounded by women who cared about her and who could encourage her. They all commented that Yanis seemed like a good man and he certainly fit into the group. Salome added, "I didn't realize that you were the woman he was waiting on when he stayed with us a couple of years ago."

"I didn't know that he had stayed with you!" declared Jenay.

Salome remembered Yanis as being one of the favorites among the young men who followed Jesus. "He was more or less the leader of the pack."

"Yes, I always looked up to him, and he has lots of friends among the followers. That's why this past year has felt so strange to me. I thought we would quickly find our ministry. Instead he has isolated himself. But God is at work, and I'm seeing really good changes," confessed Jenay. "Thank you all for your prayers."

After dinner, the men and women began to mingle, and Yanis realized that he was expected to find Jenay. Everyone was scattered around the courtyard with the men and women mixed together. This reminded him of the groups in Jerusalem, and he was pleased. He invited Jenay to sit with him on a bench in the courtyard as they waited to see what was going to happen. Jaden's oldest daughter, Abira, led the group in singing some Psalms together, and Yanis and Jenay felt surrounded by Jehovah's love. They knew that this was what they were both craving. Grandpa Zebedee welcomed everyone and introduced Yanis and a friend of one of the house servants. Then he welcomed his nephew, the Apostle Andrew. "And for those of you who may not know, Andrew is Zachary's dad." He asked Andrew to introduce his group of friends from Jerusalem and to share whatever was on his heart.

"We arrived from Jerusalem yesterday and knew that we would be welcome to rest here and be refreshed. Thank you, Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome for hosting us. Your house has always been a welcome place for Jesus' followers in good times and in bad. The news from Jerusalem is one of continual pain and persecution. James and John and their wives send greetings; they are doing well. James the Just, brother of Jesus, is doing well and preaches to hundreds each week. People continue to become followers and they are growing and learning what Jesus taught. We are seeing the followers spread out all over the Roman world to share the message that Jesus is the Messiah, that He died for our sins, and that He rose again on the third day to conquer sin and death. One of the last things He told us to do before He left for Heaven was to tell the whole world. That's why my

group and I are here. We have been praying together for several months and feel the Holy Spirit's distinct call to travel even farther north than Caesarea Philippi. Uncle Zebedee has promised us passage to Bethsaida at the end of Sabbath. We plan to visit with Zachary and start preaching in Damascus. Then we'll travel north until the Holy Spirit either takes us home to be with Jesus, or tells us to turn around. There are apparently many, many Jews who have not heard about Jesus who live in the mountainous regions beyond the Roman world. We five will be in uncharted territory. Jesus taught that there is nowhere on earth that we can travel that He has not already been. We feel His presence with us and know that we are not alone. We are following daily where the Holy Spirit leads. We are asking for your prayers as we travel."

Everyone stood to indicate that they would pray for Andrew and his group. Some prayed aloud for their safety, others for boldness, but most focused on praying for the people who would become followers of Jesus. Benji prayed, "Jehovah, thank You for Andrew's sharing with us tonight. Please bless them as they go in obedience. We also want to pray for Zachary, Kobe, and Simon's group. We pray for wisdom and courage for James, John, Peter, and others who are serving You in dangerous places. Please help us to have boldness to share during this time of calm in Capernaum, and please hear our prayer for someone to teach us more about following Jesus. In Jesus' name I pray." Zebedee then prayed for Jehovah's blessing on each one present and thanked everyone for coming. He invited them to stay and visit as long as they wished since it was the Sabbath. Yanis wanted to say goodbye to Andrew and thank Zebedee for inviting them. Jenay said goodnight to Grandmother Salome and the other ladies and they walked home in silence. Yanis seemed deep in thought, but he held Jenay's hand and didn't seem upset or withdrawn like he had been before. The silence gave them time to process all they had heard and seen.

"I think we may have found our group," said Yanis. "Do they meet every Sabbath?"

"I got that impression, but I'm not sure. They may only meet when they have a speaker."

The Sabbath was quiet and restful for Yanis and Jenay. They let the goats graze around the house and barn. They were able to relax and make plans for the upcoming changes as the milking business began to become a reality.

## Chapter 28

On Sunday at noon, Yanis asked Alex, his boss, if he had time to talk. “That doesn’t sound good,” said Alex, but invited Yanis to speak.

“Alex, I told you when I started work that I was trying to build a goat farm and only wanted part-time work. You have been good to allow me to work from dawn to noon. But it’s time for me to focus on my business.”

“But Yanis, you are the best goat butcher I’ve ever seen. How will I replace you?”

“Well, I have a proposal to try to help you out.”

“I’m listening.”

“I will need to be milking at dawn, but I’m hoping to secure a booth here at the market during the day. I’m not sure when I’ll arrive, but definitely by the second hour. I was thinking that I might could bring the milk in and work for you while my hired man sells it. I could give you about four hours in the middle of the day to get your goats done while you look for someone else. That way Quintus won’t get too upset and it will give you some time. I can probably give you another month before I absolutely have to quit.”

“You are a good man, Yanis. When will your new schedule start?”

“It will start next Sunday. But I can’t guarantee that I’ll be in exactly at a certain time. It will depend on the goats. I’ll try to be, but I promise I’ll give you four full hours,” pledged Yanis.

“Don’t forget the market will be closed for three days, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, for one of your holy days.”

“That’s right. I had forgotten. So, I’ll start my new hours on Wednesday.”



After filling the water troughs, Mr. Ezekiel and Yanis talked all afternoon about what was still needed to start the business. Mr. Ezekiel was able to guide Yanis through the process. All week they worked on details and discussed how many people to hire at the beginning. On Thursday afternoon, Yanis asked Jenay whether they had been invited to Zebedee’s for the Sabbath meal. She had to tell him that they had not received a direct invitation. Yanis said he would not go without one. Jenay was disappointed but understood. On Friday, Yanis and Mr. Ezekiel made sure everything was in readiness for the first milking day on Sunday. This would be new for the goats as well as the milkers, so it was anyone’s guess how it would go. Yanis and Jenay began to feel that stressful tension between them again, but didn’t talk about it. She prepared Sabbath bread on Friday and Yanis made sure all the water troughs were filled. All they could find to talk about was the milk business. It seemed that Yanis was second



guessing himself on everything. Jenay tried to not get fussy with him but wished that they had gone to her grandparents'. There was something special about being around fellow followers, especially when there was stress.

The Sabbath seemed very long. The goats grazed around the house and barn, and she occasionally sang some Psalms to them. Yanis took a nap in the afternoon, but she was too restless to sleep. *Now who is not trusting? I accuse him of worrying, but he's over there snoring while I'm fretting. Forgive me, Jehovah. Please help tomorrow to go well, and please help us to find Your clear direction to serve You.* Late in the afternoon, Jenay set out the bread, onions, and cucumbers for their post-Sabbath meal. They both worked together to fill the water troughs and were ready for the day to be through.



Yanis was used to getting up early to go to work, but Jenay felt like it was the middle of the night. Mr. Ezekiel had hired two of his grandchildren to help with the milking. When they tried to separate the kids from the does, total bedlam ensued. Jenay began to sing softly to the does and all the milkers stood still and let the does settle down a little. First, they needed to separate the six younger does and their kids. Then they began separating the kids from the older does, one at a time. Things began to calm down. Jenay continued to sing quietly and finally each milker was able to get about a cup of milk from each doe. Mr. Ezekiel assured them that the goats would quickly adjust to the new routine and that they should get more milk each day. Yanis poured some milk in a cup, and they all tasted the first fruits of their labor. They all agreed it was very good.

Because the market was closed for Shavuot, the children went home and Yanis and Jenay headed to the house for breakfast. They drank some of the milk and decided to experiment with the rest of it. They poured it into a large pan that Yanis had purchased at the Mercantile Store and hoped it would dry out and make cheese. They tried to celebrate Shavuot on Sunday, but each memory they shared of that first Pentecost just seemed to make them both sadder. Jenay was homesick and Yanis was out-of-sorts. For three days they continued the same morning routine and Yanis used his days off work to work on the farm. She actually looked forward to her time in the woods alone with the goats, and she was able to finish Yanis' second robe.

On Wednesday, Yanis had rented a booth at the market. They were getting just over a gallon of milk each morning. It was decided that the children would sell the milk they had and promise to increase their supply. Maybe they could at least secure one or two customers. He set the jar on the milk cart and then pulled the cart to the market. When they arrived at the booth, the children began calling, "Fresh goat milk. Fresh goat milk." It wasn't long before they had drawn a crowd.

Yanis told them where he would be working if they had any problems and to leave the empty cart and jar. He would pull it home after he was finished. He reported for work at the second hour as he had predicted. At the sixth hour, he cleaned up and pulled the cart and empty jar home. He loaded more jars and started filling the water troughs. He needed to collect more firewood, and Mr. Ezekiel helped him since the goats were foraging in the woods nearby.

The morning routine became easier each day and the milk production almost doubled. The children reported having regular customers who brought their own jars to be filled. They promised others that they would have more milk soon. The week had gone well, but Sabbath morning was going to be interesting since they couldn't hire workers on the Sabbath. Yanis and Jenay entered the barn and Jenay led the younger does and their kids out while Yanis began carrying the older kids out. They couldn't start milking until they got all eleven kids out of the barn. By the time they had finished milking, they were exhausted, and the goats were frustrated and hungry from being kept in the barn. Yanis had no idea how to deal with that but promised to talk with Mr. Ezekiel tomorrow. Jenay reported that the milk they had poured into the pans last week didn't look or taste very good and she asked if it was okay if she poured it out. After looking, he agreed. She offered to visit Grandmother Salome next week and ask her how to make cheese. They both stretched out on the grass in the yard to enjoy the Sabbath. They were finding a new pattern, but once again the goats were taking up all their time and attention.

Jenay walked to Grandmother Salome's on Tuesday and asked for a lesson in cheesemaking. Grandmother was glad to help and as they were finishing, she asked, "Jenay, why didn't you two come for our Sabbath fellowship? I thought Yanis enjoyed himself and you two would become a part of the group."

"I know. We both enjoyed it and need the group so badly, but it is a long walk, and Yanis wasn't sure that you met every week. He felt uncomfortable just stopping in uninvited," said Jenay honestly.

"Uninvited! You are my granddaughter. You don't need an invitation!" Jenay could tell that her grandmother was upset with her.

"I'm sorry. Yanis is really struggling and I'm trying to be submissive, but when he makes up his mind, I can't change it. He makes the decisions, Grandmother. What was I supposed to say?"

Grandmother Salome took a deep breath and said, "You tell Yanis that since James and John told us about the Holy Spirit guiding us, our family gets together every Sabbath for a fellowship meal and time to pray together and share. Many of our family don't attend, others attend when they can, but all are welcome each and every Sabbath evening. You tell him that this is his special invitation now that he is family."

"Thank you, Grandmother. I can't promise, but I think we will be there this week. We need it."

“Then I’ll be praying that it works out and remember that I’m praying for you each and every day. I can’t believe you are so close, yet this is our first visit.”

“I’m hoping that once the goats can forage by themselves in another couple of months, that I will be able to visit more often, but I need to run now, or I’ll be late getting dinner on the table. I love you, Grandmother. Shalom.”

“And I love you, little one. Shalom.” How Jenay needed that reminder. She didn’t have time to stop at the market, so hurried home and fried the last onion for dinner. She was grateful for the leftover Sabbath bread.

Over dinner, she talked to Yanis about her visit with her grandmother. He seemed pleased that the group was meeting regularly and promised that they could plan to go this week. When she told him about what she had learned about the cheese making, he agreed that it would be expensive to do on a large scale. They discussed purchasing one cheese box and a churn just for their own use.

All week they continued with the morning milking of the eleven does. It had become their new routine. On Friday afternoon, Yanis filled all the water troughs and the extra pots, and he and Jenay walked across town for Sabbath dinner while Mr. Ezekiel got the goats settled for the night. Once again, they were surrounded by love and peace and felt welcomed and accepted. The men and women visited at their respective tables and Yanis began to learn the names of some of the cousins that he didn’t yet know. There were about twelve family members and some servants that gathered for a time of singing and praying together. Jonas led them to share their prayer needs and each family was prayed for by someone else in the group. Yanis asked for them to pray for him to figure out this new business so that he could get back to doing what he loved — teaching about Jesus. One of Jaden’s sons-in-law prayed for them. Both felt a powerful sense of Jehovah’s presence with this group and were grateful for the opportunity to participate. Zebedee invited everyone to stay and made it a point to remind everyone that he hoped to see them next week.

On Sabbath morning, Yanis and Jenay trudged to the barn dreading the chaos that had happened last week. Mr. Ezekiel was already there and beginning to collect the older does. Yanis protested that this was against the Sabbath Laws. Mr. Ezekiel calmly said, “Not unless you pay me. These are Jehovah’s creatures that need to be milked. I am just helping out a neighbor. Come on, let’s get busy.” Jenay began to milk while the men continued to carry the kids outside. With the three of them working together, it didn’t take nearly as long to get finished. Mr. Ezekiel left and Yanis and Jenay enjoyed their Sabbath. They drank as much milk as they could and poured the rest out.



On Tuesday Alex asked Yanis how long it would take him to train a new man to take his place. "Do you want me to teach him about all butchering, or just goats?" asked Yanis.

"I think just goats. He's never done any butchering, but he says he's willing to learn."

"That will be about right. I need to be ready to quit in two weeks, and it will probably take that long if he's never done any butchering."

"You've been a real help to me. There will be an increase in your pay to train the new guy. His name is Romulus. Do you want to start him tomorrow?"

"Sure. Just make sure that he knows my arrival time varies a little because of my business."

"Yeah, I've already told him I won't put up with that from him," laughed Alex.



Yanis pulled the cart home and stopped at the Mercantile Store to purchase a cheese box and a large bowl. He couldn't remember if there was anything else that Jenay would need, but he could pick up more tomorrow. He had wanted to say hello to Jesse, but he was out showing property.

Jenay was making bread and needed to go to the market to get some fresh vegetables. When he showed her the cheese box and bowl, she was excited. "But I'll need to purchase some thread to make the cloth to drain the cheese, and I'll need some extra salt; I'm running low."

"Don't you also need some thread to make you another robe? I noticed that you made an extra one for me, but you didn't make one for yourself." She thanked him as he gave her the silver pieces and she hurried to the market. Her heart was singing that he had noticed her needs. *Thank You, Jehovah, for opening his eyes. Help me to be a good wife for Yanis.*

She found the thread that she needed for the cheese box and guessed that she would need about two skeins, then she found two different shades of green in the least expensive threads and was delighted to have something besides a solid color robe. It would be nice to have a clean robe for Sabbath nights. She found salt and hurried to pick out some onions and cucumbers and rushed back to the house to bake the bread. Tomorrow she would forage in the woods and try to find some fresh fruit. There should be some apricot trees hiding somewhere. It was the right season for them. Her heart was happy as she set dinner on the table, and apparently Yanis was in an equally good mood. He told her about Alex's request for him to train a new man that would start tomorrow. "So, that means we are getting closer to our dream," said Jenay.

"Yes, and so far, things are looking good. I'm still trying to figure out what to do with our evening milk. I need to talk with the Capernaum Inn and see if they will buy it. I also stopped by the

Mercantile Store to talk with Jesse about starting to teach a group of his friends on Sabbath afternoon. I should have asked you first, but I just felt strongly that I should do it.”

“Oh, Yanis. That makes me so happy. What did he say?”

“He wasn’t there.”

Jenay giggled and teased, “I guess you’d better check with your wife. Are you thinking about doing it around noon on the Sabbath?”

“Yes, if that works for Jesse. We’ll have to be available for milking in the morning and again at sunset. So, there will just be a few hours in the middle.”

“That’s okay, if it makes you happy, and I know it will make me happy!” said Jenay emphatically.

“I’ll try to catch him again tomorrow, so I may be a little late getting home.”

Yanis arrived home with a big grin on his face. Jenay knew that his offer had been well received. Jesse said that he would love to host a regular meeting to learn more about following Jesus. He would talk with his wife and the rest of the family about meeting at noon on the Sabbath starting next week.

On Friday, Yanis and Jenay hurried across town to arrive for Sabbath dinner with Grandpa Zebedee’s group. During the prayer time, Yanis shared with them about starting to teach a group about Jesus. Benji spoke up. “Yanis, it seems that you are wanting a place to teach about following Jesus and we’ve been praying for someone to teach us. We would love to hear about your travels with Jesus.” And suddenly, Yanis found himself leading Zebedee’s group. He started out by telling them about his childhood. His dad was a priest and was training him and his four brothers to be priests. He told about listening to John the Baptizer preach and seeing Jesus baptized. He heard the voice from Heaven proclaiming, “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” He told about being forced to choose between his family and following Jesus and how on his thirteenth birthday, he had left home with the robe on his back, a blanket, and a few rolls of bread. “I traveled to Jerusalem to try to find Jesus and I’ve followed Him ever since. There’s so much to tell, you’ll have to be patient with me as I try to get it organized.”

Everyone was pleased that Jehovah had heard their prayers, and Yanis began to weep as Zebedee prayed for their new teacher. Zebedee, Jaden, and Jonas talked with Yanis afterward and agreed that the group schedule would continue with singing, prayer, and share time, but they wanted him to prepare a message for them each week unless one of the apostles were visiting. They wanted to learn about following Jesus. Yanis agreed, and he and Jenay left in a daze. “Oh, Jenay, it’s happening. Are you okay with this? I’m going to be terribly busy.”

“I’m happy that you have found your ministry.” He squeezed her hand. “And I’m very proud of you,” she said.



On Sabbath morning, Mr. Ezekiel helped them with the early morning milking and quietly slipped away. This time they poured most of the milk into the cloth inside the cheese box. Jenay would add the salt tonight after the Sabbath had passed. Three days later, Jenay tasted the cheese and liked it. She spread some on a roll for Yanis and he agreed that it was good. It would help with their meals, but would not be worth it to try to sell.

After work on Sunday, Yanis stopped by the Capernaum Inn and talked with the owner about buying goat milk. He agreed to purchase one large jar of fresh milk each evening if Yanis could deliver it at sundown. He would serve it to his customers. The owner indicated that in the past Mr. Bart had given him a discount on buying his Sabbath milk since it was already soured and beginning to curdle. His servants made cheese for the week from it. He would be happy to purchase three of the large jars of day-old milk. That had been his arrangement with Mr. Bart. The men agreed on a price. Yanis was thrilled to find a place for his Sabbath milk. Now, he only needed to sell about five more large jars of milk each night, or he would be out of business.

Yanis stopped by the well and filled the milk jars with water and started filling the water troughs. Jenay had found some wild mint in the woods. She was experimenting with flavoring the cheese and was excited about it. She gave him a bite on a piece of bread, and he agreed that it was great. Tomorrow they would have cheese with their dinner. Mr. Ezekiel promised to put away the goats so they could go to their Sabbath group.



Zebedee's family was eager to gather on Sabbath night. Jenay so enjoyed her time with her grandmother and aunts and cousins. The dinner conversation was lively, and it seemed everyone was excited to hear from Yanis again. At the men's table, Yanis asked if anyone knew where to sell his night milk. They agreed to pray with him and ask for wisdom, but no one could think of anywhere to sell it. *Why would Jehovah tell me to start a milk farm and then not provide a place to sell the milk? Maybe Jehovah didn't tell me? Maybe I'm just totally off track!* Suddenly he recognized the voice of the liar in his ear. Satan always tried to attack him and distract him when he was about to speak about Jesus. He remembered and asked the Holy Spirit to help him to focus on the message He had sent him to deliver. Jonas led the group in sharing and prayer time. Everyone agreed to pray for Yanis and Jenay as they met with their new group tomorrow afternoon. Jaden needed to hire some new fishermen. One of the servants was approaching his freedom date and needed wisdom to know what to do

next. Someone asked if he wanted to learn to fish. Everyone laughed at the look on his face. It apparently wasn't what he had in mind.

Jaden invited Yanis to speak. Jenay thought back to Passover of this year. *I despaired of Yanis ever getting on track. I actually gave up on the marriage and left. My little girl eyes had adored him and thought he was a great teacher. I loved his leadership and ability to explain The Law and The Prophets. This year has been a shock. I've seen him at his worst. Jehovah, You have heard my prayers and are bringing him back. Jehovah, You know he wasn't created to be a goat farmer, he was created to grow followers of You. Please help him to become all that You have intended. Bless our marriage and help me to encourage him. Help me to be a good wife and show me my role.*

Yanis began to speak. "Last week I shared with you about choosing to follow Jesus. I traveled to Jerusalem and threw my blanket in the olive grove. I arrived exhausted, with my feet bleeding and my heart broken. I was practically starving to death, and it was cold and wet. A group of Jesus' followers found me and brought me food and Jesus healed my feet. As I told Him my story, He asked me to forgive my dad and brothers and continue to love and pray for them. I promised Him that I would. The next day we traveled south of Jerusalem to Hebron and He argued with the Sadducees. But even though they became very, very angry with Him, He just kept loving them. He healed all those that would come to Him even when they were spitting in His face. I had never seen that kind of love. I realized that He didn't take it lightly to ask me to love those who had hurt me. He was asking me to do what He was doing. For a long time, I thought that was all there was to following Jesus, just following His example, doing what He did. But the longer I followed Him, the more I realized that I couldn't come close to loving and being like He was. I wasn't patient and kind and gentle and forgiving and peacemaking. I was pretty much the opposite. The longer I followed Him, the more I wondered why He would even allow me to be in His group. But then, everyone in the group was more like me than like Him. We were all a pretty messed up bunch. It wasn't until the night of the last Seder that He told us that it was the Holy Spirit living inside of Him that gave Him the power to be different and do the things that He did. Then He told us that after His death, resurrection, and return to Heaven, He would send His Holy Spirit to live inside of us. It is this Holy Spirit that empowers us, guides us, and equips us to follow, love, and behave like Jesus. I still mess up a lot, but I want us to become a group that encourages each other to keep our ears open to what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing. My challenge for you this week is a simple question. We'll talk about it next week. What is the last thing you heard the Holy Spirit ask you to do, and were you obedient?"

When Zebedee hugged Yanis later, he pressed a silver piece into his hand. When Yanis protested, Zebedee said, "You said I was to be obedient, so let me minister as the Holy Spirit leads me. I am not 'paying' you; I am simply giving an offering to Jehovah's servant in obedience to His leading."

Yanis swallowed hard and slipped the coin into his robe. Yanis and Jenay walked home together hand in hand. She said that he had done a great job, and she was looking forward to learning from him. Those were sweet words to Yanis, but not near as sweet as the words he was hearing in his heart. Deep down he knew that he was finally doing what Jesus had called him to do in Capernaum. *Teaching others to follow Jesus is my reason for living. You are so good and patient with me. I want to teach and that's why You've brought me here. Help me to keep my focus on You and show me how to get all the work done so that I can teach more and more.*

Jenay went straight to her blanket, but Yanis went out in the courtyard for a while to make sure he was prepared for tomorrow. He woke Jenay up an hour before sunrise and they went to the barn together. Mr. Ezekiel was lighting the lamps. Jenay began singing and the three of them were able to get all seventeen does milked in just over an hour. Yanis told Mr. Ezekiel about the agreement with the Capernaum Inn. They filled the three jars completely. Yanis carried the rest inside the house and poured the cheese box full. They still had more milk than they could drink. Yanis filled the water troughs with the jars of water he had prepared yesterday, and then they rested for a few minutes before they walked to Jesse's house. Jenay was so glad that she had been able to finish her new robe. She had washed Yanis' robe at the well so that he had a clean one to wear, too. When they arrived, they found the courtyard filled with people. Everyone was friendly and she certainly felt welcome, but she wondered how she would ever figure out who was who. She remembered that Jesus just talked with one person at a time and gave them His full attention. She tried to do the same. A servant was serving juice and it was refreshing after such a busy morning. After a few minutes of just visiting, Jesse asked everyone to give their attention to a friend of his who could tell them more about following Jesus.

Yanis stood to one side of the courtyard and spoke confidently. "Thank you so much for allowing me to do this, Jesse. I have known for many years that Jehovah was calling me to Capernaum to establish a business so that I could spend the majority of my time teaching others about Jesus. I thought I would do one and then the other, but when Jesse and Miriam and Ariel indicated that they were searching for answers, I felt that the Holy Spirit was saying that it was time to do both. So, while I'm in the middle of trying to establish a goat farm just outside of town, I am also trying to be totally obedient to what I hear the Holy Spirit saying. In Jerusalem, the followers of Jesus have established small home groups that meet for the purpose of encouraging one another, praying for each other, and reminding each other to stay on track. I need that as much as you do. They also welcome anyone who wants to learn more about Jesus, even if they have not invited Him to be their Messiah. The home groups help each other and support each other through hard times. So, there are some really good reasons to have a group rather than trying to follow Jesus on your own. I'll tell my story at a later time, but you need to know that



I began traveling with Jesus' followers when I turned thirteen and spent three years listening to Jesus teach and watching Him daily. It was an awesome privilege. Now, I feel the Holy Spirit calling me to help others follow Jesus. I'm asking each one of you to consider whether you would like to meet weekly and let us form a group for the purpose of searching for answers to our questions and encouraging each other to be obedient to Jesus."

There was a general feeling of excitement. It seemed that everyone wanted to know more. Yanis was pleased that in this group, the women spoke freely, and even the three servants who were present were treated like friends. They agreed to meet next Sabbath afternoon. Yanis and Jenay visited until Yanis realized that they needed to get the goats milked. They quickly said their goodbyes.

Yanis and Jenay walked as fast as was allowed on the Sabbath. Mr. Ezekiel and the other milkers were waiting to begin just as soon as the Sabbath was over. Yanis and Jenay pushed one cart to the Capernaum Inn, then hurried to get the second cart and deliver it.

As they walked home together, they talked about how the Holy Spirit had timed it perfectly so that they could help these two groups find the answers they were searching for. They were finally beginning their ministry.

"Are we done for the night?" asked Yanis.

"I need to salt the cheese and then I will be, but don't we still need to haul water?"

They stopped at the well and filled the milk jars. Then Yanis pulled and Jenay pushed. While he filled the water troughs, Jenay went into the house and salted the cheese and drained it. Then they went back for a second stroll in the moonlight.

## Chapter 29

Mr. Ezekiel, his two grandchildren, Yanis, and Jenay finished the morning milking and headed to the market. There was certainly a need for the morning milk. As he walked to the Meat Shop, he was trying to figure out how to sell the rest of the night milk. He was a little earlier than usual and only Quintus was working. “Hey, Quintus, you know that I’m training Romulus to take my place so you won’t have to butcher goats, don’t you?”

“Yeah, the boss said you were starting your own goat farm. I’ll miss your help. You are a great butcher.”

“Thanks, but I think I prefer milking them to slaughtering them.”

“You are milking the goats? I thought you were raising them for meat.”

“Nope. We are ready to start milking a herd of seventeen right now, but I’ve hit a snag. I can’t find enough night customers. I can easily sell the morning milk, but no one seems to want the night milk.”

“Are you serious? I know who would buy your night milk. My brother had a good business going until Mr. Bart died and he couldn’t get goat milk. He’d love to buy your night milk!”

“That would be an answer to our prayers. What does your brother do with the milk?”

“He makes a hard cheese out of it and sells it to the Roman soldiers around here. They all love to carry it because it’s like dried cheese and it keeps forever. But he couldn’t find goat milk and his business fell apart. If you are serious, I’ll take you to meet him when I get off work tonight. He’ll be so excited. He’s working out at the quarry, and he hates it. He’ll be home by sunset, though.”

“Quintus, I’ll meet you here before sunset. I’ve got a lot of milk that’s going to waste if I don’t find a buyer soon. Let’s get busy before Alex catches us talking. Don’t want the boss man mad.

“Good morning, Romulus. You are late. Don’t do that to yourself. If you get a reputation for being late, then you are liable to lose your job, and then things just go from bad to worse. Let’s get started.”

At the sixth hour, Yanis collected the cart with two jars that the children had left at the market booth. He pulled it to the well and filled the jars with water. Then he came back to fill two more. He told Mr. Ezekiel and Jenay about Quintus’ suggestion. He asked Mr. Ezekiel how much milk to promise and when it would be available. Mr. Ezekiel said that the older kids were mostly weaned and they needed to start milking at night or the milk production would decrease. He suggested that they could produce six or seven gallons each night and production should go up with regular milking.



Quintus took Yanis into a very Roman neighborhood to the south of town. Quintus knocked on the door of a small house. Two little boys ran out and hugged the giant man. Yanis smiled as he realized that Quintus might be big, but he was gentle as a lamb. “Go get your daddy,” Quintus ordered them.

They returned and said, “He’s tired. He said for you to come in.” Yanis felt an immediate horror. He didn’t want to enter a Gentile house but didn’t want to lose the deal.

“Wait here,” said Quintus as he stepped inside. In a few minutes both men appeared at the doorway. “You two should talk,” was all Quintus said.

Since the man was just standing and frowning at him, Yanis gave it his best shot. “My name is Yanis. Your brother tells me that you may have a use for my goat milk. I purchased Mr. Bart’s farm and have it up and running. We are not at full capacity yet, but I’m trying to secure customers that want to grow with us.”

“I’m August. Are you for real? I’d love to get my hands on fresh goat’s milk. You aren’t going to sell me Sabbath milk or day-old stuff?”

“No sir, the Capernaum Inn wants my Sabbath milk to make cheese for their customers. I can bring you fresh milk each night except the Sabbath — I mean, Friday night.”

“I need lots of it. How much have you got?”

“Right now, I can only guarantee you five gallons a night, maybe more. In the next two weeks, I hope it will increase closer to fifteen gallons. I have seventeen does ready to wean. I won’t know exactly until we get there.”

“What I used to do with Mr. Bart is just pay him for whatever he could bring me. Just bring me everything you’ve got, and I’ll buy it from you as long as it’s fresh. Can you get here around sundown?”

“I’ll try my best. I would need to shift my goat’s schedule just a little bit earlier each day, but that should only take a few days.”

“You are a very honest man.”

“I don’t want to promise something I can’t deliver, and I don’t know how long it takes to change the goats’ schedule. I’ll get it here as soon as I can.”

“You say it will be about two weeks before you are up to full production?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When can you start?”

“I can bring you whatever I get tomorrow night. It will probably be close to five gallons — hopefully more.” They negotiated a price and agreed to meet tomorrow night.

As Quintus and Yanis walked away, Yanis said, “Quintus, I have no idea how to find this place. You are going to have to show me where I am.” So, Quintus walked Yanis back to the main road and then helped him navigate the side streets so he was certain he could find August’s house tomorrow night alone. “I’ll see you tomorrow and thanks again. This very possibly will save my business and hopefully help August, too.”



For Jenay, the days started with milking before dawn. It seemed she was just running all day trying to get her chores done. Then it was time for milking again, helping Yanis with the deliveries, and hauling water. She fell into her blanket beyond exhausted. She had been doing well with that schedule until about two weeks before Sukkot when she must have gotten some bad greens in the forest. It didn't seem to bother Yanis, but she felt ill all day for a couple of days. She had a hard time keeping up with her chores and every time she opened the barn door, she felt nauseous. There was no time to be sick, so she kept pushing through.

On Sabbath night, Yanis and Jenay walked to her grandparents' house to eat Sabbath dinner and meet with the group of Jesus' followers. Yanis began, "Tell me your name and how you are related to Zebedee and then share with the group what the last thing was that you heard the Holy Spirit instruct you to do. You can share as much or as little as you wish. I need to get your names mastered. There's only one of me — but there are almost twenty of you. Please be patient with me." The group shared how hard it was to know when the Holy Spirit was leading and when they might be self-directing. Laila introduced herself as Zebedee's niece and said that she often heard the Holy Spirit reminding her to listen to Him and not her older brother, Laban. Yanis was pleased that they felt comfortable helping each other and not forcing him to come up with all the answers. He felt it was productive for everyone. Once more Zebedee pressed a silver coin in Yanis' hand, and Yanis accepted it without comment.

As they were leaving, Jonas and Benji asked if they could speak to Yanis alone. Jenay nodded and Yanis went out in the yard with the men. She hoped it wouldn't be long. Grandmother Salome invited her to come into the house. They walked to one of the back rooms and Grandmother Salome had her maid pull out a pile of beautiful robes. Jenay admired them and the maid held one up to her. It was really short and would never fit Jenay. Grandmother Salome sighed and said that that was what she suspected. Then they sat and talked. "I saved those robes all these years for my granddaughters, and all of you are too tall. Do you know what those robes are?"

"No, but they are beautiful," said Jenay.

"Those were the birthing robes that I wore for your abba and then for the other three boys. Carrying a baby seems like forever, but it's really not long at all and the robes are perfectly good. I've saved them all these years, but I guess you won't be able to use them either."

"But Grandmother, I'm not carrying a baby," protested Jenay. "Why do you think I am?"

"Oh, I know these things. If you haven't seen the signs yet, you will shortly," said Grandmother confidently.

"We can't afford a baby."

“Jehovah sends babies when He is ready whether you can afford them or not. Have you felt more tired than usual?”

“Grandmother, I always feel tired, and there’s always more work to do on a farm. I’m stronger than I’ve ever been. I think you just want another grandbaby.”

“Grandbaby, who’s having a grandbaby?” asked Zebedee.

“Women’s talk. Don’t you say anything to anybody,” Salome ordered.

As Yanis and Jenay walked home, Yanis asked, “Who was the woman who said she was Grandpa Zebedee’s niece? I thought she was Jaden’s daughter.”

“No, she is the Apostle Peter’s daughter, and she lives with Laban, her brother, and takes care of his house. She has two younger brothers that she takes care of, too. Their mother died a couple of years ago. I don’t think Laban treats her very well. He’s pretty rough, and was always mean to the rest of us, so I can’t imagine that her life is very pleasant.”

By the time they got home, Jenay was exhausted. She hoped she would feel better in the morning because there was a lot of work to be done. But on Sabbath morning as she tried to enter the barn, she ended up running into the yard and vomiting. She returned to the barn and continued to help with the milking, but Yanis could tell she was not well. He insisted that she stay in bed until time to leave for the new group.

When they arrived, Jesse’s servant had set out juice and fruit for the group to enjoy. Yanis and Jenay were welcomed to the group and Jenay felt comfortable with the women. When Jesse called the group to find a comfortable spot, Yanis felt certain of how he wanted to start the group. “After Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, home groups began springing up all over Jerusalem. They were started mostly by people who had recently come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but really knew nothing about Jesus’ teachings. Their belief was primarily based on His resurrection from the dead after such a gruesome death. Everyone recognized that this was something that only God could accomplish, and it got their attention. The apostles and those of us who had followed Jesus and heard His teachings began to circulate among the groups and help them to find the answers to their questions and to teach them the New Way that Jesus taught. You have agreed to meet with me and let me be a part of your group, but I need to know what it is that you are searching for. I honestly don’t know whether you are followers of Jesus who are looking for encouragement, or whether you are still trying to decide whether Jesus is the Messiah. Could we discuss that for a few minutes?”

After a few minutes of silence, Ariel spoke up. “I know that He’s the Messiah. He raised me from the dead and I’m convinced that He is or was God on earth.”

“Oh, wow! I’m just putting two and two together. Was your dad the ruler of Capernaum at the time?”

“Yes, and he still is. This is my dad, Jairus.”

“Oh, I remember when you came to our camp and asked Jesus to come to heal your daughter. It’s good to meet you, sir. I’m sorry I interrupted you, Ariel. This just brings back good memories. Please continue. What answers are you searching for?”

“It’s no problem. I still don’t understand about the Holy Spirit leading followers. I understand it in theory, but not in practice. Does that make sense?”

“Certainly. Thank you for sharing. How about one of you men, what are you searching for?”

“I guess pretty much the same thing. I’ve asked Jesus to be my Messiah and I felt a definite change in my life, but I can’t say that I’ve heard Him speak.”

“And your name is?”

“Joel.”

“My name is Talman, and I do hear the Holy Spirit speak, but I don’t always trust that it’s really Him speaking. I mean, what if it’s just my own ideas or thoughts. I guess I’m searching to know how to discern when it’s Him and when it’s me.”

“Thank you for sharing. Unfortunately, with a group this large, it will take a while for me to get to know each one of you. We’ll plan to do more getting acquainted and I’ll plan to do some teaching next time, but Jenay and I have goats to milk and we need to close. Let me pray for you and we’ll see you next week.”

Yanis and Jenay hurried home and began to push and pull one cart of Sabbath milk toward the Inn while Mr. Ezekiel and his grandchildren began to milk. Jenay felt more tired than usual, but she knew that it had been a long day, and she knew that Yanis needed her to push. The cart was heavy with five gallons of milk in each jar. Only two jars would fit on each cart, so each night they had to make the trip to the Inn twice and then take the rest to August. She could tell Yanis was still thinking about the group. “So, do you think they are all followers?” she asked.

“It’s possible, but I don’t know. We’ll have to wait and see what they say next week.” He filled the milk jars with water and pulled the cart to the house to start filling the water troughs. Tomorrow morning was the beginning of their having to milk all the does morning and evening, and he knew that both of them were already tired. His mind shifted to finding more milkers to hire and someone to help with deliveries.

## Chapter 30

On Sunday morning, they met Mr. Ezekiel and the two children in the barn. Jenay fought back the nausea that she felt, and thought of what grandmother had said. After they milked, Yanis and the children took the first cart to the market to sell. Jenay helped with the milking and then helped Yanis push the second cart to the market. They hurried home to get the third cart. It was Yanis' first day to not work as a butcher, so he and Jenay shopped at the market together and he helped her fill the last cart with some of the heavier things that she needed. He pulled it home and they worked together to get the cart unloaded before he headed back to the well. Later he went to the Mercantile Store and Jesse recommended twin boys to help with the milking. They attended Hebrew School but were looking for work both before and after school. Since school was out for a break, he suggested that they walk over there now and talk with them.

The men talked about the group meeting yesterday. Jesse indicated that everyone was looking forward to next week. Yanis agreed, "I'm looking forward to it, too. We'll see where Jehovah guides us and what this group can accomplish. Do you know of other followers of Jesus in Capernaum?"

"Zebedee is a fisherman over on the coast side. I'm pretty sure that he and his family are also followers of Jesus, and I think they may even meet as a group."

"Yes, they meet on Sabbath nights."

"Okay, here is the house. The boys are twins. They are ten years old and the youngest of several boys. They are good milkers, according to their dad, and looking for work before and after school."

"That could be a real help. How much should I offer to pay them?" Jesse told him and Yanis nodded. That was the same as he was paying Mr. Ezekiel's two grandchildren. They visited with the two boys and their dad. They agreed to arrive one hour before dawn each day except the Sabbath and each afternoon at the eleventh hour to help with the evening milking and deliveries. They agreed to start this afternoon and would be paid each Friday before the Sabbath. Yanis thanked Jesse for all his help and then hurried home to check on Jenay.

When he arrived, she was sitting on the mat crying. "Jenay, what's wrong?"

She was crying so hard he couldn't figure out what was going on. He fetched a wet cloth and wiped her face. When she was finally calmed down, she explained that a messenger had just invited them to her grandparents' for dinner and to spend the night to visit with her abba. He and Uncle John were in town, and she wanted to see her abba, but she couldn't because she needed to milk the goats. And she began to cry again.

“Please don’t cry. I promise I’ll take you to your grandparents’ tonight and we’ll spend the night, and you can stay and visit with your abba as long as you wish. It will be okay. Please stop crying.”

“But what about the goats?” she sobbed.

“I just hired two new milkers and Mr. Ezekiel can take care of them. Now, let me go find Mr. Ezekiel and talk with him. You get up and get ready to go. We’ll both go and take a little break and visit with your dad. It will be fun. Now quit crying and I’ll be back in a bit.

“Mr. Ezekiel, I need some help with my marriage again,” said Yanis. Mr. Ezekiel looked puzzled until Yanis explained. He told him that the two boys, Adin and Asaph, would be arriving to help with the milking each evening and morning. They would also help with the evening deliveries, but had to go to school in the mornings. They would start work tonight. He was wondering if Zokur could come and fill the water troughs for three days and nights so he could just concentrate on taking a break with Jenay so she could visit her dad.

“You know that hiring all this help will cut into your profits, don’t you?” asked Mr. Ezekiel.

“Yes, sir, and I will pay you for all your extra hours and supervising. But I think my marriage is more important, and Jenay hasn’t seen her dad in almost two years. This is more important than profits.”

“You are a good man, Yanis. I’ll be glad to go get Zokur. You take Mrs. Jenay and let her get some rest. She’s been looking tired lately. But I don’t know where to deliver the night milk. Zokur and the boys could pull the two carts, but I don’t know where you deliver it.”

“I didn’t think of that. You’ll need to deliver one large jar of fresh milk to the Capernaum Inn at sunset. I’ll meet you there and help you deliver the rest of the night milk to August. Will that work? Is there anything else I forgot?”

“I think I can handle the rest,” said Mr. Ezekiel. “I need to go get Zokur before the new boys arrive.”

“Thanks so much, Mr. Ezekiel. I’ll put a bonus in your pay.”

Jenay had put on her fresh robe and drained the cheese. She was ready to go when Yanis returned. Yanis felt that she still looked tired and was glad he had hired more help.

Finally, they arrived, and she was in her abba’s arms. Once more she was crying, and Yanis hoped that James didn’t think that she was unhappy with her marriage. “Oh, Abba, there’s so much to tell you, and I’m so glad to see you. Tell me all about Jerusalem and Mother and Aunt Marta. Is everything okay there?” Everyone left the two of them alone to visit. As the afternoon passed, more and more family arrived to visit with James and John. Yanis explained to Zebedee that he needed to make a milk delivery but would be right back.

Yanis met Mr. Ezekiel, Zokur, and the two school boys, with the two carts, at the Capernaum Inn. He helped the children push the heavy carts to August’s house. Mr. Ezekiel assured him that the new boys were a lot of help and worked well with the goats. Yanis said that



he and Jenay would return on Wednesday morning. He walked Mr. Ezekiel and his crew back to the main road.

Yanis ran back to Zebedee's, and the servants brought him a late plate. Soon he was catching up with all the news. The ladies were all seated at a separate table, and Zebedee's house was filled with sweet, sweet fellowship. After dinner, everyone sat in mixed groups all over the courtyard and grassy yard. It was good to be together. The Apostles James and John gave a report on the work in Jerusalem and said they had not seen a lot of persecution this past year. The home groups were thriving and there were many, many new followers and new groups forming. They reported that they were headed to Damascus to check on a home group that had left Jerusalem to minister there. They were told about Zachary relocating to Damascus and promised to look him up and report when they returned. They hoped to return within a few weeks and then continue to travel to Antioch. Jonathan, Jenay's twin brother, was ministering there, and James and John were going to check on him. "Laila, we'll try to locate your abba before we return to Jerusalem. Last we heard he was ministering along the Great Sea coast."

"Thank you," she whispered.

Soon the crowds started heading home and Zebedee invited the men to the roof to talk. Yanis wasn't certain that he was invited, but Zebedee assured him that he and Benji were welcome if they wanted to be included. Both men joined them.

Grandmother Salome and Jenay sat quietly in the courtyard and just enjoyed the peace and quiet. "Jenay, how have you been feeling?"

"I think you were right, Grandmother."

"Are you having more symptoms?"

"Yes. When should I tell Yanis, because he's getting worried that I'm sick. And is it okay for me to keep working? I mean, Yanis can't do all the work himself."

"It will be harder trying to get your work done with the nausea and the extra fatigue. But hard work won't hurt the baby, or none of us would have survived carrying little ones. If you have any pain in your belly, you are probably overdoing it. You'll notice that more as the baby gets bigger. But you are strong, and I think you'll do just fine. It's up to you when to tell Yanis, but I think he will be thrilled. Most men are, as long as they don't have to birth it!"

Salome and Jenay decided to go on to their rooms and let the men come later. Soon Jenay was sleeping soundly. She wasn't even aware when Yanis slipped into his blanket much later.

On Monday, as they visited, James asked Yanis about the new group he was leading and stated, "You may find a lot of Pharisaical influence. When Jesus was here, He wasn't allowed to teach in the synagogue even though He had raised the ruler's daughter from the dead. He did a lot of miracles and teaching around here and of course was based here for almost two years. But if I recall correctly, it seemed the synagogue always moved in the direction of the Pharisees, so keep your eyes open," said James.

John added, "Also, I think a lot of Pharisees from Jerusalem are migrating this direction because there's so many Romans moving into Jerusalem. You may find your group either leaning toward the Pharisees, or possibly in an uphill battle against them."

"Thank you for the warning. I was actually wondering about that when I learned that Arial and Ruler Jairus are members of the group."

Soon Jonas and his family arrived, and everyone moved out to the courtyard to visit. Family members came to spend as much time as possible with James and John. Jaden and his wife arrived, and he reported to Zebedee that most of the Fish Shop was still open for business. "It won't hurt us to take some time off until James and John leave on Wednesday morning."

"Are you taking James and John to Bethsaida?" Benji asked his grandpa.

James answered, "No, we need to walk and minister along the way. We haven't been that way in a couple of years and want to check on the followers between here and there. We'll leave early Wednesday morning and plan to be back in a couple of weeks, depending on what we find along the way."

Someone was at the courtyard gate, and Zebedee walked over to greet them. Suddenly, Jenay recognized her best friend Gabriela and her husband Orly. They lived in Cana, a day's walk away. Jenay and Gabriela were hugging and screaming and Orly and Yanis were grinning. They had seen each other at Orly and Gabriela's wedding only ten weeks ago, but you would think it had been an eternity. They greeted the family, and Jenay was glad that she had had special time with her abba yesterday. While everyone else visited and listened to the men talk, Gabriela and Jenay slipped away to talk privately. It was a wonderful day of visiting and being together. The servants kept a supply of juice, breads, and fruits available. Grandmother Salome invited Jenay and Gabriela into the house and gave Gabriela two of her birthing robes. Jenay confided to Gabriela that she was also carrying Yanis' baby but hadn't found the time to tell him yet. Their business was taking up all his attention right now. Gabriela was able to assure her that she had had no problems, and that the morning sickness seemed to be passing. She was still dealing with fatigue, but other than some extra naps, she was getting everything accomplished. The girls enjoyed having some private time to just catch up on girl talk.

As the family came together for worship after dinner, Orly shared that Jehovah had allowed him to baptize about 200 Jews from the synagogue, including the ruler. Abira led them in singing some Psalms, and Zebedee led in a prayer time for James and John, for Zachary, for Orly, and for Yanis. It was a special time. Then everyone began to say their goodbyes and promised to pray for the travelers. Orly and Gabriela walked to the farm, but Yanis and Jenay stayed one last night to be near her dad and to see him off the next morning. It was a hard goodbye, but she knew he would return in a few weeks, and that made it a little easier.

Grandmother Salome had breakfast prepared for James and John to eat as they walked, and she sent a box home with Yanis and Jenay to feed their company a good breakfast. It felt funny sitting in the house eating a luxury breakfast while Mr. Ezekiel supervised the work in the barn. But it was so good to sit and talk with Orly and Gabriela. After breakfast, Yanis took Orly out to the barn to show him their set up. He explained that three of Mr. Ezekiel's grandchildren were selling the milk at the market this morning, and that he had hired two additional school boys to help with the milking.

The men talked all afternoon about their respective groups. Orly encouraged Yanis to make Jenay a full partner in ministry just as Jesus had treated the women that traveled with Him. Yanis agreed that that would be good for their marriage. That night they joined the other milkers in the barn and taught Orly to milk goats. Orly helped Yanis push the cart to make the night deliveries, and then they joined their wives for dinner. Early the next morning, Orly and Gabriela headed back to Cana, and Yanis and Jenay joined the other milkers in the barn. With fifteen goats and seven milkers, they were quickly finished. Jenay helped Yanis and the children take the milk to the market. She purchased food for the next few days, and they walked home together pulling and pushing the cart. They stopped at the well and filled the two jars with water. Yanis sat down with Mr. Ezekiel and discussed the future of the farm. In the spring they would be ready to breed the kids — which would give them an additional fourteen does to milk and more kids. How big did they want to grow? How much more milk could they sell? Capernaum kept growing and the children still had people wanting milk that they couldn't provide. They decided that they would probably increase to approximately thirty does and then start selling the kids for meat. Mr. Ezekiel suggested that Yanis hire Zokur full time to help him out with the watering and deliveries or anything else that needed done. Yanis felt that he and Jenay could handle that part. Yanis finished filling the troughs with water and then went to the woods to cut firewood. They no longer needed to watch the goats as they foraged, because they returned to the barn at the exact time for milking. He pulled the cart to the house and stacked the firewood for cooking. By that time, it was time to start milking again. He was grateful for all the milkers, and it went quickly. Even with the schoolboys help in the evenings, delivering the night milk to the Inn and to August was a strenuous task. Jenay seemed to be exhausted after helping every night. When they added more milk to be delivered, they would need to make even more trips. He began to think about the time and energy costs and wondered how it would all work. He was glad he still had a few months to think about it.

Sabbath night, Yanis and Jenay returned to her grandparents' to meet with the family group. The dinner fellowship was excellent and Yanis did a good job encouraging the group to learn to listen for the Holy Spirit's leading. Most of them reported that they were not sure that they were hearing the Holy Spirit, and therefore were not following in obedience. He gave them tips about how to determine if it was the

Holy Spirit, Satan, or just themselves trying to guide their lives. He challenged them to listen this week and to explore what the Holy Spirit was saying. "If you cannot hear the Holy Spirit guiding you, then you are in the same shape as someone who is not following Jesus. You have no guidance, no power, no effectiveness. It is only through the Holy Spirit that we can know for sure what Jehovah wants for our lives."

Yanis and Jenay walked home quietly. "You seem awfully quiet tonight."

"Yes, I have much on my mind," said Jenay. Yanis couldn't see her tears, but he suspected that she was crying.

"I would be glad to listen if you want to share," said Yanis gently.

"I'm not sure it's my place to speak."

"Why would you say that?" asked Yanis.

"Because I haven't been good at saying the right things lately."

"Why don't you just tell me what's on your mind and we'll work on it together. I want to know what's bothering you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I love you. You are my wife. I want to do everything I can to make you happy."

"You say that, but I don't see it," said Jenay quietly. "You say a lot of things, but they never happen."

"Like what?" Yanis asked, trying to not get mad. She knew how busy he had been and how much he had been working to make a home for them.

"You said that you wanted to focus on the groups and not the goats, but you are always focused on the goats. You told Orly that we were going to be a team and work together to prepare messages for the groups, but that hasn't happened. And there's something that I've been wanting to tell you for almost two weeks, and you don't have time. We don't ever have time together. We are always working. Maybe I'm wrong, but you told the group that they needed time alone with God to determine where He was leading, but I don't see you taking that time. I thought you quit working at the market so that we could work side by side, but it doesn't feel like side by side when you are in front of the wagon and I'm in the back." Then she began to gently cry again, but this time she couldn't stop the sobbing. "I'm sorry. I don't want to complain. I'm trying to be patient, but I'm tired and want to go home and get a good night's sleep. I may not go to Jesse's with you tomorrow. I'm just too tired. I need a break."

"But we just took a break. What are you saying?"

"I'm saying I'm tired and grumpy and you shouldn't be listening to me until I get some rest. I'm sorry I brought it up."

They arrived home, and Jenay went straight to her mat. She was sound asleep before he finished working on his message for Jesse's group. Sabbath morning was always hard because it was just the three milkers and it took them well over an hour. They went back to the house and Jenay refused to eat breakfast again. She said she was going back to bed, and she would see him in time to milk this evening.

“You don’t want me to wake you to go to Jesse’s?”

“No, you don’t need me to be there, and I need the rest.” Yanis sat in the courtyard and tried to figure out what was going on with Jenay. All he could figure out was that she had been working so hard that she just couldn’t push any further. Maybe he should talk to Mr. Ezekiel about hiring Zokur to help out. That cart was too heavy for her. Or maybe he needed to purchase an ox or a donkey to pull the cart. All he knew was that Jenay was exhausted from all the work and wasn’t happy. That made him sad, but he still needed to be prepared for the group at Jesse’s. He checked to make sure she was still asleep and slipped out. He didn’t like going alone, but he didn’t want to break his promise to be there.

He arrived and explained that Jenay wasn’t feeling well. He shared that they had spent several days visiting with her dad who had come from Jerusalem. There had been too many late nights this week. “Jesus said that once He died, He would send the Holy Spirit to fill our empty core and empower us to change the world. He described it as wildfire. He said that it would transform our lives and everyone we touched. Why are we not seeing that? Let’s play around with that for a few minutes. Does anyone have any ideas?”

“I feel like I wouldn’t know enough to answer their questions,” said Rabbi Joel.

“I don’t feel safe talking about it. I don’t know who will report me to the Pharisees,” said Ruler Jairus.

“Zachary says the major problem is that we’re not willing to take the time to listen for His instructions,” said Miriam.

“That’s a good point and one that I’d like to focus on. If we don’t have time to listen, then we’re not going to know what Jehovah wants. Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer. I don’t know of a single morning that He began His day without spending at least an hour in prayer, and I can think of very few nights that He didn’t do the same. Some nights He would pray all night long until He was absolutely sure of Jehovah’s plan for Him. I know that that’s one of the major deficiencies in my life right now. I’m too busy to take time to listen. I’m committing to you to make some changes this week. I need to spend more time in prayer — it’s really that simple. Before we close today, has anyone else thought of any other answers that they were searching for?” The group just shook their heads. “Arial, could I call on you to lead us in a Psalm, and then we’re going to dismiss early to give us all some time to pray.” They all promised to pray for each other.

Yanis walked home feeling totally convicted by the Holy Spirit of his lack of time in prayer. He couldn’t lead the group to find answers, when his own life and marriage was a mess. Tears ran down his face as he realized that something had to change.

## **The End (Or Only the Beginning?)**