

*THE NEW WAY SERIES*

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*Waiting in  
Obedience  
in Capernaum*

*Dale Weatherford*

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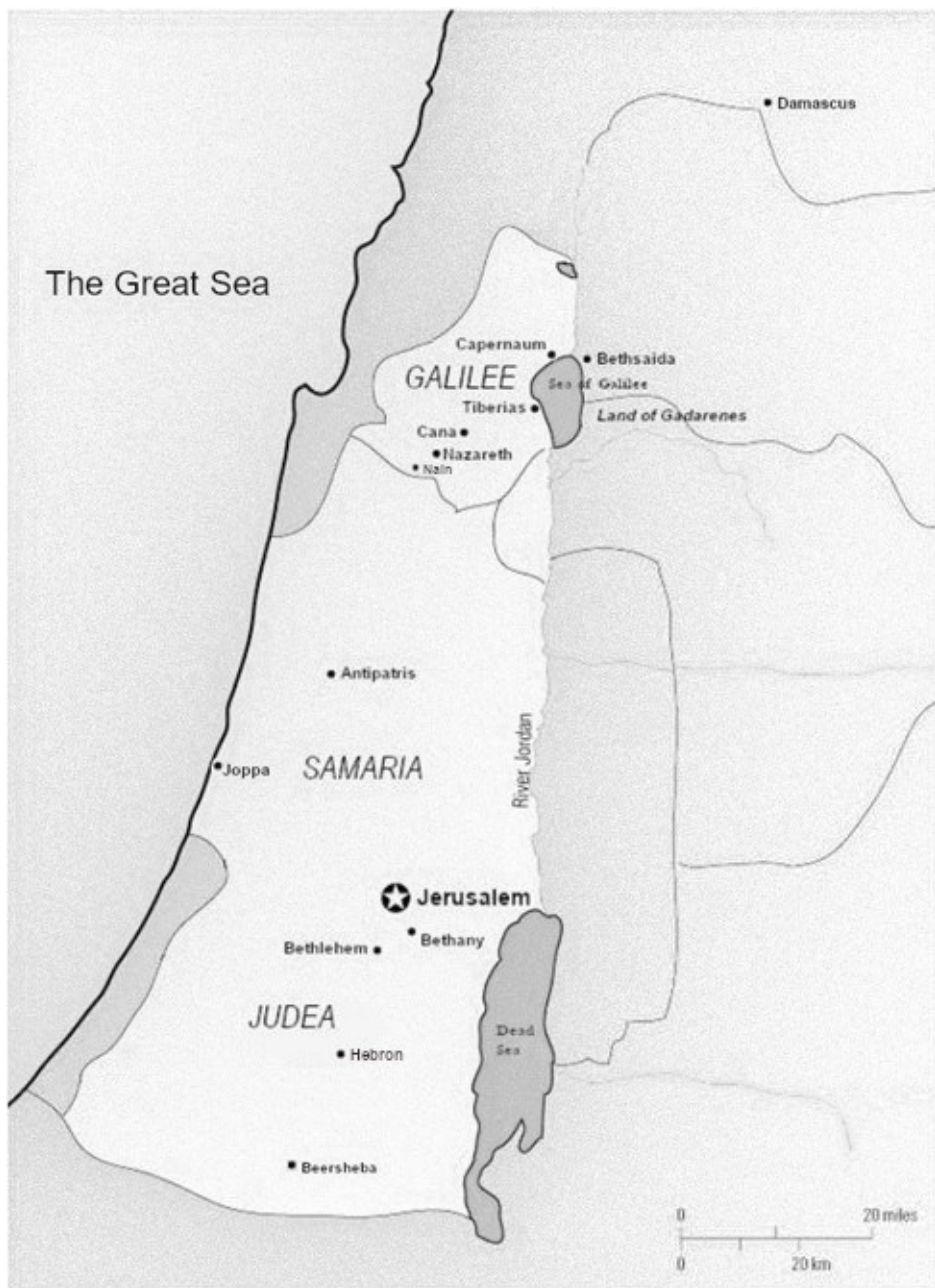
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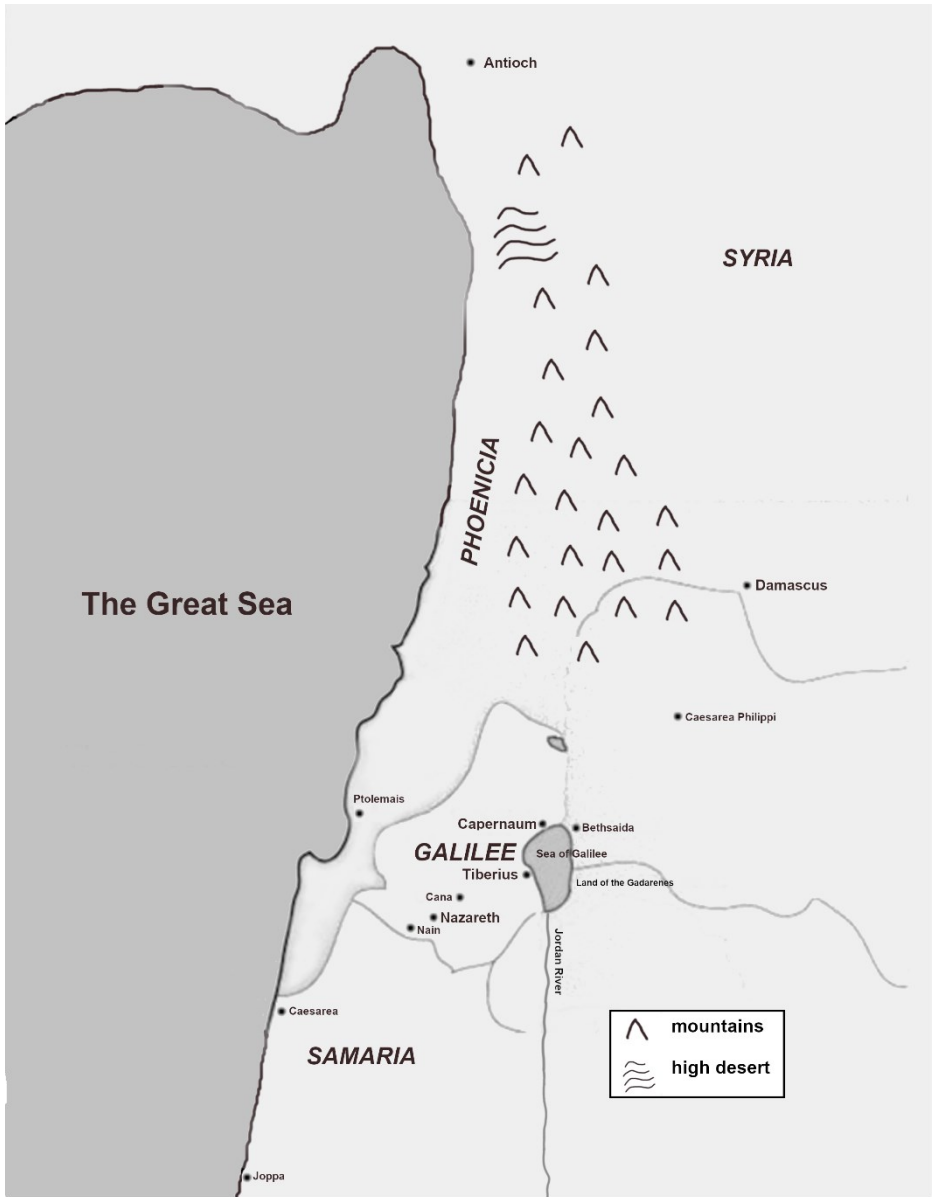
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# Acknowledgements

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# 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 #6**

### ***Waiting in Obedience in Capernaum***

Not only have our young adults realized that Capernaum is not exactly what it seemed, but now it is growing and changing before their very eyes. How will they respond to their changing world? Is change the same thing as progress? What happens when what you've discovered to be Truth is unacceptable to those around you? Should you keep quiet or push for reform? See what obedience to the New Way brings to Capernaum. It may surprise you.

Dale Weatherford

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# Chapter 1

Yanis walked home from the group he had just led. He didn't want to face Jenay. He knew that he had spoken the truth when he told the group that the reason they had no direction from the Holy Spirit was because they weren't spending time in prayer. Maybe it was time he practiced what he preached. Jenay had confronted him earlier and made him face the fact that his life and marriage was a mess. She had claimed she didn't feel like a wife since they never had time to talk. As he got closer to the farm, he could see Jenay sitting in the yard singing Psalms to the goats, and he knew he needed to join her and listen, really listen. As he approached her, she turned and quietly said, "You are back early."

"Jenay, I'm sorry that you are disappointed in me. I would like to listen, but as you said, there never seems to be time. We only have about an hour right now, but I want to hear whatever you want to say. I'm just going to sit here and listen."

Jenay sat and stared at the grass. Finally, she said, "I'm frustrated because we keep thinking this goat business is going to get easier, and it just keeps getting harder. I guess I feel that my dreams will never come true."

"And what are your dreams?"

"To teach others about Jesus and watch them grow. I didn't plan on growing goats. But I guess somebody has to do it. Jesus wasn't critical of people who were going about their daily jobs."

"But we're a part of two groups now. Why do you say it's not happening?" asked Yanis.

"Maybe it's because I feel so useless. I don't even feel like a wife because I never see my husband."

"Jenay, can you tell me one thing that I could change that would help you feel better?"

"Do you really want to hear it?"

"Of course," he said, but hoped he could handle whatever it was she wanted.

"I'm very concerned about Jesse's group. It's too large, and they are not comfortable sharing with each other, or maybe with us. I've spent the afternoon praying, and I feel the Holy Spirit is saying we should divide it. You teach the men, and I will teach the women. With less people in the group, there would be more time to discuss and really go deeper. But you are the leader and I'm not trying to take your group."

"No, I like the idea. I would much rather teach an all-men's group. Let's talk with them next week and see what they think."

"That would be a start. But when would we work together to make sure that we're teaching approximately the same things?"

"You mean like what I promised Orly?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry I haven't been including you. Some of that was because you haven't been feeling well and I felt you needed your rest. I hated to ask you to add something else to your schedule."

"I appreciate that, but tell me, honestly, when have you had any time to spend with me?"

"I promise I'll hire Zokur to help around here and maybe that will free up more time."

"Can we schedule a time to prepare the lesson for the groups or not? If we don't schedule it, it won't happen."

"What about mornings after I fill the water troughs?"

"Okay. And when are we going to schedule time for us to discuss things and plan things? And I just need to be with you when you aren't pulling a milk cart! There's things I want to tell you, but you don't have time."

"I'm glad you want to be with me, and I'm sorry that I've been so busy. What is it that you want to discuss with me?"

"I don't think there's any discussion required; I've just been wanting to talk with you about my not feeling good lately."

"Is there more to it than just being frustrated with me?"

"Yes. But I'm not sick. I'm carrying your baby. You will be an abba around Passover next year."

"Oh, Jenay. I'm sorry I haven't been listening. I've been worried about you. When did you find out?"

"Actually, the week before Sukkot. Grandmother Salome recognized the symptoms before I did, and Gabriela confirmed it."

"May I kiss the mother of my baby?" asked Yanis.

"Certainly."

"I don't want to ever miss out on knowing everything that is happening. Please give me some time to hire more workers. And we'll talk to Jesse's group on the Sabbath."

"Thank you, Yanis. It relieves my mind to know that you are happy about the baby."

"Of course I'm happy! I'm surprised you would be concerned."

"I didn't want it to overwhelm you."

"I'm just excited to be an abba. Wow! I do feel overwhelmed," admitted Yanis. He was grinning from ear to ear. "I can't wait to tell everyone."

"No. It's not polite to tell until I start showing, and that won't be for another couple of months. It's our secret. Promise?"

"Of course, if that's what you want."

Mr. Ezekiel and his grandchildren arrived, and everyone moved to the barn. Yanis asked Asaph to help him make the deliveries since Jenay wasn't feeling well. Jenay was already asleep before he got the water troughs filled. He spent some time trying to figure out how he could afford to hire more workers. He finally decided to sleep on it and think about it in the morning.

Before dawn he woke Jenay and they hurried to the barn where Mr. Ezekiel and the other four milkers were already busy. Yanis pulled one cart to the market with the children pushing and then came back

to pick up the second and then the third cart and pulled them alone. By the time he was finished filling the water troughs, it was late morning. Just as he entered the yard, Talman from Jesse's group arrived and asked if he had time to talk.

"Certainly." They sat in the courtyard and Talman explained his purpose for dropping by.

"Yanis, I told you that I was a banker and I am. But I also have taught at the Hebrew School for about ten years. I teach a class to the oldest students to prepare them to apply Scriptures to their future businesses. Jesse and Zachary were a couple of my students, and I got to help them get established. As I was praying for you last night, I felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to offer you my help. I don't know much about goats, but I do know about business, and I'm wondering if I can help you set up a business plan that doesn't totally wear you out. You seem exhausted to me, and sometimes having another businessman listen will give you some ideas on how to improve your daily schedule."

"I know that is from the Holy Spirit, because that's exactly what I need. I've never run a business, and I feel like I'm drowning in the work."

"I was certain that that was what the Holy Spirit was saying, but Sarah didn't want me sticking my nose in your business."

"No, I appreciate any help I can get. So, what do you need to know to help me?" asked Yanis.

"Why don't you just explain what it is you do, and I'll listen and ask questions. I also need to know how many employees you've hired and what they do."

Yanis began to describe his current jobs with the goats. Then he listed Jenay's roles and realized why she was always exhausted. He explained Mr. Ezekiel's jobs and each of the five children that they had hired. He said that while they were beginning to break even with all the salaries, there was really no profit, and he wasn't able to even properly feed Jenay. He confessed that they often foraged in the woods for food to eat. "I feel like a total failure."

Talman continued to ask questions and simply listened. "Yanis, it looks like you've got a good business started, and it should do well for you and continue to grow. But it's really labor intensive," Talman began. "I suggest that you hire Mr. Ezekiel as your steward. That will tie his salary directly to your profits and he will be in charge of daily operations. You would be free, although I suggest that you continue to keep the financial books so you can see what is happening. Now, he will make all the decisions, but everything he decides will affect both of you. I also suggest that you secure an apprentice since he is getting older and needs to train someone to take over after he is unable to work.

"Now one of the big advantages that quickly emerges is that a steward and an apprentice are allowed to care for their animals on the Sabbath — so you would have at least two milkers available. Mr. Ezekiel might be able to encourage his grandchildren to voluntarily

help him on the Sabbath in order to get a higher pay scale during the week, for example. I've seen that done.

"Overall, I don't believe that you would hurt yourself financially by letting Mr. Ezekiel totally run the farm and you just keep the records. You own the land and all the equipment. You deserve to find someone who will run it for you to make money. I also recommend that you consider purchasing the wooded areas around here as soon as you can, so that someone doesn't surprise you by buying the land and you lose your free food supply. That could destroy your business quickly."

"I am in shock. I never realized I could do this. I think that it will ease a lot of problems with my time, which will allow me to minister the way I want. I am humbled that you would spend this time with me. Thank you. How much do I owe you for this invaluable help?" asked Yanis.

"You owe me your prayers as I try to follow obediently, and a listening ear when I need it."

"Thank you, Talman. I look forward to having time to hear your story."

It was almost time for the milkers to arrive, and Yanis decided he would wait to talk with Mr. Ezekiel. He went to find Janay and make sure she was okay. He quickly outlined what Talman had suggested and asked her what she thought about it. "Yanis, it doesn't really matter what I think. It matters what Jehovah thinks. Have you spent any time seeking His clear direction?"

Once again, he realized that he was operating according to what he wanted, not what the Holy Spirit was saying. He hadn't even asked. *I came here to teach others, but I'm not on track. I must take time to pray and determine Jehovah's direction for the farm and for me.* "You are right. I will spend that time tomorrow after I go to the market. I will not speak to Mr. Ezekiel about it until I have clarity."

"Then I will support anything that you do. But I'm having trouble following you when you have no time to seek Jehovah."

"Thank you for speaking boldly to me, Jenay. You are indeed Jehovah's helpmeet for me."



On Monday, just as soon as Yanis had the water troughs filled, he told Jenay he would be north of her lean-to in the woods for a time of prayer. She just nodded and he left. He spent the rest of the day in worship and seeking Jehovah's face. He confessed his sin of self-sufficiency and diligently asked for Jehovah to direct his decisions. When he returned to milk that afternoon, he was no closer in knowing what to do than when he had begun. After he made the deliveries, he sat down to eat a late dinner with Jenay and shared with her that he had had a great time of worship, but no clear direction. "Yanis, you need to practice what you would teach others. Wait for clarity."

So, on Tuesday, once he had the water troughs filled, he returned to the woods to pray and worship. On Wednesday, he heard clearly

that he should invite Jenay to worship and pray with him tomorrow. So, on Thursday they both walked to the woods and prayed together for the first time since Gabriela and Orly's wedding. They confessed their sins and let Jehovah cleanse their relationship. They began to pray about the message for the Sabbath night group. Yanis and Jenay both agreed quickly that Jehovah was leading them to answer questions from the group. They worshipped and thanked Him for guiding them. They prayed about their earlier decision to break up Jesse's group into men and women. They felt that Jehovah confirmed that. They began to thank and praise Him for guiding them. Then Yanis began to pray aloud and asked Jehovah to reveal if he should sell the farm, or whether he should secure a steward. He had never been willing before to give up the farm entirely, but now he was ready if that was what Jehovah wanted. Like Abraham offering his son, Yanis laid the farm down before Jehovah. He lay with his face to the ground and worshipped with a new freedom. He felt released. He gave the farm to Jehovah. It was not his own. He surrendered it totally. As he lay face down and worshipped, he was reminded of Solomon, a young man that worked at the Fish Processing Plant. Zachary had told him that he hated being indoors, but he was a faithful worker. Yanis had no idea why he remembered that conversation, but he felt certain that he should talk with Jaden about this young man and whether he would consider learning the goat business. Both Yanis and Jenay felt that Mr. Ezekiel should be the steward if he was interested, but if not, they would wait and see how Jehovah directed them.

They walked back to the farm just in time to start milking. Jenay made a quick dinner while Yanis and the boys made the deliveries. Yanis would talk with Mr. Ezekiel.

On Friday, after taking the three carts of milk to the market, Yanis filled the water troughs and then went looking for Mr. Ezekiel. He was in the barn sweeping and Yanis asked him to come into the courtyard and sit down to talk. He said that he was considering taking on an apprentice and wanted his opinion. Mr. Ezekiel agreed. Yanis shared that he was feeling called to spend more time in teaching others about Jesus and less time taking care of goats. "I intend to get the farm set up under a steward so that I will be able to spend most of my time in ministry. I am interested in offering that steward position to you. The first thing I would recommend to the new steward would be to hire Zokur on a regular basis to do the heavy lifting."

"If I were to accept the steward position, would you still be telling me what to do and when?"

"No. I would keep the financial books and I would probably continue to make recommendations. But the difference is, if you are the steward, you can run the farm anyway you see fit. However, if you cannot help us make livable profits, you would be replaced. A steward has final say on everything except his own employment. And I'll help with milking if I'm available. Over these last few months, I've learned that you know more about goats than I'll ever know, and I've learned to

trust your judgment. So, I see no reason for you not to be in charge and share the profits.”

“I’ll let you know soon,” said Mr. Ezekiel.

That afternoon, just before Yanis and Jenay left for Zebedee’s group, Mr. Ezekiel asked Yanis what would be involved in his becoming the new steward of the milk farm. Yanis said that it would just be a verbal agreement between the two of them concerning the percentage of profits. Yanis asked if the thirty/seventy split sounded right to him, and Mr. Ezekiel agreed and grinned. He said he thought he could improve his salary. They agreed that the stewardship would begin immediately. He asked if Yanis would go with them to August’s house and introduce him as the new steward. He didn’t want to deliver milk to the wrong house. Yanis agreed.



That night, Yanis and Jenay enjoyed the fellowship of Zebedee’s group. Yanis asked Jaden about Solomon and told him that he felt the Holy Spirit was leading him to talk with him about apprenticing at his farm. Jaden agreed he would be an excellent choice and recommended him highly. “Let’s meet on Sunday and I’ll introduce you two.”

During the sharing time Yanis confessed that he had spent more time in prayer this week. “I realized that I had slipped into a lot of self-control and not enough listening to the Holy Spirit. I have been forgiven and cleansed and just wanted to encourage you to keep checking to make sure that you are hearing clear guidance from our Lord Jesus.” Later when Jonas called on Yanis to share the message, he felt so much more confident that the Holy Spirit was directing him. He asked if there were any questions that anyone wanted to ask. Several stood and Yanis called on one of Jaden’s sons-in-law. But instead of giving a quick easy answer, Yanis asked, “How would you find the answer to that?”

“I’m asking you!”

“Yes, but I’m challenging you to take some time to seek the Holy Spirit and listen and then wait until you know the answer with perfect clarity. If you are willing to wait, He’s willing to speak. Too often we run to our friends for answers because we know which one will agree with what we want. Last week I had a question about the farm. It took several days of seeking Jehovah’s face before He answered me. By the end of that time, He had convinced me that the bigger question was whether it was my farm or His. That was sobering. When I was ready to surrender it to Him, He began to guide me and give me the direction I needed. Now, as a group we can help each other with advice, or we can encourage each other to seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance and to wait patiently on Him. It’s so easy to run ahead of Almighty Jehovah as if we have a better plan. Would you be willing to take that question directly to the Holy Spirit?”

On Sabbath morning, Yanis and Jenay helped Mr. Ezekiel with the morning milking. It felt different. Yanis felt a distinct lifting of responsibility. He was very comfortable letting Mr. Ezekiel make the decisions of what needed to be done.

Yanis and Jenay walked to Jesse's house. They were working together and felt a new oneness. They had agreed that both would share their story of traveling with Jesus. Everyone greeted them warmly and wanted to know if she was feeling better. They told her they missed her last week, and it felt good to be missed. Yanis asked Ariel if she would lead a Psalm to prepare their hearts for worship. She did and everyone joined in enthusiastically. Then Yanis began to speak. "Last week, I spent the week in a prayer retreat each afternoon. One of the things that the Holy Spirit showed me is that He wants this group split into two groups. I'll be leading the men and Jenay will be leading the women. I'm going to share my story with you, then Jenay is going to share hers, then I'm going to ask the women to be ready to discuss when and where they are going to meet and the men to decide the same." There was some whispering among the women and Yanis waited until they were ready to listen.

"My Father was a priest and he faithfully trained each one of his five sons to follow in his footsteps. But as I grew, I began to listen to the preaching of John the Baptizer. I was present the day John baptized Jesus. I saw the Holy Spirit descend like a dove on Him, and I heard the Voice from Heaven declaring that Jesus was God's Son. At thirteen, I was forced to make the decision whether to follow Jesus or my dad. I chose to follow Jesus and my dad declared me dead to him. I followed Jesus for over three years and was in the garden the night He was arrested. I was hiding for fear of my life on that Passover and Sabbath, and I saw Him after He was resurrected from the dead. I talked with Him, ate with Him, hugged Him and know Him to be alive. My desire is to serve Him obediently wherever He leads me for the rest of my days. I know that He has called me to Capernaum to help others figure out how to obediently wait for His Holy Spirit's direction and follow Him. Now, please listen to my wife Jenay's story."

Jenay felt uncomfortable speaking in front of such important and well-educated men, but soon she realized that they were listening intently. "I was raised in Capernaum with my twin brother, Jonathan. Our abba was a fisherman. We were only five years old when our dad came home one day and told us that we would be going on a special trip. My dad and his brother, my mother and aunt, and two of my cousins all left the same day and started following Jesus wherever He led us. I grew up over those next three years learning how to love and care for people the way Jesus did. When we would return to Capernaum, we would stay with my grandparents, Zebedee and Salome. I loved it here and always hoped to return. I always knew that Jesus was sent from Jehovah and was supernatural. I watched Him do miracles and was so amazed at His patience and kindness and love. He always had time to give hugs. But after His death and resurrection, I understood that He was my Messiah and that I needed a Messiah to

pay for my sin. I was present when He returned to Heaven, and I received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost ten days after that. I've been trying to live in obedience to Him ever since. I walk and talk with Him all day long. It almost seems like Jesus never left. He's always here to guide me and we talk about everything. I would like the opportunity to meet with the ladies so that we can share this intimate relationship that is available to each one of us. I think it will be much more constructive to meet at a separate time from the men. Jesus taught that we are equal spiritually, but He also reminded us that He has special jobs for us as women, as wives, and as mothers. I'm available to meet with you any morning or early afternoon."

"Thank you, Jenay. Let's close in prayer and then discuss when the two groups would meet," said Yanis. "Father, we come before You, praising You for giving us friends and fellow followers to encourage us. Help us this week to be obedient as You lead us. In Jesus' name."

Everyone began to discuss dates and times. "Why don't we meet at our house on Wednesdays at noon? Will that work for everyone?" asked Rachel.

"And if it's nice weather, we can meet in our hideaway," added Arial.

All the ladies agreed that that would be possible, and they wanted to start this Wednesday. Then Jesse asked the men if they could meet somewhere else so that Miriam wouldn't have to keep the babies quiet. Joel offered his house at the tenth hour on the Sabbath and Elizabeth agreed.

Yanis and Jenay were able to visit just for a few minutes and then had to hurry back to the farm. "You did a great job," said Yanis, "and I was very proud of you. You'll be a great leader for the ladies. I keep feeling that these men are dealing with some serious issues that they aren't sharing with their wives and daughters. Let's just keep praying for them."



## Chapter 2

They arrived home just before the sun set and Mr. Ezekiel already had the goats in the barn. Zokur helped each milker pour their fresh milk into a large pot that he had set on a cart. He seemed so proud to be helping, and Yanis was glad to see that Mr. Ezekiel was handling the decisions. Yanis reminded Mr. Ezekiel that he would not be available on these post-Sabbath deliveries but was just helping tonight. Mr. Ezekiel assured him that he understood. Zokur had two carts ready to go to the Inn. There were three jars of day-old milk and one fresh. And then he had three more carts ready to go to August's. When everyone was through milking, Mr. Ezekiel assigned the children to help with the deliveries. Yanis told Mr. Ezekiel that he had a lead on a possible apprentice and would be talking with him tomorrow. He volunteered to cover the deliveries until he was able to secure an apprentice. Mr. Ezekiel thanked him and walked alongside Yanis as he pulled one of the carts to August's house.

On Sunday, Yanis pulled one cart, Zokur pulled one cart, and the two children pushed and pulled the other cart to the market. Yanis told them to leave his cart at the booth and he would pick it up on his way back. He hurried to meet Jaden at the Fish Shop. Jaden spotted him and called for Solomon to join them. Solomon was obviously nervous about being called out by the boss. "Solomon, I want you to meet a friend of mine and talk with him today. Zachary actually recommended you to him and he wants to offer you a job. So don't be nervous. Just listen and see if this job is something you are interested in doing. Okay? Solomon, this is Yanis."

Yanis met and talked with Solomon and he indicated he was eager to meet Mr. Ezekiel. "When could I come and look it over?"

"Well, the best time is either one hour before dawn — that's when we start our morning milking — or one hour before sunset for our evening milking."

"I'll be there in the morning if you'll give me directions."



Yanis and Jenay were in shock. Their exhausting day suddenly turned into busy ones filled with ministry and normal routine. They continued to help each morning with the milking, but then they returned to the house for breakfast and spent time planning and praying together. Each day, Yanis recorded the accounts for the farm. Soon, they would be able to add a well, and hopefully, by the end of the year, purchase the wooded land around the farm as Talman had suggested. He had time to build things that Jenay needed and built a cradle for their future little one. Each week Yanis and Jenay prepared a lesson that they had learned from Jesus.

By the end of the summer, they were both leading very tight-knit groups who were learning to depend on the Holy Spirit and follow in obedience. As they shared their stories and their lives, these groups formed strong bonds that would carry them through the hard times ahead. They were praying about how to reach the rest of Capernaum for Jesus and continued to be amazed that the Holy Spirit kept saying to keep quiet. They obeyed. The women's group expanded their efforts to minister to the hurting women of Capernaum. They began to weave robes for the needy and provide food for the sick. But probably their most important role was praying for the men's group to stand firm and sturdy.



In the early fall, Yanis and Jenay spent a Tuesday evening at her grandparents' house to visit with the Apostle Matthew who was in town. They were thrilled to discover that Jenay's Uncle Kenan had also come to Capernaum for business and brought their friend Orly. Yanis spent most of the night catching up with Orly. Orly was excited to share with him that Jehovah was calling him to share the good news with Gentiles. Yanis was repulsed by the idea at first but had to agree that it was consistent with what Jesus had taught. They spent most of the evening talking about Orly's call to minister to the Gentiles. Yanis could see that the Holy Spirit was speaking to Orly, but had no inclination to spend any more time than necessary with Gentiles. As they talked, he began wondering about August, Quintus, and Alex, but he quickly brushed them out of his mind.

Yanis spent several days with the Apostle Matthew discussing their groups. Matthew, too, was surprised by the Holy Spirit's instructions to the men's group to keep quiet and not try to spread the New Way. That seemed to go against what they had been taught by Jesus, but Matthew warned Yanis to be obedient to the Holy Spirit. Jehovah knew the hearts of men, and this might mean that there was trouble brewing ahead. He assured Yanis that the apostles would be praying for his and Jenay's groups.

The Sabbath night group at Mr. Zebedee's was growing deeper also. Because they were a large and mixed group, their focus was on worship and prayer support. They enjoyed singing and praying together, and each week the followers left feeling refreshed and ready to tackle another week. They especially focused on praying for the apostles and those sharing the good news in hard places. Zebedee and Salome's home was a focus for the apostles as they traveled. Their hospitality was well known among the followers.



One cool, rainy night late in the fall, Salome had already settled for the night when she heard the servants answer a knock at the door.

Zebedee was out with his fishing crew, and she expected it was another follower needing lodging for the night. Soon her servant Arah, knocked gently on her door. "It's Zachary, ma'am. I will prepare him a plate and put him in the guest room, but I thought you would want to know."

"Thank you, Arah." Salome quickly dressed and rushed to the dining area. They hugged and both tried to talk at once.

Zachary said, "I'll eat, and you talk," as he received the plate that Arah handed him. He devoured the food and Arah brought him more.

Salome told him that the Fish Shop was doing well and that his Uncle Zebedee still went out most nights with his crew. She told him about his friend Yanis leading the Sabbath night group and teaching them more about Jesus. Now, she was ready to hear him talk. "So, what brings you home?"

"No, Aunt Salome. Damascus is my home now. But I made you a promise and I intend to keep it."

"What promise is that?" she inquired, feeling puzzled.

"I told you if there was ever a special lady, you would be the first to know."

"You traveled all this way to keep your promise?"

"Yes, and no. I finally feel that I can honestly approach a woman and tell her what life with me would be like and invite her to join me on this adventure of following Jesus. For the past year, I have felt very settled in Damascus and I'm ready to talk with her abba."

"Oh, Zachary, that is so good."

"Well, it may be good, or it may go very badly. All I know is that I heard the Holy Spirit very definitely telling me to ask her abba and I've traveled here to do so."

"Are you going to tell me her name or keep me in suspense?"

"Don't you think you should be asleep this late at night?" teased Zachary.

"You are cruel. You know I won't sleep a wink until I know."

"I hope to talk with Ruler Jairus tomorrow after school. I have no idea whether he will allow me to marry Ariel and take her to Damascus. Jehovah will have to prepare the way for me because otherwise this will just be a wasted trip."

"No. If you have come in obedience, then something good will come of it. You know that," said Aunt Salome wisely. "Now, off to sleep with you. I need my beauty rest."

He gave her a hug and kissed her forehead. "Goodnight, Aunt Salome. I may sleep a little late tomorrow."

"Zebedee will sleep until noon, so take your time. Goodnight."

Zachary was at the table before Aunt Salome joined him. He assured her that he had slept wonderfully but had things on his mind that woke him at dawn. He was going out but would return as soon as possible. "I plan to stay over the Sabbath before I start back so that I can visit with the family."

"Shalom, and I'll be praying for your time with Ruler Jairus."

Zachary grinned and started walking across town to the Westside Mercantile Store. He hoped that he could catch Jesse and visit for a few minutes if he wasn't too busy. He knew he couldn't visit with Elijah until school was out midafternoon. "Zachary, am I seeing a ghost or is it really you?" cried Jesse.

"Hey, man. It's me, I think. Can you answer a question for me?"

"You know I'll try," said Jesse.

"Is Ariel still available? I mean, is she married or espoused?"

Jesse began to laugh. "I should have known! Man, I've told you, her dad is going to be a tough nut to crack. I don't think he's let her look at a man and she's nineteen now. So, you are here to talk with Jairus?"

"I didn't come to ask your opinion. I feel certain that the Holy Spirit instructed me to come and ask. So, I'm here in obedience. I know you don't understand that, but I'm just following instructions."

"And that's the part I want to tell you. I certainly do understand. The day you left, I asked Jesus to be my Messiah and began following Him. I've been growing and learning ever since. In fact, Yanis is leading a men's group and we're all trying to be focused on obedience."

"That's the best news I've heard in a long time! I've been praying for you daily."

"Even better than that Ariel is still available?" Jesse teased.

Zachary slowly nodded his head and assented. "Seeing my best friend following my very best Friend is the sweetest thing I can possibly imagine."

"Come to the house. Miriam will want to see you and you've got to meet my son, Zach, and my beautiful daughter."

"Sure. Apparently, I have a namesake." The men walked over to the house and were greeted enthusiastically not only by Miriam, but also by Tobias. They didn't mention the purpose of Zachary's visit — just that he had a chance to come to town. Miriam and the children were preparing to go to Rachel's for the women's study led by Jenay. Zachary, Jesse, and Tobias visited and caught up on Zachary's work in Damascus. He said that he was leading a group of followers of Jesus. They were protected from other religions by the Romans, and it was a peaceful and beautiful area. He worked at a Fish Processing Plant on the Barada River and had purchased a home. "The city is surrounded by orchards and farms and the market place is abundant. In fact, some people call Damascus the Fragrant City because it is so pleasant when all the orchards are in bloom. I really enjoy living there and I'm allowed to talk freely with Romans, Greeks, Jews, and Jesus followers. I've been leading some classes about Jesus for the Greeks who live there."

"You look happy, and yet you have traveled back here to seek a wife."

"Yes, the Holy Spirit has led me to take this next step. I don't know whether it will result in success, or whether my trip was for another purpose. But I will return knowing that I have been obedient."

While Tobias was in the kitchen, Zachary asked Jesse if he had any suggestions on how best to approach Ruler Jairus. “Well, actually, Wednesdays are a good time to talk with him. He usually stays at the school to prepare tomorrow’s lessons since his home is filled with women. If he’s not there, then he’s probably visiting with either Joel or Yanis. The men’s group has made us all very close friends. Just be honest about your reason for the visit. He will probably ask for time to discuss it with us over the Sabbath. We talk about everything together. I don’t know what time limitations you have and what you have planned, but I hope you will be able to spend some time with me and Elijah before you return.”

“I hope so, too. But right now, my mind is on this one thing. Sorry. School lets out at the eighth hour, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then I had better be going.”

Tobias brought some juice for them to drink, and then Zachary said that he would let them know how it went. Jesse promised to be praying.

Zachary walked to the school. He couldn’t help noticing how much the west side of Capernaum had grown. It seemed to have doubled in size since he left two and a half years ago. As he walked, he prayed for peace and total reliance on the Holy Spirit — something he had learned while taking care of his dad in Jerusalem. When he arrived at the school, the boys were quickly leaving for the day.

Elijah was the first to see him. “Zachary! Welcome back.” He ran to give him a hug and the other three rabbis welcomed him enthusiastically.

“Well, I’m only here for a brief visit, but it’s great to see you guys. How is the school?”

“Not many changes. We only have room for fifty students, so with all this growth, we are turning away more and more boys each year. We have a good group this year, though. It’s going well,” said Rabbi Joel.

“But what’s going on with you? How is Damascus?” asked Elijah.

“Damascus is a beautiful city. I’ve found a strong group of followers of Jesus and I’m leading the group there. But I’m also able to teach in the marketplace — similar to the apostles teaching at the temple. It’s a peaceful city and they allow me to teach about Jesus every day, and all kinds of people listen from various religions. I have a good job at a Fish Processing Plant. I’m the steward there, but my boss allows me to take a long break at noon to teach. That about sums up my life. How about you guys, what’s going on here?”

“Your friend Yanis has been leading our group, and I feel that we are growing and learning so much,” said Ruler Jairus.

“Yes, I spent the morning with Jesse and heard a little about that.”

“While you are here, the main thing that we are curious about is that the Holy Spirit keeps instructing us to keep our obedience to Jesus a secret. That seems strange; doesn’t it to you?”

“You mean you don’t feel led to tell others about it?”

“No, we don’t tell anyone,” said Elijah. “Doesn’t that seem strange to you in light of Jesus’ commands?”

“Yes, it does seem strange. But I want to encourage you to be obedient even if you don’t understand what God is doing. I wonder if there’s something brewing in Capernaum that you are not aware of. Maybe there’s a Sanhedrin spy that would report your teaching about Jesus.”

“I need to get home to Hava. We have a newborn, and Hava expects me home to help.”

“And is this a first-born son?”

“Oh, no, this is our third child and second son. Our first-born is a daughter and she is two years old. Then our son was born at Sukkot last year so he’s just over one. Our second son was just born last week. Trust me, Ira wants me home, too! I could never thank you enough for Ira. He’s been such a help and a real brother to me as I learn to be an abba.”

“Is Ira part of the men’s group?”

“Yes, he and Tobias, Jesse and we four rabbis.”

“Plus Yanis, of course.”

“Actually, I promised my Aunt Salome to have dinner with her, so I just stopped by to say hello,” said Zachary.

“Let’s get together before you leave,” said Elijah as he darted out the door.

Joel and Talman hugged Zachary and told him he was always welcome to stop by for a visit with their family.

“Thanks, and shalom,” said Zachary suddenly realizing that the Holy Spirit was clearing the room just for him and Ruler Jairus to speak.

“Ruler Jairus, do you have time to talk with me for just a few minutes?”

“Certainly. The ladies are all at my house and I usually stay here until closer to dinner. They have their study time while they sew for needy ladies in Capernaum. Sometimes I have to remind them it’s dinner time.”

“So even though the Holy Spirit is telling you men to keep quiet, He’s allowing the ladies to minister?”

“I think it’s because they just very quietly show Jesus’ love and care much like He did. No one seems to mind being loved and cared for when they are in desperate need.”

“I guess not,” Zachary agreed. The men took their seats on a couple of benches, and Zachary spoke. “Sir, I told you that I would never ask a woman to be my wife until I was sure what I wanted to do with my life. I have been a part of a tightly knit men’s group that has encouraged me to let the Holy Spirit guide me in this area. I shared with you that I have a home and a good way to provide for a wife. I can’t promise to know where the Holy Spirit will lead us in the future, but I want you to know that I am here totally out of obedience to what the Holy Spirit has shown me.”

“And what has the Holy Spirit shown you?” asked Jairus quietly.

## Chapter 3

Zachary responded, "I feel certain that two weeks ago, He asked me to come here and ask you to consider allowing me to marry your daughter. I know that I have loved her since the day I met her and saw her ability to minister and serve Jesus with passion and energy. She could minister to a lot of ladies in Damascus and quite frankly, the Holy Spirit said that it was time for me to take her as my wife. That is as honest as I know how to be with you. I'm available for any questions, and I promise you that if the Holy Spirit has not prepared your heart or her heart, I will leave and never bother you or her again." Zachary sat and bowed his head waiting for the outburst of rage he expected to hear. Instead, all he heard was the quiet breathing of Jairus. When Zachary looked up, Jairus had tears streaming down his face. The two men continued to sit in silence.

"The Holy Spirit has prepared my heart. I see Ariel's longing to be married and to bear children. It breaks my heart. But the thought of her moving so far away is hard."

"Damascus is equally far from here as Jerusalem. It takes about five days to walk it, or two and a half days in an oxcart. It is a beautiful place to live, and the people are hungry to hear about Jesus. I can picture Ariel being very happy there."

"I do not know if Ariel will be willing to leave Capernaum and her two closest friends."

"I understand. I would not want you to force her. It should be her decision. But I know where Jehovah has led me. I will not stay in Capernaum."

"I understand. What are you thinking about an espousal time frame? I know that trips back and forth would be expensive. What did you have in mind?"

"Actually, I have not dared to think that far. I am not prepared with gifts for the espousal on this trip. Could I think about it overnight while you talk with Mrs. Rachel and Ariel? I hope to stay in Capernaum until Sunday. I could come back for the espousal and then come back later for the wedding if that's what she prefers. But let me pray about it, and can I speak with you again tomorrow after school?"

"Yes, I'll meet with you tomorrow after school and we'll talk about plans. I will talk with Ariel and her mother tonight."

"Thank you, sir. It would be a great honor for me to care for your daughter and watch her fulfill the ministry and purpose that Jehovah has planned for her. Shalom."

"Shalom." Jairus sat in the empty classroom and stared into nothingness. He felt certain that this was Jehovah's plan. He had known it ever since Hava and Miriam began birthing children. He could see the sadness in Ariel's eyes, and he knew he couldn't deny her the opportunity to be all that Jehovah God had planned. The sun was

getting low, and the women might be gone by now. He walked home slowly.

The other ladies had gone home, and Rachel and Ariel were excitedly talking about the group. They sat down to eat dinner and Rachel asked how his day had gone. He seemed distracted and quiet. She became alarmed and asked if there was something wrong. And in that moment, he knew that he wanted to share with both of them together. It would be Ariel's choice. And he was ready to share the news with them both. "It was a normal day, and then it became a most incredible day that I am still trying to process. I would like to talk with both of you together."

"Let's sit in the living room and talk." Rachel got up to instruct the servants, and Ariel pulled three cushions close together in the living room. Jairus was trying to decide what to say. When Rachel returned, Jairus got up and kissed her and then returned to his cushion.

"Rachel, for nineteen years we have raised a daughter together. We have included her in all the decisions that concerned her and encouraged her to grow with us. Tonight, I have decided that since there is a decision before the three of us, we should make this decision together."

"Yes, Jairus. If this decision concerns all three of us, then I agree that we should make it together. But you are scaring me. Are we in danger from the Sanhedrin?"

"No, thankfully not. A young man asked for Ariel's hand in marriage today and we've always said that she would have the final say. We would not sell her or pledge her to someone that she does not approve of as a husband." Both women gasped as the significance of this conversation sank in.

"Abba, who was it? Is it someone I know?" Her heart was pounding so hard she could hardly breathe.

"It was Zachary. He is living in Damascus and has prepared a home there. We could visit you there, but it would mean leaving your homeland, your friends, and family to be with Zachary. Now I would expect you would need to pray about this decision, but I'm available to answer any questions that you may have. And if you like, we could invite Zachary to dinner tomorrow night and let you ask him questions."

Rachel said, "This is all so sudden. I'm having trouble thinking about Ariel leaving us."

Very quietly, but firmly, Ariel said, "It's not sudden for me. I've been waiting since Miriam's wedding for this moment. It's been almost three years since I knew that Jehovah would someday bring Zachary to me. But Abba and Mother, I will be obedient if you do not want me to go, but my desire is to have babies of my own, to be fruitful and multiply and be a wife and mother. Since Creation, women have left their parents and chosen to follow their husbands. Jehovah knows that this is the desire of my heart."

"I suggest we all sleep on it. Would you like for me to invite Zachary to dinner tomorrow night?" asked Jairus.



Rachel sighed and said, "Yes, I think that would be advisable. We need to hear more about his plans." Each went to their blankets, but the two women lay awake — one praising Jehovah for hearing her prayer, and the other making lists of questions.



By the time Zachary had arrived back at Uncle Zebedee's, he had left to fish for the night. Zachary ate dinner alone with Aunt Salome and told her that his talk with Ruler Jairus went well. "What are you thinking about the timing for an espousal and wedding?" she asked.

"I'm not sure. I guess I want to just take it one step at a time. I don't want to make plans and have them crushed."

"I understand, but it's important that you make tentative plans in case the answer is yes," encouraged Aunt Salome. "In other words, are you wanting to do an espousal ceremony now, and then return later for the wedding? Or do you want to come back again for the espousal ceremony and stay for the wedding? Or do you intend to just skip it all like Yanis and Jenay? They got espoused and three weeks later had a wedding with just her parents present."

"I don't know. I'll have to pray about it," hedged Zachary.

"Well, I'd advise you to have a plan before you talk with Arial, or she will think you are not ready."

"What do you recommend, Aunt Salome?"

"Are you ready for the espousal, I mean, do you have gifts for the parents and for Arial?"

"No. But I know what I want to give her."

"How long would it take you to get ready?"

"Probably a couple of weeks."

"Okay, that's a start. Then would you be able to take off work and stay here and spend time getting acquainted, or would you want to get married pretty quickly so you could return to Damascus?"

"I couldn't stay. And the house is already prepared and furnished, so there wouldn't have to be a delay. Are you saying that I should propose that we do the espousal and wedding at the same time?"

"I'm saying you could suggest it, then let Arial and her parents help you modify it."

"You sound like this might actually happen."

"You are a good man, Zachary, and you have been patient to wait for Ruler Jairus to get ready. He just might surprise you. I trust that the Holy Spirit has a good plan for your future. Now, let's call it a night and hopefully you can get some sleep. Oh, and your uncle and I want to host the wedding whenever it happens. We talked about it this afternoon."

"Aunt Salome, that would be incredible. You would do that for me?"

“That’s what families do.” Zachary went to sleep with his gratitude overflowing. He couldn’t wait until tomorrow. He just wished he didn’t have to wait until school was out.

Thursday at breakfast, Aunt Salome gave him directions to Yanis and Jenay’s farm. It would give him something to do until the eighth hour. He enjoyed the walk and hoped that they would be home. It was a beautiful fall day even though the rainy season had begun. It was certainly getting colder. That was something else he needed to consider when he thought about traveling with Arial to Damascus. He wanted the weather to be nice for their walk. He forced himself to quit thinking about Arial and began to search for the farm. Soon, the two men were remembering good times in Jerusalem. They talked of their ministries in Damascus and Capernaum. Yanis invited Zachary to visit the men’s group on Sabbath evening at Joel’s house and Zachary agreed. They said their goodbyes and Zachary began walking slowly back toward the school. He would be early, but he knew he could sit in the courtyard until the students had cleared out. When the exodus was complete, Zachary opened the door and found all four rabbis waiting for him. He was surprised, but then remembered that they had always made parenting decisions together. He sat down on the bench that Ruler Jairus indicated.

Ruler Jairus addressed the other men, “Zachary and I met yesterday, and he asked for my permission to marry Arial. I talked with Arial and Rachel last night. I would normally talk with you guys about such things, but Arial has already made her own decision. She indicated that she has been waiting for Zachary for the past three years but agreed to abide by my decision. I realize that the Holy Spirit is saying it is time. My only regret is that she will be moving so very far away. I just wanted to inform you of what is happening.”

“Congratulations, Zachary. You have selected a fine wife,” said Talman. Congratulations were said all around.

“When will this all take place?” asked Joel.

“That is still to be decided. Zachary, you are invited to join us for dinner tonight so that Rachel and Arial can help us decide on dates. Are you available?” asked Jairus.

“Certainly, sir. It would be my pleasure.”

“So, you would take Arial back to Damascus with you?” asked Talman.

“Yes, but it’s no further than Jerusalem from here. It’s a five day walk or two and a half with an oxcart.”

“That’s closer than I thought,” said Talman. “And I still have my oxcart.”

“The wedding would be at my Uncle Zebedee’s and Aunt Salome’s so that all her friends could attend. And you would all be welcome to visit us in Damascus — but not all at once!”

The men continued to visit, until Elijah suddenly remembered that he needed to be home with Hava. He hugged Zachary and ran out the door. Rabbi Joel, Rabbi Talman, and Ruler Jairus continued to ask about Zachary’s work and ministry in Damascus. They wanted to know

the political climate and seemed really happy for Ariel. Goodbyes were said and Ruler Jairus and Zachary walked together. “Wow! I guess I was bracing for the worst and hoping for the best,” said Zachary.

“I think every young man feels that way when he asks for a bride. I remember how I felt when I talked with Rachel’s dad.”

“I think it made it easier that the Holy Spirit had given me such clear directions.”

“And I think it made it easier for me to say yes, when the Holy Spirit was pushing me that direction.”

“All praise to Jehovah. So, tonight is just for the purpose of setting up the dates and answering Ariel’s questions?” asked Zachary.

“Yes, and dinner. I’m ready for dinner. How about you?” They washed at the ceremonial pots and then entered the house. Rachel and Ariel welcomed him to their home and dinner was served. Zachary had never been to their home and was pleased that it was not fancy or ornate, yet it was gracious and welcoming. He felt that Ariel would like the home he had prepared for her. Zachary described Damascus and the basic geography. He described how the city had natural geographic boundaries because of the rivers. He explained that his neighborhood was made up of followers of Jesus. He described it like a family where everyone knew everyone else like a tiny village — yet Damascus was a huge city with an even more extensive market than Jerusalem. He told them about his job, so that there would not be financial want. But he quickly moved to his opportunities to minister as leader of a group of followers and the doors that were opening as a result of his teaching in the marketplace each day. He answered their questions and enjoyed watching Ariel’s face as he described what she would find there. When dinner was over, they moved into the living room and relaxed on cushions. “This living room is approximately the same size as mine, and you may host guests as often as you wish. Damascus is a little higher elevation, so it is colder there. Most celebrations are held indoors.”

“I would like to know your plans as to dates for the espousal and wedding,” said Mrs. Rachel.

“Of course. I have some basic ideas, but I am certainly willing to work with you and Ariel to determine what is the best timing for everyone. My heart tells me to be espoused tomorrow and married the next day, but that is not realistic. My second choice was to return in one month and become espoused and then married within two weeks. The major problem is the rainy season. It would be a miserable time to travel through the mountains and could even be dangerous. So, I believe my most reasonable suggestion is that we plan to be espoused and married around the first of the year. I will plan to bring an oxcart so that you can move the things you desire. I employ a cook and a man servant. We would employ a maidservant for you, but the house is fully furnished. I thought you would want to bring your own clothes and musical instruments and whatever you wish. Are these dates agreeable to you?”

“I guess it would be better to wait until the first of the year, but I don’t like waiting,” said Arial boldly.

“I know. I don’t like it either. But I think it would be safer and more enjoyable travel. It will take two or three days in the oxcart.”

“And the wedding would be here in Capernaum?”

“Yes. Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome have been like parents to me, and they are hosting the wedding.”

Ruler Jairus said, “We can talk about it later. Ladies, I have a room full of boys who will not be merciful if I don’t get some sleep. Will you join us for the Sabbath dinner tomorrow, Zachary?”

“I’m sorry, but I promised Uncle Zebedee to visit with him and my family tomorrow night.”

“Then you will be welcome to spend the Sabbath with us,” said Ruler Jairus.

“I would enjoy that. Yanis and Jesse have asked me to attend the men’s group on Sabbath afternoon. Then I will be leaving very early on Sunday. Thank you for your pledge.” Goodnights were said and Zachary walked happily back to his uncle’s.

After Zachary left, the three of them just sat in silence and looked at each other. Their lives would never be the same again and yet, it felt right.



On Friday morning, Zachary visited with Jaden and walked through the Fish Shop. He visited with Aunt Salome and then about the ninth hour, Zachary walked over to his old house. Jesse had told him that Elijah had bought the house and added a couple of rooms to it. He wanted to visit for a while before his family gathered at Uncle Zebedee’s. Elijah welcomed him and they visited surrounded by babies. Hava showed him baby Ezra, and Zachary was charmed by little Deborah who told him all about her new baby “budder.” Nick apparently liked to climb and kept Ira busy. “I suppose he is named after Nicodemus.”

“Yes. We have never found out what happened to him. We think he is in hiding somewhere, but no one knows where. Joseph was killed. You knew that, didn’t you?”

“I knew that’s what Talman expected.”

“Is it peaceful in Damascus?”

“Very. It’s a good political climate where many different groups live together peacefully. Did I tell you that I was teaching about Jesus in the market places each day?”

“That must be incredibly satisfying. I wish we could talk here, but the Holy Spirit keeps saying to wait and be quiet. I get frustrated and sometimes even think about leaving here so that I can teach the New Way to others. But really, I’m very settled here. I can see myself staying for the rest of my life and enjoying my grandchildren right here — enjoying the view of the sea.”

“You have a beautiful family and I’m so glad you were able to buy the house and enjoy it. I guess I’ll see you both at the end of the year. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Zachary walked back to Uncle Zebedee’s and visited with him until the group started arriving. He was surprised and somewhat disappointed that the group was essentially the same size as when he left it two and a half years ago. Zachary shared his good news with the group and how they could pray for his ministry. “I keep hearing that the Holy Spirit is leading you to keep quiet about following Jesus. I want to encourage you to wait in obedience as the Holy Spirit leads you. Be careful to not run ahead, but be diligent to not lag behind. I believe that Capernaum is in a transition with many, many Pharisees moving here to escape Jerusalem. I don’t know what the future holds for Capernaum, but I promise you my prayers.”

## Chapter 4

Zachary attended synagogue and sat with Elijah and Jesse. He was pleased with the message. Ruler Jairus talked about listening to Jehovah guide us even when it doesn't make sense. He based his teaching on the Prophet Elijah who obeyed Jehovah's orders exactly as recorded in I Kings 17, but who got unexpected and unwanted results. But he continued to obey, with more unexpected results. There were twists and turns along the way, but the Prophet Elijah was rewarded because he faithfully obeyed. Ruler Jairus encouraged the people to obey Jehovah and listen for His voice. While he did not mention Jesus because of the Sanhedrin's rules, he encouraged all those present.

As Zachary walked home with Ruler Jairus, Zachary asked if he had seen an influx of Jews moving from Jerusalem to Capernaum. "Oh, yes," said Ruler Jairus. "We are having to turn away boys at the school because we cannot accommodate them. And the westside of Capernaum is really building up." Zachary asked if it was predominantly Jews or whether it was equally Roman. "I believe it is predominantly Jewish," replied Ruler Jairus. They joined Ariel and her mother at home and settled onto the cushions to relax.

Together they set the date for the espousal ten days before the wedding and discussed her guest list for the wedding. "Abba, could Zachary and I sit in the courtyard and talk privately for a while?"

Jairus looked at Rachel and she nodded. "Yes, but stay where we can see you. You are not espoused yet."

"Yes, Abba."

Ariel led Zachary to the courtyard, and they sat together in silence for a few minutes. "I would like to hear again what led you to decide it was time for marriage. I was in so much shock the other day, I'm not sure what you said." Zachary and Ariel talked and talked. They shared their dreams for marriage, their goals for ministry, the possibilities for doing ministry together, and many, many other topics. It was one of the sweetest times that Zachary could remember, at least with a woman.

Jairus came out and asked Zachary if he was going to attend the men's group. Zachary jumped to his feet and apologized for losing track of time. He said goodbye to Ariel and Mrs. Rachel and then promised that he would return before the next to last Sabbath in Adar for the espousal. "That's only about three months away, but I know it will pass very, very slowly for me. Please pray for it to hurry!"

He and Ruler Jairus walked to Talman's house and Yanis welcomed Zachary to their group. There were the three rabbis, plus Ira, Tobias, Jesse, and Yanis. This group of seven men were closer than brothers and knew each other very well. Yanis had helped them to be transparent in their pursuit of holiness, their total obedience, and their commitments to their wives and children. It reminded Zachary of

his group in Damascus. He knew that they were praying for his journey to be a success, and he was eager to give his report. The men shared their prayer requests, and everyone prayed together. Yanis related a parable that Jesus taught during his last week on earth. Yanis explained that he was trying to teach the men all the parables that Jesus taught so they would be ready to teach others when the time was right. Zachary agreed that it was a good plan and encouraged them to really focus on listening closely to the Holy Spirit's leading and obeying quickly. Yanis shared with the group that Zachary felt they may be headed to a time of persecution with so many Pharisees moving into the area.

"So far, so good. We haven't seen any real trouble yet, but I've got the same feeling that if we were to start sharing about Jesus being the Messiah, we would be in danger pretty quickly," said Talman.

"That's why I want you to be prepared to obey immediately, and that takes practice and staying in tune." said Zachary.

Talman prayed a prayer of blessing on everyone as they dismissed. Everyone hugged and said goodbye to Zachary. He returned to Uncle Zebedee's and quickly slipped into his blanket, praying for safe travels tomorrow.

An hour before dawn, Zachary folded his blanket and joined Aunt Salome who was setting out a food bag for him. She kissed him goodbye, and he left, eating the bread and olives as he walked quickly along the Sea of Galilee. He should be home by late on Thursday if all went well.



Jenay walked through the rain to meet with the women's group on Wednesday. Since they all enjoyed weaving, they were helping her and other young mothers to get ready for their little ones. So, each week, they met and sewed together while Jenay taught them more about following Jesus. The group had bonded as sisters, and Ariel knew that it would be hard to leave this sweet group. But deep down inside, she just wished it would hurry. Her desires were toward Zachary and marriage and motherhood of her own. The winter seemed wetter and colder than usual, and the women enjoyed gathering to work and learn together.

Finally, the days began to get longer and there was hope that spring would someday arrive. Jenay began foraging in the woods for fresh fruit and greens. Sometimes she would sing Psalms and the goats would all come and surround her. She giggled as she thought of her conversation with Yanis last night. She had told him that Sarah had insisted that she come to her house to birth the baby. She and her servants would care for her until she was able to take care of herself. Yanis had looked very confused and couldn't understand why she couldn't care for herself — the goats were just fine within an hour of giving birth. Wasn't birthing a baby the same thing? She had assured him that she would need help, and he would not be able to assist her

with what she needed. He had reluctantly agreed, and she encouraged him to ask the other men. She laughed thinking about how easy the goats dropped their babies and then nudged them up to nurse as if nothing significant had just happened. Oh, she hoped it would be that easy.



Arial and her mother, Rachel, had been sewing heavier robes for her since Zachary had said it was cooler in Damascus. Her mother had insisted that she pack the two birthing robes that she had saved for her. They fit perfectly, and it was a special gift that Arial cherished. They were also sewing a wedding robe. Arial had picked out a beautiful pink thread for it, and her mother was embroidering flowers across the yoke. It was indeed beautiful. Day by day they were watching the time grow closer.



On Wednesday night, Zebedee's family gathered to celebrate his nephew Peter's second son, Elam, becoming a man. Zebedee had been a surrogate dad to Peter's sons ever since he left to follow Jesus. His oldest son, Laban, had followed in his dad's footsteps to become a fisherman for Uncle Zebedee, but had rejected Jesus and his heart was bitter. He was not interested in celebrating with his younger brother. Their mother had died, and their sister Laila would sit in the place of honor as his parent. Laila had a right to be proud of the way she had raised her two younger brothers. Elam had been working in the Fish Market, and Uncle Zebedee assigned him a full-time job there since he excelled in working with customers.



Spring finally began to show signs of pushing winter aside, and Zachary arrived at noon on Friday. He visited with his family on Sabbath night and Arial's family on the Sabbath. The espousal took place after school on Sunday at the ninth hour. Yanis led the ceremony since Ruler Jairus couldn't. Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome presented Zachary, and Ruler Jairus presented Arial. All of Yanis' and Jenay's groups were there as witnesses. Zachary gave Ruler Jairus a beautiful sword with Deuteronomy 33:29 engraved on it:

Happy art thou, O Israel:  
Who is like unto thee, a people saved by Jehovah,  
The shield of thy help,  
And the sword of thy excellency!



“Damascus is known for its beautiful swords.” Ruler Jairus accepted it and stated that he would hang it in his office.

Then Zachary presented Mrs. Rachel with a bag filled with beautiful silk threads. He told her that Damascus was famous for its silks, and he thought she would look lovely in a silk robe.

Then Zachary looked at Arial and said that he had only brought her one present because he wanted to spend the rest of his life pleasing her and letting her pick out silk threads and beautiful things. Today, he had secured a gift to represent how they first met, and also their plans for the future. He set a large wooden box before her and removed the lid for her to see inside. There was a set of Jewish Scripture on papyrus scrolls. Now they could continue to study The Law and The Prophets together. Arial and her parents were crying tears of joy. She had always been welcome to use her dad’s copy, but now the scrolls were becoming more and more hard to obtain and it was a precious gift. Yanis completed the ceremony and declared them espoused. Next Wednesday, they would be married.

All week, Zachary and Arial worked on loading the oxcart and deciding what to take. Arial had asked her handmaiden Dara to go with her and she had agreed. Zachary spent the Sabbath with Arial’s family group, and attended the men’s group on Sabbath afternoon. On Tuesday, Zachary and Arial walked to the market to purchase food for the trip. Zachary was amazed to learn that Arial had never been on a trip outside of Capernaum. She had never slept under the stars or cooked over a bonfire. They were both looking forward to the adventure. Early on Wednesday, he began to smell the goats roasting over the fire. The house was abuzz with extra hired servants setting up the courtyard and making room for the fifty guests that Aunt Salome had invited. She seemed to be everywhere, tasting and directing and thoroughly enjoying getting everything perfect for her nephew’s wedding. The front guestroom was turned into a marriage chamber, and Zachary wasn’t allowed to peek inside.

Since school was still in session, the rabbis taught until the eighth hour, and the wedding ceremony was scheduled for the tenth hour. It made for a very long day for Zachary. He wished he had planned to hang out with Yanis or Jesse, but it was too late to walk across town now. He left the house and began to walk along the seashore. How many times he had come here to pray. He walked south of the Fish Shop. He found the rocks where he and Jesse used to sit and talk for hours. He sat down and began to pray. But he was afraid he would be late, so he couldn’t relax for long. He thanked Jehovah for Arial and prayed that he would be a good husband to her. He headed to Ruler Jairus’ house and hid until he saw him arrive home from school. He tried to be patient as he gave him time to get settled. Then he knew the time had come. He strode toward the door and knocked firmly. Ruler Jairus opened the door and invited him in. He stated the traditional words: “I’ve come for my wife, Arial.” Ruler Jairus left him at the door and called to Arial. In just a few minutes, he saw her radiant smile. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement, and she took his

breath away. He took her hand and led her away from her Abba and Mother. At Uncle Zebedee's, he introduced Arial to his family. At the tenth hour, Yanis called for everyone to gather in the courtyard for the wedding ceremony. "Ruler Jairus and Mrs. Rachel, has Zachary met all of your requirements to become husband to your daughter Arial?"

"Yes, he has," replied Ruler Jairus.

"Mr. Zebedee and Mrs. Salome, has Arial met all of your requirements to become wife to your nephew, Zachary?"

"Yes, she has," replied Zebedee.

"Then it is with great pleasure that I declare it Scriptural for this wedding to commence. Let's pray for this new couple." Yanis prayed not only for their happiness in marriage and fruitfulness in parenting, but he also prayed for their ministry in serving Jesus side by side.

"Now let the celebration begin!"

The hired musicians began to play, and there was much laughter and fun. Dinner was a feast and then they sang and danced to the traditional wedding music. Zachary wasn't sure why or how, but he knew it was time to claim his bride. He found Arial dancing with her friends, but when he called her name, she came to him, and he led her into the wedding chamber where they became man and wife. They spent a few minutes alone afterward, but both were eager to spend time with their friends. They returned to the festivities and partied until late. Elijah and Joel took their families home early because they had to teach school tomorrow morning. Everyone else stayed until the wee hours of the morning. Ruler Jairus was not teaching the remainder of the week, and he and Mrs. Rachel stayed a little later, then they went into the wedding chamber and removed the ceremonial covering. This covering proved that Arial was a virgin when the marriage was consummated. Ruler Jairus tucked it in his robe before they began their walk home. Zebedee's family had been released from fishing duty so they could party for the whole three days even though Jaden had to leave periodically to check on things. Eventually, Zachary and Arial retreated to the wedding chamber and slept. No one stirred until midmorning when the music started again. All day on Thursday and Friday, the guests came and went whenever they could get off work. Food was served throughout the day, but the dinners were elaborate. On Friday late afternoon, the musicians packed their instruments and headed home. Aunt Salome lit the Sabbath candles, and Uncle Zebedee prayed the Sabbath blessing over all their guests. After dinner, Jonas invited everyone to gather around for a time of prayer for the new couple. The party atmosphere changed to one of seriousness. They sang several Psalms together, and then the guests began to leave for their homes. Zachary and Arial stayed in the wedding chamber again. On Sabbath morning, they enjoyed breakfast with Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome and then walked to the synagogue together. Arial joined the ladies in the balcony, while Zachary joined Elijah and Jesse on the men's floor. Ruler Jairus brought the message and encouraged each one to look at King David's life and the long waits that he experienced between Jehovah's blessings. He

encouraged the people to not grow weary in waiting for Jehovah's plan to unfold. Zachary and Arial walked home with Ruler Jairus and Mrs. Rachel. All afternoon, friends stopped by to say a last goodbye. The men's group had decided not to meet but showed up to help Zachary load the cart after the Sabbath. Arial said her goodbyes to her parents. It was hard, and even though tears were flowing down her cheeks, they could see her joy and encouraged her with words of love and promises to visit. They spent their final night in the wedding chamber at Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome's house and left at dawn on Sunday.

## Chapter 5

On the next Sabbath afternoon after the wedding, Jenay was helping with the evening milking when she first noticed the tightenings. Yanis was meeting with the men's group at Talman's. It had already been arranged that she would go to Sarah's house. She had a guest room and experienced servants to help, and the other ladies could come and go as they pleased. Jenay was so grateful that the men had convinced Yanis that she should not do this alone. She said goodnight to Mr. Ezekiel and the other milkers and returned to the house. She was too excited to rest. She ate a roll with some goat cheese, but surprisingly didn't feel hungry. She tried to weave but was too restless to sit still. She wished it was daylight so she could walk to the woods, and realized there was a full moon. She walked around the yard and the walking felt good. As she watched Yanis enter the yard, he was singing a Psalm and she joined him. He was surprised that she was still awake. When she explained that it was time for them to go to Talman's, he quickly gathered her blanket and the baby's supplies. They didn't need a lantern because of the full moon. As they walked hand in hand, she occasionally had to stop and deal with the pain. It was only a mile to Talman and Sarah's, but it seemed much, much longer. She encouraged Yanis to hurry, but constantly asked him to slow down because she couldn't keep up. They finally reached Talman's front door and were greeted by servants who woke Rabbi Talman and Mrs. Sarah and showed Jenay to the special birthing room that they had prepared for her. Yanis kissed Jenay tenderly and prayed over her, then she insisted that he leave quickly. She screamed and grabbed her belly. Sarah came beside her and encouraged her to walk.

Talman and Yanis went back to Yanis' house to try to get some sleep. Before dawn, Yanis was checking on the goats and informing Mr. Ezekiel that Jenay was birthing the baby at Talman's house. He went back inside and woke Talman. He set out some rolls and olive oil, and they walked while they ate. When they came close, they could hear Jenay still crying out in pain and for the first time, Yanis felt fear that he could lose Jenay. Goats didn't have this much trouble birthing, and he had never been around a woman giving birth. He grabbed Talman's arm and begged him to tell him what was wrong. "Nothing is wrong. Everything sounds fine to me. I know this is your first time. Why don't we go to Joel's?" Talman led Yanis away from the house and toward Joel's house. The servants invited them in and explained that Elizabeth was helping with the birth. Joel assured Yanis that it was normal for all the ladies to support each other, and that it could last for hours or even days before the baby arrived. Yanis was horrified. He hadn't listened before, but now it was real. Joel had to get to school but assured them the servants would take care of anything they needed. By noon, Yanis couldn't wait any longer to check on Jenay.

The birthing was still in progress. They returned to Joel's to wait. It was almost sunset when a servant arrived to say that Yanis should come. He took off at a run, and Talman and Joel couldn't keep up.

Yanis arrived and was escorted into the room to see Jenay and his brand-new daughter bundled in her arms. Jenay opened her eyes and Yanis just knelt beside her and cried tears of joy. He stroked her hair and thanked her for their daughter. "Are you disappointed that she's not a boy?"

"No, she's beautiful, just like her mother." They sat in silence and wonder, and everyone left them alone. He was an abba.

When the baby cried, the women allowed Salome to place the baby on Jenay's breast. Salome watched her granddaughter nursing her great granddaughter for the first time. "I wish her mother, Kayla, could have been here, but I am so grateful to Jehovah for this privilege."

The baby didn't nurse long, and Sarah called Yanis in to learn how to wrap the baby in a clean shawl. He sat and held her. He asked Sarah when he could take Jenay home. "It is a long walk, but I think she will probably be ready by Tuesday morning since it was an easy birth. Tomorrow, you need to learn how to help Jenay with the baby. But remember she can't lift anything heavy for eighty days — you know the rules."

Yanis stayed and ate dinner with Talman and Sarah, then he left to spend the night at home. Yanis spent all day Monday letting Sarah teach him how to help Jenay with the baby. Jenay was asleep and the baby was lying beside her. Yanis just sat and watched them sleep. His heart was filled with wonder and praise to Jehovah for giving him two girls to protect and love. When the baby cried, Jenay woke and put her to her breast before noticing he was there. "Oh, Yanis. Isn't she perfect? You are an abba."

"And you are a mother."

Sarah came in and out to make sure that they understood how to care for the baby. She showed Jenay how to wrap the baby tightly in the swaddling cloths. She explained when to remove the swaddling band and encouraged her to watch her activity level. Jenay assured her that she would be careful and not overdo. Yanis was eager to take her home, but Sarah explained that there was the danger of her bleeding to death if he was not patient. "Go home and get some work done but come back for dinner and I'll show you what else you need to do for the baby. Also, you two should agree on a name."

Jenay asked Yanis if he had thought of a name. "Only boy names," he admitted wryly.

"I think she deserves a girl's name," teased Jenay.

"Let me think about it and we'll name her tonight," said Yanis. "I'm going back to the farm. I've got work to do."

"That will be fine. I'm going to mostly rest today and recuperate from yesterday," said Jenay. Yanis kissed her forehead and then kissed the baby.

By Monday afternoon, Jenay was up and caring for the baby with no problems. The ladies from the group had all dropped in to visit and offered their help. It was decided that they would take turns bringing a dish for dinner each evening for the first week. When Yanis returned, he and Sarah went over the things that he would need to do. Yanis assured Sarah that he could take care of it all. Yanis asked Jenay if it would be okay to name the baby Abie. He explained that his mother's name was Abigail, but everyone called her Abie. Jenay agreed that it was perfect. Jenay ate dinner with them and afterward Sarah and Talman sat in the floor and showed them how to stretch Abie's little arms. Yanis had never seen such a tiny baby and was afraid he would hurt her. Talman reminded him that this was part of being an abba, and he needed to learn to care for his daughter. "As she learns to trust in you, you will be able to teach her to trust in Jehovah." Jenay was so grateful for an older, wiser abba to guide Yanis. After they had stretched baby Abie's arms, Sarah showed Yanis how to wrap her in the swaddling cloths. They visited for a while, and then Yanis returned to the farm with the promise to come for Jenay and Abie tomorrow morning after milking.

Yanis and Jenay walked home on Tuesday. How strange it felt to be three now, and yet how perfectly right. Jenay stretched out on her mat immediately and Yanis laid baby Abie beside her. He built a couple of small boxes and put Abie's shawls in one and her swaddling cloths in the other. He sat and watched his girls sleep and felt a contentment he had never known.



It was the beginning of a new year and Gaius and Corina were excited to be nearing Capernaum with their family. It had taken weeks of planning and packing, and now the day had arrived. Their three children were ready for a stretch, and they assured them that they were beginning to see the outskirts of Capernaum. It had been a hard decision to pull up roots from Cana and move to Capernaum, but they wanted to be obedient. It would be a little easier for Pollux and Salacia because they had family in Capernaum. They were in the first oxcart leading the way with their children. Gaius reached over to take Corina's hand. They had prayed and waited until Jehovah had given clear direction, and then everything had happened quickly. Now they were entering their new town, and he was excited to show her the house he had bought. He hoped she would be happy with it.

For the first few weeks, Gaius and Corina just settled into life in Capernaum. They went to the market, met their neighbors, made friends at the well, and each Sabbath afternoon they spent with their friends, Pollux and Salacia. They often discussed when they should start their first group. They weren't sure that they knew enough people, but many of Pollux's family were curious. They would wait until they were certain of the Holy Spirit's leading.



On Thursday, Rabbi Joel, Rabbi Elijah, and Ruler Jairus left Capernaum with a group of twelve students and their dads as well as eight alumni, including Jesse, on their annual trip for Passover. It was a much larger group than last year, and they took two donkeys to carry the food and supplies. The ladies all waved goodbye as the men and schoolboys left town at dawn, eating their breakfasts as they walked.

The three leaders and Jesse camped in the olive grove with the other followers of Jesus while the group that traveled with them provided their own accommodations. It was a peaceful celebration, and so rejuvenating to be in fellowship with crowds of other followers. Often one or more of the apostles would come and teach in the olive grove around a campfire. It was a relaxing time without the tension of last year.

On the last day of Passover, the group met at the designated camping area on Tuesday before sunset and started down the mountain on Wednesday at dawn. Each night the group wanted to ask questions and discuss Jesus, and the rabbis answered their questions readily since they were not at school or the synagogue. It was a very satisfying trip.



On Passover evening, Pollux and Salacia and their four young children arrived at Gaius and Corina's home. Their three children ran and greeted their friends and quickly began playing in the backyard. The men were comparing notes on their new jobs. Gaius was an accountant and had been hired by the local judge to work with the court's finances. Pollux was working at his brother's Carpentry Shop. "It's great to be working together again."

During dinner, the four adults began to plan the first group meeting, which would start on Friday at sunset. They would meet at Pollux's house, and he would be the primary leader. The others would be available for support. They had already invited twelve people.

At the end of dinner, Gaius reminded everyone of why they were gathered tonight. "On this night, Jewish families are celebrating a holy day called Passover. But that Passover was just a picture of the real thing. Seven years ago, Jehovah allowed His Son, Jesus, to be crucified so that He could be our sacrificial lamb. He died to pay for our sins, and tonight we remember. The unleavened bread represents that Jesus was sinless and that His body was broken for us. The wine reminds us that His blood was poured out to pay for our sins. As the food gives us life, so does Jesus' sacrifice." The four adults took a bite of the unleavened bread that Gaius passed around, and then took a sip of wine to remember what Jesus had done for them. They asked the children to sing with them:

Jesus died to set me free,  
Free from the sins that burdened me.  
Jesus died to make me new.  
Filled me with His Spirit and cleansed me, too.  
Now He guides me day by day,  
Strengthens me and shows the way.  
He will take me to Heaven, to live with Jehovah.  
He is my Messiah. Praise His name!

“Thank you for coming to celebrate Passover with us.”

“Thank you for inviting us. It was good to celebrate. So, we will see you on Friday and bring the drinks.”

“Shalom.”

Pollux laughed and said, “Shalom. It still seems strange to use that word.”



Talman and Sarah hosted the Passover gathering since the other men were all in Jerusalem. Elizabeth and Rachel and their two daughters had celebrated together for nineteen years while the rabbis traveled. This year Ariel would not be there. Miriam and Hava arrived with the five grandchildren who made sure that “Grandma” Rachel was kept busy! Miriam announced that she was carrying Jesse’s third baby and would give birth during the summer. It was fun to be together, and Talman led the Passover Seder as they remembered Jesus’ sacrifice for their sins.



As the sun set, Yanis roasted the lamb pieces that he had bought at the market and made unleavened bread in a skillet over the firepit. Jenay was impressed, and they enjoyed their first Passover as parents. They remembered their espousal and marriage two years ago and how Jehovah had blessed them. Yanis led the Seder but modified it to celebrate Jesus as the sacrificial lamb. Somehow it seemed more special to share it with Abie even though she slept through it.

Soon Abie was just a normal part of the family, and the young couple couldn’t remember a time when she was not there. Jenay was required to rest and heal for eighty days, so the ladies walked out to the farm for their Wednesday meetings. Yanis had made enough benches so that everyone was comfortable in the courtyard, and the weather was perfect.

When Jenay’s eighty days of confinement were complete, Yanis walked with Jenay to present her and the baby to Ruler Jairus at the synagogue. They gave an offering in lieu of a sacrifice, and Ruler Jairus declared Jenay clean and recovered. Yanis also asked Ruler Jairus if he could come out to the farm and give him a price for some



land that he wanted to purchase. There were so many people moving into Capernaum, he felt it was important to secure his goats' grazing land. Now that he was an abba, he needed to think about such things. On Thursday, Ruler Jairus gave Yanis an extremely good price, and Yanis bought five additional sections of land. Yanis hammered stakes in the corners of his property. He and Jenay discussed how to let other people know that it was private property now. They decided to build a rock fence. They began collecting stones to pile up along the property lines until someday they could build a stone fence. It wouldn't keep the goats in but should keep people out.



Jenay could hardly wait for the Sabbath dinner at her grandparents' so that she could show off baby Abie. Yanis had been meeting with the group alone while she was in confinement. Everyone expressed their pleasure at having Jenay back, and, of course, baby Abie was the center of attention. Yanis taught and answered questions, then the three of them headed home.

The following Sabbath, during the share time, Zebedee surprised the family by announcing that he would be in charge of assigning the fishing crews and making sure each crew arrived home safely, but unless he was needed, he would stay home and get a decent night's rest. Everyone cheered and agreed it was high time that he take it a little easier. Jaden knew how strenuous the life of a fisherman was, and he was proud of his dad for stepping down. Yanis felt the Holy Spirit changing his planned teaching and instead talked about the seasons of life described by King Solomon.

As Yanis and Jenay walked home, they talked about how Jehovah was using them in this season of their lives. They were busy teaching others, and busy raising Abie, busy with the farm, but still making time to seek Jehovah's face and really feel His presence with them. They were happy in their marriage, and they were discussing whether it would be appropriate to contact the families that went on the Passover trip with the rabbis. But while that sounded good, they kept hearing the Holy Spirit say, "Be still and wait." So, they waited obediently.

On Sunday, Orly and Gabriela, their friends from Cana, surprised them with a visit and a messenger invited them to dinner at Jenay's grandparents' home since the Apostle Peter was passing through. Yanis and Jenay were surprised by Orly's news that Jehovah was calling him and his wife Gabriela to Joppa to minister to Gentiles. The Apostle Peter said that the Holy Spirit was prompting followers all around the Great Sea to teach the New Way to all nations. Orly would be able to do that in Joppa since it was one of the largest port cities in Samaria. Yanis smiled and promised to pray for Orly, but he didn't fully understand his decision. They visited late into the night and said a sad farewell to their good friends the next morning.

All day, Peter visited with his Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome. Just before sunset on Monday, Peter and Zebedee boarded one of the fishing boats and headed to Bethsaida. This would cut off a day's journey for Peter and allow him time to visit with his son, Laban, who would be part of the fishing crew on that boat. The men would drop Peter off in Bethsaida and then fish on their way home. Zebedee looked forward to being out on the water with his nephew, Peter.



Talman had generously provided his oxen and cart, and one of his servants to drive Jairus and Rachel to Damascus for a visit with Arial. They left early on Sunday morning of Sukkot since school was now out for the summer break. None of those traveling had ever been outside of Israel and were excited, but nervous. Jairus and Rachel enjoyed the change of scenery and agreed that the mountains were beautiful. Even at this late date, they could still see snow on the caps of the mountains to the west. How relaxing it was to get away from Capernaum. It had been another long school year, and being ruler at the synagogue always took its toll on Jairus' energy. They needed to be re-charged and couldn't wait to see Arial.



On Tuesday after Orly and Gabriela left, Yanis told Jenay that he needed to spend some extra time in prayer. She felt that he was grieving Orly moving so far away and didn't question him. They agreed that he would hike north of the lean-to but stay on their property so Mr. Ezekiel could find him if needed. She assured him she and Abie would be fine. Yanis packed a travel bag and promised to be back before Friday for Grandpa Zebedee's group.

He kissed them both goodbye and started hiking until he reached the end of the path. He thought of the years that he had followed Jesus and seen Him go off into the wilderness to spend time with Jehovah. *I've lived in Capernaum for two and a half years and You have used me to develop two very strong groups. But where is the growth that I thought would take place? I came here out of obedience, and while others are experiencing great success, I feel stuck.* He very honestly laid out his feelings to Jehovah. He grieved. He admitted that he felt like a failure. *What is my calling? What is my purpose? I'm trying to be obedient, but I don't understand why my groups are still the same size as when we started. What am I doing wrong?* He threw his blanket on the ground close to the stream that marked the end of his property and started building a bonfire. He began to replay in his mind the ways he had been able to help each member of the two groups and while that felt good, they were still the same size as when they started. What did Jehovah have planned for him? He was determined to search until he was certain. He slept and felt refreshed.

## Chapter 6

“Where’s the other ship?” yelled Jaden as he met the fishermen bringing in their last haul before dawn. Usually, his dad met the fishing boats and dismissed the men when they came in after a night of fishing. But on this Tuesday, only three ships came in. Jaden realized it was the boat that had taken Peter to Bethsaida last night. “Has anyone seen Dad’s ship? They were going to Bethsaida but were supposed to join you this morning and fish on the way back.”

“There was a storm up north, so we didn’t go very far out. They may have spent the night in Bethsaida,” said one of the crew bosses.

“Probably. Go home and get some sleep and then report back here at noon. If he’s not home by then, I’ll send you out to check. They probably just docked somewhere to let the storm pass,” said Jaden. He watched as the fish sorters began preparing the fish for market. Everything seemed perfectly normal, but it was not, and Jaden knew it deep down inside. He dreaded telling his mother, but he knew better than to avoid it.

Jaden opened the gate to the courtyard and walked toward his mother. When she realized it was not Zebedee coming home, her heart knew that Zebedee was gone. She let out a startled cry. “I didn’t mean to scare you, Mother. I just wanted to let you know that Dad’s late coming in this morning. The men said there was a storm north of here and he probably spent the night in Bethsaida. I expect he’ll be home by noon, but I just wanted you to know so you wouldn’t worry.”

“Jaden, I’ve been married to a fisherman for more than forty years. I always worry! But I also know that Jehovah will take care of him wherever he is. You know it, too, so quit fretting.”

“I’ve got to get to work. Let me know if you need anything.”

“Thank you, Son. But I’ll be fine.” Salome called her servant Arah and told her that Zebedee was late arriving today. She asked if she would mind walking around the courtyard with her. “I don’t want to be alone right now.” Arah understood.



All morning, Jaden and Jonas had watched the coast and as noon approached, they pulled four more boats out of the shed and made sure they were ready for use. Jaden had assembled sixteen workers who could row a boat and asked them to meet him at the shed at noon. At noon, the three crews that had fished all night reported to Jaden. He sent Benji and a crew to Bethsaida to see if Zebedee might be getting repairs there. He sent two boats to other ports where they might have been pushed by the storm. Jaden joined the four crews who were searching the water for any sign of survivors.

He requested that they all return by one hour before sunset and report to Jonas.



On Wednesday, Yanis woke early and prayed for Jenay and Abie. He prayed for the women as they met this afternoon and then he felt led to worship. He began by reciting Scripture that he had memorized as a child and occasionally sang some Psalms. He decided he wouldn't ask questions; he would just be still and worship. All day he focused on worshipping. It was a good day. He needed this time to just draw near to Jehovah. There was an unfamiliar peace and he soaked in it. As the sun set, he began to ask Jehovah if he was off track or disobedient in any area of his life. He watched as the stars began to come out and the woods around him settled down for the night. He listened to Jehovah's creation but didn't hear Him speak. He just felt peace.



Jonas was left standing alone on the beach as he watched the seven boats heading off in all directions. The Fish Market was closed after a busy morning, and he walked over to check on the Processing Plant. Several of the workers had volunteered to search, so Jonas told Malachi to go ahead and shut down for the day. Everyone should report at the regular time tomorrow. He checked on the ship builders and while some of them were out searching, others were still at work and wanted to stay close in case word came in. Jonas agreed but said that he was going to go update his mother.

Jonas greeted his mother with a kiss. He told her where Jaden had sent crews to search, and she nodded mutely. He said that they would all be back by sunset to report. He hoped he could bring her good news then. But until then they would just have to hope.

"And pray."

"Yes, Mother, and pray."

At sunset the boats began to return. Benji's ship was the last to arrive, but all the reports were the same. They were not docked along the coast, and there were no signs of survivors. "Go home and get some rest. We'll start searching for survivors again at dawn tomorrow." Jaden, Jonas, Benjamin, and Joseph walked toward Zebedee's home. They all dreaded the decisions that must be made tonight.

Salome had been watching for them and greeted them with a hug. "We must send for James and John. They need to be here."

"We'll also need to send messengers to Damascus to find Peter and Zachary."

"I don't want to bother them. Zebedee is in Heaven and wouldn't want them to stop their work," said Salome.

"Mother, Laban and Saul are missing, too," said Jaden.

“Oh. Oh. No! They weren’t ready to meet Jehovah. Oh, my babies. Oh, Jaden, I pray every day that they will change their minds and begin to follow Jesus. Oh, my babies. We need to find Peter and Andrew.”

“Maybe Zachary will know how to find Andrew, but we need to send servants first thing in the morning,” said Jaden.

Salome began giving orders. The head cook would provide food and a kitchen servant for each oxcart. Noah would go to Jerusalem and bring James and John back, if possible, and would also contact her brother Zeke and cousin Anna to let them know of her loss. Urias would go to Damascus and try to find Zachary and Peter. She had no idea how to reach Thomas. They would leave one hour before dawn tomorrow and travel as quickly as possible.



On Thursday morning Yanis woke early and began to pray. “Father, I desire obedience, and I want to know if there is any area where I am failing to do Your will.” He thought of a story from The Law and The Prophets about the first king of Israel. The prophet Samuel had told him to wait for him to arrive, but King Saul had grown impatient and instead of waiting had acted in disobedience. It had cost him his kingdom. Yanis felt deeply that the last thing he had heard Jehovah say was to wait. Now he felt that there was something that Jehovah was preparing for him that required waiting. Once again, he felt that flood of peace. “Is that all you want from me? You just want me to be still and wait? Father, I will be obedient. As long as I know Your clear direction, I choose to be obedient even though I don’t understand it.”



Jaden and his wife, Laisha, had spent the night with his mother and stayed in one of the guest rooms. At dawn he sent out the seven ships but decided to stay on land today to help Jonas shut down the business. He reminded them to return before sunset.

Jaden and Jonas closed down the rest of the Fish Shop, and then Jaden walked to Yanis’ farm to let them know. When he entered the gate of the farm, he discovered Jenay with baby Abie in her carrier, picking up rocks and adding to what looked like a rock fence. It was only about three handbreadths high, but she was diligently working. She called to Uncle Jaden and immediately asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Jenay, I come bearing bad news.”

“Okay. Do you want to sit down in the courtyard? You look tired. It’s a long walk for a fisherman.” She led him up to the tiny house and squeezed some fresh juice. She laid Abie down in the house to sleep.

“Jenay, you know that Dad took Peter to Bethsaida on Monday.”

“Yes, he said he was going to visit with Peter and save him a day’s journey of walking toward Damascus. Yes, I knew that.”

“Jenay, Dad didn’t come back. He, Saul, Laban, and four other crewmen were lost. We think that Peter safely made it to Bethsaida because of the timing of the storm that others reported in the area that night. We’ve been searching all the coasts and can’t find any trace of them.”

“So, Grandpa has joined Jesus. I’m sorry, but I need a few minutes to process that,” she said, as tears began to form.

“Jenay, you know he loved you so very much. You and Jonathan were his pride and joy. Can you come to help Grandmother Salome and Laila grieve? I need to get back, and I will escort you if you can come. Oh, I should have asked where Yanis is.”

“Yanis is on a prayer retreat and should be back tomorrow afternoon. I’ll just leave a message with Mr. Ezekiel, and he will send him over. I can come with you now. Just let me get Abie back in her carrier. I need to put together a bag for Abie, and I need to leave word with Mr. Ezekiel, and then I’ll be ready to go.” She ran down to the barn and asked Mr. Ezekiel to tell Yanis when he returned that she had gone to Grandmother Salome’s because of the death of her grandpa. “Tell him to come as soon as possible.”

“Shalom, and may Jehovah comfort you.”

“Thank you, and shalom.”

They walked quickly and soon Jenay was in Grandmother Salome’s arms. They cried together. “Unwrap my newest great granddaughter and let me hold her,” said Grandmother Salome who needed to focus on life instead of her loss.

Jenay listened as Grandmother Salome told all that Jaden was doing to try to notify those who needed to know. “Have you let Uncle Kenan know?” Jenay asked.

“Oh, I don’t think so. But both oxcarts are gone. We’ll have to wait until one of them gets back.”

“Or someone could walk it. I’ve walked it; it’s only a day away.”

“But Jaden said we shouldn’t give up until tomorrow afternoon, and then it will be Sunday before someone could go. Remind me after the Sabbath to send someone if I forget.”

The older great grandchildren were happy to watch baby Abie, so Jenay was free to minister. The servants kept providing juice and snacks for all those who needed it. Since no one felt like eating large meals, the snacks were welcome.

At sunset, the crews reported no signs of survivors but promised to begin again at dawn.



That Thursday, during the week of Sukkot, Talman answered an urgent knock on the door of his office at the bank. It was the kind of knock that struck fear into every fiber of his being. He quickly opened the door and for a minute couldn’t figure out who he was seeing. Then

he welcomed Meshullum. It was not time for a school inspection. "Meshullum, come in. I was not expecting you."

"I was not expecting to come, but I am bringing you news that I feel is imperative that you and your fellow rabbis hear. But first, let me make it clear, I am a follower of Jesus. He is my Messiah. I have kept it a secret from the Sanhedrin in order to help other followers like you. Now, I have been discovered and I need help."

"I understand. How can I help you?"

"My family is with me. Can you hide us for the night?"

"Certainly. I will walk to my home, and you follow me. I have a barn out back and servants to care for the oxen. You and your family are welcome."

Talman quickly told his steward that he would be out for the rest of the day, and started home at a brisk walk. Meshullum followed Talman and quickly pulled the cart around back. Talman introduced Sarah and she welcomed them. Meshullum introduced his wife, Hannah, and his two daughters. The men went to the rooftop to talk. "I have been discovered as a follower of Jesus and my opportunity to serve and help other followers has come to an end. My wife and I have felt the Holy Spirit guiding us to relocate to Syria. We are not sure where. We are simply following His leading."

"I have a good friend in Damascus that I can recommend. He would be glad to help you get settled there or provide lodging for a period of time."

"We will settle wherever Jehovah leads, but for now, I have an urgent message to deliver to your fellow rabbis. Is there any way that we could meet today?"

"As far as I know, everyone is in town except Jairus. When do you want to meet?"

"As soon as possible. Where's Jairus? I would like to get out of Israel sooner rather than later."

"Jairus should be arriving in Damascus today. It is his daughter and son-in-law who I was referring to. Jairus won't return until after Sukkot."

"Then send for the others and have them come immediately. I cannot wait for Jairus. You'll have to give him the message."

Talman sent two of his servants to fetch the other rabbis and tell them that he needed to speak with them urgently.

Joel arrived quickly and was totally out of breath. When Talman greeted him, Joel complained, "Don't scare me like that. I'm too old to run! And what is the emergency? I thought you were hurt or dead!"

"Meshullum is here, and he said he has an urgent message for us. I don't know any details. He said he would rather tell all of us at once, so we need to wait for Elijah."

Joel climbed the stairs and greeted Meshullum. He had been the inspector of their school for five years, but since he represented the Sanhedrin and enforced their rules, he really didn't know him. Joel greeted him and took a seat. Soon the servants were serving them juice and slices of fresh fruit. "Rabbi Elijah lives on the east side of

town, so it will take him longer to get here.” About twenty minutes later, Elijah arrived, totally out of breath. He, too, expressed concern for Talman.

Meshullum repeated what he had already told Talman about his being discovered as a helper to fellow followers. Then he told them that his last helpful act as a member of the Sanhedrin was directed to them. “Your trip to Jerusalem with the schoolboys this year was reported to the Sanhedrin by several families from the school. They reported that you spoke openly about your being followers of Jesus and used the trip as a cover for trying to convince the schoolboys to also become followers. When the report was made, spies were sent to the olive grove, and it was reported that you were mingling comfortably with other followers of Jesus. They have been discussing arresting you and putting you all to death but have instead decided on a different course of action.

“They are sending Priest Shimei to Capernaum to take over the synagogue and the school which will effectively starve you out. I do not know what to recommend to you. I could get no information as to whether he is bringing in rabbis to replace you, but I know he will replace Jairus as ruler of the synagogue and you, Joel, as head of the school. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but I wanted to give you time to relocate if that’s where Jehovah leads you. My life and the life of my family is in danger, and I have chosen to relocate outside of Israel. I had planned to spend the night and let my family rest after such a hasty departure, but I would feel better getting out of town since I’m not sure of the exact date of Priest Shimei’s arrival. I would not want to be discovered here. Thank you for coming so quickly. I believe we could be to Bethsaida by sunset and out of Israel by tomorrow. I will feel much safer once I’m out. I will be praying for the four of you as you determine Jehovah’s direction. Can you give me Jairus’ location in Damascus? I possibly could warn him to not return.”

Talman asked that he at least wait until they could pray together.

“Jehovah, You alone know all our futures. You know the plans that You have made for us. Help us to be faithful to be obedient wherever and however You lead. Please bless Meshullum and keep his family safe as they relocate. Thank You for his warning. In Jesus’ name. Let me help Meshullum get on the road and then I will return as soon as possible,” said Talman.

Talman and Meshullum walked out to the barn and informed the servants that Meshullum had decided to continue his journey. “Were the oxen watered and fed?”

“Yes, sir. It will only take a few minutes to get them re-hitched.”

“Okay, let’s find Sarah and your family. They are probably in the garden.” Meshullum told his family that they were going to continue on a little farther today instead of spending the night. They hugged Sarah goodbye and followed him to the barn.

“What was that all about?” asked Sarah. Talman told her that he needed to meet with the men who were waiting on him and that he



would catch her up on all the news when their meeting was over. He returned to the roof to find the other two in shock.

Talman sat down on a cushion and the three sat in silence. "I guess the report is credible," said Elijah.

"Yes, I would assume so. I can't imagine any reason it would not be," responded Talman.

"What do you know about Priest Shimei?" asked Joel.

"He was part of the Sanhedrin when I was there. I wouldn't say he was in the inner circle with the High Priest but was certainly a crony. I imagine this will put him in good standing with the leadership. Meshullum didn't say whether he was being forced to relocate here, or whether he volunteered. Either way, I suspect he already has friends here."

"Did Meshullum say when he would arrive?" asked Elijah.

"No, he just said he was afraid he was close behind him and wanted to get out of town as soon as possible," replied Talman. "I suggest we walk out to Yanis' and just spend some time in prayer." The men agreed, and Talman told Sarah where they were headed.

"Talman, Yanis isn't home. Remember, I told you that Jenay said Yanis had taken a prayer retreat and was away all week. He should be back sometime tomorrow." The three men turned and went back up the stairs.

"Jehovah, we're listening. Please show us what to do," prayed Talman. They sat in silence, each buried in his own thoughts.

Elijah finally spoke. "The way I see it, we can either pack up and try to get out of town before Priest Shimei arrives, or we can sit back, wait, and see how bad it is."

"Yeah, but what if he's coming with orders to just kill us all and our families?" asked Joel. "I wouldn't want to just sit and wait for that!"

"No. But I don't think we can guess about this. We need Jehovah to guide us. Remember, the Holy Spirit will direct us step by step. I think we need to know for sure what He's saying. I don't intend to move or stay without knowing a clear direction," stated Talman firmly.

"One thing we know for sure is that Jairus will no longer be the ruler of Capernaum," said Elijah quietly.

"That's true, but we don't know what will happen at the school. We don't know if we'll be allowed to teach, or even if we'll be allowed to live," said Joel.

"I think we should pray," said Talman. Each man began to pray for wisdom and clarity and beg Jehovah for help. Talman led them to sing some Psalms and they continued to pray. All afternoon they prayed and worshipped. They were startled when Sarah called them down to dinner. Elijah said he needed to get home but would meet with them first thing in the morning. They quickly dispersed, agreeing not to share it even with their wives. They would return after breakfast tomorrow for more prayer.

When Sarah asked what was going on, Talman spoke carefully. "We received some news from the Sanhedrin that will affect the school. We need to pray and determine our response. Until we know

Jehovah's direction, I will not talk about it. I'm sorry. We will meet again tomorrow to pray. Please be patient with me."

"Of course, and I will be praying," said Sarah. Similar conversations were taking place in each of the three homes.

## Chapter 7

On Friday at dawn, Jaden sent out the seven boats. This time he went with them since his mother seemed to be handling things well and was surrounded by family. Jaden ordered that everyone return by the ninth hour. Jonas would be in charge of meeting the boats and seeing them properly stored before the Sabbath.



Yanis slept and woke refreshed at dawn. He continued to feel nothing but peace. He prayed and worshipped, ate the last of his food, and began the hike back to Jenay. He was eager to see her and Abie, and they would fellowship with Zebedee's group tonight.

When he arrived home and couldn't find Jenay, he assumed she had gone to the market and headed to the barn to let Mr. Ezekiel know he was back. Mr. Ezekiel gave him the message, and Yanis quickly changed his robe and began to run toward Zebedee's house. He hadn't asked what had happened or when, he only knew that Jenay would be devastated. When he arrived, Grandmother Salome was surrounded by ladies, and they were singing Psalms and worshipping. Abira and Jenay were leading one Psalm after another and most of the ladies and children were singing along. When Jenay saw Yanis come in the room, she immediately excused herself and pointed to the courtyard. Jenay told him everything that she knew. He held her and let her cry for a few minutes. Then she assured him that she was at peace about letting Grandpa Zebedee enjoy being with Jesus, but she was horrified by the deaths of her cousins, Saul and Laban, who had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Yanis agreed. He asked about the other four crewmen and Jenay admitted that she had no idea if they were followers or not. He told her that he had had a great prayer time and had spent four whole days coming to the same conclusion he had started with. "Jehovah told me to wait and He's still saying wait. But it was a good week and I'm more confident now that that is really what He is saying. I want to walk down to the Fish Shop and see what's going on if you are sure you are okay. I'm assuming I need to prepare something for tonight."

"Probably not. Everyone is still in shock. Maybe just share some words of comfort and let us sing. That seems to make everyone feel better," suggested Jenay.

"Okay. I'll be with the men unless you need me here." He walked down to the beach and found Jonas sitting alone watching the Sea of Galilee for signs of the returning boats. "Jonas, I just heard. I can't tell you how sad this makes me. How are you?"

"I really haven't had much time to think. We haven't officially given up the search."

“When will that happen?”

“At the ninth hour today. All the ships are supposed to come back, and we’ll store them for the Sabbath. Jaden said that he would officially announce the death of the seven men then. We’ll close the shop for a week, and we can start dealing with our grief as sons instead of trying to supervise everyone else. Jaden has been running things, but today, he needed to go out and search for himself.”

“Zebedee was such a giant of a man. He will be sorely missed. You were blessed to have such a dad.”

“Yes, I was.” Jonas and Yanis sat together on the beach and waited for the ships even though it was only noon.



Joel and Elijah arrived soon after breakfast and joined Talman on the roof. They all agreed that they had received no clear direction but were feeling more at peace about the situation. “When I consider what Meshullum said, I don’t think they have orders to kill us. What we don’t know is whether we will have jobs,” said Joel. “Jairus and I would have a hard time finding another position to support our wives. I planned on teaching school for the rest of my days, but we’re getting a little old to start over.”

Talman suggested that it would be better to spend the morning worshipping and praying if no one had received a clear word from Jehovah, and the other two agreed. Talman led them in quoting the beginning of Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.

Each man prayed aloud, and then they began to spread out to pray quietly and alone. Occasionally, one of them would begin to sing a Psalm and the others would join in. By noon they all admitted that they had heard nothing and decided to walk out to Yanis’ farm to see if he had returned.

Mr. Ezekiel explained that Yanis was with Jenay at her grandparents’ because Mr. Zebedee had died. The men debated whether they should bother him or not, but decided that they needed his input and prayers. They quickly walked across town. As they were walking beside the market, they saw a train of oxcarts filled with very elaborate household goods coming into town. There were ten of them traveling together. Either a lot of people were moving into town, or someone very important. They all looked at each other and realized that Meshullum’s prediction was coming true. They walked faster and

knocked on the door at Zebedee's house. The servant welcomed them in, but they explained that they needed to speak with Yanis privately and would prefer not to disturb the other guests. The servant went and talked with Jenay. She came out and greeted the men. They again apologized for bothering her during her time of grief, but they needed to talk with Yanis about a very important matter. Could they speak with him in private at Elijah's house?

"He left about an hour ago saying he was going to the Fish Shop to see if he was needed there. He will either be there or walking along the beach. I hope everything is okay," said Jenay. "I will be praying for you."



As Yanis and Jonas sat on the sand and talked, they heard yelling behind them.

"YANIS!"

"YANIS!"

"Uh-oh, I hope something else hasn't happened," said Jonas.

Yanis recognized the rabbis and wondered why in the world they had come all the way across town to find him. *I will meet with them tomorrow.*

Joel, Talman, and Elijah recognized Jonas and apologized for interrupting. They expressed their sympathy for the loss of his dad but stated that they urgently needed to talk with Yanis. Yanis asked where they would like to talk, and Elijah suggested the rocks behind his house. Yanis felt a little angry as he apologized profusely to Jonas for leaving him alone at a time like this. "It's okay, Yanis. I'm never alone. The Holy Spirit will keep me company, and look, isn't that a ship on the horizon? They will be in soon, and I'll be busy storing boats for the Sabbath."

As Yanis walked with the rabbis along the sand, the Holy Spirit reminded him that he had said he was ready to serve whenever and wherever, and all the anger melted away. "Guys, what's going on?" They began to share with Yanis all that had happened since Wednesday. As they talked and shared together, Yanis kept hearing the Holy Spirit say, "Who knows but what I've called you for such a time as this?" *Should I tell them what I know about Priest Shimei? Oh, Father, this is not what I thought You were saying. How do I deal with him again?* Yanis felt certain that Jehovah was revealing to him his purpose in being in Capernaum at this time. Not only would these men and their families desperately need his leadership for the coming days, but he was going to have to deal with a past that he thought he had left behind. Yanis sighed deeply, yet he knew that Jehovah would guide him step by step.

When they reached the rocks, they all prayed together and after a time of silence began to put together a plan. First of all, they would tell their wives exactly what was going on. They would not keep it a secret. But they would not share it with anyone else and they would

ask their wives not to share it. They would get through the Sabbath and were glad that the synagogue was closed for Sukkot this weekend. On Sunday, they would leave on a spiritual retreat and spend the week seeking Jehovah's direction. The men were all in agreement except that they felt they should share with the rest of the men in their group on Sabbath afternoon. Yanis said that he could join them for group on the Sabbath, but he would need to be with Jenay's family for the next week. Yanis explained where he had taken his spiritual retreat and said the men were welcome to use his property. "Just don't forget to bring fishing line. There's a stream there that should have good fish in it."

The rabbis promised to meet Yanis at Talman's at the tenth hour tomorrow afternoon and then hurried to get across town before the Sabbath began.



Yanis returned to Zebedee's house in time to hear the news that the searchers had found nothing, and Jaden officially declared all seven men deceased. The men washed at the ceremonial water pots and the servants called for dinner. But everyone was exhausted from grief and there was very little talking.

After dinner, Yanis stood and commented that he had heard the ladies singing Psalms of praise this afternoon when he arrived. He asked if they would sing something now, and then he just wanted to ask them one question. Abira led them in Psalm 23, and then Yanis surprised them with his question. "What do you think Heaven will be like?"

"I remember sitting around a lot of campfires with Jesus eating wonderful fish dinners. I always thought that Heaven would be like a giant campfire where you could talk with Jesus like we did when we were traveling with Him. I can picture Grandpa fishing with Jesus," said Jenay.

"I guess I picture Heaven as being just a great big place where we can all sing praises together to Jehovah. Dad's big ol' bass voice will be joining in the praises," shared Jonas.

On and on the family shared. Yanis prayed a prayer of blessing over the grieving family and asked that they focus on worshipping and letting Jehovah carry them through these hard days, one at a time. "I will need to be in and out tomorrow, but I'll be here as much as I can."

He kissed Jenay goodnight and said that he needed to be at the farm to help with milking in the morning. As Yanis walked home he realized he had not told her about the new priest coming to town. He prayed for wisdom to know when to talk about it. If indeed Priest Shimei was already here, it wouldn't be long before everyone would know. Maybe early next week there would be time.

Before dawn, Yanis woke and joined the milkers. Solomon was especially sad when he heard that Mr. Zebedee had passed. He had worked for him for many years before coming to apprentice at the farm

and knew him to be a great man. “Mr. Zebedee actually saved my life. My dad was sick, and my family was starving. Mr. Zebedee gave Samson and me jobs before we were really old enough to work. Then Jesus healed my dad. I was only eight when I started working at the Fish Shop. He assigned me to pick up rocks for net weights and he paid me generously and always sent home fish for our family to eat. He was a great man.”

Once the milking was finished, Yanis hurried back to Zebedee’s house which was not only packed with family, but also with Fish Shop workers and townspeople. Everyone was surprised that there were no dirges being sung. They were told that Zebedee hated that kind of music and Salome wanted joyous Psalms to be sung. So, his granddaughters were taking turns singing Psalms, and often the whole crowd would enter in and sing.

Jaden and Jonas asked Yanis if he would go with them to visit the homes of the other crewmembers who were killed. Yanis agreed but told them that he had another meeting at the tenth hour and couldn’t miss it. First, they wanted to speak with Zachary’s mother and express sympathy for the loss of Saul. A man answered the door and said that he was her husband. He thanked the men for their sympathy, but they could hear her screaming that she didn’t need their sympathy since they had killed her only son. They walked away and stopped to talk. “I guess, in some ways, it was my fault. I was the one who picked that crew so they could spend time with Peter,” said Jaden.

“Yes, but our Jehovah is big enough to protect them if He had chosen to. He chose not to protect them from the storm. That’s not something you can control. You are not Jehovah,” said Yanis. “And you don’t know but they may have listened to Peter and your dad this time.”

“I’m okay with Dad’s death. I mean, he’s in Heaven and much better off. I wouldn’t want him to suffer in his old age. But these other men were young and had families, and they didn’t know about Jesus. I think that will haunt me to the end of my life. When we open the Fish Shop again, I want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to hear about Jesus,” said Jonas.

“I would like that, too,” said Jaden.

Yanis said, “I’ll be glad to help you with that whenever you want to talk about it. They should have the freedom to attend or not, but you could offer a class during working hours and actually pay them to listen.”

“There’s going to be a lot of changes at the shop that I don’t even want to think about right now. I don’t know where I’ll get six more fishermen. We’ve wanted to expand to more ships before but could never get enough crew trained. I’m feeling overwhelmed.”

“Well, right now, you need to decide how you can best minister to hurting families. You may encounter more anger.”

“One house we don’t have to go to is Laban’s. Laila, Elam, and Shem are all at Mother’s house right now. I know Laila’s grieving, but life is going to be easier for her with Laban gone. I think he was pretty

abusive to her. Since her mother died a couple of years ago, she's been taking care of all three of her brothers."

"Guys, I've only got time to visit one more family. Can we go there now?"

"Sure, this next house is close." Jaben knocked on the door and asked if they could visit for a minute. The woman invited them in. She had two little children, but there were two young men who seemed to be helping her pack even though it was the Sabbath.

"Do you have a place to go?" Jonas asked gently.

"Yes. We'll be moving in with my youngest brother. He and his wife have room for us, and they can sell the house so I can pay off some debts. I'm sorry for the loss of your dad. He was a good man."

"Thank you. If there's anything you need, please let us know," said Jaden. "We will be praying for you as you get settled. Your husband was a good worker and will be missed. Shalom."

"Shalom."

After they left the house, Yanis said, "That was better, but I really have got to run. Can you tell Jenay that I've gone on to my meeting? I'll be back after Sabbath."

"Sure. And thanks. We'll visit the other families tomorrow."



Yanis shared with the men what had happened to Zebedee and his six crewmen. Everyone expressed their sympathy. But the primary concern was the news of the new priest in town. When they told Jesse, Ira, and Tobias, they were stunned by the news. They all promised to take extra time to pray next week for Jehovah to reveal His plan to the rabbis. They spent most of their time preparing for the rabbis' camping trip. Ira and Tobias would pack some food bags for them, and they would plan on fishing as their primary food source. The three of them would meet at Yanis' farm one hour after sunrise. That would give them time to eat breakfast with their families before leaving. Yanis told them to just follow the rocks that were the start of a fence, and it would lead them to a stream and good camping area. Jesse would stay behind to run his business. He would also keep his eyes and ears opened and come to get the men if necessary. Yanis apologized for not being available but felt that his responsibility was to be with Jenay. The men agreed.

Once they had everything settled for the trip, Yanis prayed a prayer of blessing over each one present and asked Jehovah to bless their time of worship and seeking His face this week. It was late before they dispersed and Yanis returned to Zebedee's house.





As the Sabbath came to a close, Jenay began to softly sing Psalm 23. The others joined in.

The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside the still waters.  
He restores my soul;  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil;  
For You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup runs over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (NKJV)

Benji prayed for all the families that were affected by this tragedy and asked for Jehovah to fill them with His peace during this time of loss. "And please help Grandmother and all of us as we grieve. In Jesus' name I pray." Soon everyone had said goodnight except for a small group of cousins who gathered around Grandmother Salome — Benji, Joseph, Jenay, Laila, Elam, and Shem.

"I miss Jonathan at times like this. I wish he wasn't so far away." Jonathan was Jenay's twin brother and they had spent many happy hours tagging along with Grandpa Zebedee while he taught them about fishing and boats and life. And that started the cousins sharing happy memories. It was nearly midnight when Yanis returned.

They all stayed in guest rooms and got settled for the night. He apologized for being so late but said that he would explain later. She asked if he would cancel the women's group for her so she could concentrate on her family, and he agreed.

At dawn Yanis woke and decided to meet the men before they left on their retreat. He prayed with them and walked a little way into the woods with them before he returned to Zebedee's house. It was hard to sit still and visit when there was so much he wanted to accomplish at the farm. But then he remembered that Jesus always put people first. He asked Jehovah to show him how to minister. Around noon, Jaden and Jonas asked Yanis if he was ready to visit the remaining three families. Yanis walked with them and asked how they were doing. They both agreed that it helped to put it in Jehovah's hands and trust that He had done everything possible to reach these men.

“Maybe Peter preached and the whole crew came to know Jesus as Messiah,” said Jonas.

“We just have to release it and find our peace in trusting Him,” agreed Jaden. They visited the other three grieving families and found that all of them were packing and moving in with family members who would help them through this hard time. It gave them all a sense of peace to know that none of the new widows would be sold into slavery or have to deal with this alone.

Yanis asked, “Is this the first crew you’ve ever lost?”

“No.” They both replied.

“But it’s the first crew we’ve lost since we came to know Jesus as Messiah. I think I thought that bad things wouldn’t happen to us once we were following Jesus,” admitted Jonas.

“I’ve never thought about it, but I guess that’s what I believed, too,” agreed Jaden.

“It’s a common belief. But if you think about it, you know it’s not true. The followers in Jerusalem could tell you very quickly that bad things happen to His followers, and Jesus Himself taught that in this world we would have troubles. Then He said, ‘But don’t be afraid because I have overcome the world,’” said Yanis.

They returned to Zebedee’s place and found it more packed than when they left. The whole town had heard, and everyone wanted to express their love for Zebedee. It seemed there wasn’t a family in Capernaum that he hadn’t helped in some way.



Yanis ran to Elizabeth’s house to let her know that Jenay would not be meeting with them this week. He assured Elizabeth that Jenay was doing fine, especially since her parents had arrived late Monday night. She didn’t want to miss a second of time with her mother. This was an important family time and Elizabeth agreed. “I’ll lead the group. We need to be in prayer for our husbands to make wise decisions and let Jehovah guide them.”

“I am praying for all of you,” promised Yanis. “I wish Jenay could be with you today, but she can’t.”

“I understand, and I’m sure the other ladies will, too. Please give her a hug from all of us. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Yanis returned to Zebedee’s home and continued to be available to minister. He asked Jehovah to provide him wisdom to know when to speak about the new priest. He knew that this group would want to be praying, but there were always townspeople around.

Of course, Kayla couldn’t take her eyes off baby Abie. Jenay and her mother talked non-stop all day on Tuesday. On Wednesday they walked down to the beach with James, Yanis, and Abie just to be alone as a family. James told Yanis and Jenay about her twin brother Jonathan’s ministry with the Gentiles in Antioch. They talked of many

things and caught up on the happenings in Jerusalem, but Yanis still felt the Holy Spirit say it was not time to mention the new priest, so he obeyed.



On Thursday, Salome's servant Urias returned from Damascus. He reported to Salome and Jaden that he had located Zachary and Peter, and both expressed their sympathy to Salome and Laila, but did not feel they should leave their ministries at this time. They would visit as soon as possible. Zachary had promised to send a messenger to try to locate his dad, the Apostle Andrew, but had no idea if or when that would be successful. Salome thanked Urias for his service. Jaden walked to the barn with him and asked if Peter had indicated whether anyone on ship had accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

"He didn't mention it, sir. But I didn't ask. He said that he will probably be returning within the month, but he wasn't sure. He did express that he hoped you would take care of Laila for him."

"Thank you, Urias. I know it wasn't an easy assignment." They talked for a few minutes about how he had located Zachary and Peter, then Jaden returned to the house and let Urias care for the oxen.



Ruler Jairus and Rachel arrived back home from Damascus on Thursday morning so that they could take a few days to prepare for the Sabbath. Jairus sent one of his servants to let Joel know that they were back. Joel's servant said to tell Jairus that Joel and the other rabbis had taken a spiritual retreat and would return on Friday around noon.



The three rabbis had had an incredibly good week of prayer and felt fortified and ready for whatever lay ahead. But they had no clue what that would be. They felt certain that Priest Shimei would take over the synagogue this Sabbath and they wanted to warn Jairus and Rachel before then, if Meshullum had not found them. They also decided that they needed to let Jesse tell Miriam what to expect. On the last night of their retreat, as they sat around the campfire, they felt the Holy Spirit's presence in a special way. They felt strengthened and ready to return.

On Friday, after an early breakfast, they packed their bags and hiked back to Yanis' house. He wasn't at home, and they assumed he was still with Jenay grieving for Zebedee and the crew that was lost. They prayed again as they left Yanis' yard and felt led to go straight to Jairus' house to see if they were home yet.

Since they were walking right past Jesse's Mercantile Store they stopped and told him that after much prayer, they felt he should warn Miriam that Priest Shimei would probably be in charge tomorrow morning. She needed to be prepared for that.

Jesse asked if they could pray together, and they went into his back warehouse and prayed for wisdom to know how to tell Jairus and Rachel. They felt the Spirit was leading them to go home and get their wives and tell them all together. Elijah felt that it should just be the three friends and their wives because bringing Hava meant having to supervise the children and could make it more awkward. They agreed that the three original friends and their wives should be together. Jesse said he would take off early and talk with Miriam so she would be prepared.

The men all headed in different directions. Elijah went home to Hava. Joel went to ask Elizabeth to go with him to Jairus' house. She assured him that they had arrived home yesterday. But she hadn't visited with them yet. Talman went to get Sarah and she agreed to go with him.

Talman and Sarah met Joel and Elizabeth and they knocked on Jairus' door. He welcomed them in and called for Rachel. Hugs were given all around and everyone wanted to know how Ariel was. They were invited to sit in the living room, and they all chatted for a few minutes. Jairus stated, "This seems like something more than a welcome home party. I sense something is not right."

"First, you need to know that Zebedee, two of his nephews, and four other crewmen were lost at sea last week. Yanis would have been here with us, except this is their family day of mourning and he needed to be with Jenay."

"Oh, how terrible for Jenay and Salome," expressed Rachel.

"Yes, but there's something more that you think Yanis should be here to tell me. I know you guys too well. Spill it!" demanded Jairus.

Joel spoke first and asked if Meshullum had contacted him while he was in Damascus.

"No. Why? Is this something to do with the Sanhedrin?"

Joel apologized for having to be the bearer of the news so soon upon their arrival home. Jairus insisted that they wanted to know what was happening and what was wrong. The two men explained what they had learned almost two weeks ago and how they had spent the time in prayer. Talman also told them that they had seen a large caravan of ox carts coming into town on Sunday of this week which might mean that something could happen at the synagogue this Sabbath. "We felt we needed to warn you before it happens."

A knock at the door startled everyone. Yanis apologized for scaring them but said he wanted to assure them of his prayers. He reminded them that when Jesus was asked to leave, He left without any emotion except sadness. Yanis couldn't stay long but promised to be in constant prayer for them. He confessed that he hadn't told Jenay yet but hoped to this evening. Her parents and much of her family were together, and he hated to burden her with it. He promised she

would know before the Sabbath was over. He returned to Zebedee's house to join the family for Sabbath dinner.



Friday was the eighth day of mourning and was traditionally considered a family day. The townspeople allowed the family a day to grieve alone. What a sweet day it was. The fact that Zebedee was not there left a shocking void in their family. He had indeed led his family well, and everyone had stories of his love. Everyone felt that they were his favorite. The day passed all too quickly as they sang together, worshipped together, and remembered.

As the sun set, Grandmother Salome lit the Sabbath candles and Jaden led in the Sabbath prayer. Everyone was crying as they realized that never again would they hear Zebedee's blessings on them. It was a hard moment. The servants served a wonderful Sabbath meal in the courtyard, and the family gradually transitioned to their usual laughter and joy. Jonas called the group to gather around and invited James and John to speak. They briefly caught the group up on their trip to visit Jonathan and told how the Holy Spirit was moving all along the Great Sea to lead followers to reach out to Gentiles. They shared that some Gentiles were trying to reach the Romans who lived in Jerusalem and were excited about what the Holy Spirit was accomplishing. "I believe there will be great changes as the gospel is shared all over the world." Jonas called on Abira to lead them in a Psalm and then asked Yanis to close in prayer.

Yanis left soon afterward to return to the farm so that he could help with Sabbath milking. He wished he could be at the synagogue with the men but knew he wouldn't be through in time to be there and didn't want to make a scene by walking in late. He woke early and went on to the barn to get started with the milking. Soon Mr. Ezekiel and Solomon arrived to help. They could tell that Yanis was deep in thought and so mostly milked in silence. They all missed Jenay singing the Psalms to them and the goats as they milked.

## Chapter 8

Pollux and Gaius were talking together on the rooftop. From the initial group they were now ready to launch forty new Roman groups. They were baptizing the new followers in the Sea of Galilee this morning, and it was indeed growing like wildfire as more and more Gentiles were signing up for the classes. They even had a waiting list for some of the groups because they didn't have enough leaders. They were praising Jehovah for His calling them to Capernaum. They were amazed at what He had accomplished in only two rotations of classes. He had blessed them here, and their children were settling in and making friends.



Jairus and Rachel talked and prayed together most of the night. They felt ready to face whatever Jehovah asked of them. They had agreed that Jehovah was good and would give them strength as they faced the future with Him. They ate breakfast and prepared for the Sabbath morning. They dressed as usual and began their walk to the synagogue. They always arrived a little early to make sure everything was in readiness. But this morning, instead of finding an empty building, they found an almost full floor. There was a priest and four priest trainees sitting on the platform greeting the people. Jairus squeezed Rachel's hand and she walked slowly up the stairs to the women's balcony. There she could hear, but not see, what was happening on the main floor. She sat on the nearest bench because her knees were about to buckle. She shut her eyes and began to pray earnestly for her husband. She knew that this would be the day that he would either be ousted quietly, or possibly be killed. She prayed for his courage and for her own. She realized that she could hardly breathe. She was so grateful when Elizabeth and Sarah arrived and sat beside her. Miriam and Hava arrived later and sat in front of her as if to protect her from the happenings. But nothing could relieve the pain of waiting to see what would happen. Rachel just continued to sit and pray.

Ruler Jairus approached Priest Shimei and welcomed him graciously. Priest Shimei smiled condescendingly. "Jairus, I will be in charge of the synagogue from now on and your services will not be needed. I suggest that you leave without making a scene."

"I am not welcome to worship here?" Jairus asked.

"No, you are not. You have made your beliefs clear. You may either walk out or be thrown out," Shimei whispered threateningly.

"I intend no harm to you or to my people. I will leave peacefully as you have requested." And with that Jairus turned to leave. As he walked out, he spoke with the rabbis and asked them to stay. He

walked out with his head held high and was amazed at the strength that Jehovah supplied. It was as if he were totally filled with an amazing supernatural power. He stopped just outside the door and asked the next woman who entered to please tell his wife that he would be resting at home. She looked puzzled but promised to tell Rachel. Rachel immediately stood and slipped out the door leaving the other ladies sitting. She assured them that she was fine and quickly joined Jairus. They walked home together slowly. They sat in their quiet house in silence. Jairus finally shared with her what had been said and that he had felt an amazing sense of Jesus' very presence with him. He said that he was so grateful for the preparation that Meshullum had provided. Otherwise, he might have resisted and found himself dead. They talked about what this might mean to the school. But there was no way of knowing until they were told whether he still had a job there. He began to weep as he thought about his students and how they would be forced to learn the Scripture under the Pharisees' interpretation. He knew then that he wanted to teach students to follow Jesus. That was more important to him than leading the synagogue.

Around noon, Jairus' home began to fill not only with their family and the group, but also with alumni who were seeking answers to what the future would hold. Many of them said that they had become followers of Jesus and would not want to attend the synagogue without Jairus leading it. Jairus asked them to be patient while he sorted this out. He warned them that any sudden departure from the synagogue could lead to accusations of treason against the Sanhedrin. He encouraged them to pray and let the Holy Spirit guide them and to visit him later after things had cooled down a little. Once again, he was so grateful for Meshullum's warning that had allowed him to prepare for this event.



On Sabbath afternoon, while Abie was taking her nap, Yanis asked if Jenay, her parents, and her Uncle John and Aunt Marta could walk to the beach with him. Jenay asked Laila to watch Abie and they left the house. Yanis led them to the rocks behind Elijah's house. James and John remembered coming here many times. As they settled on the rocks so that they could hear each other, Yanis apologized for pulling them away from the family. "I have an update that I need to share with Jenay, and I felt that the apostles needed to hear it, too. It is not good news for Capernaum."

"Oh, Yanis. What's wrong?" cried Jenay. Yanis told them what the rabbis had told him about Meshullum's visit. He shared what the rabbis had seen last Sunday, and what they suspected would happen this morning. "I haven't checked on them today. After a week of prayer, they did not feel that their lives were in danger, but they know that Priest Shimei will take over the synagogue and school. They don't know whether they will have jobs or be forced to relocate. Capernaum

is filling up with Pharisees who are leaving Jerusalem, and they intend on making trouble for followers. We need your prayers and support. Jenay and I could find ourselves in trouble for leading the followers of Jesus.”

James put his arm around Yanis’ shoulders and assured him, “Followers of Jesus are not immune to persecution, but don’t forget that Jesus promised to not leave us as orphans. He will help us through it, or He will take us home to live with Him — which is a far better outcome!”

“But what will happen to our friends? You don’t know what happened at the synagogue this morning?” asked Jenay.

“No, I wanted to be here with you. It’s out of my control. The rabbis have been praying all week and were as prepared as they could be.”

“That’s why they needed you so much this week. I should have known there was something up.”

“I have waited to tell you the news so that you could minister to your family, but we should be available to our friends when your parents leave tomorrow.”

“We need to leave at sunrise. We will be praying for whatever happens here, and we will report it to the other apostles,” said James.

“Losing Dad is bad, but losing Ruler Jairus and all the rabbis would be a severe loss for the future of Capernaum,” said John.

“I need to leave now and meet with them. Jenay, I’ll let you share with them about our group unless you’ve already told them. But I need to run.” He left them, walking as quickly as was allowed on the Sabbath, and headed to Joel’s house.

Jenay walked slowly back up to the house with her parents and aunt and uncle. She told them about the group that Yanis led and then about the women’s group that she was leading. It made her parents so proud to hear of their ministry to these vital leaders of Capernaum. But they also warned her of the dangers. “I know, Dad. I’ve watched you all my life! Thank you so much for trusting me to come here and serve with Yanis. It hasn’t always been easy, and I’ve never worked so hard in my life, but they have been good years, and I think I’ve grown a lot. That group of ladies are the ones who got me through Abie’s birth. I just wish we all lived closer.” They continued to talk until they were back at the house.

As the Sabbath ended, all the families began to migrate to their own homes. Goodbyes were said and everyone promised to pray for James and Kayla and John and Marta as they traveled home tomorrow. Salome had arranged for Noah to drive them back to Jerusalem. They would leave at dawn tomorrow, and Jenay and Abie would stay to see them off.





Yanis met the men's group and heard what happened at synagogue that morning. He felt it was a good beginning — at least they were not dead, arrested, or run out of town. They decided to meet for prayer every morning until they heard the plan. They wanted to be tuned and ready to obey whatever they needed to do. They rotated houses so that it wouldn't be so obvious that they were gathering. It felt strange to be afraid to be caught praying. But they knew that their lives were still in danger if they did or said the wrong thing. They prayed, but simply heard that they should wait. They were specifically praying about whether Jehovah approved of them teaching under the new Priest's rules. Since they had been abiding by the Sanhedrin rules anyway, they didn't see that as a major problem. The real question was whether they would be allowed to teach. If not, then they would need to relocate quickly. They waited but heard nothing from Priest Shimei. It was a long and stressful summer break.



Jaden had found four new men for his fishing crew and then rearranged the men and their assignments so that all four boats fished close to shore, while only one boat went further out with the round net. It cut back on their supply of fish, but until he could find more fishermen, he had no choice.

Jaden and Jonas discussed when and if one of them needed to move in with Mother and help her, but decided that for right now, she had excellent servants and Laila was visiting her as often as she could. Uncle Kenan had come for a visit early in the summer, and Salome had really enjoyed seeing him. He had encouraged her and promised to visit more often. Apostles continued to stop in for short visits, and the new priest had not hassled them in any way.



When it was only one week before school should start for the fall semester, it was decided that Rabbi Joel would approach Priest Shimei on Wednesday at noon while everyone else was praying. The ladies' group would be meeting and as many of the men as possible would gather to pray for him. Joel said he felt like Queen Esther going before the King to plead for her people. They knew that he would have to listen to Priest Shimei blast him for allowing the boys to talk about Jesus on the Passover retreat. He also knew that because they were all followers of Jesus and had decided to not deny it, they could be arrested immediately. If they were stoned by the synagogue, who would notice? It was a terrifying thought to be responsible for the lives of the other three rabbis, but they all agreed that the Holy Spirit was saying it was time to get it settled.

On Wednesday, Rabbi Joel walked to the synagogue and knocked. One of the priests in training answered the door and

escorted Joel into Priest Shimei's office. The decor was elaborate and expensive. Rabbi Joel was not invited to sit. He said, "Priest Shimei, I simply came to inquire as to how the Hebrew School would be staffed. I need to let my rabbis know if their services are no longer required, or if they should be preparing for a new school year." He, too, was amazed at the supernatural strength that was flowing through him. He sensed that Priest Shimei was actually afraid of him, and he was determined to be obedient to the Holy Spirit within him.

"They are not your staff. You have not kept them in line. I will be in charge of them, and one wrong move from any one of you will result in all of your dismissals. Do you understand?"

"So, you want all the rabbis to continue to teach for the coming year, but you will be in charge. When will we know which students and what subjects we will be teaching?" Priest Shimei became frustrated, and Rabbi Joel realized that he didn't have a clue as to how to run a Hebrew School. "Would it be helpful to you if I meet with the rabbis, set up the class roster, and give the teaching assignments? I could submit that to you on Friday and let you make any changes that you desire before school starts on Sunday."

"Yes, that would be agreeable. Your reports have been clean, and I have received no complaints of your work during school hours. But let your rabbis know that any activity with the students outside of class will be closely monitored."

"Yes, sir. Of course," said Rabbi Joel. "I will submit my outline to you on Friday. Shalom."

"Shalom."

Rabbi Joel walked away from the meeting in absolute awe at the miracle that had just taken place. He knew that it was only by the power of the Holy Spirit that he had said and done the right things at the right time. He was screaming on the inside but quietly striding toward home. *Praise You, Father! Praise You, Jesus! Praise You, Holy Spirit!* When he entered the back courtyard he found the entire group, both men and women, still on their knees praying for him. He began to weep, and his body began to shake as he realized what Jehovah had accomplished. Everyone gathered around him thinking the worst. Servants brought him juice to strengthen him, and he sat on a courtyard bench and told them all about the encounter and what had been decided. They all agreed that Priest Shimei was the one who should be worried, not them. He would be surrounded daily by men who knew the truth, and they had Jehovah guiding them step by step. The priest was in danger of learning the truth himself! Joel called a meeting of all the rabbis to meet at the school tomorrow to begin preparations for the new year. Everyone walked home praising Jehovah and knowing that He was up to something good.

Rabbi Joel met with Priest Shimei on Friday to submit his plans. Priest Shimei looked over the plans and began to make changes. "Why do you list Rabbi Talman? He is not a trained rabbi, is he?"

“No, sir. But he does a great job with the older students preparing them for business. His class focuses on applying The Law and The Prophets to life.”

“I don’t want Talman teaching my students anything. He is not loyal to the Sanhedrin and will be a distraction from our purpose.”

“Yes, sir. I will dismiss him. Will you or one of your priests-in-training be teaching instead, sir? We will need four rabbis to adequately teach the students.”

The priest ignored Rabbi Joel’s question and stated, “I noticed that you are limiting the roster to fifty students and there have been complaints that students are being turned away. I will announce on the Sabbath that the school will accept all boys who are between five and thirteen years of age.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I don’t see why three rabbis should not be sufficient to cover a town this small.”

“Yes, sir. Would you make an announcement that they should register on Sabbath afternoon? I will wait to meet them in the back courtyard of the synagogue.”

“That will be fine. Shalom.”

“Shalom,” replied Joel, feeling that he had just been totally defeated.

He walked home slowly and told Elizabeth he was going to Jairus’ house. As he expected, Jairus and Elijah were waiting for his report. They could tell that this encounter was difficult. Joel told them what had happened. His voice was dull and dispassionate. “You know that there is a possibility that we will have seventy or eighty students,” stated Jairus heatedly.

“And we won’t know until Sabbath afternoon!” complained Elijah. “How do we plan anything?”

“And I’ve got to go talk with Talman, and let him know he’s not teaching,” said Joel.

“Well, at least it won’t affect his income since we’ve never paid him anyway,” said Jairus.

“The students will be disappointed.”

“How many students can you realistically take, Elijah?” asked Joel.

“I was really enjoying my twenty, but I have some experience now and could probably handle thirty, but not many more than that, because they are just learning the discipline and they swarm on me. I guess I will have to be a lot more strict to handle that many. Can we say absolutely no more than thirty?”

“But where will we put them?” asked Jairus.

“I usually teach outside on pretty days. But rainy days are going to be a mess. Gentlemen, I think we have ourselves a problem.”

“Well, we’ve seen the Holy Spirit give us solutions before. We’ll just have to pray for His intervention. I’ve got to go talk with Talman.”

“Do you want me to go with you?” volunteered Jairus.

“Sure. I’d appreciate the company. I’m going to go to his bank so I can be home for dinner. He’s going to be so disappointed.”

“Or maybe relieved!” said Elijah. “He prefers to work with no more than ten students!”

“That’s true. Shalom.”

“Shalom.” Elijah started home and the other two rabbis walked to Talman’s bank. As they talked, Talman was perfectly at peace about not teaching, but very concerned for the situation that his three friends were in. He promised to pray for them and agreed that he would help them with deciding what to do with the roster once they knew how many students would be attending.

On Thursday morning, the men’s group met for prayer and the others heard the report. Yanis encouraged them to keep tuned to the Holy Spirit’s leading, and to keep their eyes opened for a miracle.

But the miracle they hoped for didn’t come. When the group met at the tenth hour on the Sabbath, Joel reported that they had one hundred and six students enrolled. Yanis led them in a time of worship and prayer for guidance. The other men left while Talman, Yanis, and the three rabbis worked on the roster. They had a quick post-Sabbath dinner and another short time of prayer and then started looking at the names and ages of the boys. Seven of the names were duplicates and they were able to bring the number down to ninety-nine. They assigned thirty of the youngest ones to Elijah. They split the other group into ages and gave Jairus the middle group and Joel the oldest. Then they began to discuss space. The weather was great right now, so Elijah would primarily meet in the back courtyard. As they prayed, Joel felt that he should ask if his group could use the synagogue for their space. There should be room either on the main floor or in the women’s balcony to teach thirty-five students. He would ask Priest Shimei in the morning at the opening ceremony. It would mean that the rabbis wouldn’t be available to help each other, but they wouldn’t be packed like sardines either. They spent some time praising Jehovah and asking for Him to open Priest Shimei’s heart to their suggestion. They were learning that while the Holy Spirit was leading, things didn’t always turn out as they expected. They needed to trust and not depend on their own understanding.

Sunday morning came way too quickly, and the rabbis all arrived early for school. Rabbi Joel had his classroom area packed up so that he could move to the synagogue if permission was granted. He hoped that Priest Shimei would arrive early so that they could talk before the opening ceremony. But it didn’t happen. Later, Joel explained to Yanis that it was a blessing. As each student arrived, he was instructed to stand by his teacher and wait on Priest Shimei. The parents were asked to wait outside since there would be no room inside for everyone. By the time Priest Shimei and his assistants arrived, he could only stand in the doorway of the school. The school was totally packed shoulder to shoulder with boys who could not sit. He stood in the doorway and prayed a prayer of blessing on the school year. He dismissed the parents and started to leave. Rabbi Joel called after

him. "Priest Shimei, as you can see there are more boys than we can accommodate here, and they will not be able to learn in this environment. Would you prefer that we use the main floor of the synagogue, or the women's balcony to teach the oldest students?"

Priest Shimei felt trapped and his face showed it, but he also knew that he would have a lot of very unhappy parents if he didn't find a solution. "The women's balcony should be available, but make sure that the boys clean up every day. I don't want the women complaining."

"Yes, sir."

When he returned inside, Rabbi Elijah had taken his group to the outside courtyard. He was assigning the returning boys in the group to assist the new students. He would have them work in teams and hopefully not lose any boys today.

Rabbi Joel told Rabbi Jairus the plan and asked him to be available if Elijah needed assistance. Then he instructed the thirty-five oldest boys to carry the bags of teaching material to the synagogue. The balcony gave them enough space to spread out and sit on benches, but it was awkward since there was no place for Joel to stand to lecture. He finally settled on standing at one end and having the boys sit in the floor between the benches.

It was not ideal, but it would work. They would have to work in groups to be able to use the scrolls, but it was doable. The main thing he would have to contend with was his own fears that everything he said would be overheard by the priests below. He prayed that he could teach confidently and without feeling constrained.

Rabbi Jairus got the boys started with his first lecture on interpretation. He read a Scripture to them, and they discussed it. It was awkward to have so many students, and it required him to find new ways to include all the boys.

At the end of the school day, Yanis and Talman met them at Joel's house. They reviewed the day and admitted that while they were totally exhausted, it would probably work. They prayed for a few minutes to thank Jehovah for His presence and for providing space for all the boys. Rainy days would still be a problem, but they would deal with that when the time came.



The fall passed quickly. The men's group changed their time to the ninth hour so that they could allow the rabbis to prepare for a new week of school. Joel had requested that Rabbi Jairus be allowed to attend the synagogue because of his influence on his students. Priest Shimei assented smugly and reminded Joel that one wrong move and they would all be dismissed.

## Chapter 9

Corina was nervous about tonight. Not only would they be hosting the leaders of all the groups in Capernaum, but the elder from Cana and his wife would be joining them. It would be an exciting celebration now that they had forty groups meeting. Corina had volunteered to host but hadn't realized how large the meeting would be. Now she was fretting that they would not have enough benches. Salacia had sent over her kitchen servants to help with the cooking and serving.

Magnus, one of the new leaders, introduced his dad, Lucas, to Gaius and explained that he was the elder from Cana. The men began to talk intently about the groups. Lucas was thrilled with their progress in Capernaum. Soon the courtyard was filled with people, and Gaius called Corina to his side to welcome the guests. He introduced Lucas and Amata who were the elders from Cana. "We'll hear from Lucas later, but let's feed him first!" Gaius led in a prayer of thanks for the food, and everyone took their seats. Some of the ladies had to share a bench, but there was much laughter and joy among this group. Lucas was pleased with what he saw.

The group moved the tables after dinner, and couples shared the benches so everyone could hear. Lucas walked to the front of the group and looked at the forty group leaders. Tears came to his eyes, and he choked up as he began to tell them about a Jewish man and his wife who had first told him about Jesus. "Now the message of Jesus is spreading like wildfire among the Romans. If you have forty groups meeting, I'm guessing that it won't be long before every Roman in Capernaum will hear the good news of Jesus. We cannot control who will invite Him to be their Messiah, but it is our job to spread the message. I'm so proud of you. I remember Orly, that Jewish man who designed the material that we use, saying that someday we would not know the names of all the people being reached for Jesus. Orly and his wife are ministering in Joppa, not only to Romans, but to all the different cultures of this world. I want to encourage you to teach your future groups to listen closely to the Holy Spirit's leading. There are needs in every community all over the world. If the Holy Spirit leads you to relocate, don't be afraid, but move forward with confidence. Look how Pollux and Salacia, and Gaius and Corina have been blessed for their obedience. That's my challenge to you." Long after the others had gone home, Lucas and Magnus stayed and visited with Gaius and Pollux. Lucas answered questions and encouraged them in their ministry.



"I don't see that we have a choice," stated Joel. "Priest Shimei practically ordered us to take our annual trip to Passover. He felt it was

a good experience for the students and saw no reason to stop now. But we can't mention Jesus on the trip, and we can't open it to alumni."

"And we can't stay in the olive grove, and I would just as soon stay home," grumbled Jairus.

"I know, but remember, one wrong move and we're out," said Joel.

"I've actually been surprised that this year has gone as well as it has," Jairus admitted. "Jehovah has been good. I just always looked forward to the trip because it was the only time we were allowed to share about Jesus. It was satisfying. Now, it will just be a long hard trip."

"Do you think Priest Shimei is trying to get us to go to Jerusalem because he thinks we'll mess up and he can kill us there?" asked Elijah.

"Now, that's a pleasant thought. What will we do while we're there? You know we will be constantly watched," said Jairus.

"Hey, what if we just stayed in the campground outside of Jerusalem. We could go to the temple one day and the rest of the time claim to just be waiting on the students," suggested Elijah.

"That might work, and we could get some rest," agreed Joel.

When Rabbi Joel announced the upcoming trip to Jerusalem for Passover, he was surprised that all thirty-five of his students signed up with their dads. This would be their largest group yet. He guessed the approval of the priest made it a special event. When he invited Priest Shimei to walk with them, the priest indignantly assured him that he would travel by oxcart. The rabbis were as eager as the students for school to be out for the Passover break on Friday.



Shem, Peter's youngest son, turned thirteen during the first week of Nisan, and Jaden planned a family celebration for him since Peter would be unable to attend. Shem had worked for Uncle Zebedee since he was eight and was eager to be a part of a fishing crew. Like his dad, the Apostle Peter, he had fishing in his blood. Jaden thought he would make a good fishing partner with Benji and assigned them together. It was not an official apprenticeship, but an informal mentoring that benefited both young men since Shem was a strong follower of Jesus.



When Yanis heard that he couldn't travel with the students to Jerusalem for Passover, he asked Jesse if he wanted to walk with him. He also asked if he would mind him opening the invitation to Salome's group. In the end, it was decided that Yanis, Jesse, Benji, and Hezekiah, one of Salome's servants, would travel together. The four men would leave on Wednesday and camp in the olive grove.



The men's group on Sabbath afternoon focused on prayers for the trip to Jerusalem with the schoolboys. Special prayers were requested that the trip would be safe not only for the students, but especially for the rabbis. They felt that they were walking into a trap but couldn't figure out how to avoid it. Yanis and Jesse told the group that they, too, were traveling to Jerusalem. They didn't see any reason why they couldn't check on the group occasionally as they would be traveling the same route at the same time. It made the rabbis feel more secure knowing that their group members would be close by. They could remind them to keep focused on what the Holy Spirit was telling them to do. They were determined to follow Priest Shimei and the Sanhedrin's rules exactly. They felt that that was what the Holy Spirit was instructing them to do, but they wanted to be perfectly tuned in case He had further instructions for them.

Early Wednesday morning, the students, the dads, the three rabbis, and three donkeys loaded with food left the synagogue amid much fanfare. The four friends left Jesse's Westside Mercantile Store before the students. All day long they continued to see the other group and called out their hellos. Since Jesse and Benji were alumni of the school, they very casually visited with the rabbis and made sure not to mention the name of Jesus. Jesse knew Joel's route by heart, so his group decided to stop one campground before the schoolboys so that they could worship freely. They waved to the students and rabbis as they passed them on Wednesday afternoon. They did the same on Thursday. But on Friday afternoon, Jesse and Yanis deliberately selected the same camping area where they knew the students would be staying. They chose the farthest campground away from the stream. It was almost hidden from the main camping area. Soon they heard the student group arriving and collecting firewood for their bonfire. The four men made their way to the stream and caught enough fish for dinner and casually went back to their camping area. Before sundown, the entire camping area was packed with travelers. Each group was quickly preparing their dinner before the Sabbath. The smells were wonderful as they cooked over the open fires. Prayers for the Sabbath were being offered at each site. As night fell, the schoolboys were surrounded by people from all over the world singing praises to Jehovah. Many of the songs were about climbing Mount Moriah to the temple and were called Psalms of Ascent. Many were about the coming Messiah. And the night was filled with joy and peace and excitement about spending the Sabbath while on their way to Jerusalem. Rabbi Joel, Rabbi Jairus, and Rabbi Elijah led the students in quoting several passages of Scripture and then Rabbi Jairus prayed a prayer of blessing over them for a good night's rest. All day on the Sabbath, the students played in the water, skipped rocks, and did short hikes in the woods surrounding them. Soon after breakfast, one of the dads asked Ruler Jairus if he could take a walk



with him and answer some questions. “Certainly,” he replied. They walked a little way from camp and the dad asked if he would tell him about Jesus. Jairus answered firmly, “I cannot mention His precious name.”

“I understand, but I heard you talk about Messiah two years ago when I came on this trip, and I was hoping I could get answers.”

“Sir, I am under Priest Shimei’s orders and cannot. But you may know the two alumni that are camping in this same campground. Yanis and Jesse would be glad to visit with you.”

By the end of the day, Yanis and Jesse had spoken with four dads and their sons about Messiah. They were rejoicing that one dad and son had become followers of Jesus and had promised to meet with Yanis when they returned to Capernaum. They also understood the danger of mentioning their decision to anyone else.

On Sunday and Monday the schoolboys continued to travel closely with Yanis and Jesse, but increased their distance as they approached Jerusalem. The rabbis planned to remain in their last camping place for the week. They would only travel into Jerusalem to refresh their supplies and make their offering at the temple. Yanis and his three fellow travelers were looking forward to staying in the olive grove and visiting with Yanis’ friends. Benji was torn between staying in the olive grove, or going to his Uncle James and Uncle John’s house. He knew he would be welcome, but finally decided to celebrate with Yanis, Jesse, and Hezekiah. They all felt renewed and refreshed by the fellowship that they experienced in the grove with large groups of followers. They celebrated the Galilean Seder and then the Judean Seder the following evening.

On Thursday morning the four young men went to the temple and heard the Apostles James and John preaching on the temple steps. Afterward they visited with the apostles. Benji was James and John’s nephew, and James was Yanis’ father-in-law. Yanis reported that Jenay and baby Abie were spending the week with Grandmother Salome and all three were doing fine. James and John invited the men to dinner and they gladly accepted. Yanis reported that the rabbis in Capernaum had been allowed to teach under Priest Shimei, but they were under incredible pressure and weren’t even entering Jerusalem for fear of being “associated” with followers of Jesus. James and John were concerned. They knew Priest Shimei and felt that Yanis and all the rabbis were in serious danger. “Could you show us this camping place? We’d like to encourage the rabbis and show our support. We’ll walk out there with you tomorrow morning. Could we meet you at the entrance to the olive grove at sunrise? It’s the safest time to travel.” They agreed and said their goodnights.

An hour before dawn, Hezekiah and Yanis woke the other two men. They ate a quick breakfast and made their way out of the grove. As they approached the temple they saw James and John walking toward them. They quietly greeted each other and James handed Yanis a jar of wine to carry. Then they quietly left town. When they arrived, they found Jairus, Joel, and Elijah lying on their blankets

staring at the cloudless sky. They sat up quickly when they realized that someone was approaching. Yanis grinned and said, "If you can't come to the party, we'll bring the party to you!" James and John led all of them to cross the stream and showed them a small grassy area that was the perfect place to hide. They laid down several bags of food their servants had prepared as well as a couple of jars of wine. The men enjoyed sweet fellowship and appreciated the apostles taking time to minister to them. James and John reminded Jairus that they had been to his home with Jesus on the day that Jesus healed his little girl.

"Did you know that that little girl is married to Zachary and is serving in Damascus?" asked Yanis.

"Small world!" exclaimed John.

They discussed having the new priest in town. "I don't understand why Jehovah would ask us to remain in Capernaum, but tell us to keep quiet. It doesn't make sense," said Jairus.

"I don't want to uproot my family and leave. But it doesn't seem very productive to remain," shared Elijah.

"And yet, you told me that two men have accepted Jesus as their Messiah on this trip without you having to break the priest's or the Holy Spirit's rules," reminded John.

"Yes, and we talked to three other dads and their sons. So, we may see a new group forming on the way home," said Yanis. "I'm thinking of meeting with them out at the farm on Sabbath about noon. I would think it would be relatively safe. I just don't know whether to teach them to follow Jesus' instructions to tell the whole world, or to follow the Holy Spirit's instructions for us to keep quiet."

"I think you need to teach them to obey whatever the Holy Spirit tells them. We can't predict where He will lead them or what He may ask of them. That's not our responsibility. Our job is to make sure they know how to listen and obey quickly," said James.

"That's a good reminder. Just like I could speak when the rabbis couldn't, maybe Jehovah's plan is for these new followers to lead all of Capernaum to Jesus," said Jesse.

"We need to get back into the city before Sabbath. It's been good to fellowship with you, and the groups here in Jerusalem have been praying for you. I can't imagine the stress you are under, but Jehovah knows and cares and He will instruct you in the way you should go. He will counsel you with His eye upon you. May Jehovah bless you and keep you in His care," said the Apostle James. The six of them left the rabbis and walked back into Jerusalem. They quickly said their goodbyes at the olive grove entrance. The rabbis agreed that they had not felt so supported since they had left Nicodemus' reunion six years ago — the year Jesus was crucified. They started remembering good times with Nicodemus and wondered what had happened to him and his students. They felt relaxed and refreshed.

On Sunday, the rabbis walked into Jerusalem with their donkeys and restocked their supplies for the trip home. Sunday afternoon all the students and their dads returned to the camping area ready for the

journey home. The campfire was lively with discussion that first night. The students asked questions and shared their impressions of their first Passover sacrifice. On Monday morning, they started down the mountain.

Yanis, Jesse, Benji, and Hezekiah were about an hour behind them because they left from the olive grove. It was Wednesday before they caught up with the group. They greeted each other and inquired if they had enjoyed the Passover celebration. One of the dads casually asked if they had had a good Passover. Yanis replied, "Yes, it was very good. We enjoyed time with many of our friends who also follow Jesus. We got to visit with the Apostle James, who is my father-in-law, and had a good visit. I lived in Jerusalem after the crucifixion, so I have many friends who still live there."

"Hurry up, you two. I want to get to camp. My feet are killing me," called Benji. "I'm a fisherman, not a hiker!" They passed the other group but since they knew Rabbi Joel's plans, they were able to select the same camp site. Again, they selected a place that would put them out of sight from the campers but require them to walk nearby to reach the stream. If anyone so desired, they could talk with them without being seen. They got their bonfire going and walked to the stream to catch some fish. By the time they had caught enough fish, the student group had arrived and were eating their dinner. They said hello and returned to their camp. After dark, as they had hoped, one of the dads and his son came to ask questions. They assured them that they were welcome to learn more about Jesus before they made a decision on whether to invite Him to be their Messiah. Yanis asked if they would like to bring their family out to the farm on the Sabbath. He and his wife would be available about the fifth hour. They agreed to meet then and hurried back to their blankets. The four prayed about whether to be available the next night or not. "The other two dads who had questions are regular customers at my store, so I think they can find me if they want to talk," said Jesse.

"I would say it would be safer for everyone if we just keep walking and not try to rendezvous with the group again. We may be getting a little too close to Capernaum for it to look unplanned," agreed Yanis. They decided to sleep a little later tomorrow since they had been rushing to try to catch up.



Jenay and Abie greeted Yanis with a hot meal and wanted to hear all of his news from Jerusalem and her parents. They talked long after the lamp had burned out. Then all day Friday, they continued to remember things to share with each other. Jenay was excited about the two families that would be coming to visit on the Sabbath and said she would prepare some juice and fruit to share. Yanis had no idea how many guests would be coming, but Jenay felt there would be plenty of room to either sit in the courtyard or just sit in the grass in the yard. They really had no room inside, but they had seating for eight in

the courtyard thanks to Yanis' benches. Yanis reminded her that Jesus didn't worry about such things. He assured her it would be fine.

On Sabbath night at Grandmother Salome's, Yanis reported about his trip to Jerusalem for Passover and said that James and John and their wives were doing fine. He asked if Benji or Hezekiah wanted to share, and they both declined after saying that it was a special trip, and they were glad they went. Yanis related the parable Jesus taught saying that followers of His would be like light to a dark world and like salt to food. "We often focus on being light and salt, but tonight I want you to think about these two examples. Is there such a thing as too much light?"

Various answers came from the group: sunburn, heat sickness, it could kill plants, it could kill people.

"So why would Jesus tell us to be light?"

The group replied: because you need light to see in the dark, you need light to grow, you need light to guide you.

"So apparently, Jesus was saying that as followers we need to be tuned to the Holy Spirit to guide us to know how intense our light should be and when." He continued to share how discouraging it was to have been here for three years and see no new followers of Jesus. "I've enjoyed helping you grow, but man, it's been hard. This week, we were simply walking to Jerusalem and got to share with four men and their four sons about Jesus. One man and his son invited Jesus to be their Messiah, and one other man and his son agreed to meet with Jenay and me tomorrow. I don't know whether my light has been too bright, or too dull, but the Holy Spirit has finally allowed me to share again and I'm so excited. Please pray that I won't try to teach them everything I know in one session. I think that would constitute death from too much light all at once." Everyone laughed. "I want to challenge you to look around again and see if there's anyone that you need to share with, or if you need to back off and let them come to you. I challenge you to pray and be obedient to whatever the Holy Spirit is telling you." Jaden led in prayer and the families headed home.

## Chapter 10

On Sabbath morning, Jenay put Abie in her carrier and joined the milkers in the barn. She always enjoyed this time with the goats. She had her favorite does and they greeted her. She began to sing the Psalms as she milked. It was their early morning worship time with Jehovah's creatures. Zokur came with his grandpa and enjoyed emptying the pans into the jars and watching them fill. Abie played contentedly beside Jenay as she milked. *I am so blessed.* They finished the milking and Yanis carried two jars of milk into the house. When she asked, he said he didn't know how many children were coming today, and he wanted to be able to offer them milk to drink. She smiled and agreed. They rested on the grass and watched Abie play. She had just turned one and was trying to learn to walk. Her parents watched as she would take a step and fall, then pop right back up and try again.

The two families had met along the road and arrived together. Yanis introduced Jenay and Abie and the men introduced their families. "I'm Jeremiah and this is my wife, Kaleigh. My son, Ruell, will be turning thirteen this summer. My daughter Aliza is nine, and Anita is four."

"And I'm Jozek and this is my wife Malina. These are my two sons, Immer and Michael."

"Welcome to all of you. Are you comfortable joining us on the grass? Then we can just let the little girls play around us. We need to keep an eye on Abie." Jenay had brought out a supply of blankets and they sat in a circle to talk.

Yanis began, "Let us tell you our story of meeting Jesus, and then I'd like to answer a few questions. You can decide if you want to come back next week to hear more. Does that sound right to everyone?"

Yanis shared his background as the son of a priest and then told about beginning to follow Jesus. He told about hearing Jesus teach and perform miracles for almost three years. Then he asked Jenay to share. She said that her dad had begun to follow Jesus when she was just five years old. She too had heard Jesus teach and saw His miracles, but her favorite memory was His hugs. She always knew that He loved her. Yanis asked them to share what they knew about Jesus or any questions they wanted to ask.

Immer said that on his first trip to Passover, the rabbis had openly shared that Jesus was the Messiah presented in Scripture, but because they weren't allowed to talk about it in school, he wasn't sure what he believed.

"Immer, I was raised as a priest and our study of Scripture is even more rigorous than what you got in Hebrew School. I can tell you that I completely believe that Jesus is the Messiah promised by Jehovah. I believe He came as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed for our sins. He

predicted with perfect accuracy the timing of His death and His resurrection. I'll be glad to answer any questions that you might have."

"I guess my main question is why the Jewish leadership is so against Jesus," said Immer.

"Immer, you need to understand that if I answer that question honestly, it could cost me my life, and the life of my wife and baby daughter — you know that, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. But why?"

Yanis bowed his head and quickly prayed for wisdom. "One thing I learned from Jesus during my three years of walking with Him is that He begged the Jewish leaders to accept Him as the Son of God and as their Messiah. He pleaded with them to leave their religion and follow Jehovah again. Many priests, rabbis, and members of the Sanhedrin have become followers of Jesus. Jesus welcomes them. But the two beliefs are incompatible. One is the plan that Jehovah created from the beginning. Your rabbis taught you that it is found in The Law and The Prophets. The other is a religion that focuses on what the leadership can gain from the people."

"Then why aren't the rabbis teaching about Jesus?"

"Because the Holy Spirit has told them to keep quiet. I believe that there will come a point when we will be released to tell it again. It is happening all over the world. Whole cities are coming to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but the opposition is so strong in some other cities like Capernaum, and Nazareth, and sometimes Jerusalem, that just mentioning Jesus could get you killed immediately. That's why our meeting here today is so dangerous. I hope you understand that."

"Oh, I do. I promise I won't mention your name to anyone. I guess I was just confused because the rabbis seemed so eager to share Jesus with us, then they never mentioned it again."

"Their hope was that it would plant seeds that would grow until you would come and ask. It has taken a while, but it has happened. Now, my time is limited because I meet weekly with a group of seven men that I am teaching about Jesus. I also meet with a group of about twenty on Sabbath nights. If you would like, I will meet with this group each week. But before you leave, I must share one more thing with you. After Jesus died and came back to life, He told the apostles and disciples not to attempt to do anything until they had received the Holy Spirit. Next week I will explain that, but I must ask you to refrain from trying to tell anyone about this meeting until you have the ability to discern what He is directing you to do. If you were to run ahead of the Holy Spirit, it could result in a lot of unnecessary bloodshed. Please, be patient and let me explain more next week. I hope that Jehovah leads more people to our group, but these are dangerous times, and you must wait in obedience. Would you be interested in meeting again next week at the same time?"

Everyone agreed and thanked Yanis for sharing honestly with them. "I've had questions for a long time, and it feels good to have a place to get some real answers. I pledge to keep this secret," said Immer.

Yanis kissed Jenay on the forehead and walked back into town with the families. They talked about the men's work and for all appearances, it looked like a Sabbath stroll. They parted ways as Yanis headed to Rabbi Talman's for their afternoon meeting. Jenay picked up the blankets and called Abie to come inside. They joined the milkers once the Sabbath had ended and Abie got her hugs from everyone. Jenay carried her back to the house and put Abie to sleep. She made herself a roll filled with goat cheese and began to pray for the families they had met today. She hoped that they would return each week and become followers of Jesus. She was trying to sort out the names, but it had been a long day and she crawled into her blanket and was asleep before Yanis returned.



It had been six weeks since Passover, and Jenay was eager to meet with her friends. Once everyone had gathered, Miriam and Hava led them in some Psalms, and Jenay tried to focus on worship. She knew that Elizabeth would lead them in a sharing time, so she sat back and tried to listen carefully to what everyone else was sharing. Most of the prayer requests were for the rabbis who would be forced to travel to Jerusalem for Shavuot. They were worried about how to avoid the New Way celebration of Pentecost and where they should stay. *They could stay with my parents, but that would put them in severe danger with Priest Shimei. How much did he just threaten them and how much did he really know about their whereabouts? Jerusalem is full of spies. It is not possible to move in secret there.* Finally, Elizabeth called on her, and Jenay shared that both families that they had been meeting with had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Yanis would be baptizing seven adults next week at the beach behind the Fish Shop. A younger boy and girl had accepted Jesus as their Messiah, but Yanis would wait until they were older to baptize them. The women were excited for Yanis and Jenay. It had been a long time since they had been able to disciple new followers and they rejoiced with her. "And this may be minor compared to that, but I'm carrying Yanis' baby. I'll need to ask all of you to help me again, although this time I think Yanis will be more understanding. Can you help me figure out when the baby will arrive? I can't remember how long it takes."

"When did you start seeing symptoms?"

"At Abie's first birthday — so about a month ago."

"So, I would guess it would be Kislev, right at the start of winter."

"Have you told Yanis?"

"No, he's too busy these days. But I will soon, because I'm having some pain with lifting heavy things."

Elizabeth let the girls giggle and talk awhile then she suggested that they sing another Psalm before Jenay taught them.

Jenay told them about her friend Gabriela who lived in Joppa. "She's the one I was with when my brother and I saw Jesus ascend to

heaven. But she told me about something that happened on the Sabbath night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus and His apostles and a few of the other disciples were all eating dinner at Gabriela's parents' home. The house was filled with guests, and Jesus was still reclined at the table, when her neighbor, Miss Mary, brought in an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. She broke it and poured the perfume on Jesus' head, and then His feet, and wiped His feet with her hair. Gabriela said that Mary was singing softly to Him and calling Him her Messiah. She said it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. Now, picture this incredible sacrifice and time of worship. I also want you to imagine what happened next. Can anyone guess?"

"The crucifixion."

"Yes, but that was the next week. I'm talking about immediately after the perfume was poured out and Mary worshipped him so beautifully."

"I guess everyone was praising her."

"I imagine that everyone joined in, and they sang and worshipped, too."

"Exactly. That's what I expected Gabriela to tell me. But that's not what happened. She said the first thing that happened is that the men began to complain about the smell." All the women began to laugh knowingly. "I mean, talk about spoiling the moment! And then they began to complain about the waste and expense. They began to attack her and tell her she should have sold the perfume because it was worth a year's wages, and she could have given it to the poor."

"Oh, how terrible."

"Poor Mary."

"What happened? What did Jesus do? Didn't He defend her?"

"He certainly did! Gabriela said that He looked around the room and told the men to leave Mary alone. He said that her sacrifice would be remembered by followers everywhere because she had anointed Him for burial. Now my point is this. Followers may not always agree with your ministry or gift or service to Jesus, but we don't answer to them. We answer to Jesus. I want to encourage you to be brave and do whatever the Holy Spirit is telling you to do. It may not be popular or fun. I know that your husbands are being obedient even though others may look at it and say what they are doing is wrong. Each of us must answer to Jesus. Is Jehovah calling you to do something that is hard? Then do it! Is He asking you and your husband to make decisions that are not popular? Then do it. Remember Mary didn't pour out her expensive perfume to get the praise of men. She did it as an act of worship.

"Next week I want to take a quick detour and just talk about worship. So, this week, think about all the ways that you worship. We'll share them next time before we talk about Jesus' last week of teachings."





"I assume you will be traveling to Shavuot?" Priest Shimei had cornered Rabbi Joel as he was leaving the synagogue after school.

"Yes, we usually borrow an oxcart from a friend and travel to Jerusalem."

"Where will you be staying?"

"We haven't discussed it. But we can always stay in the olive grove, or there's a nice camping area out toward Emmaus if it's too crowded in the grove."

"Just remember to stay away from the Jesus followers. They always make a big commotion for Pentecost."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't forget I'm watching," said Priest Shimei threateningly.

"Would you prefer that we stay here, sir?"

"And miss a holy celebration! Of course not! That would be a very bad move on your part."

"Yes, sir. We would prefer to celebrate Shavuot at the temple as we always have."

Priest Shimei waved him away disdainfully.

"Shalom," said Rabbi Joel as he left.



On Sunday morning, the three rabbis left for Jerusalem. Talman had loaned them his pair of oxen and oxcart knowing that Elijah would take good care of them. They had decided to look for a farm on the road to Emmaus. Many of the farms would pasture the oxen and provide a place to camp. It was about six miles out of Jerusalem but would give them a little space from being in the olive grove where they would not be able to avoid being seen with followers of Jesus. If that didn't work out, they could always stay in the camping area where they had stayed for Passover, but they didn't want to give away their hiding places.

They enjoyed the trip to Jerusalem and met quite a few Jesus followers on the way. They stayed as much to themselves as they could so that no adverse report would reach Priest Shimei. Their constant thought on this trip was how long they could continue to teach under these conditions and whether or not it was time to leave Capernaum as a group. None of them wanted to teach another year like this, and yet, they had impacted students' lives and had not had to change how they interpreted Scripture. They hoped that Shavuot would lift their spirits and give them reason to hope. They recalled that it was at the first Pentecost celebration that they had accepted Jesus as Messiah and began their journey of following Him. That had been seven years ago. Elijah drove the oxcart and Jairus and Joel bounced around in the back. Occasionally one of them would ride on the front seat with Elijah to keep him company.

They stopped near the market in Jerusalem, and Elijah waited with the oxen while Jairus and Joel bought food for the three days.

They drove out toward Emmaus and found a farm that had room for both the oxen and three campers willing to pay a day's wages per day. There was a stream, a pasture to stake the oxen, a place to build a bonfire, and a grassy area to throw their blankets. It was a little closer to Jerusalem than they liked, and they expected it would get more crowded by sunset. They picked out their spot and settled in. Elijah explored behind the stream and found a nicely wooded area where they could disappear during the daylight hours.



Jenay had baby Abie in her carrier and was busy picking up small rocks to add to the fence that would one day mark their property boundaries. So far, the rock wall was only about five handbreadths high and only on the north side, but it was a start. On Tuesday, Jenay thought she heard a commotion and started toward the house. Jenay saw Jesse walking toward the barn yelling for Yanis. "Jesse!" she called. "What's wrong? Jesse!" Jesse finally heard her and ran to meet her.

"Is Yanis here?" he asked, gasping for breath.

"Yes, and no. He's gathering rocks and is out in the woods. What is wrong?"

"Something amazing is happening, and I want to tell both of you. I just need to find Yanis first."

"If you follow the little trail of rocks, you'll find him somewhere along the north boundary. That's what we're working on first. Or he'll be home by sunset."

"I'll go find him. This is unbelievable and I want you both to hear."

He took off at a run following the tiny rock wall that outlined their property. She could still hear him yelling for Yanis. She wondered what could be so exciting. But with Jesse, there was no guessing. She would just have to wait. She brought Abie inside and washed up so that she could start making bread. She was already running late, and she fussed at herself. The days were just so pleasant to be outdoors.

She mixed the bread and set it aside to rise. She would simply fry some onions to add to the cheese she had made. She knew Yanis would be hungry after lugging rocks all day. She had just sat down to weave when she heard Yanis and Jesse coming back into the yard. They joined her in the courtyard and Jesse was still acting as if he would explode with news. "You two will not believe what I found today."

Yanis humored him and guessed, "An elephant."

"Don't laugh. I was looking at a house on the south side and found this huge building. There was a sign out front that said: New Way Worship Center, Everyone Welcome. The building is not finished, but there were five or six guys working, so I stopped and asked what it was. They told me that they were building a place so that followers of Jesus could meet for fellowship and to learn more about Jesus. They

asked me if I had ever heard of Jesus, and I told them that I was also a follower.” Suddenly Yanis and Jenay were extremely interested and realized why Jesse was so excited. Apparently, there was a group already following Jesus that they had not met. “Yanis, they are Gentile!”

“What? You spoke with a Gentile?” asked Yanis.

“Sure. I speak with Gentiles all the time at my store. I mean, not a lot, but it happens. I thought you said that Jesus died for people of all nations. I’m telling you, these men are followers of Jesus. And they’re Gentiles! It’s incredible. And get this. They asked who taught me about Jesus and I told them about you.”

“Gee, thanks,” said Yanis rolling his eyes.

“And they said that Orly from Cana had given them your name and told them to look you up if they ever needed help,” stated Jesse.

“So, do they need help?” snarled Yanis.

“No, I don’t guess so. I just thought you would be excited.”

“I’m sorry, Jesse, I’m just really tired. We’ve got enough trouble in Capernaum without the Gentiles stirring up more trouble. I don’t need more complications with Priest Shimei.”

“Okay. I sorta’ told them we’d stop by on Thursday to visit. But I will go by myself. I shouldn’t have spoken for you. I’m sorry. I was so excited, and I guess I’m a little confused. I’ll let you guys get your dinner. Shalom.”

“Shalom, my friend, and thanks for the news,” said Yanis wearily.

Jenay decided to keep her mouth shut, but she was hearing the Holy Spirit affirming that this was something big and good. She hoped so.

They heard the milkers come and leave to make deliveries. *The business is going good, but the purchase of the land put us back a little financially. Maybe someday, I’ll be able to install that well to make life easier for everybody.* Yanis realized that he had reverted to thinking about the goat farm instead of focusing on what the Holy Spirit was saying. He tried to stay in the present. Little Abie wanted his attention and was trying to show him the tunic that her mother had made for her. She was getting too old for swaddling cloths, and Jenay had made her a pink tunic. Yanis knew he had a choice to make. He could either pay attention and show her that he loved her, or he could continue to focus on the goats and miss this evening with his wife and daughter. He felt the distinct prompting of the Holy Spirit to spend the evening enjoying his daughter. She would not be awake long and then he could slip away and pray. “What a beautiful new tunic! Is it pink? Is that your favorite color?”

“Actually, I gave her the choice of several threads that were the cheapest, and she picked out the pink. So, I guess it is her favorite. She’s growing up so fast. She’ll be talking before we know it — then you’ll never have peace and quiet again.”

Yanis grinned and thanked Jenay for understanding. “Do you have anything special planned for Pentecost?”

“I’m supposed to meet with the ladies at noon. What were you thinking?”

“I would like to just go to the woods and spend the day praying. I need to get clarity on this. But I hate to leave you on a holy day.”

“Yanis, don’t forget, you would normally be in Jerusalem. That’s why I’m meeting with the ladies today. Most of their husbands are away.”

“Thanks Jenay. I’ll leave early in the morning and be in the woods behind the lean-to if you need me.”



So, on Pentecost, Yanis found himself alone in the woods. “Jehovah, Creator of Heaven and Earth, I don’t know what You are doing. Haven’t we got enough problems with the Pharisees in Capernaum without sending us Gentiles, too!”

“Be still and know that I am God.” The voice seemed to boom and reminded him of the day he had seen Jesus baptized and heard Jehovah speak aloud.

He began to think back to that day and distinctly remembered John the Baptizer pointing at Jesus and saying, “Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.” Yanis felt an excitement that he hadn’t felt in a long time. He started remembering conversations with Orly. He remembered Matthew the apostle telling him about the Gentile baptism and how the Holy Spirit was guiding them just like he guided the Jews. Matthew was convinced it was real. When he had visited with James and John at Zebedee’s passing, they told him about Jonathan’s work with the Gentiles in Antioch. *How could I be so off track? The Holy Spirit is at work all around me, and I’ve missed it because I’m so stubborn. I remember Orly telling me that the Gentiles were becoming followers so fast that they had more leaders than followers. Orly also told me that he had sent a group to start work in Capernaum. Is this that group? It has to be. Even Zebedee admitted that the Gentiles needed Jesus as their Messiah.* He tried to quiet his brain and think about goats. He tried to think about Jenay and Abie and the new little one that would arrive in a few months. He wanted to think about anything except Gentiles. It was wrong. He knew The Law and The Prophets. It was forbidden for a Jew to even speak to a Gentile. His early training was deeply ingrained and all he felt was repulsion. Gentiles were vile and evil.

All day he argued back and forth with himself. He prayed, he pushed back, and finally, he surrendered. Jesus had said, “Go into all the world and make disciples,” before He left to go back to Heaven. He had told the apostles that that was their assignment.

Yanis knew that he had to go with Jesse and at least meet these followers of Jesus. He didn’t know what Jehovah wanted from him, but he knew it was pointless to fight it. “Okay, Jehovah. I’ll go. I won’t touch them, but I’ll go and see what they are up to. Now can I get some sleep?” He slowly walked back toward the house. He felt like

he'd been run over by a chariot. He recalled telling his group, *it's not always fun to follow in obedience, but Jehovah always knows what is best. The quicker we obey, the better.* "Okay, Jehovah. I'll go. Please don't let there be trouble."

He crawled onto his mat beside Jenay and heard her steady breathing. *Jehovah, if You don't lead me, this will turn out bad. I promise I'll listen and be obedient. I know deep down that You are up to something. I just hope it doesn't get a lot of people killed.*



Jenay spent some extra time praying that Jehovah would guide Yanis and give him clarity. Just before noon, she put Abie in her carrier and walked to Rachel's house. The ladies met outdoors where Ariel, Hava, and Miriam had spent many happy hours together. The ladies mostly prayed for the three rabbis who were in Jerusalem. It was so easy to sing praises to Jehovah in this place that had been specially designed to make beautiful music. How they all missed Ariel and wondered what she was doing and if she was possibly a mother by now. They hoped so. Jenay sensed such a deep melancholy among the ladies today. Since it was Pentecost, she shared with them what she saw on the day when Jehovah sent the Holy Spirit. Jenay asked them to share something that the Holy Spirit had led them to do recently. And they began to worship and praise Him.

Hava announced that she was carrying Elijah's baby and would be birthing about the same time as Jenay.

The ladies cheered up as they began to think about Jehovah's blessings and agreed that Jenay would birth at Sarah's again, and Hava would birth at Elizabeth's and they teased about where to send the men. "We'll send them all camping with Yanis!"



The rabbis hid and rested all day on Pentecost. But on Thursday and Friday, they walked into Jerusalem to purchase sacrifices to offer at the temple. Just as they had the past twenty years, they prayed for a good harvest among their students. As they walked back to their camping area, Jairus said that he and Rachel were feeling that they wanted to relocate to Damascus and be near Ariel and possible grandchildren. He asked the other rabbis to pray with him. His major hesitancy was that Priest Shimei might require the other two rabbis to attempt to teach fifty students apiece. He felt that he should stay if they were planning to stay. Joel encouraged them all to be careful about wishful thinking and instead concentrate on seeking Jehovah's clarity and direction for the next year. "But we haven't even lived through this one yet! We've still got six more weeks to go after we get home."

## Chapter 11

On Thursday, Yanis told Jenay that he needed to meet with Jesse and visit this building site. She simply nodded and said, "I'll be praying for you." *She is always ahead of me when it comes to understanding what Jehovah wants. Thank You for my wife.*

He knocked on Jesse's door just as they were finishing breakfast. Jesse invited him in, and Yanis greeted Miriam and the children. The men left together. The Mercantile Store was closed for the three days of Shavuot.

As they walked, Yanis apologized for his bad attitude. "I spent the day in prayer yesterday and Jehovah showed me that He's up to something and I need to listen. I guess I'm scared. But that's just myself talking. I want to protect Jenay, and my children, and the rabbis, and all of us. But that's not my job. My job is obedience."

"I know you've got a lot on your plate, but I was just so excited when they told me how Jehovah was guiding them. I know it's not what we were taught, but you preach about it all the time. I guess it just really surprised me that you teach about it, but don't believe it."

"My friend, I saw it with the apostles. They all taught what Jesus taught, but they had never considered what it actually looked like. It takes time for the New Way to really change our behavior. Let's just go and see what's happening there."

"Pollux said he worked there every morning. He's a carpenter and has his own business, so he's supervising the work, then other volunteers work whenever they can. They've been working on it about a month, and they are hoping it will be finished in another couple of weeks."

As they approached the building, Jesse began looking around and greeted some of the men and asked where to find Pollux. They pointed to a man carrying large pieces of lumber up to the roof. "Hey, Pollux, someone wants to see you!"

As Pollux came toward them and realized it was Jesse and hopefully Yanis, he said, "Shalom."

"Shalom," said both men automatically.

"I am Pollux; are you Yanis?"

"Yes, Jesse said you wanted to meet me, and I want to hear what is happening. It seems that Jehovah is blessing your ministry here and I was not even aware of it until Jesse told me yesterday."

"Do you have time to visit for a few minutes? We could go to my house. It's not far." When he saw the horror on Yanis' face he quickly said, "We have a back courtyard, or we can sit in the yard if you prefer."

"Forgive me, but I have never been inside a Gentile home. I don't mean to offend."

"And because of your friend Orly, I understand what your Scripture taught and why you were forbidden to associate with

Gentiles. But because of Jesus' death, The Law and The Prophets have been fulfilled. Jesus' death on the cross has set us all free from the Laws placed on us. We are Jesus' followers, not Jews. You are Jewish. We can respect that and still be friends."

Yanis and Jesse agreed to walk to Pollux's house. "How many Gentile followers are there who will be meeting in this building?" asked Yanis.

"We moved here at Passover just over a year ago. There were the four of us, two couples, and our children of course. We started a group of twelve, and seven weeks later we were starting eight more groups of twelve and now we have several hundred followers of Jesus. Most of them are Gentiles, but there are some Jews, Greeks, and Syrians mixed in. Jehovah created us all."

"This building won't house but around two-hundred people," said Jesse.

"That's right. But it will allow us to get together in larger groups for fellowship meals and worship. We hope to have different groups meeting here each morning, day, and evening. It will always be open to anyone who wants to learn about Jesus. That's our dream. Right now, we are getting it built, and then Jehovah will bring the people He wants to come and worship Him."

Tears began to run down Yanis' face as he was overcome with the realization that Jehovah was at work in Capernaum. He thanked Pollux for talking with them and asked if there was anything that he could do to help and how they could pray for him. Pollux explained that they were still praying for someone to teach them more about Jesus. "We know about His death and resurrection, but we really don't know a lot about His teachings. Please pray that Jehovah will send someone to teach us more about following Jesus after we accept Him as our Messiah."

Yanis didn't even think twice about shaking Pollux's hand and promising him that he and his group would be praying for them.

Jesse and Yanis started walking back to Jesse's store. "Jesse, do you mind going on? I need to talk with Jaden."

"Sure," said Jesse, grinning.

"What?"

"I knew I was right. Jehovah is up to something, isn't He?"

"I think so. I just don't know how it fits into the plan," said Yanis.

"Do we ever? Our job is obedience," quoted Jesse.

"Yeah, yeah. Preach at me. I'm just a hardheaded fool. I'll see you on Sabbath afternoon."

"I'm praying for you, brother."

"Thanks."

Yanis walked slowly toward the Fish Shop, but then he sat down on a bench in the market that was closed for Shavuot. *I need to be home working. Why am I just sitting here? Father, if You want me to join forces with the Gentiles and teach them and mentor them, You are going to have to give me direction. I need clarity. I thought You were opening up a small group for me with the two couples. I wasn't*

*expecting this. I just want to serve You however You want me to serve. Yes, I confess I was jealous of Orly and the way You were using him, but I feel the danger of trying to copy him or be like him. I want to be whatever You want me to be. I saw You, Jesus, deal with people one at a time. You were not impressed with the large crowds. Don't let me be influenced by the numbers of people that I could minister to. Help me to know what You want.* Immediately, he heard the verse, "I will counsel you with My eye upon you." He got up from the bench and then sat down again. *I don't need Jaden to tell me right from wrong. I know that You are calling me to help the Gentiles. Just show me how.*

Yanis walked back to the New Way Worship Center and found Pollux. "Pollux, I was wondering if my wife and I could sign up for one of your classes."

Pollux looked puzzled until Yanis explained. "I feel that Jehovah is calling me to help you. My wife and I both traveled with Jesus for three years. We can teach you what Jesus taught and did while on earth. But first I need to know for sure what you are teaching. I need to get acquainted with some Gentiles. I must admit, I've never spent time with a non-Jew, and Jehovah is telling me that I need to. Can you sign us up for the seven-week class?"

Pollux was smiling from ear to ear. He called Zotocus over and introduced him to Yanis. "Is your new group full?"

"No, I only have six signed up so far. That's really unusual but I'm trusting that Jehovah will guide me to the right people to add."

"Would you be comfortable adding this Jewish gentleman and his wife? They want to check out what we are teaching about Jesus."

"Sure. We meet at our place at sundown on Tuesdays. It won't be kosher. If you aren't comfortable eating with us, you can bring your own dinner."

"Thank you. I'll have to check with my wife, but I'm pretty sure we'll be there on Tuesday and yes, we'll bring our own meal if that's okay."

"Sure. Whatever makes you feel more comfortable. If you are ready to leave, I can show you my house now or Pollux can show you later. Do you have children?"

"I have a daughter who is just over a year old. We'll need to bring her with us."

"Of course. My girls will love watching her."

"I need to get home, so I'll walk with you now." Goodbyes were said and the two men walked together to Zotocus' house. Yanis recognized the area as not being far from August's house and assured Zotocus that he could find it on Tuesday afternoon.

"I'll see you three around sunset and we'll look forward to having you in the group."

"Thanks. Shalom."

"Shalom."

When Yanis arrived home, he needed to update the farm accounts. When he was finished with the books, he walked down to



the barn and found Mr. Ezekiel and Solomon cleaning and getting ready for the milkers. He told them that he felt he had enough money saved to have a well dug. He asked Mr. Ezekiel if that was the next step, or whether there was something else he needed worse. Mr. Ezekiel said he was ready to expand the herd again. They still ran out of milk at the market each morning, and August had said he would take as much as they wanted to sell him.

Yanis replied, "If we produce more milk, we'll increase our labor costs, but it should cover it. If we get the well, it would make it easier on all of us. That should free up Zokur to help more with building the fence or collecting firewood. That seems to be what I'm doing the most of these days. So, if it's alright with you, I think I'll order a well to be dug soon. Where would you want it?" They discussed a couple of locations, and Yanis said he would arrange for it on Sunday.

Yanis began looking for Jenay and discovered her and Abie picking up rocks and stacking them along the front border. He smiled as he watched them working so diligently. One tiny pebble at a time would someday produce a sturdy fence. Suddenly he felt the Holy Spirit remind him that He was building and growing him, one tiny pebble at a time. *Yes, Jehovah, grow me and make me into the man You desire.* Jenay noticed him and encouraged Abie to run to meet her abba. She was growing so fast. His love overflowed for both her and Jenay. He took Jenay in his arms and held her close. He kissed her affectionately and began to cry. "Jenay, Jehovah is at work in my life, and I need you to help me with some changes."

"You know that I'll do anything I can to help. Let's walk to the house. I need to finish dinner. We were just enjoying being outdoors while the bread rose." Yanis and Jenay sat in the courtyard while the bread baked, and he began to share all the things that Jehovah had showed him this morning.

"I know that Jesus loved the Gentiles and spent time with them and ministered to them," agreed Jenay.

"But He didn't eat with them because that was forbidden by the Law," stated Yanis.

"True. But when we went to Gabriela's wedding, the Gentiles were welcome there."

"Yes, but that was kosher food. I don't think I can eat non-kosher."

"Why don't you go to Cana and talk with Uncle Kenan? I'm sure he would know how Orly handled it."

"Does it matter how Orly handled it? Isn't it more important that I determine what Jehovah thinks?"

"Yes, but I thought it might reassure you that you are not alone in struggling with this."

"Do you think Orly struggled with it? He seemed to always just know what Jehovah wanted. It seems that I struggle with everything!"

"I think we all struggle when we don't know exactly what Jehovah is saying or where He's leading. And yes, I think Orly struggled with a

lot of things. You only saw him after he had it settled with Jehovah. You weren't with him during his sleepless nights."

"I guess so. Are you willing to go with me for these classes on Tuesday nights?"

"Certainly. I suppose these are the ones that Orly designed?"

"They are supposed to be. I want to see if they are sticking to what we know to be truth or whether they are full of Roman ideas. I need to know whether Jehovah is calling me to get them back on track, or to join them to push them further along."

"I understand, and I think it will be fun. But I've never been around Gentiles either. It should be interesting. Let's focus on how we saw Jesus treat the Gentiles and not worry about the kosher part right now. I'll pack us some cheese rolls and we'll be fine."

"Do we tell the groups what we are doing?" asked Yanis.

"You'll have to pray about that. We know that Grandmother Salome's group will be fine with it, but I have no idea how the rabbis' group will react."

"Jesse was pretty excited."

"Yeah, but he's not a rabbi!" They talked about many things and discovered a peace and contentment between them. It made them both feel that they were on the right track.

That night they shared with Grandmother Salome's group about the Gentile followers. Everyone was excited and encouraged Yanis to investigate it. He shared how Jesus loved and ministered to the Gentiles. He was grateful that Orly had cleared the way ahead of him.

After Sabbath milking, Yanis and Jenay waited for the two couples to arrive. They sat and visited in the grass and watched the little girls play. They had met together for the past two months and had become good friends. All those old enough had accepted Jesus as their Messiah and they were learning to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance. They all dreamed of increasing the group to include more friends, but so far, they had all heard that they should be careful and wait. Yanis and Jenay told them about meeting some Gentile followers and both shared incidents in Jesus' life where He had ministered to Gentiles. Yanis shared that he wanted to investigate it further and was wondering if Jehovah might be calling him to minister there since they were praying for someone to teach them more about Jesus. The couples agreed to pray for him.

Yanis left for the men's group middle of the afternoon. The three rabbis were still in Jerusalem, so it was a small gathering. They covered a parable that Jesus taught, and Yanis was home early.

On Sunday, Jenay and Abie walked all the way down to the stream with Yanis. Jenay took a blanket for Abie to nap on. Abie helped pick up rocks, but also was thrilled to play in the stream. Jenay held tightly to her and wished the stream was closer so she could do laundry in it. They weren't much help to Yanis, but he enjoyed having them close by. He realized that Jenay was beginning to show, and he asked if she had felt the baby move.

“No, it’s still a little early. But I may need to start wearing my birthing robes again soon. This one is getting tight. I won’t need to weave any new things for me or the baby, but I noticed that you are outgrowing your robes again. I probably should buy some thread so you’ll have decent robes to wear to the groups. I can’t send my husband off in torn and dirty robes!” When Abie woke up from her nap, Yanis said it was time to start back. Abie loved leading the way by following the line of pebbles that led all the way back to their yard. Yanis took Jenay’s hand, and they walked in companionable silence.

On Monday Yanis worked on the farm. As it approached sunset, he and his family walked to Jenay’s Uncle Jonas’ house. This was a special night to celebrate Jonas’ son, Ziph, becoming a man. Ruler Jairus, Rabbi Joel, and Rabbi Elisha attended but Priest Shimei was not invited. Unlike his two older brothers who had become fishermen, Ziph accepted an apprenticeship under his dad in the Ship Building Shop. He had worked there part time since he was eight and enjoyed working with wood.

Yanis worked around the farm all day on Tuesday. As the sun began to set, they began their walk to Zotocus’ house. Zotocus introduced his wife, Mariana, and Yanis introduced Jenay and Abie. Mariana asked Abie if she would like to play with the other children upstairs. The ladies walked upstairs, and Jenay felt comfortable leaving Abie to play. Mariana’s two daughters were nine and eleven years old and there was a maidservant also attending them. There were two other younger children playing, and Mariana said she thought they were expecting one more. Abie made herself at home and couldn’t care less that these were Roman children.

Jenay went back to join Yanis but discovered that he was surrounded by a group of men, so she hesitantly joined the group of women who were sitting in the living room visiting. Several told her their names and she tried to remember that Jesus loved these women and wanted her to love them, too. She began to talk with the lady closest to her. Angela introduced herself and said that she had a three-year-old daughter upstairs. She pointed out her husband and Jenay did the same. Angela asked when baby number two was due and said that they were praying that Jehovah would send another baby for them soon. They knew that He had a perfect plan, so they tried to wait patiently. Suddenly Jenay realized that the two of them really weren’t so different.

It was a little awkward when the servants served the plates and Jenay pulled out her roll and cheese. She noticed that Yanis was doing the same. She mostly listened to the other ladies talk and began to get to know them. After dinner, Zotocus asked the ladies to help clear the tables while the men circled the benches for their discussion. The men sat with their wives and that made Jenay feel more comfortable. Zotocus and Mariana were the hosts and leaders. Angela had attended the group last time, and had convinced her husband, Titus, to attend this time. There were two other couples and Yanis and Jenay. Zotocus explained that the purpose of the class was to

introduce them to Jesus: who He was, what He taught, and why that was important to people from all nations. "But before we can understand Jesus, we have to learn a little about the Jews." Both Yanis and Jenay were fascinated by the simple explanation that Zotocus used to describe 2000 years of Jewish history. They had never heard it explained so simply. Yanis expressed that he was impressed.

Zotocus said that it was written by a Jewish man named Orly who risked his life to tell his Gentile co-workers about Jesus. Now, everyone used his seven-week series to help Gentiles understand Jesus. "Next week we'll start with the birth of Jesus and look at some of His teachings. I hope you'll all come back. I'm going to pray a prayer of blessing over you before you leave. Jehovah God, open our ears and eyes and hearts to learn more about Jesus. Bless us as we go to our homes. In Jesus' name." Everyone commented that it had been a helpful lesson for them, and they planned to return next week. Jenay went upstairs and quickly collected a sleeping Abie. Yanis carried her home. They both expressed their amazement that Zotocus had done such a thorough job, but most of all, that these Gentiles were interested in knowing more about the Jews. They didn't feel so bad about bringing their kosher food now that it had been explained. They looked forward to next week.

On Wednesday Jenay talked with the women about her experience with the Gentiles. They agreed with her that it would feel strange to be surrounded by them but applauded her effort to get to know them. "How will you ever be able to teach them about Jesus if you don't understand them?" commented Rachel.

"Well, what I found out last night is that they are a lot more like us than we've been led to believe, and they are searching for truth."

On Thursday, by the time Yanis and Jenay had finished breakfast, a team of men had arrived to start digging a well for the farm. Jenay was beside herself with joy. This had been a dream of hers since they had first learned that the well was a mile away. Oh, how much easier it would be to just carry water from the backyard. She would have hugged Yanis, but he was out the door and showing the men where to begin digging. All day, she and Abie picked up rocks along the north road in order to stay out of the men's way. Near sunset, the men shouted that they had found water and by midafternoon on Friday, the well was finished. Jenay was allowed to draw the first jar from it. She agreed that it tasted better than the community well and would be such a help to her.

Yanis and Jenay headed to her grandmother's and enjoyed the sweet fellowship. They reported their enjoyment of hearing the Jewish history taught so well. Yanis used the history as the basis for his message, and everyone agreed that it was concise and accurate.

On Sabbath at noon, they met with Jeremiah and Jozek and their families. They had finished their singing time and Yanis was just ready to speak when two men arrived at the gate. Yanis went to greet them. He recognized them as Jethro and Parosh, two who had gone on the

Passover trip and had asked questions about Jesus. "I'm sorry, I didn't realize that you had guests. My son and I just wanted to visit your farm."

"I'm so glad you came. I need to ask my friends if they have any objections to you joining us." Everyone agreed that they felt okay, and so Yanis invited them to come in and to be seated on the grass. "We have been meeting since the Passover trip. As you know, it is not a safe thing in Capernaum to be investigating the claims of Jesus. It could get you killed. That's why I wanted to make sure we as a group felt safe revealing ourselves to you. If you are spies and report us to the Jewish authorities, we and our families will most likely be killed. But if you are seeking information about Jesus, we are available to tell you what we know."

"We are definitely seeking information about Jesus, but we don't know who to ask without getting in danger ourselves."

"It is a terrible time to live in Capernaum, but I assure you, you are safe with us. You boys are probably in school together and you will have to be very careful to not speak of Jesus or of this group. I cannot impress upon you enough how important it is. It would endanger the lives of a lot of people, including your own families."

The boys agreed that they understood. "Now, do you have a specific question you want to ask, or do you want us to share with you our stories?"

"We heard you say that you had been visiting with the apostles over Passover and we've been wondering for the past several years what is going on. We heard about Jesus' crucifixion, and then about his resurrection from my brother-in-law who lives in Jerusalem. But he says it is too dangerous to become a Jesus follower and is not interested. But Parosh and I can't seem to get it out of our minds. We asked Ruler Jairus about him, and he won't talk about him either. He suggested we visit you, so here we are."

"Okay. I will give you all the information you seek. Do you want to bring your wife and other children next week or will it just be the two of you?"

"I think my wife would like to come, too. But we'll leave the little ones home with the servants. I have three younger boys and they are a handful."

Yanis looked at the group and said, "If indeed Jehovah is going to grow our group, I would suggest that we meet in a place that is not quite so visible. Let's all walk there now so you'll know where to meet next week. When you arrive, just make sure you are inside the fence. There's a clearing just a little ways back behind these trees. We won't be visible from the road."

Everyone agreed that they would feel safer further away from spying eyes.

"Okay, so next week when you arrive, follow the pebbles that we have piled up to start our stone fence. That's the boundary to our property, and someday we'll get it finished. Follow that back into the woods and you'll find us. Don't all walk in together. We will grow as

Jehovah sends more families who are seeking truth. Let's pray together today and then I need to leave to teach another group. Father, thank You for bringing us all together to learn about Jesus and Your plan to pay for our sins and fill us with Your Holy Spirit. You are so good." Yanis and the other two men emphasized the importance of not mentioning the group to anyone, and Jethro and Parosh understood. "Shalom, and we'll meet next week at the fifth hour." Yanis kissed Jenay on the cheek and left to meet the men's group at Talman's house.



The men gathered at Talman's house and Jesse told them all about the New Way Worship Center that he had found on the South side of town. He shared that he had discovered that it was predominantly a Gentile group building it. The men had questions about Jesse associating with the Gentiles. These men knew the Scripture, so Yanis started with Jehovah's promise to Abraham to provide a Messiah to bless the whole world. He walked through The Law and The Prophets and showed that Jehovah intended from the beginning for Gentiles to be blessed by the Jewish nation, and the Messiah wasn't to be limited to Jews. He knew he was preaching to himself. He felt the Holy Spirit guiding him to one Scripture after another. Then he told again what John the Baptizer had said about Jesus being the sacrificial lamb Who would take away the sins of the whole world. And he told about Jesus' treatment of and love for Gentiles throughout His earthly ministry. He concluded by saying, "This group actually started in Cana under my friend Orly. I felt led to check it out also, and Jenay and I will be going on Tuesdays to attend one of the classes to make sure that they are teaching truth and not mixing it with Roman ideology. Do any of you have questions?"

"I know that Jesus died to free us from the Law. Is this one of those cases where we are tied down by Jewish tradition instead of free from the Law?" asked Jairus.

"I think it is. But the trouble is, it could get you killed by the Jewish leadership. Making friends with Gentiles is not going to be popular with Priest Shimei, and I suggest that we keep my association with them as secret as possible. In fact, if you wish, I will quit meeting with you while I check them out if you feel any danger whatsoever."

"I don't think Priest Shimei cares what we do as long as we don't teach about Jesus and keep him from having to teach the boys," said Elijah.

"You may be surprised how much information he collects. I think he has spies everywhere," said Jairus.

"So, we started the Gentile class this week and will continue for another six. Do you want me to not meet with you? You guys can meet as usual, but it might save you some major grief if I'm not coming here and making you 'unclean.'"

“No. We need you to guide us. We’ve got a lot of questions coming up as we decide whether to teach again next year or what to do about relocating. We need you to help us sort things out. We’ll just have to be very careful,” said Jairus and the other men agreed.

The men were eager to hear the report from the Gentile meeting and Yanis summarized the teaching for them. They, too, expressed surprise that the Gentiles would want to know about Jewish history. “Remember it was a Jewish man who designed the course, but I was watching the faces of the others, and they were genuinely interested in learning about the history behind Jesus. I think it was a good start, but we’ll see where it goes this week.” The other men shared prayer needs, but Yanis didn’t feel comfortable talking about the new family in his afternoon group. He would share later.

Someone asked if Jairus had any more clarity about moving to Damascus. He said, “We don’t. But we have decided that we’ll go for another visit just as soon as school is out if we can borrow your ox cart again. Now that I’m not the ruler, we can stay as long as we want. I think it will give us time to consider whether we want to relocate or not.”

“And whether that’s where Jehovah is leading,” added Talman.

“Of course,” agreed Jairus.

The men enjoyed a quick post-Sabbath dinner and then left to allow the rabbis to plan their week.



Yanis spent the week building some troughs out of logs for Jenay to be able to do laundry at the new well. This morning, he needed to catch up on other things and then go to the Mercantile Store. Just as he finished the books for the farm and headed out the gate, a man startled him. Yanis’ heart began to pound as he felt certain that the man was sneaking around spying on him. Yanis invited him into his courtyard to talk, and the man nervously followed him and took a seat. Yanis recognized him as Melchi, another one of the men who had talked to him about Jesus on the Passover trip almost three months earlier. The Holy Spirit assured Yanis that the man was just scared to death to reveal his interest in Jesus. Jenay brought them juice and took Abie to the woods to collect pebbles to provide them privacy.

“How can I help you, Melchi? I remember that you had some questions about Jesus on our trip to Passover.”

“Yes, I did. I do. I mean, I still do. My son, Benjamin, and I talked with you, and we’d like to make an appointment to learn more from you. I was wondering if you could maybe come to our house. I mean, my wife and daughter would like to learn, and my older son and his wife would like to, as well. When we went on the Passover trip three years ago, the rabbis were talking freely about Jesus, but this year, they wouldn’t say anything because of the new rules. I was really

disappointed. We've been waiting to get some answers for three years."

"I'm so sorry. But I assure you, you've come to the right place. I am a follower of Jesus and I teach groups all over Capernaum. I am leading a small group this Sabbath, if you and your family would like to join us. You know that it's not safe to be caught meeting or teaching about Jesus, so I'm going to have to trust you and your family to keep this private. I'm risking the lives of everyone in the group by inviting you, but I feel it's the right thing to do. We meet at the fifth hour here at my place, and you and your family are welcome, but you must not tell anyone else anything. It could cost you your life and the lives of your family. You know that."

"Yes, but not knowing whether Jesus is the Messiah is making us all miserable. We must find out the answers."

"I agree. Let me walk you out and show you where we are meeting this week." He showed him the beginnings of the fence and told him to follow it until he found the rest of the group. "There's nothing unlawful about a family taking a walk in the woods on the Sabbath. I'll see you at the fifth hour. Shalom."

"Shalom." Melchi looked so suspicious leaving the farm that Yanis realized anew how very dangerous each addition to the group would be. Then he decided that it was really out of his control.

He walked toward the lean-to and called to Jenay and Abie. He told Jenay about the two new families and asked what she thought about him building some log benches. She didn't think it was a good idea, because it would be evidence that they couldn't quickly scoop up and get rid of. "I hope everyone brings a blanket. We should have warned them. But the grass is thick here, and it should be no different than sitting in the back yard."

"I'm going to go talk with Jesse. I'll be back in a little bit." Jenay was surprised but knew that there was something on his mind. He would share it when he was ready and after the idea was fully formed. She was glad he had men that he trusted to help him sort out his thoughts. But she secretly envied other women who seemed to know what was going on in their husband's heads.

"Good morning, my friend. What can I do to help you?" Yanis had caught Jesse at the Mercantile Store and asked if they could talk in his office. "Sure, come on back." Once settled, Yanis asked Jesse if it would be more economical to purchase an existing home or to build a new one. Jesse, of course, was glad to help since he had been buying, renting, and selling houses in Capernaum for several years. They decided that a three-bedroom would be large enough, but it needed a large courtyard or space to build one for large gatherings. Yanis described the courtyard that Mr. Kenan had in Cana that would seat twenty or thirty guests. Jesse looked through his records and said he could show him a couple that were close to that description, but they were not close to the farm. "That's the primary advantage of building one yourself. You can put it where you want it. I would think you would want it on the property you already own, wouldn't you?"



“I guess so. It would be pretty sad to live elsewhere.”

“I can see you building a house just north of your current place so it’s not far from the well and you could still enjoy the woods.”

“So, what would that cost?”

“Well, that varies. Some people hire the stone mason to come in and clear the land and lay the foundation — others do it themselves. You could certainly save money by cutting your own lumber and hiring someone to build it for you. You could also do it in stages, like building the main house and then adding the courtyard. There’s lots of ways to do it. You are so handy with wood, you might even build the courtyard yourself. I would guess if you hired everything done, it would cost you a year’s wages.”

“Thanks, Jesse. I was just wondering, and I needed your input.”

“I’m glad to help. Let me know if you want to look at some houses to get some ideas about what you want.”

“What we want is a roof over our heads that is not exploding with children! We’re all sleeping in the living room together and with baby number two arriving soon, I’ve got to think about these things.”

“So, the milk business is going well?”

“Yes, better than I expected, and Talman helped me get it organized so that I can leave most of it in Mr. Ezekiel and his apprentice’s hands.”

“That’s good.”

“I’ve got to get back to work. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

## Chapter 12

Yanis practically ran home, found his axe and started downing trees. Jenay heard the trees falling and went out to see what he was doing. She and Abie stood on the road and watched Yanis working. It was too dangerous for Abie, so they went back to the yard. Jenay and Abie walked to the market to get some fresh vegetables. Abie always got tired and needed to be carried before they made it home. She arrived home carrying Abie and balancing the basket on one arm. She started a batch of bread to let it rise and pulled out her weaving. It was hard to find time to weave now that she wasn't sitting watching the goats every morning. She needed to finish Yanis' robe and wasn't making a lot of progress. Maybe she would have more time to weave once the rains came. She had just gotten settled when Yanis came and asked if she could look at something. He took her by the hand and led her to an area where he had cut down several trees. "I guess I should have asked you first, but what do you think about this being the area for your new house?"

"Oh, Yanis. It's perfect. Are you sure we can afford this?"

"I talked with Jesse, and he suggested we do it in stages. I'm trying to clear enough space for just the main house. I was thinking you would want three bedrooms, a living room, and a preparation area for the kitchen. Then later we would add the giant courtyard where our group could meet. We would put that on the back so it wouldn't be visible from the road. Jesse said if I provided all the lumber and did a lot of the preliminary work, he thought I could afford it. It won't be ready for the baby, but maybe by next year. What do you think?"

"I think it's going to add a lot of work for you, but I agree it would be great to be able to spread out, especially in the rainy season. A sleeping room of our own would be nice. I see you are expecting this one to be a boy, if you'll need two more sleeping rooms. Of course, one could sleep in the living room. We don't have to be fancy, and I don't need a lot of space."

"I don't know what Jehovah has planned for us. I'm just trying to think things through. I just wanted to see if a house was possible. I can't promise that it will ever happen. But I do want you to know that I would like to give it to you as a gift someday. My priorities are on ministry, and I just don't know where Jehovah will lead us."

"Yanis, I married you to share your life and join you in ministry. I don't care about fancy things. We need very little. Please, don't get off track and focus on the wrong things. Let's see where all these ministries are leading us. I'm more interested in seeing people learn about Jesus. Don't worry about a new house. If it happens, it happens. I understand."

"You are an amazing woman. I love you, Jenay." They walked into the house holding hands, and Jenay quickly braided the bread and slid it into the oven while Yanis played with Abie.

On Tuesday, Yanis, Jenay, and Abie spent the morning collecting rocks for the fence. That afternoon, Jenay cleaned the house while Abie took a long nap. Yanis chopped down more trees and began splitting them into lumber. Near sunset, they began to walk toward Zotocus' house. As they walked, they rehearsed the names of the people they had met last week. Once again, they brought rolls with goat cheese to eat. Everyone seemed more friendly and eager to talk than last week. Abie was happy to see her friends and quickly ran to play with them. Jenay was not nearly as nervous and quickly connected with Angela, Mariana, and the two other ladies.

After dinner, Zotocus asked each one to tell their name again, and also their first memory of hearing about Jesus. As each of the Gentiles shared, Yanis was struck by the fact that none of them had heard of Jesus until someone had invited them to a group like this. It was shocking to realize that they had no background at all. When it was Yanis's turn, he said, "My name is Yanis and I was probably ten years old when I started listening to a man named John the Baptizer teach about Jesus. You heard about him last week. I was there the day John declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the whole world."

Jenay introduced herself and said, "I was only five when my dad, a fisherman, told me about a miracle of catching more fish than they had ever caught before. I think that's the first time I heard about Him."

"Last week we looked at Jewish history. Does anyone have any questions about what we covered?" Zotocus waited, but no one responded. "Jesus did many miracles and supernatural works during the three years He was on earth. He fed five thousand people with just one serving of food and stopped storms, but He was primarily known for His miraculous healings. Tonight, I want us to explore how He was able to do these miracles. Throughout Jesus' last year on earth as a human, He kept telling the apostles and the many disciples that followed Him that it was not Him doing the miracles, but it was Jehovah inside of Him." Zotocus explained about the body, the self, and the inner core where Jesus was filled with Jehovah's Spirit. "Jesus claimed that it was Jehovah's Spirit that was guiding Him, telling Him what to say and do, accomplishing the miracles, and doing the supernatural things. Then the very last night before His arrest, Jesus told His apostles that every human had a core. The only problem was — it wasn't filled with Jehovah's Spirit. What do you think it was filled with?"

Yanis and Jenay exchanged glances and kept quiet. Everyone else shook their heads. Zotocus explained that it was empty, it was dead. "When I first heard that at the core of my being, I was empty, I felt ashamed. I felt that someone had uncovered my secret because I had always felt empty. Nothing fills that empty core. We can try to fill it with partying, or marriage, or children, or our jobs, or wealth, or pride, but nothing fills it except Jehovah's Holy Spirit. On the last night that Jesus spent with His apostles, He promised to pay the price so that they could be filled on the inside with the Holy Spirit. We are going to

close tonight and I'm going to ask you to consider whether you feel empty or filled on the inside, at the very core of your being. Jehovah, we thank You for this group. Help us to acknowledge that we need a Messiah to fill our empty core. Help us to seek truth and be ready to learn more about You and what You can do for us. In Jesus' name."

Once again Abie was sleeping soundly as they said their goodnights and started home. "Wow!" said Jenay. "That was good."

"I thought it was very clear and accurate. Didn't you just want to blurt out, 'I was there! I was there!'" asked Yanis.

"Yes, it broke my heart to realize that most of these people have never heard anything about Jesus. We are so privileged!"

"But with that privilege and honor comes great responsibility. We were chosen to bless others. We must teach others what we know," said Yanis.

"I don't know whether we should keep quiet and let Zotocus teach, or whether to let him know that we traveled with Jesus and know the answers to his questions. I feel deceitful."

"I think if we tell, then we won't hear what Zotocus and all the other Gentile groups are learning. I think it's best if we just keep our mouths shut — as long as we aren't denying our Lord," said Yanis.

"So, you want to attend one complete set of these lessons in order to better understand what they have heard," stated Jenay. "That makes sense. It's just hard to think of having to wait for five more weeks."

"I need to pray about it, but I may talk with Pollux before then. I told him I was considering helping him to teach about Jesus, and I feel certain that that is something I should be doing. I'm just not sure of how much time I can commit and when that should happen. Their building should be ready soon, but he was talking about teaching every night and certainly on the weekends. I just don't know what Jehovah's plan is for me."

"I want to encourage you to wait until you have clarity before you volunteer."

"Right. I've got to practice what I preach," grinned Yanis.

On Wednesday morning, as usual, Yanis and Jenay worked together to prepare their messages for the group. This time would be about Jesus' last week of teaching at the temple before His arrest. Jenay and Abie left before noon to meet with the women's group while Yanis went out to fell trees.

On Friday, they walked to Grandmother Salome's, and Yanis shared the same teachings with the group there. Everyone wanted to know how the Gentile group went on Tuesday, and Yanis had a hard time explaining how grateful he felt for the privilege of traveling with Jesus. "We take it for granted, but these people in our group had never even heard of Jesus until someone invited them to come and check it out. All week I've just been amazed at the difference between my amount of firsthand knowledge about Jesus and the rest of the world's. I think Jehovah is calling me to share what I know with those who have never heard. Pray for me. Please pray for us. We don't

know what we're hearing, but we feel a strong attraction to this group that is spreading the good news to everyone in Capernaum."

When Jaden hugged him and pressed a silver coin in his hand, he asked if he and Jenay could come over for dinner some night this week. Yanis called to Jenay, and they decided to walk over on Thursday afternoon and visit before dinner. On the way home, Jenay said teasingly, "About that kitchen you are building me. I don't think we need to worry about it. We can eat with the Gentiles on Tuesday after work or just continue to take sandwiches. I'll eat with the ladies on Wednesday. We'll eat at Grandmother Salome's on Sabbath nights, and you'll probably eat with the men for post-Sabbath dinner. At this rate, that only leaves two nights for me to cook!" They laughed together about their crazy schedule.

"I wonder what Jaden wants to talk with me about?"

"You know he loves you, so I wouldn't fret about it."

"I guess. What are we going to teach the groups when we reach the end of Jesus' teachings?"

"I don't know. Whatever the Holy Spirit shows us. Or start all over at the beginning." Yanis laid Abie on her mat and he and Jenay were quickly asleep. Tomorrow would be a busy day.

They were up before dawn to help with the milking. On Sabbaths it was just Mr. Ezekiel, Solomon, Yanis, and Jenay. It took almost two hours to milk all the nannies and then Solomon and Yanis filled the water troughs. As they ate breakfast Jenay laughed that she had once thought they could have their Sabbaths free to rest. Both of them were praying that they had done the right thing by inviting these men and their families to come and learn about Jesus when it was so dangerous. Four of these boys were still in Hebrew School. They prayed that they were mature enough to not talk. Yanis put the thoughts behind him, and he and Jenay let Abie lead them to follow the rock wall to the grassy area. They sat in the grass and played with Abie while they waited. Soon the families began arriving. Yanis explained that there would be five families coming, and they needed to wait for the others before they began.

Soon all five families were present. The schoolboys migrated together, and the rest sat in family groups. Yanis welcomed everyone and stated that they had been waiting for Jehovah to complete the group. They would spend time getting to know who Jesus was, what He taught, and why it was vitally important for each person to know that He was sent as God's Lamb to be sacrificed for the sins of all people. Unless the Holy Spirit said something different, they would not add anyone else to the group.

He asked each dad to introduce his family, and then they would get started. He introduced Jenay and Abie. Jeremiah introduced his wife Kaleigh, his son, Ruell, and his two daughters, Aliza and Anita. "Ruell and I asked Jesus to be our Messiah on the Passover trip, and my wife became a follower about a month ago." Anita got up and took Abie's hand and the three girls began to play, quietly picking wildflowers.

Jozek introduced his wife, Malina, and his two sons, Immer and Michael. "We all agree that Jesus is the Messiah and were baptized about a month ago with Jeremiah's family."

Then Jethro introduced his wife, Jerusha, and his son, Parosh. Melchi introduced his wife, Akiva, his son, Benjamin, and his daughter, Esther. "Then this is my first-born son, Nehemiah, and his wife, Liana."

"My name is Yanis. We started this group to answer your questions about Jesus. We'll back up a little for those of you who have just joined us." He told again the story of his childhood training as a priest, his decision to follow Jesus, even though it meant the loss of his family, and his three years of being a part of Jesus' disciples. He told them that he was present for part of the last Seder and was in the garden when Jesus was arrested, saw Him on the night He rose from the grave, and was present the day the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell the believers. "Jenay, will you share a brief summary of your testimony?"

"My abba, the Apostle James, began following Jesus when I was only five," began Jenay. "Our whole family followed him for over three years. Yanis and I were both part of Jesus' disciples, but I also got to see when Jesus returned to Heaven forty days after the crucifixion. I've been following Jesus ever since."

Yanis continued, "Now, I'd like to ask if you have any questions that I can answer. But I must warn you that I have another group that I teach at the ninth hour, so I'll have to leave pretty soon. If you have a question, please stand and I will call on you. Okay, Melchi, what is your question?"

"Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah promised throughout Scripture?"

"Yes. Without a doubt. What about you, Nehemiah? What is your question?"

"I don't understand why the Jewish leaders don't acknowledge Him as Messiah."

"I believe they were looking for a political Messiah to liberate Israel from Rome. When that didn't happen, they were disappointed. But I saw Jesus pleading with the Jewish leaders to stop creating a religion of their own. He begged them to search Scripture to see what it said. The Law and The Prophets very clearly point to Jesus as the Messiah and describe Him in detail. There are over 300 prophecies about Jesus in The Law and The Prophets and He said that the ones He didn't fulfill this time, He would fulfill when He returns next time. We don't know when that will be, but He said it would be soon. Does that answer your question?"

"My understanding is that Jesus didn't come bringing new ideas. He came to get all of us back on track with Jehovah's original plan," said Jenay.

"Yes, thank you."

The newcomers had lots of questions and Yanis encouraged the new followers to answer the questions. That way both were engaged and enjoyed learning together. The time passed quickly and Yanis

needed to leave for the men's group. He suggested that each family wander around the woods for a while or visit, and then stagger their leaving, now that there were around twenty of them.



"Is it really just one more month?" asked Rabbi Elijah.

"Yep. School will be over in four weeks. We really need to decide what we are doing," said Rabbi Joel.

"And I say, you need to determine what Jehovah wants you to do," said Talman sternly.

"And I say, you aren't the one having to guard your every word because you are being constantly listened to," said Rabbi Joel heatedly.

"And you aren't the one trying to contain thirty wildcats who are ready to be out of school," said Rabbi Elijah.

"And you aren't there on rainy days when we are practically sitting on top of each other!" said Rabbi Jairus. "I'm tired of this. I want out. I can't do this another year. I may just pack up everything and move to Damascus."

"Send my oxcart back if you decide to stay," said Talman, firmly.

"Are you accusing me of stealing it? I'll buy my own, I don't need yours," spat out Rabbi Jairus.

"Gentlemen, I know you are all tired and it's been a really hard school year, but I think we need to all cool off and think about what we are saying," suggested Yanis.

"Could we just have some time of silence and private prayer? It's been a busy week for me, too, and I just need to pray," said Jesse.

"Sure," agreed Yanis. Each man sat on his cushion with his head bowed into his hands. Yanis began to pray for wisdom to know how to lead these men experiencing incredible stress. But soon, instead of being focused on the men filling the room, he felt Jehovah's Spirit speaking to him in a new way. His mind was filled with peace that permeated every fiber of his being. He felt washed clean of all other thoughts and just desired to worship. Most of the men in the room joined him as he began to quote Psalm 43:

Vindicate me, my God,  
and plead my cause  
against an unfaithful nation.  
Rescue me from those who are  
deceitful and wicked.  
You are God my stronghold.  
Why have you rejected me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
oppressed by the enemy?  
Send me your light and your faithful care,  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy mountain,

to the place where you dwell.  
Then I will go to the altar of God,  
to God, my joy and my delight.  
I will praise you with the lyre,  
O God, my God.

Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.

“Let’s put our hope in God and seek His face. He will show us what to do. Each one of us must be obedient. We may not be allowed to stay together as a group, or we might. I don’t know what Jehovah has planned. But this I know: What He has planned will be good. We must keep our confidence and hope in Him. We have nowhere else to turn,” stated Yanis.

“Father, forgive me for focusing only on what I can see. Help me to trust You to guide me and help me to release my brothers to do the same,” prayed Talman.

“Father, forgive me for my fear. Help me to trust You. Show me how,” prayed Joel.

As each of the men began to pray aloud for forgiveness and restoration of fellowship, Jehovah’s Holy Spirit sent unity and peace among brothers. They were once again in fellowship and spent the next few minutes in offering and accepting apologies. They left the meeting knowing that no matter what happened, even if they were all sent in different directions, they would still serve Him until they were united again in Heaven. It was a special time of commitment.

Yanis headed home, but just as he reached the western well, two Roman guards stopped him and asked his name. “I am Yanis. I own a goat farm just outside of town. I am heading home.”

The guards laughed and said, “No, you are under arrest and will be coming with us.” They bound his hands but allowed him to walk between them since he showed no sign of resistance. He was taken to a prison near downtown. Once he was inside the cell, the guards put his legs in shackles to make sure he would not escape.

“May I ask why I am being arrested?”

“We just follow orders. We have no idea.”

“Could you let my wife know so that she will not worry?”

“Oh, she should worry. You are in a Roman dungeon.” And with that they exited, taking their lantern with them.

Yanis was left in total darkness. *I will probably starve to death in here. No one knows where I am.* “I do, and you are not alone.” Suddenly, Yanis recognized that Jehovah was speaking to him, and everything was okay. He couldn’t explain the peace that overwhelmed him, but he knew that Jehovah would work it all out and he chose to trust Him no matter what happened. The Holy Spirit filled his head with



Scripture that assured him. For several hours he lay awake and just quoted one Scripture after another until his mind was filled with peace. He slept on the cold hard floor and woke with the sun. No one brought him breakfast and he remembered that he hadn't eaten dinner last night, but even though he felt hungry, he did not feel weak. He felt filled with power through the Holy Spirit.

Middle of the morning on Sunday, a guard brought him before the judge. As he had anticipated, Priest Shimei told the judge that Yanis was disobeying Sanhedrin rules by teaching about Jesus. The judge looked at Yanis and asked if the charge was true. "Yes, sir."

The judge looked again at Priest Shimei and asked if there were any other charges. "No. It is forbidden by the Sanhedrin to speak the name of Jesus, let alone teach about him."

"So, you have no other charges against this man?" asked the judge again.

"No," replied Priest Shimei smugly.

"Case dismissed. Let the prisoner go free. The Sanhedrin's rules only apply to teaching in schools and synagogues and this man was doing neither. You are free to go." The guards unlocked the shackles and untied his hands. Priest Shimei had already left in a huff.

Yanis walked home as quickly as he could, but his legs were asleep and felt like pins and needles. He could hardly wait to get home to Jenay and reassure her that all was well. But when he arrived at home, she was not there. He went down to the barn to talk with Mr. Ezekiel. He told him what had happened and asked if he knew where Jenay had gone. Mr. Ezekiel said that she had gone to search for him, but he thought she said she was going to talk with Jesse at the Mercantile Store first. "Could you and Zokur see if you could find her and assure her that I'm home and safe. If she's not at Jesse's just leave the message and come back to work. Thank you."

Yanis went back to the house and began searching for some bread and olive oil. He was starving. He stretched out on his mat to wait for Jenay and quickly fell asleep. The next thing he knew, he had his arms full of a little girl yelling, "Abba's home! Abba's home!"

"Don't scare me like that! Where were you?" demanded Jenay, who wasn't sure whether to be mad or glad to see him.

He sat up and tried to focus his eyes. He gave Abie a hug and asked if she wanted to pick up some rocks for the fence. She pulled his arm, and he encouraged her to run ahead of them. "I'm coming. I'm coming. Let me hug Mother first and then I'll be right there. Jenay, I spent the night in a Roman dungeon. So, don't be mad and don't be scared. Jehovah was very, very good. It was not pleasant, but other than being hungry and not getting much sleep, I'm no worse for the experience, and Jehovah was faithful."

"Oh, Yanis, I was so scared. What happened?"

"How old is too old to talk in front of her?"

"Abie, we are going to sit over here in the grass so that Abba can rest. Can you show him what a good helper you are and pick up some

rocks for the fence?" They moved to a grassy area where they could talk and not be heard, but still keep an eye on Abie.

"I was arrested by two Roman guards on the way home from group. I was almost to the well, so no one saw it happen. I asked them if they would tell you, but they said no. I spent the night in a dungeon, and this morning I was brought before the Roman judge. Priest Shimei stated that the charges were teaching about Jesus. The judge dismissed the case because the rules of the Sanhedrin clearly stated that Jesus was not to be mentioned in the Hebrew Schools or the synagogues. I had done neither."

"How did he know that?" asked Jenay.

"Apparently, he had checked it out; I don't know. All I know is that Jehovah gave me this incredible peace and told me not to be afraid, and here I am, just a little sore from sleeping on a hard floor and still a little hungry because I missed dinner last night and breakfast this morning."

"Let's go back to the house and get you something to eat," said Jenay.

"I ate a roll and some olive oil. I thought that would be enough."

"Come on, let's get you fed, and you'll feel better."

"Not until you tell me how terrible it was for you," said Yanis.

"I put Abie to bed and went to bed myself when you weren't home at your normal time. I just assumed you were talking with one of the guys. Then Abie woke me up in the middle of the night with a bad dream or something and I put her back to sleep and realized that you still weren't home. I got up and began to pray for you and tried to figure out what could have happened. At dawn, I told Mr. Ezekiel that you had not come home last night, and Abie and I were going to the Mercantile Store to talk with Jesse. If you came home, that's where I would be waiting. Jesse's store wasn't even opened yet, but Miriam invited us in. Jesse ran and talked with the rabbis before they left for school, but no one knew your whereabouts. Jesse and Talman came back to see if you were home, and then Talman said that if you weren't home by noon, he would go to the judge and ask if he could help him locate a missing man. Come Abie, Abba is hungry, let's go fix him a snack." They walked back to the house hand in hand. Abie was happily running in front of them. Jenay pulled out a couple of apricots and filled a roll with goat cheese. She apologized for not having an onion to put on it. Abie sat on Yanis' lap and helped him eat the apricots.

## Chapter 13

After eating, Yanis was ready to get back to work on felling trees and splitting lumber. Jenay and Abie picked up rocks along the front of the property and the day passed quickly. When Abie took her nap, Jenay decided to rest with her. The three rabbis arrived to check on Yanis as soon as school was out. Yanis was busy felling trees, but stopped and greeted them. “Jehovah took care of it. He knows what is best. Now, quit worrying about me. It actually has given me the confidence to meet with Jaden. He’s wanting me to teach his employees at the Fish Shop about Jesus — at least offer it to those who want to know. That is neither a Hebrew School nor a synagogue. And I’m praying about teaching at the New Way Worship Center which is also neither. I feel that it was Jehovah’s confirmation that this is the right direction for me. I’m actually excited about it. I felt closer to Jehovah than ever. It was a neat experience to suffer for Him — if you can call that suffering. How was your day?”

“Certainly easier than your night. Forgive us for complaining last night.”

“No problem. I’m sure Jehovah understands. We all have our limits.”

“We need to get back to town. We don’t want to be seen with such an unsavory character,” teased Joel.

“I’m sure he’ll come up with more charges at some point, but I’m not afraid of him. I have Almighty Jehovah on my side,” stated Yanis.

“We’ve got to get home, or our wives will panic. Will Jenay meet with them on Wednesday?”

“Of course. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Yanis felled a couple more trees and then headed toward the house. Jenay had fried the last of the potatoes and topped them with goat cheese. They enjoyed a quiet evening at home together.

On Tuesday, Jenay asked Yanis if he could pull a cart to the market for her and help her stock up on some big things that she was out of. When they returned, Yanis continued his work and Jenay got busy sorting and storing all the goods in one corner of the house. That afternoon, they walked to the meeting at Zotocus’ house. Now it felt comfortable, and they quickly began talking with the others in the group. The group seemed eager to ask questions and get answers. They wanted their empty core to be filled and wanted to know what they needed to do to make it happen. Zotocus skillfully shared with them the story of the Samaritan woman who talked with Jesus. He had told her if she wanted to be filled with living water, she should simply ask. He told the story of Nicodemus, a prominent Jewish rabbi and member of the Sanhedrin, coming to Jesus and asking what he needed to do to get eternal life. “Jesus told him that he needed to have a new birth. His core had to come alive or be born. How is that

possible? Jesus gave him the same answer and said we only needed to ask Jehovah to do it for us.

“Why do we need our core to be filled and alive? Because if it is empty, we cannot be in a right relationship with Jehovah. We cannot go to Heaven to live with Him. And we can’t be guided by His Holy Spirit here on earth. Jehovah says that what keeps us from having a right relationship with Him is the fact that He is Holy, and we are not. Throughout the ancient Scripture, Jehovah showed the Jews that only one thing would pay for sin. Does anyone know what that is?”

When no one else seemed to know, Yanis answered, “Blood. We were told to bring an animal sacrifice to cover our sin.”

“Exactly. And since Creation, men and women have killed an animal and sacrificed it to try to pay for their sins. Even in the Roman world, we bring sacrifices to appease our gods. But Jehovah told Adam and Eve that someday He would send a special sacrifice that would completely pay for our sin — past, present, and future. He said that what we needed was a Messiah to rescue us from sin because we could never be good enough to quit sinning. So, Jehovah sent Jesus into the world for the purpose of being His lamb, His sacrifice, to pay for our sins. That’s what John the Baptizer meant when he said that Jesus came to be the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the whole world.”

“Hold it. So, you are saying that Jehovah God requires a blood sacrifice to pay for our sins, and then sent Jesus to do that for us?” asked Titus.

“Yes. You realize that a blood sacrifice does not mean a drop of blood, or even a cup. It means that the lifeblood must be poured out completely. A blood sacrifice means death. So, if you and I have to pay a blood sacrifice every time we sin, we’re in trouble, and we need a Messiah.”

“I’ll say!”

“So, God requires a blood sacrifice, but He sent Jesus to pay it for us?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying!” said Zotocus.

“Why? Our Roman gods don’t do anything for us. We are expected to do what they want, or need, or desire.”

“That’s why this is often called the good news, because it is very, very good news. Jesus died on the cross and was crucified to pay the price for your sins and mine.”

“That’s incredible.”

“Yes, it is. Now, let’s move on, because you need to know this. For the entire last year of Jesus’ life here on earth, He began to teach His followers that He was going to be crucified. He told them that first He would be scourged, then crucified. But He also told them that three days later He would conquer death and rise again. He told them the exact date and time this would happen. Yes, Julio, do you have a question?”

“How could he know all this?”

“Remember, last week we talked about Jesus having His inner core filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was telling Jesus what the future would be, and He was teaching it to His followers.”

“Yeah, but why would he do it? I mean, I wouldn’t die for someone else!”

“Not next week, but the week following, we’ll be studying about Jehovah God, and you’ll learn that one of His primary attributes is love. He loves us so much, He sent His Son to die for us and pay the price of our sins, so that we could be in a right relationship with Him. But that’s getting ahead of ourselves. The answer to your question, Julio, is that Jehovah loves you.

“Jesus died to pay for our sins. When we simply ask Him to be our Messiah, God forgives us and fills our inner core with His Holy Spirit. We are led by Him while we are on this earth, and then when we die, the Holy Spirit takes us to Heaven to live with Jehovah for eternity — forever and ever. Okay, I know that was a lot of material and it’s getting late. Next week we’ll primarily answer questions, but are there any questions that we need to deal with tonight?”

“I assume you are going to tell us how we can find this Jehovah God?”

“Yes. We have four more lessons to make sure you get all your questions answered. Well, we’ll never understand everything about Jehovah — because He’s Jehovah and we’re not. But yes, I think you will understand it a lot better when we are finished.” Everyone started collecting their children, and Yanis and Jenay picked up on the deep feeling of confusion and frustration in the group. They wanted answers and instead they had more questions than ever. Yanis thanked Zotocus for the evening and they began their walk home. Neither of them spoke, but both of them were feeling a little nervous each time they saw a Roman soldier. They didn’t want to feel fear, but after what had happened, they just felt uneasy about being out at night. Jenay began to quietly sing a Psalm and felt the fears slip away. It was a long walk home and she was glad that Yanis was carrying Abie. She was getting heavy to carry. “Jenay, I can’t remember what we had planned to teach our groups this week.” They began to plan as they walked and soon they were home.

“I’m so tired. It’s been a long week and it’s not even halfway!” said Jenay as she yawned.

“Maybe tomorrow will be easier for you. You enjoy teaching the ladies, don’t you?”

“Uh-huh,” she mumbled as she crawled onto her mat. He placed Abie on her mat without even lighting a lamp.

On Wednesday, the women were scattered and upset about Yanis’ arrest and the decision the rabbis needed to make concerning next year. Jenay tried to reassure them that Jehovah would guide them and let them know when they needed to know. She reminded them of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as conquering king. She encouraged the ladies to acknowledge Him as king of their days. She reminded them that if you were serving a king, you didn’t have to worry

about anything. You just had to stay obedient. The ladies left with hugs and promises to keep praying for each other.

When Jenay and Abie got home, she started some bread and then went out to search for Yanis. Lately, he had been felling trees for the house, but she hadn't heard any trees falling. She walked down the path of rock and Abie ran in front of her. She found Yanis digging with his shovel. He explained that he had cleared the area for the main house, but now he needed to dig up all the remaining stumps. It was not an easy task. She encouraged him to quit soon and come in for dinner. Abie asked if she could stay with Abba, and Jenay returned to the house to prepare dinner without her usual helper. During dinner, they talked about what Jenay had covered with the ladies and that they would need to save the teaching about the cleansing of the temple for later.

On Thursday, they worked outside all day; Yanis was digging up stumps, Jenay was picking up rocks, and Abie was running back and forth between them. Midafternoon, they called it quits to rest a few minutes before they needed to walk across town to Jaden's house. They were surprised to see that Jonas and his wife had been invited, too. It was a lovely dinner and they enjoyed visiting with each other. Then Jaden invited the men to meet on the rooftop. Jenay and her two aunts began talking about the upcoming baby and other women talk while Abie played quietly. Jenay told them about Yanis working on building her a bigger house. They talked about how Grandmother Salome and Laila were doing, and the evening passed quickly.

Yanis had prepared a plan for teaching classes about Jesus to all the employees at the Fish Shop. He was totally unprepared for Jaden's question. "Yanis, we are working together to keep the Fish Shop going, but the truth is, we are in trouble. Dad would only hire Jewish men. Now, many of the Jewish men in Capernaum won't work for us because we don't attend the synagogue and aren't in good standing with Priest Shimei."

"Whoa. I didn't realize that. So, Priest Shimei is trying to starve you out?"

"I don't know whether it's deliberate or not, but it's certainly hurting our business. I mean, the people still want our fish, and they are happy to buy everything we catch. Thankfully, the women aren't picky about who catches their meals. But we can't find men who are willing to fish. We are down to three boats and that's half of what we sent out four years ago. Jonas' ship building is the only part of the business that is making any profit. We sell boats to lots of other fishermen all over the Sea of Galilee."

"Do you have enough of the other workers?"

"Well, that's the other problem. If there's not enough fish coming in, then we have to lay off our workers. Some of them have worked for Dad since they were children. It will really hurt."

"So, the main problem is fishermen. If you don't have enough fisherman, you don't have enough fish, and then that affects everything else in the business," said Yanis.

“Exactly.”

“Okay, I understand the problem, but I don’t know how I can help.”

“Well, as I said, we have a question and need an honest answer.”

“No. I don’t like boats! And it’s not my calling from Jehovah,” said Yanis firmly. The two men laughed and assured him that was not the question.

“What do you think about us hiring Gentile fishermen? I think there are probably some men who would be interested since their population is so large here,” stated Jaden.

“And what would happen if we did? I mean, do you think Priest Shimei would close us down completely if we hired Gentiles?” asked Jonas.

“I hear you. Let me think a minute,” said Yanis. “Can I think out loud and let’s work together on this?”

“Sure.”

“According to The Law and The Prophets, your penalty for associating with a Gentile is that you become unclean and can’t attend the synagogue.”

“Well, that’s not a problem. We don’t attend the synagogue anyway,” said Jonas.

“And if I recall, you already catch fish that are not kosher and sell them to Gentiles. Am I right?”

“Yes, we sell catfish to the Romans. They buy quite a bit of it.”

“So, you are already unclean according to the Law. I can’t see any reason to not hire Gentile fishermen. Now, that doesn’t mean that Priest Shimei won’t try to interfere.” The men discussed several other details such as whether they would keep the crews separate or mix them together. They discussed whether they could afford to lose their Jewish customers if Priest Shimei ordered a boycott of the fish market.

“I can’t see that happening, because we are the only Fish Shop in town. And every home is dependent on us if they want fish.”

“Why don’t I ask Pollux if he knows of any Gentile followers of Jesus who might need jobs? He knows most of the Gentiles in town and I’ve been wanting to talk with him again anyway. Give me your information on pay and hours, and all that stuff, and I’ll pass it on to him.”

“Hold it. Our next step is to talk with Mother. Even though I’m officially in charge of the company, I still want to run it by her. I’ll let you know at dinner tomorrow night,” said Jaden.

When everyone agreed, they thanked Yanis for his help and everyone headed home for the night. As they walked home, Yanis shared with Jenay what the men had discussed. She agreed with Yanis that there would be nothing wrong in hiring Gentiles to work for them since they were not staying kosher anyway. Then they looked at each other and knew they were both thinking the same thing. “Why are we staying kosher?” asked Yanis.

“That’s what I was thinking. Why are we? Dad said that Jonathan isn’t and neither are other Jewish followers who are working with Gentiles.”

“Have we gotten ourselves into a mess that is leading us further away from Jehovah, or are we moving closer to what Jesus taught us?”

“Oh, my. That’s a lot to think about this late at night. Let’s table that until tomorrow. I need to pray about it,” said Jenay.

“Me, too. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Yanis. Jehovah is stretching us, isn’t He?” But Yanis was already snoring.

On Sabbath night, Jaden asked Yanis to share with Pollux their need for workers. He gave him the information about the job openings. After dinner and a time of sharing and singing, Yanis talked about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as king. He closed with a prayer of blessing and once again, they began their late night walk across town. “Sometimes I think we should move to this side of town. It sure would be closer!” said Yanis.

“I know, let’s buy four houses, one on each side of town and then we could always be close to whatever late night meeting we have.”

“Sure, but they had better be already built when we buy them, because I can’t dig any more stumps!”

“Agreed!”

They laughed and enjoyed their time of being together.

The Sabbath meant starting before dawn with milking. Abie loved milking day and enjoyed talking to the goats while her parents and the two men milked. Jenay sang Psalms and Abie sang along with her. It was a special time, but oh, so early. After breakfast, they walked down to the lean-to to wait for the other families to join them for worship.

Everyone seemed more relaxed meeting in the woods. After visiting for a while, Yanis began to teach. “I’m assuming that all of you are familiar with basic Jewish history either taught in Hebrew School or in the synagogue. If you are not familiar, please stand.” No one stood. “Okay, so that saves us having to cover 2000 years of Jewish history. So you know that a Messiah was first promised to Adam and Eve when they sinned, then promised to Abraham and every prophet since then. But after the prophet Malachi, Jehovah stopped speaking to His people. That was about 400 years ago. Then Jehovah sent us another prophet about forty years ago. This prophet was John the Baptizer. He introduced Jesus to the crowds as the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. He also baptized Jesus, and the heavens opened and Jehovah spoke verbally to all those who were witnessing the baptism. He said, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!’ I was there that day. I will never forget it. Did any of you hear John the Baptizer speak?”

Everyone shook their heads. “I got to hear Jesus speak a couple of times and watched Him heal hundreds of people. When I told my family that I was going to follow Jesus because I believed He was the Messiah, I was declared dead to my family and traveled to Jerusalem



alone to try to find Him. I found the group of followers in the olive grove beside the temple, and they took me in. They began to teach me, and I followed Jesus and His apostles for three years. I will be teaching you what I saw firsthand. Sometimes, I'll let Jenay share with you things that she saw, because she, too, was following Jesus with her family. Today, I want to remind you that Jehovah knows the right timing for everything. He knew that it was time for the Messiah to come. He knew what a mess the Jewish leaders had gotten us into. He knew all about our problems with Rome, and He knew that we desperately needed a Messiah. But He didn't come to save us from Rome, He came to pay for our sins so that we could be in a right relationship with Jehovah. That's why He died. The Jewish leaders didn't cause His death, and the Romans didn't cause His death. He came for the purpose of dying for our sins. Jehovah knew the political and religious leaders would do the job for Him. He became the sacrificial lamb for you and me. I'll stop there and let us share any prayer requests or questions."

"There's only three more weeks of school left, and the rabbis are pushing us to finish our interpretations. I'm really behind. Is it all right to pray that Jehovah would give me more time to get it all finished?" asked Michael.

"It's not only okay to ask for Jehovah's help, but Jesus encouraged us to treat Jehovah as our Father and ask Him for anything we need just like we would our earthly dads. Now, Michael, He won't do the work for you because He knows what is best. But He will help you make the best use of your time. Anyone else?"

"Weren't you going to mention what Jaden talked with you about?" prompted Jenay.

"Oh, yes. I wanted you to know that the Fish Shop is hiring men who either are or want to become fishermen. They would be happy to train you. No experience is required. Most of them are followers of Jesus and Priest Shimei is trying to starve them out. Talk to me afterward and I can tell you more about the pay and hours. Let's close in prayer." Yanis prayed a prayer of blessing over each family.

The three schoolboys wanted to know how much the pay would be for the fisherman job, and Yanis told them the hours, the pay, and the holidays. They were all turning thirteen this summer and would need to find jobs or apprenticeships soon. They said they would talk to their dads and think about it.

Yanis said his goodbyes and gave Abie and Jenay a hug. He left for Talman's house. He couldn't keep from wondering if he was being watched as he entered. It certainly felt like it.

"Do you guys always get this feeling that you are being watched, or is it just because of what happened last week?" asked Yanis.

"Oh, everywhere we go, there are spies following us. I don't want to get another argument started, but I'm sick and tired of it."

"I wonder if that is how Jesus felt during his last year. Every time He came to Jerusalem the Pharisees were watching His every move," said Yanis.

“So, I guess we should feel honored,” laughed Elijah.

“Yes, seriously, I think you should feel good about your obedience this year and how you’ve stood firm in a very hard place.”

“I want to hear about your time in prison. What was that like?”

The men visited awhile and then Yanis began his teaching about Jesus entering Jerusalem as king on the last Sunday before His death. He talked about total allegiance to the King of kings and Lord of lords. He talked about being part of the royal army. The men were challenged and encouraged by his words. After a time of encouragement, Yanis started home, with the men promising to pray for his safety. He and Jesse walked to the well together and sat and talked about the New Way Worship Center and what Yanis was learning from the Gentiles. They laughed about Yanis trying to disguise the fact that he knew all the answers and how hard it was to not yell, “I was there!”

“Are they getting it right?”

“Amazingly so. He describes it a little different than I would, but it’s always accurate.” They visited a little before both men headed home. Jenay was relieved to have him home safe.

## Chapter 14

On Sunday Jenay and Abie went to visit with Grandmother Salome. They would come back by the market and be home in time to make bread. They enjoyed their visit, and Abie kept them entertained with her constant talking. Jenay had a hard time getting her to leave her great grandmother until she mentioned the market and suddenly Abie was ready to go and pulling on her mother. She said, "Look!" and "Pretty!" at everything. It was hard to shop when she was constantly running off to look at another booth. Jenay threatened to tie a rope to her if she didn't quit running off. Abie just giggled and continued to explore. Jenay was exhausted by the time they arrived home. But she had managed to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner, and she started a pan of bread. Maybe this week wouldn't be as busy as last week. Once she had the bread made, she went out to check on Yanis. As she suspected, he was still digging stumps, and Abie quickly began to 'help' Abba. Yanis asked her to work on the rock wall so he could talk with Mother.

"What's up?" Jenay asked.

"I was praying while I was working, and I realized that it's going to be the rainy season soon. Where are we going to meet with our group then? I got to thinking that if I could get this area cleared, we might be able to get a shell of the house up and meet inside."

"What do you mean a shell?"

"Just the foundation, roof, and outer walls. Then later we could add the inside walls for the kitchen and sleeping areas," explained Yanis.

"So, it would just be a big empty room."

"Exactly. And we would be out of the rain and warmer."

"That sounds fine to me, if you've got time to get it finished before the rains."

"Well, I've got all summer. I think I should go ahead and get on the stone mason's and the carpenter's schedules. But I've got to get back to work."

"Abie, let's go get your nap and fix Abba a good dinner."

Yanis worked for a while longer and then walked down to talk with Mr. Ezekiel. He asked if Zokur could help him with the stumps. "Does he have any available time between his other jobs?"

"Yes, I'll bring him, and you can show him what you want him to do."

Zokur said he would like to dig the stumps, but he didn't have a shovel. Yanis promised to buy him a shovel if he would work for a couple of hours every afternoon. Yanis headed to the house for dinner, and Zokur returned to the barn to greet the milkers and help with the deliveries. First thing on Monday, Yanis scheduled the stone mason to lay a foundation for him at the end of summer. Then he asked the Carpenter Shop to help him build a house a couple of weeks after the

stones were set. He explained that he didn't have the money to do the inside, but he needed the shell built so his family would be warm for the winter. They agreed, and he ran to the Mercantile Store and bought another shovel. He also bought a small spade for Abie. She would enjoy that.



Midmorning, Yanis told Jenay that he had to run an errand and would return as soon as possible to get back to work. In his prayer time late last night, he had felt overwhelmed with the need to talk with Pollux. When he arrived at the site, there were several men scurrying around putting on the finishing touches to the New Way Worship Center. He asked if Pollux was around and was directed inside. Pollux gave him a big smile and welcomed him. He asked if he and his wife were enjoying their class with Zotocus and Yanis assured him that they were. He asked if Pollux could take some time to talk with him about how he could help. He was definitely feeling the Holy Spirit leading him to help the Gentiles understand more of Jesus' teachings and how to follow Jesus once they accepted Him as Messiah. Pollux said he always had time to talk about that. He said that he needed to set up a time for them to meet with Gaius who worked a regular job and wouldn't be available until evenings. "You meet with Zotocus on Tuesdays, don't you? Our families also usually meet on Tuesday after work to discuss business, but I don't want you to miss your group. Let me see if we can meet tonight instead. The rest of our nights are pretty full with groups. We don't live far from here. Let's just walk over and let me talk with Corina." They knocked on a door and a servant welcomed them. A woman came to greet them, and Pollux introduced her as part of the original four. "Would it be possible to move our meeting to tonight? I would like us to include Yanis and his wife, but he's not available tomorrow night."

"I don't know of any problem. We're meeting here, and as long as you don't expect a feast, we should have dinner around sunset, and you and your wife will be welcome."

"I also have a baby girl who is just over a year old."

"Oh, my girls will love her. We'll look forward to it."

"Corina, could you let my wife know? I need to get back to work," said Pollux.

"Sure."

"Thank you, Pollux. Should we meet you here?" asked Yanis.

"Yes, at sunset. Shalom."

"Shalom, my friend."

Yanis didn't know why, but as he began to walk home, his knees became weak, and his eyes filled with tears. He knew that Jehovah was at work, but he wasn't sure what it all meant. He just knew that he had been obedient. Now, he needed to hurry home and tell Jenay the plan. Jenay and Abie were out at the new house site. Abie was digging

stumps with her spade and Jenay was picking up rocks for the fence. He called to them and motioned to Jenay that they needed to talk. They left Abie digging in the dirt. He told Jenay that he had felt a distinct word from Jehovah that he needed to talk with Pollux about teaching the Gentiles. She nodded. He told her about the dinner meeting tonight and asked if she and Abie could go with him. "Of course. I'll just need to get her down for an earlier nap."

"I need to get busy." Yanis started digging stumps and Zokur came to join him soon. They were making good progress and Jenay called for Abie to come to the house with her to get some juice. They went to the well and got a jar of water to wash themselves. Jenay was tired of feeling confined and put on one of the birthing robes. It seemed a little soon to be wearing it, but it was so much more comfortable. She slipped a fresh tunic on Abie and told her it was nap time. They would go and play with some new friends tonight.

Jenay sat and wove while Abie napped. Her mind was racing, wondering what Yanis planned to do. She loved supporting his ministries, but never knew what he was thinking or planning. She thanked Jehovah for giving her a husband she could trust to lead them obediently. *I'm certainly not going to complain about him doing too much ministry after all my prayers during our first year of marriage!* She smiled at how much things had changed. Now, they were going out again tonight.



Pollux welcomed Yanis and his family. He introduced them to Gaius and called the children to come and meet Abie. It seemed there were children everywhere. The oldest looked to be about six years old, and Pollux said that four of them were his and three of them were Gaius'. They promised to look after Abie, and she happily joined in their play. Servants were supervising, and Jenay felt comfortable leaving her. Gaius welcomed them to his house and invited them in to meet their wives. Corina welcomed Jenay with a hug, and Salacia explained that Corina was Gaius' wife and she was Pollux's. "I hope you don't mind eating indoors. It's just easier to make sure the children eat. When we sit in the courtyard it's hard to keep up with all of them." Soon the three ladies were talking about the children and Jenay was feeling comfortable. She felt that same sense of fellowship that she experienced with her Jewish friends who were following Jesus. She was surprised by that.

Yanis and the men were getting acquainted. Yanis was telling them about trying to get a house built before the rainy season. Pollux said that building the shell sounded like a good idea to him. Yanis asked when the Worship Center would be complete. They said they planned to have large gatherings there to celebrate each night next week. Various groups from different areas of Capernaum would have a fellowship meal, special music, and a speaker each night. It would

be very, very busy. Corina and Salacia had organized and scheduled all the details.

Dinner was served, and the three couples sat together at a table, while servants supervised the children's table and then took them upstairs to play. Abie didn't even hesitate — she knew where the fun was!

"Yanis, you said that you felt that Jehovah was calling you to help us. We'd like to hear what you have in mind," said Pollux.

"Honestly, I have no idea. I currently teach a group made up of Jenay's family each Sabbath night. There are about twenty followers of Jesus, and I have been teaching them about Jesus' life on earth. I also answer their questions about obedience and try to guide them in applying Jesus' teachings to life. Jenay and I teach five families on Sabbath morning essentially the same things. Only two of the families have accepted Jesus as Messiah and the other three are just learning. Then on Sabbath afternoon I teach a group made up of mostly rabbis, who are all followers of Jesus. Jenay teaches a group made up of their wives and daughters and a few others on Wednesdays at noon. She essentially does the same lessons and provides support for them. All of these groups are Jewish. During my prayers last night, I knew that Jehovah was calling me to help you and your Gentile groups to understand the things we learned from Jesus during our three years of being disciplined by Him, but I don't know what it would look like."

"Did you say that you know a group of rabbis who are followers of Jesus?" asked Gaius.

"Yes. They have had a really rough year since Priest Shimei has been assigned to Capernaum. He is strongly opposed to Jesus and is requiring the rabbis to teach under very strict supervision. It has been an incredibly hard year for them."

"Yanis, we have been praying to know what to do with our sons. My son is seven years old. I don't want to send him to Roman school because the teachers there will insist on him learning all about the Roman gods. But I can't send him to Hebrew School because we are not Jewish. We have been praying for a solution. I do not have time to teach him, but it breaks my heart that he doesn't have a school. How many rabbis do you know that are followers of Jesus?"

"I know three who were trained under Nicodemus, one of the men who placed Jesus' body in the tomb after the crucifixion. The other rabbi is not formally trained but has been teaching for about ten years until Priest Shimei forced him out. He can only teach halftime because he owns the Capernaum Bank."

"But would they be willing to teach Gentiles?" asked Gaius.

"All I could do is ask, but I know that they are excited about this ministry and have been praying for you," said Yanis.

"Let's assume that they all say yes. Do they teach Greek, or only Hebrew?"

"I'm sure they teach both."

"Do any of them teach Latin?" asked Gaius.

“We would want the boys to learn Greek, and of course numbers, and then some Hebrew and Latin, and, of course, some Jewish and Roman history,” Pollux was thinking out loud.

“Why don’t we set up a meeting with the rabbis and let you talk with them. I’ll be meeting with them on the Sabbath. Could we plan to meet with you next Monday?” asked Yanis.

“No, the Worship Center opening is all next week, so it would have to be the following Monday. That will also give us all time to pray about using the Worship Center as a school for our sons. This would be an incredible asset to our followers. Yanis, thank you for at least presenting it to them and letting them pray about it,” said Gaius.

“And we certainly want to take advantage of your offer to help us teach the New Way to all our members. We’ll have to discuss it at a later date because we still need to talk about some other business,” said Pollux.

“I am amazed at how Jehovah provides for each and every one of our needs. I’m looking forward to meeting your rabbi friends in two weeks. We will host the dinner here again and they may bring their wives if they wish,” said Gaius.

“Rabbi Elijah has three children, so are you sure you want wives and children, or do you just want the rabbis?”

“Oh, we would love to meet them all. What ages are his children?”

Jenay answered, “Four, three, and almost two.”

“I’ll check with them and let you know how many to expect,” said Yanis.

“Let’s pray before you leave,” said Pollux. “Father, bless Yanis and Jenay and thank You for this possibility of Your guiding us to teachers for our children. Please continue to guide Yanis to know how to help us grow our people to follow You. Bless their ministries and their home. In Jesus’ name I pray.”

Jenay went upstairs with Corina and picked up Abie who was sound asleep. She handed her to Yanis. They said their goodnights and thanked them for dinner and began their walk home.

“We just ate our first non-kosher meal,” said Jenay.

“In a Gentile house.”

“And hugged them and had sweet fellowship with them.”

“And now we need to talk with the rabbis about joining us there. I know that I heard clearly that I was supposed to meet with Pollux today. I never dreamed that this might happen.”

“Do you think the rabbis would consider teaching there?” asked Jenay.

“I think they are pretty desperate to get out from under Priest Shimei.”

“But won’t it put them in extreme danger to teach Gentiles?”

“Again, I think it’s like I told Jaden. What can he do except kick them out of the synagogue? If they aren’t attending the synagogue, I don’t think he can tell them what they can and can’t do. But I’m sure

he'll find a way to make life miserable for them. Oh, I forgot to ask them about fishermen."

"You'll be back over there next week to tell them who is coming or if they are not coming," reminded Jenay.

"I want to talk with the rabbis right now," said Yanis.

"It's very late. I think you shouldn't."

"I know. But I want to! I think they will be thrilled, but they may not. I guess I just want it to be good." They walked in silence for quite a while, each thinking their own thoughts.

Yanis laid Abie on her mat and turned off the lamp.

"Yanis, are you hurt that they are more excited about the rabbis than about your volunteering?" asked Jenay tenderly.

"I guess, a little. But I just want Jehovah's will to be done. I've really got my hands full with leading my current groups. He knows what is best. Let's get some rest."

"Goodnight, Yanis. I'm so proud of you."

"Goodnight, Jenay. That makes me happy."

Tuesday morning, Yanis had thought he would orchestrate a meeting with the rabbis, but he felt he should wait so they would have time to talk. He and Jenay needed to be at Zotocus' house by sunset and it was a long walk. He decided he would try to meet with the rabbis on Wednesday. He was afraid to be seen with them, and he knew he couldn't wait until the Sabbath, so after breakfast he ran to Jesse's store and asked to speak to him in his office. "I need to speak to all four rabbis, including Talman. I was wondering if you could set that up for me since you'll be out and about town today. I need to meet with them, but don't want to be seen by spying eyes. Could we meet on your rooftop?"

"Do you want to call the entire group together, or just the four rabbis?"

"Just the four rabbis for right now. I believe that Jehovah has given me a word for them that they need to hear."

"Okay. It's easy enough for me to stop by the school and let them know, but could you talk with Talman at the bank? Would that put you or him in too much danger?"

"No, that should be fine. He's my banker. I should be able to go there without a problem. Thanks, Jesse."

"When do you want to meet?"

"Right after school tomorrow, if that would work for them."

"Okay, I will let them know to meet you at my place. You haven't had any more trouble with Priest Shimei, have you?"

"No, everything has been calm. Oh, and I need to let you know, Jaden is needing men to train as fishermen for his Fish Shop." They discussed the job and benefits, and Jesse was happy to list it for them. "I've got to run to Talman's, and thanks for letting us meet at your house."

"No problem. I'll let the rabbis know."

Yanis ran toward Talman's bank. He hated not having time to work on the house, but he knew that this was more important. He



knocked on Talman's door. They greeted each other and Talman asked how he could help him. Yanis said, "I don't want to sound all secretive, but Jehovah gave me a message the other night that affects all of you rabbis. I would like to share it with all four of you and let you pray about it. Forgive me for not sharing it with you right now, but I want to share it with everyone at the same time. I was wondering if you would meet us at Jesse's after school tomorrow?"

"No problem. I can do that. I hope it's good news," said Talman.

"I've got to run and get some work done. Shalom."

"Shalom, my friend. Be safe."

Yanis only got one stump dug before noon and then Zokur joined him, and they made some good progress. Zokur loved digging stumps, and he was worth every penny of his pay. He and Zokur headed to the house by midafternoon where he found Jenay and Abie both asleep. He poured some juice and let them sleep a little while longer. His mind continued to focus on what the rabbis would say tomorrow. He knew that he was getting off track and began to pray for wisdom. *Father, I want Your will to be done, not my own. You have a plan, and I confess that I don't know what it is. Please work it all out to Your glory and let me simply be Your instrument. Use me as You desire. In Jesus' name.* Abie woke up and ran to her abba. Together they called for Mother to get up and get ready to go play with their new friends.

"I haven't walked this much since we were following Jesus, and I wasn't lugging a baby around then!" She slipped into a fresh robe and checked Abie. At least this week she didn't need a bath. They began their walk across town to Zotocus' house. They had forgotten to let Zotocus know their decision to not remain kosher when they were with the Gentiles, but the servants quickly made them a plate in the kitchen and Yanis and Jenay apologized. When they gathered for the teaching, Zotocus reminded them that these lessons were based on the questions asked by the initial group of Gentiles who were taught about Jesus. "Last week was rather random and this week is just an assortment of commonly asked questions. Afterward, you may ask your own questions. Next week will be more similar to our earlier studies and will cover what you need to know about the characteristics of Jehovah God. Tonight, we will be looking at a variety of subjects." Yanis was listening, but he was not hearing. His mind was racing with questions about the rabbis teaching at the Gentile school. Zotocus covered praying in Jesus' name, but praying to Jehovah God. They discussed the Sabbath, and Zotocus asked Yanis how he and his family celebrated the Sabbath each week.

Yanis still didn't want to reveal his full identity and quite honestly answered, "Jenay and I start the day by milking about thirty goats. I own a milk farm just west of town. Jenay usually sings some of the Psalms so that we can think about Jehovah while we work, and it helps the goats to settle down and cooperate. Then we spend the day as quietly as we can. Jenay doesn't cook or clean and I don't do any farm work."

“Thank you for sharing. Do you find it helps you face a new week?”

“I’ve done it since childhood, so I can’t say what it would be like if I didn’t keep the Sabbath,” replied Yanis.

“I understand,” said Zotocus. “To summarize, we do not observe the Sabbath because it is required of us. We observe the Sabbath because it is good for us and helps us. You will find that Jehovah is always looking out for what is best for you. We’ll be talking more about Jehovah’s characteristics next week. Okay, let’s take a break and then we have three more subjects to cover.”

After the break, Zotocus continued with a discussion of fellowship, worship, and special celebrations. “I know it is getting late, but does anyone have other questions?”

“So, these celebrations or Holy Days would replace our Roman holidays?”

“Yes. You are not becoming Jews, you are becoming followers of Jesus, and we are still working on trying to set aside days to celebrate Him and what He’s done for us. Please come back next week for one of the most important discussions on the characteristics and attributes of Jehovah God. I hope you will all be here — but this I promise you: We’ll keep meeting with you until you get all your questions resolved. If I can’t answer them, I’ll find someone who can. Please don’t get discouraged because there’s so much to learn.”

“I’m still waiting to learn how to get my empty spot filled,” said Aeneus.

“We’ll cover that next week, too. Let us pray. Father, bless us as we travel home tonight. Help us to be open to what You are teaching us and help me to be able to answer their questions better and be a more effective teacher. Bring them back safely next week. In Jesus’ name I pray.”

Everyone said goodnight, but once again Yanis and Jenay noted a discouraged feeling. Zotocus kept assuring them that next week would give them the answers they were looking for, and there would be more time for questions.

Yanis went upstairs and picked up Abie while Jenay said goodbye to her friends. They walked home mostly in silence. “What did you think of tonight’s lesson?” Jenay asked.

“I was really impressed with the first two lessons, but these last two seem less effective. I think I could tweak them and make them better,” said Yanis.

“I was thinking the same thing. But we know Jehovah is using this method to reach literally thousands of Gentiles. So, I don’t suggest changing it.”

“I just hope next week really does answer their questions, and mine!”

## Chapter 15

“When are you meeting with the rabbis?” asked Jenay as they walked home.

“Tomorrow after school. Pray for me as I talk with them. They may totally reject the idea of teaching Gentiles. That’s going to be a drastic change for them. And if they are closed to the idea, then I need to let Pollux know so he can keep looking for rabbis that have accepted Jesus.”

“We need to go over what I am teaching this week.”

“I thought we were talking about the second cleansing of the temple and the fact that nothing had changed, even though Jesus had taught for over three years.”

“Right. I had forgotten we had talked about that. This going out every night is really getting tiring. I’m glad I got a nap today. We should be home tomorrow night after the ladies’ group, right?”

“As far as I know,” said Yanis, wearily. He tucked Abie in her blanket and all three were quickly asleep.

Instead of working on preparation of teaching material on Wednesday morning, they ended up praying for the rabbis to be willing to seek Jehovah and hear His direction for them. School would be out for summer break at the end of next week.

Yanis didn’t feel like working on digging stumps but opted to walk into the woods and pray for a while. He wanted to remember what he had heard and to be able to communicate it clearly to the rabbis. He needed to get it all sorted in his own head. Jenay and Abie had already gone to Rachel’s to meet with the women’s group. He grabbed some juice and then began to walk to Jesse’s house. He was greeted by Jesse who invited him to go on up to the rooftop since Talman had arrived early and was waiting. The other three had not arrived. Jesse said he would wait for them and then he had work to do at the store. They were free to stay as long as they wished. “Just tell me one thing. Does this have anything to do with the New Way Worship Center?”

“Has Jehovah been talking to you, too?” asked Yanis with a grin.

“Yes. But I’ll wait and let you deal with it. I’ll be patient, but I’ll also be praying.”

“Thanks, Jesse.” He went up the stairs to greet Talman. Soon the other three rabbis joined them. They slumped into the cushions and greeted Yanis wearily.

“Just don’t preach at us about trusting Jehovah. We’ve had all we can take.”

Yanis began to speak soothingly to them. “Gentlemen, you have been put through the fire of persecution and you have come out with some scars, but Jehovah has been faithful. Are things worse today than they have been?”

“A thousand times worse. We were informed that we were expected to attend Sukkot in Jerusalem.”

“I’ve already promised Rachel we’ll go to Ariel’s, and I intend to keep that promise.”

“Then you’d better stay there, or we’ll all be killed,” said Joel.

“Gentlemen, I didn’t call you here to make things worse. I feel that Jehovah has spoken to me, and I want to tell you what Jenay and I have learned this week. It will take me a few minutes to explain. Will you give me your attention so that you will understand the full story?”

They all agreed to listen, but everyone was so discouraged Yanis could tell that their thoughts were far away. “First of all, Jesse found a New Way Worship Center on the south side of town. It is run by Gentiles. They only started working here a year and a half ago and already have several hundred Jesus followers. I told you that Jenay and I have been attending a class that our friend Orly designed to reach Gentiles, and we have determined that it is accurately presenting Jesus. We have met with the four leaders several times to pray with them and encourage them.

“About a week ago, Jaden, Mr. Zebedee’s oldest son, and I were talking about the Fish Shop, and he mentioned that they sold non-kosher fish and had done so for many years. Jenay and I began to talk about it and realized that that was what Jesus was talking about when he said the outside of the cup looked clean, but the inside was filthy. He was saying it didn’t really matter what nationality the outside was — He was more interested in whether a person was in a right relationship with Him. Since that point, Jenay and I have been eating non-kosher food with our Gentile friends, spending time with them in their houses, and watching them follow Jesus obediently just as we are. Now, I’ve shared some of that with you, but I wanted to review it with you.

“On Sunday morning, I very clearly heard Jehovah say to go and talk with Pollux, one of the leaders of the Worship Center. Jehovah directed me to ask him how I could help him. Jenay and I met with the four of them after work on Monday and found out that their greatest need is for rabbis to teach their children. They don’t want their children to attend Roman schools, yet, they don’t have time to teach them themselves. They don’t want them to attend Hebrew School even if they could. They want to start a New Way School that would be for all nationalities: Jews, Romans, Greeks, and Syrians. They have been praying for rabbis for several months. Jehovah has not provided an answer to that request. I told them that I would bring their request to you and let you pray it through. It would be different from anything you’ve ever taught. The Worship Center will be opening next week so they don’t have time to meet with you this coming week, but have requested a meeting with you the following Monday. I’m to let them know sometime next week if you will at least attend the meeting and discuss becoming rabbis for the new school that will meet in the Worship Center.”

“How many students do they have?” asked Jairus.

“They don’t know, but they plan to find out before the meeting. They were also hoping to employ some Gentile followers to teach

Latin and Roman history, for instance. I feel certain that they would be reasonable about limiting class size and making it a successful school. But this would be something that you would have to check out and decide for yourselves. I can't tell you what Jehovah's will is for you. The first question is whether you would be comfortable associating with Gentiles."

"They sound nicer than most of the Jews I know," growled Talman.

"I'm certainly willing to meet them and talk with them. All we stand to lose is our heads," said Joel.

"That's one of the beauties of this. If you take this position, you will certainly be kicked out of the synagogue, but you could worship at the New Way Center. I don't think Priest Shimei would have any authority over you. Now, I'm sure he will try, and it may not be pleasant. That's why I can't decide for you. I will pray with you, I will pray for Jehovah to guide you, and I will introduce you to the leaders, but this is up to you — and it will be up to each one of you individually to decide what you will do."

"What will we tell Priest Shimei when he asks about our teaching next year?"

"I think he thinks you are stuck because of all your attachments here. I don't think he will ask."

"What do we tell him about attending Sukkot?"

"We're going to all pray that it doesn't come up again. Let Jehovah be God. Let Him be your Shepherd and guide you. You guys need to finish out the year well and send the boys off to their summer break. But you need to start praying about whether this is a direction that Jehovah is leading you. You would be teaching children of all nationalities. You essentially have a week to pray before the meeting next Monday. I'll pray with you anytime you desire. I intend to begin doing some teaching there for the adults."

"What about my trip to see Ariel?"

"Jairus, I don't know. I don't know what will happen after this meeting on Monday. If you have already decided to move to Damascus, we will support you and you can go with our love and our blessings. If you want to continue to teach in Capernaum, you'll need to attend this meeting," said Yanis. The others agreed.

"Now, I need to get home and so do you. You've got to finish this week and one more. I'll be praying for you to not even see Priest Shimei before Sukkot. We'll meet as a group on Sabbath as usual, I assume."

"Yes, let's meet at the regular time at Talman's."

"Okay, I'll see you all there plus the rest of our group."

As they came down the stairs, Yanis saw that Jenay was visiting with Miriam and letting the children play. Yanis and Jenay walked home together letting Abie run ahead of them. Jenay asked, "How was it received?"

"Surprisingly good. They are going to pray about it and let me know later," said Yanis.

“That’s good. The ladies’ group is really concerned about all the stress the men are under. But they seemed to enjoy the teaching about Jesus making a real difference in our lives.”

“That’s good,” said Yanis, but Jenay could tell his mind was a thousand miles away.

Thursday was an amazing day simply because they were alone all day and could enjoy being a family. Jenay and Abie stayed outdoors with Yanis and enjoyed the sunshine. Jenay worked on collecting rocks for the fence and Abie dug stumps with her abba — at least that was the goal. Zokur helped them in the afternoon and Jenay took Abie to the house for a nap while she started dinner. They sat down to dinner for just the three of them and relaxed together. Jenay treasured her time with Yanis, but she could tell he was still thinking about the rabbis and what their decision would be.

On Friday they walked to Grandmother Salome’s house and Jaden thanked him for sending the three boys to train as fishermen. “I didn’t know whether their dads would approve or not, but they seemed interested,” said Yanis.

“Yes, they will start Sunday after school before starting full time the next week. Benji will be in charge of training them. He’s pretty excited to meet some followers of Jesus who are his age, and they can enjoy some fellowship. Benji is a patient teacher.”

Yanis apologized for not being able to share about the job openings with the Gentile group yet, but promised he would do it this coming week. “They are in the middle of opening the New Way Worship Center this week and are quite busy right now. They are expecting over a thousand people to attend during the opening week.” The men began talking of other things and soon dinner was served.

Grandmother Salome sat with the women and listened to their chattering but seemed to be quieter than usual. Jenay moved closer and asked if she was missing Grandpa. “Yes, always, but I keep thinking about what Zachary said about Capernaum becoming a battle ground with Jews fighting Jews. I guess I’m just too old to deal with that. Why can’t we all just live in peace?”

“You know that that’s what Jesus wanted. But He warned us that He was more interested in us being in a right relationship with Jehovah than having peace in our families. He said that He would cause families to war against families, brothers against brothers, and fathers against sons. I’m glad that we can gather as a family and worship together. At least all four of your children are serving Jesus. That should bring you peace.”

“It does, but I’m really grieving for Andrew and Peter. Was it worth it to follow Jesus when they lost their first-borns?”

“I think so. Saul and Laban made up their own minds. They were both already adults when their dads decided to follow Jesus. Just think of all the people Andrew and Peter have impacted because of their decision to follow Him. Grandmother, I believe that Jehovah is good, and even though not everyone will accept His plan, He is still good.”

Grandmother Salome patted her arm and thanked her. “How’s that little one doing?”

“He’s getting bigger every day. It won’t be long, and you’ll be holding another great grandson.”

“Oh, he’s a boy, now?” questioned Salome.

“Of course! Yanis is sure of it!” They both laughed.



When Yanis and Jenay met the families in the woods that Sabbath morning, everyone was talking about school being out in two weeks. Soon they settled down to listen to Yanis teach. He shared about Jesus healing his sore blistered feet and about following Him around the next day and seeing Him heal many, many people. Then he turned to the group and asked, “How did He do that?” The ones who had already accepted Him as Messiah sat quietly and let the three new families think about it.

“He was a great prophet and could do miracles,” said Nehemiah.

“But Jesus Himself said that it was not Him doing the miracles, but Jehovah doing them through Him,” said Yanis. “Jesus was fully human. He was physically built just like us.” And Yanis launched into his explanation of Jesus being filled by the Holy Spirit while the rest of us were born with an empty core. He shared that if they accepted Jesus as their Messiah, the sacrificial lamb, they would be put in a right relationship with Jehovah. The Holy Spirit would come into their core and begin to fill it and guide them. There were several questions, but no one expressed a desire to invite Jesus to be their Messiah. Yanis knew that he had to leave, so he led them in a prayer of blessing and invited them to visit as long as they wished. They would meet at the same time next week. He was disappointed that no one was ready but knew that his focus was on hearing what the rabbis were thinking.

Jairus and Joel were talking with Talman, Jesse, and Tobias when he arrived. They would wait for the others before sharing anything deep. Jesse had them all laughing about a customer’s request for a very specific house. Soon they were all together and Yanis asked Jesse to lead them in a time of prayer before they started the lesson. But after the prayer, Joel said, “I thought we usually shared before the lesson.”

“Yes, but I wasn’t sure what you guys wanted to do. I’m flexible,” said Yanis.

“We talked about it at our Sabbath dinner last night and I think everybody here knows our decision except you, Ira, and Tobias.”

“Ira and I prayed about it together late Thursday night. So, he knows,” said Elijah.

“What are you thinking?” asked Yanis, trying to act like it was not important to him.

Jairus said, “Rachel and I have decided to check it out and see.”

“And the rest of us are eager to hear their plan,” said Joel.

“Let me make sure you understand. This will not be like teaching a Hebrew School. It will be made up of Gentiles. I have no idea how many students you’ll have, and I don’t know what all they will need you to teach. I just don’t want you to blame me for getting you into this,” said Yanis.

“You didn’t. You were just Jehovah’s messenger. And we are not doing this just to get out from under Priest Shimei. We’ve prayed it through and feel that Jehovah wants to use us to teach these children how to follow Jesus. It would be so great to be able to teach freely again and guide their young lives. We just don’t know what it will look like. But we all agree that we feel Jehovah’s call to check it out.”

“Okay. The plan is for me to let them know how many to expect for dinner. This week they are doing their grand opening of the Worship Center. But they want to meet at sunset the following Monday. The first thing you need to know is that the meal will not be kosher. Jenay and I have decided that while we are ministering with the Gentiles, we’ll eat whatever is offered to us. If you don’t want to eat non-kosher food, then you need to pack your own dinner. Your wives and children are all invited, and I need to let them know a headcount of how many to expect and how many plates to prepare before midweek.”

“We’ve already talked about that, too. And they can plan on eight adults and four children, and we’ll eat with them. Jehovah has called us to minister to the Gentiles, so if we can work this out at all, that’s the plan,” said Joel.

“And you are all in agreement with this?” asked Yanis in amazement.

“Well,” Elijah said, “we sorta put out a fleece — you know, like Gideon. We said that if we could get through the rest of this week without encountering Priest Shimei at all, we would know that Jehovah was calling us to attend this meeting with the Gentiles.”

“And?” prompted Yanis.

“He wasn’t at the synagogue all day Thursday or Friday. He and his assistants just didn’t show up. We think he left for Jerusalem early so that we couldn’t resign! We will finish out the year and dismiss in two weeks. Then we’ll gather up all our personal things and bring them home, just in case we aren’t allowed back inside.”

“I just want you to know I’m praying for you all. In fact, let’s just go around the room and pray for each of you.” They spent quite a bit of time in prayer. Then Joel asked Yanis if he wanted to teach them something that Jesus taught during His last week. “No, we still have one more that He did before we get into His last week of teaching.” Yanis told them about the cleansing of the temple at the end of Jesus’ ministry. He reminded them that Jesus had cleaned up the temple near the beginning of His ministry and had spent over three years teaching, yet the Pharisees and Sanhedrin were unchanged. He challenged the men to let the teachings of Jesus change them, transform them, make them into new men. He asked them how they



had changed since they had invited Jesus to be their Messiah and let the Holy Spirit guide their lives. They had a sweet time of sharing. Yanis felt a new sense of Jehovah's presence among these men, and he was eager to see what Jehovah had planned for them.

He walked home slowly after the men had shared their post-Sabbath meal. "Mr. Yanis, look!" He recognized Zokur's voice and turned to see a funny sight. Yanis began to laugh, and Mr. Ezekiel explained that tonight was their first experiment. All the children who usually helped with deliveries were leading goats that had been trained to pull the carts. These goats were wethers, male goats who had been castrated so that they would grow strong enough to pull milk carts but would not endanger the herd. There were eight of them, each pulling their own cart. Mr. Ezekiel said that Zokur had done all the training for the wethers. Yanis walked beside Mr. Ezekiel and said he would see him in the morning. Zokur still needed to fill the water troughs, and Yanis was eager to tell Jenay about the rabbis' decisions. They talked long into the night about the changes happening in Capernaum.



On Sunday morning, Yanis spent time checking the accounts for the farm, and felt that Jehovah was guiding him to increase Zokur's salary to reflect the work that he had accomplished. He saw no reason to pay him less just because he was not mentally as developed as other men. He certainly worked harder than most men! Yanis went to talk with Mr. Ezekiel and Zokur. Yanis explained that he was increasing his pay and why. Mr. Ezekiel explained it to Zokur so he could understand and Zokur thanked Yanis. Yanis apologized for being so busy and ignoring the farm. He asked if there was anything that Mr. Ezekiel needed. He said if they had two more goat carts, then they wouldn't have to make two trips for each delivery. Yanis assured Mr. Ezekiel that he had enough funds to order the new carts.

Yanis walked over to the area he was preparing for the new house. He decided to leave the last section of stumps for Zokur, while he began clearing trees for the courtyard. If he could get both areas cleared, then the stone masons could lay both foundations at the same time and probably lower the cost. As he chopped down trees, his mind was free to pray for the rabbis and their future.

## Chapter 16

On Tuesday at sunset, Yanis, Jenay, and Abie were welcomed by Zotocus and Mariana. They enjoyed sharing with their new friends, but everyone seemed eager for this lesson. They listened as Zotocus covered the characteristics of Jehovah God. And this week, he allowed time for questions. Near the end, Zotocus said that he would move out to the front courtyard and Mariana would move into the back courtyard. Everyone else could just stay and visit and enjoy the snacks provided by the servants. But if anyone would like to invite Jesus to be their Messiah, and Jehovah God to be their one and only God, they could come and talk with them privately. Yanis and Jenay watched as one by one each individual moved out to talk with Zotocus or Mariana. They noticed that Angela did not go outside, but everyone else did. When they came together for closing prayer, Zotocus prayed for the new followers of Jesus and assured those who had not accepted Jesus that he would be available for questions tonight or next week. Everyone should come back next week for more instruction, next steps, and of course, any questions that they had. After the closing prayer, Yanis went and picked up the sleeping Abie, but then he and Jenay told their hosts they would like to talk with them after everyone else left. There was much joy, and the group walked out together celebrating what had just happened. "Zotocus, I sense that you are sad that we did not accept Jesus as our Messiah tonight."

"Of course not," said Zotocus. "We are so glad that you came to get the information. You may take as long as you need to process it, and we'll be available to answer any questions you have."

"That's just it. We don't have any questions. We've already been followers of Jesus for many years. Jenay and I met while we were following Jesus as His disciples. We have been attending your group to make sure that we could support your work here. We have learned so much about Gentiles that we never knew, and you have helped us to move away from some of the Laws that were still binding us. This group has been most helpful to both of us. But I assure you, we are fellow followers and will be glad to reveal that to the group next time. I noticed that Angela also didn't talk with you about Jesus. Is she already a follower?"

"Yes, she accepted Jesus as her Messiah last time."

"Good. Thanks again for including us and letting us attend your class. It was written by a dear friend of mine, and I have always wanted to hear it taught."

"You are welcome. You have indeed made us very happy; our little group is now complete!"

"Yes, it is. We'll see you next week. Shalom."

"Shalom."



On Wednesday morning, Yanis and Jenay worked on how to present Jesus' teachings on the things that would happen before the end of time. While they had heard these teachings from the apostles, they weren't like the other parables that they had heard over and over. They didn't feel as secure teaching them and decided to just summarize the main points. When Jenay and Abie left for the women's group, Yanis walked to the Worship Center to report how many to expect on Monday. He also wanted to ask Pollux about how to let the Gentile followers know that Jaden was hiring workers.

Jenay enjoyed the excitement among the women. Everyone had heard about the possibility of the rabbis working with the Gentiles. The ladies visited and shared prayer needs, they sang a few Psalms and then asked Jenay to teach them. Jenay nervously began, "This is not a lesson that I am comfortable teaching, and I want you to understand why. Most of the things I have taught you, I personally witnessed. Jesus taught the same parables over and over so that those of us who would continue His work would be able to tell them and explain them to you. Those are fun to talk about. Today's teaching is something that Jesus taught only to His apostles, and I have only heard it secondhand. I think it is vitally important for us to know. It is also not pleasant, so, that gives it two strikes against it before we even begin. Jesus told His apostles some specific things to plan for and look for before He returned to earth. So, here goes. Elizabeth will you pray for me so that I get this right?" Elizabeth not only prayed for the Holy Spirit to guide Jenay, but to open their ears to hear truth. And she prayed for a spirit of peace and love to permeate the room. "Thank you. One of the first things that Jesus said was that no one, not even He knew when the end would come. He said that only Jehovah knew the timing. Another thing He said was that we were not to confuse earthly wars and rumors of war for the second coming. He said that wars were terrible things, but that didn't mean that His coming was imminent. What He did say is that there would be a lot of false teachers that would claim to be the Messiah and we would have to be careful to not be misled. He said that the beginning signs would be an increase in wars, famines, and earthquakes. He said that persecution of the followers would increase. But He said that the faithful would scatter to the whole world to preach the gospel to all nations. Jesus said that the temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed and that all the Jews in Israel would have to flee for their lives. He said there would be much persecution and we would have to endure it. I think that this past year we've experienced at least some of that. Then He said that was just the beginning and He called it the birthing pains. But when the real thing is happening, here's the list He gave: The sun will grow dark, the moon won't appear, and stars will fall out of the sky. And then everyone on earth will see Jesus return just as He left. An angel will blow a trumpet, and all of the followers of Jesus will be gathered

together to meet Him in the sky. So, while this may sound like a depressing lesson, the important part is that like a bride waiting for her husband, we should recognize the signs and realize that it's close to time for Jesus to return."

"Maybe that means our husbands won't have to go to Jerusalem ever again," said Hava.

"I wouldn't want him to go if the temple is going to be destroyed. It's much too dangerous," said Rachel.

"And don't forget, our job is to be spreading the good news to everyone," said Jenay. "But we don't know when it will happen. We must simply keep watching and waiting, always in obedience. Sarah, will you lead us in prayer?"

After the prayer, Miriam began to sing Psalm 150 and the ladies sang and danced together and enjoyed the freedom of knowing that the priest was out of town for Sukkot. They felt free.



Friday when Yanis, Jenay, and Abie arrived at Grandmother Salome's, Jaden grabbed Yanis in a big hug and thanked him for his help. "What did I do?" Yanis asked in astonishment.

"'Ask and you shall receive,' Jesus said," quoted Jonas.

"Did you get some help?" asked Yanis.

"Yep. Last week we got three Jewish boys that Benji is training and yesterday we got eleven Gentile followers. I'll have to train them, but Jonas can keep an eye on things here and we can keep everything running smoothly. I'm just so grateful to you."

"Don't praise me. Jehovah is your provider. You know that. I just mentioned it to Pollux, and he said he might know of some men that needed jobs," said Yanis. "I'm glad it worked out. Oh, and I also asked Jesse at the Mercantile Store to list it as a job opening. Do you want me to take that off?"

"No, the more the merrier. We could run several more boats if we had enough crew," said Jaden. "But this is a great start."

"I'm glad I could help."

After dinner the group gathered to pray and share. Jaden praised Jehovah for providing fishermen for the Fish Shop. Yanis asked for prayer for a meeting tomorrow night with the Gentile leadership to discuss ways he could help them. He didn't feel right mentioning the rabbis since it was not his business. Abira asked them to pray for Jehovah to provide Laila a husband and she blushed. They sang some Psalms and then Yanis taught the lesson on the last days before Jesus returned. Jenay thought he did a much better job than she had, and told him so on the walk home. They agreed that they were both excited about the meeting on Monday.



It was hard to get awake on Sabbath morning for milking duty. But soon they were in the barn with Mr. Ezekiel, Zokur, and Solomon. With the herd growing under Mr. Ezekiel's direction, the milking was taking longer and longer. Yanis and Jenay barely had time to grab a bite of breakfast before heading to the woods to meet with the families. Yanis had a plan that he wanted to try this morning. He didn't know how it would work, but he felt that it would be good for everyone to have a change of pace. They were still uncomfortable singing for fear of being discovered, so, they just began with sharing and praying for each other. Then Yanis stood before them and said, "This morning, I'm going to ask you to do something different. Jeremiah and Jozek, I would like for you to take Jethro and Melchi and walk a little ways into the woods. Find a comfortable place to sit and you two share how you became followers of Jesus. Answer any of their questions and just spend the morning talking about the changes you are seeing in your lives." The men got up and left the group. "Ruell, Immer, and Michael, I would like for you to do the same with Parosh, Benjamin, and Nehemiah. Jenay and Aliza will you meet with Esther and Liana? Kaleigh and Malina do the same with Jerusha and Akina. I'll keep my eyes on the two little girls and be available if you have any questions. Let's just spend some time in smaller groups answering questions about following Jesus." Yanis could see all four of the groups and was excited when he realized that the groups were deep in discussion and felt more comfortable asking questions. Soon he began to see that they were praying together. As each group returned, they were celebrating that all nine of the newer members had asked Jesus to be their Messiah. Not only were the new followers excited, but everyone was celebrating their getting to share the good news with a friend. They discovered how easy it was to just listen and answer questions and let the Holy Spirit guide them. Yanis told them he needed to run but would see them next week. He left Jenay and Abie to visit with the excited group while he walked to Talman's house.



Everyone was nervous, but eagerly anticipating the meeting tomorrow night where the rabbis would get to be in a Gentile home, eat non-kosher food, and possibly agree to work teaching Gentile children about Jesus. Yanis let them visit longer than usual. It was great to have an excited group instead of an exhausted, discouraged, defeated one. He taught the lesson again about Jesus' return but started at the end and worked backward. Everyone seemed to handle it better knowing that Jesus was coming back to meet them someday. Yanis said he couldn't explain it or answer any questions because he

wasn't there when Jesus taught it. It was one of those special messages that He gave the apostles, and he had heard it from them. They were thrilled that even in that last week, Jesus was telling His apostles to spread the word to the Gentiles. It reassured them that they were doing the right thing. They agreed to meet at the tenth hour tomorrow at Joel's and walk together to Gaius' house.

When they arrived at Gaius and Corina's, Yanis introduced each one. Abie and the other children quickly began to play comfortably together. They were all welcomed and introduced to Pollux and Salacia and a friend named Prospero. They ate in the back courtyard and let the servants care for the children. While they were eating, Gaius asked the rabbis to introduce themselves again and to let him know about their training and what they were passionate about teaching. Yanis was sitting to Gaius' right and began. "I think you know me and my wife, Jenay. I am not trained as a rabbi, but I was trained by Jesus to teach the New Way."

"I am Talman, and this is my wife, Sarah. I too, am not formally trained as a rabbi. I'm a banker. But I've taught the oldest boys part time for the past eighteen years. My class prepares them for apprenticeships and jobs and applying The Law and The Prophets to their businesses."

"How interesting. I would like to learn more about your class," said Prospero.

"This is my wife, Ruth, and I am Jairus. I was trained as a rabbi by Nicodemus in Jerusalem. I have been teaching here in Capernaum for the past twenty years. I generally focus on beginning interpretation of The Law and The Prophets for the students who have mastered their basics of reading and writing."

"Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue until Priest Shimei was assigned here by the Sanhedrin," added Yanis.

"I am Elijah, and I love teaching those beginning basics. This is my wife Hava, and I was also trained by Nicodemus in Jerusalem."

"I am Joel and this is my wife, Elizabeth. Hava is my daughter. I have been headmaster for the past twenty years and my passion is teaching advanced interpretation of the Jewish Scripture. I, too, was trained by Nicodemus in Jerusalem. Did we cover everything, or is there something else you want to know? We are all followers of Jesus, yet have not been allowed to mention His name in our classes for the past seven years."

"My name is Prospero. I am headmaster at the Roman Academy in Cana. I have led that school and taught just about every subject as necessary for the past twenty years. I am here to help Gaius and Pollux select a headmaster and teachers to begin a school in Capernaum to cater to followers of Jesus from all backgrounds — but primarily Roman, Jewish, Greek, and Syrian."

"I am Gaius, and you have already met my wife Corina. We are your host and hostess for tonight. These are our partners, Pollux and Salacia. We were leaders of a Gentile group in Cana, but moved here to Capernaum a year and a half ago. Friends, if you would excuse us,

I would like our team to have a short meeting before we address you. Please help yourself to more food or enjoy the gardens. We will return shortly. Again, my apologies for needing to leave you for a few minutes.”

The five Gentiles went into the house and began to discuss what they had heard. In the meantime, Yanis’ group stood and stretched their legs. Servants refilled their cups of wine and offered them more fruit and nuts. “I still have so many questions. I hope they don’t expect a decision tonight,” whispered Joel.

“But I like everything I’ve heard so far,” said Elijah.

“All you’ve heard is us talking. I haven’t heard anything from them!” said Jairus.

“Give it time. Here they come,” said Talman.

Everyone returned to their seats and Gaius spoke. “Gentlemen, we are in agreement that we would like to hire all five of you. Our set up is different from a Hebrew School, and it will be different from a Roman Academy. It will be the first school of its kind, as far as we know, and we want to get it right. Our school day will consist of three two-hour classes. We will pay you weekly for each class you teach. Talman, I assume you and Yanis would only want to teach part time, while I hope the rest of you will choose to teach full time. We have already secured eleven other teachers and have determined that 200 students is our limit. Prospero will be meeting with all the teachers starting on Sunday. It is our hope to get all the class offerings decided and a headmaster chosen by the end of the week. I know it is short notice, but would all of you be able to attend these meetings from the first hour until the eighth hour next week? We will start on Sunday and hopefully be done by midweek. Then it will be the headmaster’s job to figure out who is teaching what and when. It will be an interesting puzzle!”

Rachel poked Jairus and told him it was okay. She would wait another week to travel to Damascus if he wanted to do this. All the rabbis agreed to meet at the Worship Center on Sunday at the first hour. Pollux added, “If you are not interested in teaching, you need to let us know before that date so that we can secure other teachers.”

“So, we’re hired?” asked Jairus.

“Yes, if you want the job. I believe that you will enjoy this new teaching schedule, but if at the end of the week, you are still not comfortable, we will certainly release you from your responsibilities.”

“I would feel most comfortable hearing more about what I would be teaching.”

“Of course. I can understand that,” said Prospero. “I will try to make sure everyone is happy with their assignments. I think you will find it an invigorating week. Please be thinking about what a multinational school should be offering to educate its students, and I will see you on Sunday.”

Everyone thanked them for a delicious meal, collected their children, and headed home. First, Yanis took them to the New Way Worship Center to show them where they would meet next week.

Then Elijah and Hava carried their sleeping children east, while the others headed to the west side. There were a lot of unanswered questions. They were all trying to figure out how it would work to teach three two-hour-long classes instead of all day. It would certainly be different. “Does that mean I could be teaching three different subjects?” “How many students would be in each class?” “What is the pay?” Soon they were breaking off and saying goodnight.

Yanis woke early and went to check his account books. He wanted to know what he could afford before he talked with the stone mason again. The stone mason agreed to come and give them some prices for adding a cellar and whether to add the courtyard floor at the same time as the house foundation. He agreed to come out tomorrow at noon. Yanis went on to the market to pick up a bag of flour for Jenay. He hurried home to get the last of the trees cut before tomorrow. Then Zokur could finish digging the stumps before the stone mason was ready to work.

At noon on Tuesday, Yanis showed the stone mason what he had in mind. The stone mason recommended that he do all the stone at once but showed him a better location for the root cellar. He suggested that Yanis could save money if he could dig the cellar hole himself. “Don’t worry about getting it straight or level. If you have the hole the size you want it, we’ll finish off the corners as we lay the stone.” It was agreed that they would start work in two weeks, and Yanis promised to be ready.



Yanis, Jenay, and Abie walked to Zotocus’ home on Tuesday afternoon. Everyone rejoiced when he announced that the entire group had become followers of Jesus. He explained that Yanis and Jenay had followed Jesus for a long time, and Angela had accepted Him as her Messiah during her previous class. There were several questions about various things, and Yanis felt that Zotocus handled them well. He and Mariana led them in singing Psalm 150, and the rest of the group learned it quickly. They enjoyed the fellowship and were on their way home earlier than usual. Yanis and Jenay talked about what she thought a boy should learn in school. They talked all the way home, and there was a sweet sense of oneness.

On Wednesday morning, Yanis and Jenay prepared the lesson for the week for their groups. During Jesus’ final week of teaching on the temple steps, he focused on three parables. They reviewed the first parable, and Jenay and Abie left to meet with the ladies’ group.

Yanis finished chopping down the final trees and started digging an outline for the root cellar. When Zokur arrived, he told him to finish digging the stumps and then he had a new job — to dig a big hole for a root cellar. Zokur grinned because to him, digging a big hole in the ground was fun. Zokur worked on the stumps while Yanis split some logs.



## Chapter 17

Sunday morning, Yanis and the three rabbis walked to the Worship Center where they met up with Elijah. They were invited in to join about thirty men sitting and visiting in the center of a large room. Prospero came and greeted them and asked if Joel and Jairus would come with him. They got up and followed him to a smaller room near the front where four men were already seated. Prospero told the six men, "I need you to be my helpers today. I need extra eyes and ears. Today, we will determine three things. First, we need to decide what should be the core curriculum for our students. Our students will be aged eight to twelve, so they will have five years to complete this curriculum before graduation. Then you need to determine what electives we could offer based on the teachers you have in your specific group."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand the concept of electives," said Joel.

"In Roman academies, the students have certain required courses they must complete in order to graduate. But they are allowed to take additional courses depending on what they are most interested in. For example, learning to read and write Hebrew may be an elective rather than a required course. Some students may want to learn it, while others may not. It will certainly not be required for graduation."

"Yes, I see. Thank you."

"Here's some papyrus and brushes. Take notes of what your group considers to be core courses for all students, and then determine what electives your group could offer. Let's meet at noon to discuss your findings."

They walked back into the main room and Prospero began assigning each of the six helpers a small group of men and pointing them to rooms where they could discuss the questions. The rabbis and Gentile teachers were mixed together in the groups. At noon the six helpers met with Prospero while Gaius invited the teachers and rabbis to enjoy a snack and break. After a while he called everyone back together and answered questions. He told them that tomorrow's discussion would be on how to handle the fact that some students would not complete all five years before graduation. "That will be our primary discussion tomorrow. Please think about this tonight and thank you for coming. I'll be available if any of you have questions." Yanis and Talman said goodbye to Elijah and walked home talking about their different groups and what had been discussed. They both agreed that it would be different from what the rabbis were used to, but they were feeling excited about it.

Meantime, Prospero was meeting with his six helpers. He called on each one to present their findings concerning core curriculum. After hearing all the reports, the seven of them determined that the following would be required before graduation: History of the Romans, History of the Jews, Life of Jesus, Reading and Writing Greek, Logical Thinking

and Reasoning, and Numbers. "Now which of these are one-year courses, and which should be progressive and be taught at multiple stages? A typical student should be here for five years once we are established." They agreed that the two history courses would be one-year courses. The others would be two-year courses with a beginning level and a working level. Then advanced studies in those areas would be available as electives. "Great. You have done a wonderful job. Now, based on the available teachers, which of these core classes can we staff?"

After a little discussion, it was decided that they probably had enough staff to teach everything that was required for graduation. "That is good. How many teachers do we need to be able to teach all the core classes that we need for 200 students?" asked Prospero.

Someone asked, "How many days does a core class meet each week?"

"Good question. That would be important to know. At our Academy, each core class meets twice a week," replied Prospero.

"Is twenty students a reasonable class size for these classes?" asked one of the leaders.

Joel answered, "I think twenty would probably be a good average. The history classes could be much larger, but the numbers and reasoning would need to be much smaller. Do you agree?" he asked looking around at the other leaders who nodded.

"Are you saying we need ninety teachers?" asked one of the leaders.

Joel very quickly replied, "No, we would need approximately twelve full-time teachers to teach the core classes. And those twelve could offer approximately thirty-six elective classes."

"Thank you, Joel. Now, everyone, please go through your list and let's assign two teachers to each core class." They went through their list of available teachers from their groups and determined who they felt would be the best core teachers for each class. At times they couldn't decide and listed three to be decided later. Jairus said he would like to be considered for teaching the History of the Jews. Joel also wanted to be considered. Everyone agreed to list the two of them. Joel noted that each of the Jewish rabbis had been chosen for something, except for Talman.

"Gentleman, our work here today is confidential. None of this will be finalized until it is reviewed by Pollux and Gaius, so don't speak of it. Thank you for your help. Tomorrow, I will assign you different groups, and we will be discussing how to deal with students who will begin this year but are older, and will attend less than five years. What will their graduation requirements be? Then we need to continue to discuss what electives will be offered. Thank you for your help. Shalom."

"Shalom," they all replied in unison as if in a classroom. They laughed at themselves and began to talk and say goodnight as they headed to their homes. Joel and Jairus walked home comparing notes and wondering what the future held. Both were excited about being a

part of this new school. It would certainly be different from what they were used to. They both hoped to be able to teach some interpretation courses as electives but weren't sure how many Gentile students would be interested. They decided to just wait and see.



On Monday morning, the men returned to the Worship Center for day two of the meetings. Prospero announced that they had decided on six core courses that would be required for graduation for the students attending all five years. "Your leader will share with you these courses, and your job is to determine what will be required of students attending less than five years."

The same six helpers were called to the front, but they were assigned a different group of rabbis and teachers. There was some discussion about the core courses, and some teachers expressed disappointment and concern about courses that were not listed. Joel explained to his group that this list did not include the electives that would be offered — just the requirements for graduation. "Now," he said, "let's discuss a student who because of his age, will only attend for one year. How many of these core courses would you be willing to allow him to skip and still graduate? Remember this will only be applicable for students attending one year. Let me read the graduation requirements again: History of the Romans and History of the Jews will be one-year courses. The other courses, Life of Jesus, Reading and Writing Greek, Logical Thinking and Reasoning, and Numbers will be two-year courses. Advanced classes will be offered as electives." After it seemed their discussion was just resulting in arguing, Joel asked the group to go around and choose the one course they felt was most important. In the end, they mostly agreed to drop both the history courses and to require only the introductory classes to the other four. After much discussion and more arguing, they agreed on requirements for each student based on the years he would be attending. "You are dismissed for the day, and we'll meet again tomorrow in the main room. Shalom, and thank you for your help." There was even an argument about whether they should just leave, or whether they should report to Prospero. Joel agreed for one of them to go and ask while the others waited. In a few minutes the teacher returned and said everyone could leave except Joel who needed to meet with the other leaders. "Thank you," said Joel, who wanted to add, "Isn't that what I just said?" but didn't.

Since Joel's was the last group to finish, the other five leaders and Prospero were enjoying a snack of juice and some cheese rolls when Joel entered the room. He quickly poured some juice and took his seat. Prospero asked for a report from each leader regarding the requirements for each level of student. They all had very similar suggestions, and it was quickly agreed upon. "Now, you will need to refer to your notes from yesterday since we didn't have time to discuss

the electives that would be offered. I would like to hear them in this order. Who had Hermes in your group yesterday?

"I did."

"What elective did he want to teach?"

"He said he wanted to teach Ancient World History."

"How about Plutarch? What elective did he want to teach?"

"He wants to teach Roman Laws."

"Okay, so they are the two most likely teachers for Roman History, which is a core course, but they could also contribute these two electives. Do you see how this will work?"

"Okay, next is Jewish History. Since Jairus and Joel are both sitting here, what electives would you want to teach?"

Jairus said, "I would love to teach interpretation of Hebrew Scripture, but I think I would change that to maybe just a study of Hebrew Scripture since most of the students will not be learning how to read Hebrew."

"And what about you, Joel?" asked Prospero.

"I'm pretty sure I listed advanced interpretation of Hebrew Scripture. But like Jairus, I'm realizing that it might not be that useful to our students."

"Maybe you two could work together to do a beginning and an advanced level of study of the Hebrew Scriptures. We've got a few weeks to work out the final details. So, think about it," encouraged Prospero.

"Thank you, sir," said Joel.

They continued to step through each core teacher and his electives. Then Prospero said, "We now have thirty-six electives to offer. Look over your list of electives that have not been mentioned, and tell me if there are any that you feel would be a good addition for our students."

"Applying Jesus' Teachings to Business Principles sounds like a good one to me," said one of the leaders.

"That's a really good course that was taught at our Hebrew School. The students loved it, and the parents really appreciated it," said Joel.

"Any others?"

"I've got one for art class, but I'm not sure we'd have room, and it could become expensive for supplies."

"I agree it could be a direction we don't want to head. Let's stick to the academic."

"Okay, the final question of the day. Many of these teachers will not be asked to teach. In these two days of working with them, have you seen any problems that would disqualify them to teach at our school?" There was total silence as the six leaders waited for someone else to speak.

Joel spoke boldly, "Sir, I don't know this man well. He may have just been having a bad day, but I found one man in my group today to be quarrelsome and refusing to take direction. I'm not saying that he

would not be a good teacher, but I want to be honest. I do not consider these to be good qualities to model for our students.”

“Thank you, Joel. I’ll speak with you afterward about his identity.

“Anyone else?”

After no one else spoke up, Prospero thanked the group for their hard work and dismissed them. Jairus said he would wait outside for Joel to walk home.

Prospero called a man into the room and Joel thought he would die of embarrassment. This troublemaker was apparently a friend of Prospero. Joel wanted to crawl under his seat. Prospero asked Joel, “Are you referring to this troublemaker?”

“Yes, sir. I felt that his behavior did not reflect Jesus and he would not be a good role model for our students,” stated Joel firmly.

The two men laughed and agreed, then Prospero explained that Hermes had been planted in his group to test his skills in handling rough situations and to see if he would report it to him. “Joel, you seem to be quite skilled at leading men, and even though you’ve never seen a Gentile Academy, you seem to be embracing this new concept of education. Would you be interested in accepting the headmaster job here at the New Way Academy of Learning?”

“Wow! I thought those days were behind me. I honestly don’t know. I would need to pray about it.”

“We need an answer before the end of our time together on Thursday so that it can be announced on Friday. We already know that this is the direction that Jehovah is leading us. We have also selected this troublemaker as your assistant.”

“I’m sorry for giving you a hard time today. I promise to repent and behave as your assistant,” said Hermes.

“Hey, I hope you are a good actor because today was a rough day! Maybe you could teach acting as an elective.” The men laughed good-naturedly together.

Prospero said, “The sooner you have an answer, the sooner I can begin training you on some of the finer details that Gaius wants. But we will wait patiently on the Lord.”

“I will let you know as soon as I have time to pray it through and hear with clarity that this is the right direction. Is that all for today?”

“Yes, I think you’ve had enough torture for one day. Shalom!”

Joel walked out and found Jairus waiting on a bench in front of the Worship Center. Jairus took one look at Joel’s face and said, “You’re going to be my boss again, aren’t you?”

“I need to pray about it, but yes, I’ve been offered the position of headmaster.”

“It looks like all of us will be teaching together again. Except now, we’ll have many brothers helping us and 200 students. Amazing!”

“I guess I’m in shock. I just assumed we would be working under one of them.”

“Jehovah has a funny sense of humor.”

“It’s only the tenth hour; let’s go tell Yanis and then go into the woods and pray.” After a moment, he reconsidered. “No. I want to tell

Elizabeth first. I'll go tell Elizabeth, and you and Rachel come over to pray. I'll send my servant to get Talman and Sarah. Let's just pray together like old times," said Joel. So, the three friends and their wives spent the rest of the evening praising Jehovah and rejoicing. They prayed diligently for wisdom and courage to move into this new ministry. They sought His clear direction, and all felt certain that Jehovah was leading all three of them forward.

The next morning, Joel arrived at the Worship Center early and told Prospero that he was ready to accept the position of headmaster. "Welcome, Joel. I won't be meeting with the teachers very long, then you and I have a lot of work to do to get everything arranged for classes. We have a lot to discuss before the week is up. Then I'll return to Cana and start doing the same for my school."

Joel joined the other rabbis, and Prospero began to address the group of rabbis and teachers. "Welcome to our third day of training. Unfortunately, we will need to let some of you go. As I call your name, please go to the room to my left to collect your pay. You will be paid for three days since you traveled here today. We may need you in the future, but we have determined the teachers that we will need for this first school year." He began to call off a list of names, and men began getting up to leave. When he was done, there were fifteen men sitting in the room where there had been thirty. He called them by name and asked them to come to the front and stand beside him. He announced what classes they would be teaching, and they remained standing beside him. When Prospero had completed the list of teachers, only Joel and Hermes were left seated. "Gentlemen, I would like to present to you Teacher Hermes who will be assistant to the headmaster. He will also be teaching two electives on advanced numbers." Everyone cheered and whistled. "And I would like to present Headmaster Joel to you who will also be teaching one advanced elective on Jewish Scripture." Gaius and Pollux were shaking hands with all the new teachers and welcoming them. It was agreed that the teachers and rabbis would be free for the rest of the summer. They would be expected to return for another week of training and preparation the last week of Elul. "Please collect your pay for these three days and leave instructions where you can be reached. Please let us know if anything comes up that would prevent your teaching. We are looking forward to this new adventure and are praying for each one of you and your families."

Joel told the other rabbis that he needed to stay and work with Prospero for the rest of the week. They congratulated him and said they would celebrate on Sabbath afternoon at Talman's house. Joel and Hermes and Prospero prepared for the coming year. They agreed to start registering students for school every evening during the month of Elul and to cut off the registration at 200 students. Each student would sign up for his core classes and electives at that time. It would be a crazy month, but for the next two months, Joel would be free to take a much-needed break. As they ended their time together and shared prayer requests, Joel shared his fears of having to speak to

Priest Shimei first thing on Monday or Tuesday. Prospero and Hermes promised to pray, but really couldn't comprehend the fear that Joel felt. Joel knew that incurring the priest's wrath could mean death to him and his fellow rabbis.



On Tuesday afternoon, Yanis and Jenay walked to Zotocus' house and enjoyed fellowship with the Gentile group. They listened as Zotocus explained baptism, then they scheduled a baptism at the Sea of Galilee for Sabbath afternoon. Yanis and Jenay explained that they would be unable to attend because they taught two different groups on the Sabbath. They announced that Yanis would be teaching at the New Way Academy and hoped to see them there as their children grew. The group promised to pray for them and the upcoming birth. They sang Psalm 150 together and said their goodnights. Yanis and Jenay felt that they had learned so much about the Gentiles and about their passion for Jesus and they were sad that this phase of their ministry was over. They began focusing on how to teach the life of Jesus in two-hour classes. That was going to take some study and preparation to make it all come out right at the end of the year. Yanis told Jenay he would purchase some papyrus and start making an outline of what needed to be covered. He begged her to help him with it and she agreed, but said he had to find a time besides the middle of the night.



On Friday, Yanis showed Jenay and Abie all the work that he and Zokur had done to prepare for the new house foundation to be laid on Sunday. He was excited to see this started so much earlier than expected. He couldn't have done it without Zokur's help. Friday afternoon, they walked to Grandmother Salome's in time to visit with her before group. They told her about the New Way Academy for Learning and his appointment as a rabbi there. She was excited for him. She and Jenay started talking about the upcoming birth and Jenay assured her it was still months away. Yanis left and walked down to the beach. He began to pray as he walked and realized he had better hurry, or he would be late for the Sabbath. Jaden and Jonas reported that they were pleased with the work of the new Gentile fishermen, and they reported that they had had no problems with the priest.

"He's been on Sukkot travel ever since you hired them, so don't rejoice just yet. He may still pay you a visit."

"Why are you down, Yanis?" asked Benji.

"Because my friends, the rabbis, must go in and tell Priest Shimei that they will not be teaching next year. They expect a huge explosion, and I'm afraid he will arrange a stoning. I'm seriously afraid for their

lives. That's the way it worked in Jerusalem. If the High Priest wanted someone killed and they didn't have a valid reason for it, they would just arrange for it to happen 'accidentally' or incite the crowd to do their dirty work for them. I can see either one of those things happening. I've just accepted a position to teach at the Gentile Academy, so I'm a target, too. I guess all of us who are seriously following Jesus are targets. We just need to keep our eyes on Jesus and keep serving wherever He leads."

When they moved into mixed groups for the teaching time, Abira led them in several Psalms. The mood lifted as they worshipped together. Yanis began teaching about Jesus' last week before the crucifixion. "We know that He was thinking about His return to earth, because this parable asks the question, 'Will you be ready for His return?' Jesus told about ten ladies who not only had their lamps ready for the bridegroom to appear but had packed extra oil. He called them wise. He also said that ten other ladies brought lamps but ran out of oil and tried to borrow it from the other ladies. They refused and sent them to get their own oil. While they were out, the bridegroom arrived and invited the wise ladies into the celebration. When the foolish ladies returned, the door had been shut. Even though they knocked He wouldn't let them in. That is the parable that Jesus told. Now, I need to ask, what was so important about the oil?"

"They needed oil for their lamps to burn," said Jaden.

"Yes, but what did it represent?"

"Fuel," said Benji.

"Think harder."

"I think the oil represents the Holy Spirit's presence," said Salome.

"And you are exactly right, Grandmother," praised Yanis.

"I learned a thing or two while I traveled with Jesus," she stated smugly.

"Yes, the oil always represents the Holy Spirit in Jesus' parables. Now, who wants to tell me what this parable means."

"I'll try," said Jonas. "The ten wise ladies had accepted Jesus as their Messiah and were filled with the Holy Spirit. The ten foolish ladies had not and were shut out of the celebration."

"Very good!" said Yanis. "Now, what celebration do you think that is?"

"Heaven!" called two or three at the same time.

"Yes!" exclaimed Yanis. "Now why were they carrying lamps?" Suddenly the courtyard was quiet and Yanis continued, "I believe they were carrying lamps to try to look good. They were following the external rules of religion, but the inside was empty. We must remember that people can look good on the outside, but not really be in a right relationship with Jehovah. Therefore, their inner core is empty. Even as Jesus was facing His own death, He was still trying to reach the Jews who were rejecting Him. He still cared about the empty ones, and He was getting more and more bold in letting them know that they would be excluded from Heaven if they didn't prepare ahead



of time. But that boldness led to His death. Our obedience may lead to persecution and even death, but we must remember that it will ultimately lead to Heaven and eternal life with Jesus.” Yanis led them in prayer, and everyone said their goodnights.

Yanis was very quiet on their walk home. Jenay asked him what he was thinking. “To be honest, the whole time I was teaching, I was thinking about my dad and my brothers and how empty they are while carrying around an empty lamp.”

“Maybe they have accepted Jesus by now.”

“Maybe,” said Yanis, but he didn’t want to talk about it. “I heard you and Grandmother Salome talking about the baby. Does she think he will come earlier than winter?”

“Yes, she’s thinking it will be closer to midfall. She may be right. I’m feeling more tired than I did with Abie at this stage. But then, I wasn’t chasing a busy little girl then.”

“Just let me know if there’s anything I need to do to help you get ready or take better care of you. The stone masons will be here on Sunday to lay the foundation, and the carpenters will be here two weeks later. You’ll have to decide when you want to move. I’ll help you with all that.”

“Let’s take care of one step at a time. Tomorrow will come early.”

## Chapter 18

After the Sabbath morning milking, Yanis and Jenay went to the woods early and let Abie play while they sat on a blanket and just enjoyed the warm sunshine. It was good to be quiet and still together. When the families arrived, they visited and celebrated the fact that they were all followers of Jesus now. Yanis began to teach them about baptism, and he mentioned that they had baptized the first two families at the beach. Melchi was nervous about doing that. He asked if there was any other way. Yanis explained that it didn't have to be so public, if anyone knew of a stream, they could baptize there. When no one knew of a place that would be private, Yanis told them that there was a stream at the end of his property. He thought it would be deep enough to baptize. "It just needs to be deep enough for you to be fully immersed, because that's what the word baptize means. Can everyone meet here around the fourth hour, and we'll go together? It will take us about a half hour to get there, but I think that will give us enough time. I'll see you all next week. Be sure and bring dry robes or blankets to wrap up in afterward."



Yanis left to join the men's group. They were excitedly sharing with Jesse and Tobias all the news of the week. Yanis asked them what the school calendar would look like. He was trying to determine how many hours of teaching he needed to prepare. "That's a great question. I should ask Gaius. We didn't discuss it and all the teachers would need to know. I'll get back to you on that," said Joel.

"Major prayer request. We need to talk with Priest Shimei as soon as he returns from Sukkot. I'm estimating that to be probably Monday or Tuesday of this week," said Jairus. "I, for one, am not looking forward to it."

"What time?" asked Yanis.

"Probably at the first hour. If he's back, he'll lead a prayer time at sunrise and should be done about the first hour, so I think that would be best. We'll just check every morning starting on Monday."

"I'll be praying for all three of you. I know it won't be pleasant."

"I'll try to be there, and I'll wait in the courtyard, so look for me afterward, okay?" said Jesse.

"I don't think I should be there. It would just make things worse, so I'll be praying, too," said Talman.

"I don't think I should be there either," said Yanis, "but you know I'll be praying. Are you guys ready to hear the next parable that Jesus taught, or do you just want to spend time in worship and prayer?"

"I'm good for focusing on something different for a change. Let's let Yanis teach," said Jairus. Yanis taught the parable about the ten

wise ladies and the ten foolish ladies. They had a good discussion. They prayed for each other before they left, and the three rabbis agreed to meet at Joel's house on Monday morning.

Yanis walked home slowly praying for his friends. He had a foreboding feeling and felt certain that Priest Shimei would retaliate, and it wouldn't be pretty. He had seen horrific things in Jerusalem that wouldn't leave his mind. He prayed that Jehovah would give them courage to face whatever tomorrow brought.



By the first hour on Sunday, the stone masons began to arrive at Yanis' farm. There were six of them working on leveling the ground and unloading the trailers filled with stones. Since Yanis was paying them by the hour, he helped with unloading the stones as much as he could. At noon, Zokur walked up from the barn and Yanis instructed him to unload the stones from the trailer and showed him how to set them close to the men who were laying the stone. Zokur happily complied, but some of the workers seemed uncomfortable around him. Yanis had forgotten that Zokur was considered mentally inferior. Yanis had just become used to his amazing strength and happy disposition.

Yanis felt sorry for these Jewish men who considered Zokur sinful for being born with mental difficulties. Thankfully, it didn't bother Zokur. But after an hour, he told Zokur to go and check on Jenay and Abie and see if they needed help with anything. He stayed and helped the stone masons as much as he could. He made no comment, but he wanted to preach about Jesus' love for all people regardless of whether they were sick or well, educated or not, male or female, free or slave. *Oh, I can feel a sermon coming.*



On Monday the three rabbis met at Joel's as planned, prayed together, and then walked to the synagogue. It was agreed that each one would present his resignation, and then let Joel do the talking as much as possible. Joel entered the synagogue and requested a meeting with Priest Shimei. The assistant led the three men into Priest Shimei's office. "Good morning, rabbis. Did you complete your school year well?"

"Yes, sir, and we are certainly enjoying our break," said Joel.

"I wanted to let you know that I will not be available to teach at the Hebrew School next year. I have accepted another position," said Elijah, as planned.

Priest Shimei turned red but controlled his temper. "I'm sorry to hear that, Rabbi Elijah. You are a good teacher, and since you did not resign at the end of the school year, I assumed that you would be teaching next year. That puts me in quite a bind."

"I'm sorry, sir. I tried to let you know on the last day of school, but you had already left town. Today was the first day that you have been available to inform, and I have let you know as soon as possible," said Elijah.

"I too have accepted another position and will not be available to teach next year," said Jairus. "I, too, tried to inform you on the last day of school."

While Priest Shimei was trying to think of a retort, Joel added, "I, too, have accepted another position and will no longer be teaching at the Hebrew School."

"So, you are all three quitting! What do you expect me to do? I can't teach all those students! You are trying to ruin me!"

"I suggest you find other rabbis to teach. There should be plenty available in Jerusalem."

"But I'm not in Jerusalem! I'm stuck in Capernaum with three rabbis who think they can just walk out. Fine! You will all be replaced. Get out! And you are no longer welcome at the synagogue either. Get out!"

"Shalom," said Joel and all three turned and walked out. Once outside the synagogue they located Jesse and walked quickly to Joel's house before anyone said anything or breathed. Once inside Joel's house they all started talking at once. "That was relatively easy!"

"Yes, did you see how red his face was — I thought sure he was going to explode."

"I thought he handled it quite well."

"Gentlemen, congratulations, but be careful not to be caught alone. You don't want his assistants to rough you up. I would suggest that you take a servant or two with you, or a friend, if you go anywhere," said Jesse.

"I'm going to Damascus! Anybody want to come with me?"

"When are you leaving?"

"We are hoping to be ready to travel Wednesday. Talman said he would send the oxen, cart, and driver at sunrise."



On Monday by midafternoon, Yanis felt strongly that he needed to check on the rabbis. The stone masons were making good progress and there was nothing for him to do to help. Yanis asked the foreman if he needed him for any more questions. "We'll be back tomorrow and should be able to finish either tomorrow or Wednesday."

"Thanks! I'll let the carpenters know," said Yanis. "Shalom."

"Shalom."

Yanis walked back up to the house and drank some juice then told Jenay he wanted to check on the rabbis and was going to Joel's house. She asked if he would be back for dinner, and he said he planned to. He kissed her on the forehead and gave Abie a hug and kiss and headed to Joel's.

Just as he turned the corner to Joel's house, he saw two Roman soldiers leading Joel away. Yanis tried to not look, but as soon as they were past, he took off running to Elizabeth to see what had happened. "They just came into the house without knocking and told Joel he needed to come with them. They tied his hands but said they wouldn't shackle him if he would come peacefully." Yanis asked Elizabeth to send her servants to let Jenay, Jesse, and Talman know. Elizabeth wanted to go to Hava's, since she felt that Elijah would be arrested, too.

"We also need to check on Rachel. Elizabeth, can we headquarter at your home tonight to pray?"

"Certainly."

"Then please ask your servants to notify Talman, Jesse, and Jenay. We'll stop at Rachel's on our way to Hava's. Is that everyone?"

"I think so. Can I send dinner for the three men?"

"We should be able to, but let's worry about that when we get back. They will let the servants deliver their meals if they are in the Capernaum prison. That's where they took me."

"Oh, let's just all get together and pray. I want to hold my daughter and make sure she's alright."

"I'm pretty sure she's fine since they didn't bother you. But we'll see soon enough."

"Here's Rachel's house, but it seems to be totally empty. Oh, Yanis, you don't think they took her, too, do you?"

"Let's check the garden," said Yanis.

Rachel was on her knees in the garden praying and crying. She was rocking back and forth and begging Jehovah to protect all the men. Elizabeth ran to her and put her arms around her. "Come with me to find Hava, and help her with the children, or you can go to my house to meet Miriam and Jenay. Our servants are sending out the news for everyone to meet at our place."

"You two go on and get Hava. I need to pray a while longer and then I'll walk over to your house," said Rachel.

"Okay, but don't walk alone. Have at least two male servants walk with you. Do you understand? I don't want any 'accidents' to happen," said Yanis.

"Okay, but it's not even dark yet."

"Rachel, please obey me. I know what this guy is capable of doing. Please, please don't walk anywhere alone."

"I promise. Now, hurry to Hava's. She'll need you."

They hurried toward Elijah's house, but met Hava and Ira and the three children coming toward them. Yanis picked up four-year-old Deborah so they could walk faster. Hava was trying to be brave in front of the children, and Elizabeth refrained from talking about what had happened. They arrived at Joel's house, just as Jenay arrived with Abie. They sent the children upstairs to play with one of the servants. Rachel arrived accompanied by two of her men servants and two female servants. She sent the two female servants upstairs to help

care for the children while the two men helped the kitchen servants prepare a light meal for dinner.

They prepared three dinners for the rabbis. Yanis and two of the men servants walked to the prison and asked if they could deliver dinner for the rabbis. The Roman guards checked the boxes and agreed. They let the servants, but not Yanis, take the boxes of food to the prisoners. The servants whispered to them that everyone was praying at Joel's house, and they would bring breakfast to them at sunrise. "Tell them that other than being shackled in a filthy dungeon, we are being well treated. We can pray and worship here. Jehovah is good and all is well," said Joel.

Yanis and the servants returned to Elizabeth's to bring the news. By then everyone had gathered, and they sat down to a light dinner. No one really felt like eating but knew they would need their strength. The parents and servants settled the children into blankets all over Grandmother Elizabeth's guest room. They felt safe being all together. The adults gathered in the living room and all three women reported exactly the same scenario. Jesse reported what the rabbis had told him about this morning's meeting and how red-faced but calmly Priest Shimei had handled it. Yanis assumed that they would be brought before the Roman judge in the morning and released immediately. Elizabeth found blankets for everyone and while some prayed, others took short naps, and then rejoined the praying. Yanis quoted Scriptures aloud that reminded them of Jehovah's presence. Jenay sang Psalm 23 and most everyone joined in. All they could do was wait, but at least they could wait together, and it felt right to be together as a family. At sunrise, Yanis went with Rachel's servants to deliver breakfast to the three prisoners. They again reported that everyone was at Joel's house praying for them and everyone was fine. The men reported that other than being stiff and sore from sleeping on the stone floors, they had slept most of the night.

Yanis joined the others and ate a quick breakfast. He hoped they would be released soon because he needed to check on the stone masons. The women migrated to the garden and let the children play in the sunshine while they waited. The men went up to the rooftop and prayed there. But noon came and went and there was no sign of the men. By midafternoon, Yanis knew that he had to go and pay the stone masons in case they were finishing up. He asked Rachel's servants to prepare another dinner for the three prisoners and then asked Talman if he wanted to accompany him to his house to take care of some business. They took one of Rachel's servants with them and went to Yanis' farm. The stone masons were indeed finished and cleaning up. The foreman complained, "That idiot came, and we couldn't get rid of him." Yanis apologized and said that Zokur was a good worker. Yanis paid the stone mason the agreed upon price, but he insisted that Yanis owed him more because of having to supervise the 'idiot.' Yanis, gave him an extra denarius and said, "I think Zokur's help more than compensated you. I suspect that he lifted a lot of heavy stone for you."

“Yeah, whatever.”

Yanis, Talman, and the servant watched them load their tools and leave. Yanis said he needed to check with Mr. Ezekiel before they walked back. The milkers were getting ready for their night routine. Zokur was curled up in a ball, crying, and nursing some nasty looking bruises. Yanis ran to him. “Zokur, I’m sorry. Did the men hurt you?”

Zokur nodded. “I was trying to help them, and they threw rocks at me, and one of them tripped me. My knee hurts and it’s bleeding. I’m not helping anymore!”

“Zokur, those were mean men and I’m sorry they did this to you. They are gone now. I told them to leave. They had no business hurting you. You didn’t do anything wrong to hurt them. You were just trying to help. They were mean men. But Jehovah teaches us to love mean men, even when they hurt us. I have three friends in prison who are being hurt by mean men, too. But you know what they are doing? They are singing Psalms and praising Jehovah that they don’t have to be mean back. They can show love and care to everybody just like Jesus did. Zokur, can you smile and show love if I sing a Psalm for you? Can you forgive the mean men?” Zokur nodded.

Yanis began to sing Psalm 23 and Talman and the milkers joined in. Zokur stood up and began to receive the milk pans and pour them into the jars. Mr. Ezekiel came over and thanked Yanis for coming. Yanis whispered to him that the three rabbis were in prison for turning in their resignation. He and Jenay would be at Joel’s house praying. Mr. Ezekiel nodded and returned to his work.

Yanis and Talman and the servant began to walk back into town.

“Why do you think the rabbis haven’t been released? Is there any truth to them not being able to quit their contract any time except on the last day of school?” asked Yanis.

“I think it’s just a tradition, but not necessarily a written law. Priest Shimei will have a hard time making it stick since he left town before school was over,” replied Talman.

“I hope so. Are you staying at Elizabeth’s tonight? I think we need to be praying as much as possible until they are released. I think the women need to see us doing all we can,” said Yanis.

“I agree. And I need to be doing all I can. Come on, let’s go.” When they arrived at Elizabeth’s, Jesse had taken some servants to deliver the prisoners’ meals.

Yanis reported what had happened to Zokur, and that it had taken them time to get him settled down. Jenay was upset, but Yanis assured her that he was fine and was not badly hurt. “His feelings were hurt the worst, and he was already up and smiling when we left.”



It was noon on Thursday before the three rabbis were released and sent home. All three came to Joel’s because they knew that’s where everyone was gathered. The men were limping, and the wives

were very concerned. They helped them to stretch out on cushions and brought them juice. Then everyone gathered around to hear what happened. Joel began, "On Monday, we resigned from our positions at the Hebrew School."

"I told them what you had told me about Priest Shimei getting pretty mad," said Jesse.

"So, we were taken to the prison and thankfully were all put in one cell. It was dark and filthy, but we managed to get some sleep. They put shackles around our ankles, and they were tight. It made our feet swell and was painful, but I'm sure there's no permanent damage. Other than that, we were treated courteously. We were taken before a judge on Wednesday morning and Priest Shimei made his complaint. The judge listened to him and then forced him to be quiet while I told our side. Then we were taken back to prison and didn't hear anything until this morning. About midmorning, we were taken before the judge again and this time he addressed Priest Shimei and told him that our story totally checked out. Yes, he agreed that it was traditional for Hebrew School teachers to present their resignation for the next year on the last day of school. But the judge emphasized that, even though Priest Shimei knew that tradition, he had left town early in an attempt to force us to keep our contract for another year," reported Joel.

"So, he sided with you guys. Only Jehovah can orchestrate that!" said Yanis.

"Yes, He is good and took care of all the details."

"So, what happened?"

"Priest Shimei ranted and raved about it being too late to find rabbis for the Hebrew School. The judge said that that was not his problem. Then he ordered us to be released, but he also warned Priest Shimei that if anything happened to us, he would know where to begin investigating. Priest Shimei accused the judge of threatening him. The judge said, 'No, I am not threatening you. I am warning you not to take matters into your own hands. I will hold you accountable if anything happens to these rabbis or their families. Do you understand?' Priest Shimei just turned and walked out."

"He didn't even answer him?" asked Talman.

"Nope, so I don't think the danger is over. I suggest we all go to Damascus for a visit!" said Joel.

"Just wait until he finds out where our new positions are."

"Gentlemen. Jehovah has carried you safely through this attack. Let's spend some time in prayer and praise and then let everyone get a good night's rest."

Jenay and Miriam began to lead them in Psalm 150 as they celebrated the release of the rabbis without harm. They thanked Jehovah for His provision and were determined to not walk in fear. Elijah and Hava decided to spend one more night with Joel and Elizabeth, but everyone else was ready to go. Miriam offered for Rachel and Jairus to come home with them, but they insisted that they would rather be in their own place.



Yanis and Jenay let Abie run ahead of them as they walked. It had been an exhausting three days, and they were glad to be home. Jenay quickly prepared some dinner, and they all went to sleep early.

Yanis and Jenay enjoyed the fellowship with her family for Sabbath dinner. Yanis asked the group to share with each other ways that the Holy Spirit had led them and blessed them recently. Everyone enjoyed sharing. Abira led them in singing several Psalms and Yanis and Jenay felt refreshed, but their walk home seemed incredibly long, and both were eager to put their heads down.

## Chapter 19

On Sabbath morning, Yanis and Jenay helped with the milking and then returned to the house for breakfast. Yanis teased that it wouldn't be long before Jenay wouldn't be able to reach the goats for milking. She agreed the baby seemed to be very heavy. She packed a travel bag for Abie, several blankets, and an extra robe for Yanis. It was still summer, but the water could be cold. They waited at the lean-to for the other families. The boys took off together following the rock wall, while the grown-ups walked with the girls. It took them about half an hour to reach the stream. Because it was so secluded, they felt comfortable singing Psalms along the way. Yanis baptized the new followers, and everyone celebrated together. There was a special sense of peace, joy, and love as they relaxed and felt God's presence. Everyone wanted to stay longer, but Yanis had to get back for the men's group. No one wanted the special day to end.



On Wednesday morning, Yanis and Jenay prepared the second parable that Jesus taught during his last week at the temple. Yanis took Jenay and Abie out to look at the foundation for their new home before Jenay needed to leave for the ladies' group. Once the house was built, it would have three small sleeping rooms, a living area, and a small indoor preparation area. It was actually no larger than their current house except for the additional sleeping areas. Yanis took a piece of coal and sketched out approximately where the sleeping rooms would be. Then he sketched out the kitchen preparation area. It was easier to visualize with the markings.

They began picking up rocks for the fence that would eventually enclose their property all the way back to the stream. Yanis was grateful that Talman had encouraged him to buy the extra wooded land before Priest Shimei had taken over.

At noon, Jenay and Abie walked to Rachel's to meet with the other ladies. They enjoyed the sweet fellowship and reported that the rabbis were recuperating from their ordeal. They visited a while after the meeting, but all wanted to be home before dark.

By the time Jenay and Abie arrived home it was almost sunset, and Jenay quickly put together some dinner. She assumed Yanis was in the woods or the barn. He sometimes ran errands while she was out with the ladies and she wasn't usually home this early, so she wasn't terribly worried. She finally fed Abie and then had to be firm with her to stay on her mat. She didn't want to go to sleep without Abba. Jenay sang some Psalms and soon Abie was asleep. Jenay began to pray for Yanis' safety. She knew that he might have fallen while working on the fence, but deep down she knew that he was in prison again. At first

light, she would go to Jesse's and let him know. She prayed and dozed all through the long night, knowing that she would need her rest to care for Abie tomorrow. *What was it this time? And why did Priest Shimei hate Yanis?* Immediately she remembered Jesus' words: *The world hates you because it hates Me.* She knew that it wasn't anything that Yanis had done, it was just because of his obedience to Jesus. She began to pray anew that Yanis would be strong and courageous. Finally, dawn came. Jenay prepared a roll with goat cheese for Abie to eat as they walked to Jesse's house. She didn't feel like eating. She knocked at the house since the Mercantile Store was not open yet. Jesse opened the door and she explained that Yanis was not there when she arrived home yesterday. "He still has not returned. Yanis made me promise to come to your house and let you decide what needed to be done."

Miriam heard the tail-end of the conversation and asked what was going on. "Yanis is missing. I'm going to the prison. Tobias, pack a breakfast in case he's there. Come with me. They will let you deliver it to him. I will return as soon as possible and let you know what I find out. Tobias will notify the group."

Jenay collapsed on a nearby cushion and said, "Miriam, what would we do if we didn't have your family group to lean on?"

"Capernaum is turning out to be a very ugly place to live. Sometimes I dream of moving away and never looking back. It was such a sweet little town to grow up in. Everyone loved everyone and took care of each other. Now, I'm afraid to even go to the well if certain people are there. They hiss at me and the children. It's so sad. It looks like Abie is already back asleep."

"I don't think she slept well. She was pretty upset that her abba was not home to tuck her in."

Jesse was soon back home and reported that Yanis was indeed in prison. "Tobias said he was in good spirits and even better when he saw breakfast. He said for you to stay here and not go anywhere alone. He will be home as soon as possible and asked us to pray. Tobias told him we would all be praying and went to inform the others. I think Jairus and Rachel were leaving before sunrise this morning to go to Ariel's, but everyone else will be notified. I need to eat some breakfast, then I have to meet my purchasers. I'll be back as soon as possible to pray with you."

"Thank you, Jesse. You do whatever you need to do. We'll be fine," said Jenay.

The others arrived when they could, and they began to sing Psalms and pray for Yanis' safety.

Before noon, Yanis walked in, grinning. "Jehovah is so good. He took care of everything, again." Tobias brought him some juice and he gave Abie a big hug. He sent her outside to play with her friends. "I was called before the judge again, and of course it was Priest Shimei who was pressing charges. He claimed that I had hired an idiot to work for me. I guess the stone masons reported it to the priest. The judge asked why that should be a problem if I wanted to waste my money.

Priest Shimei explained that being around such people made you unclean. The judge looked at Priest Shimei and said, 'You know I care nothing for your rules and traditions. Tell me, if you insist, what the penalty for being unclean is. Surely it is not worthy of death.'

"Priest Shimei said, 'No, he will be removed from the synagogue.' The judge turned to me and asked if I attended the synagogue. When I told him no, he looked at Priest Shimei and said, 'We've had nothing but trouble in Capernaum ever since you arrived. Leave the people alone who don't want your spiritual supervision. This is not a matter for the courts and again I warn you, Priest Shimei: Quit wasting my time, or I will bring a case against you. Case dismissed and erased from the records.' So, the guards removed my shackles and here I am."

"Let's have a prayer of thanksgiving before you leave," said Joel.

"Thank you all for praying. Hopefully, things will settle down now." Yanis scooped up Abie, and they walked home with Abie riding on her abba's shoulders. He asked her to help him pick up rocks, and they all worked together for a while. Jenay took Abie to the house for her nap while she baked bread. Yanis continued to work outside, and Jenay sat down to weave on a new tunic for Abie who was quickly outgrowing hers. She had everything she needed for the baby, but she hoped to get another robe made for Yanis before he started teaching school.

On Friday, they walked to Grandmother Salome's and enjoyed the sweet fellowship. They had agreed to not even mention this latest encounter with Priest Shimei. They spent time praying for each other, then Yanis shared the second parable that Jesus taught on the temple steps that last week. "Jesus said that there was a wealthy landowner who was going on a far journey. He gave his three servants bags of gold. He gave the first servant five bags, he gave the second servant three bags, and he gave the third servant only one. Then he left on his journey. When he returned, the servants reported. The first one had earned another five bags of gold, and the landowner praised him. The second servant had earned another three bags, and the landowner praised him. The servant that only received one bag brought the landowner back his one bag. He said he was afraid of the landowner, so he just buried it and kept it safe because he didn't want to anger the master. Jesus said that the landowner was furious with the servant and ordered him to be killed and thrown into outer darkness, which is another way of saying that he kicked him out of Heaven for all eternity. Now, we immediately know Jesus is talking about Himself or Jehovah being the landowner because only Jehovah can remove someone from Heaven. But who do these three servants represent and why did Jesus tell this parable? Let's play around with that for a few minutes."

"Is Jesus saying that there are different levels of followers, some more loved than others?"

"I don't understand why Jesus would be so harsh with the servant that was afraid. He usually is so kind and understanding when we are afraid."

"He does seem to be rather harsh with the third servant."

After the group had discussed their questions, Yanis reminded them, "Let's not forget the theme of these three parables that we started last week with the ten wise ladies and the ten foolish ladies. Does that help any?"

"Are you saying that the third servant was not a follower of Jesus? Then that would explain why Jehovah would not allow him into Heaven."

"Exactly," said Yanis. "Why is he afraid of Jehovah? Because he is not in a right relationship with Him. When Jesus returns there will be a judgment, a giving of accounts. Those that have accepted Him as Messiah will be rewarded, and those who have not will be cast out. But that doesn't explain why the first two servants got different amounts to use. Can anyone explain that?"

"We all have different abilities to serve Him."

"Yes, but I don't think He would reward us differently when He's the One who created us."

"Maybe He's saying that He is pleased no matter what we give Him."

"He did say, 'Well done' to both of them."

"Yes, He did. But there's a vast amount of difference between three bags and five bags of gold."

Yanis began, "I believe that when Jesus returns from His long journey, He will find three types of people. The first servant represents the follower who is being obedient in all things. He will get the greatest rewards. The second servant represents a follower, who has accepted Jesus as his Messiah, but is sloppy in his obedience. He's still following self instead of following the Holy Spirit. And while he's going to go to Heaven, he's not going to be rewarded the same way. We will all give an account for our obedience. And we've already ascertained that the third servant was not a follower at all. He had rejected Jesus as Messiah and was not in a right relationship with Jehovah. I want to encourage you to examine your obedience and see if there is anything that the Holy Spirit has asked you to do that you are not doing. Peter always says, 'Be quick to obey.' Let's sing another Psalm, Abira."



The families gathered on the Sabbath at their usual hiding place and enjoyed their time to be together. Everyone in the group was now a follower of Jesus. Yanis encouraged them to be obedient and asked them to share with each other things that they had heard the Holy Spirit say to them. It was a sweet time of fellowship. "Next week, I want to start a series of messages about what Jesus taught. It will encourage us to become more like Jesus." They prayed together, and Yanis left to meet with the rabbis' group.



The men's group was agitated and out of sorts because of the arrest. Jairus was in Damascus, and everyone just seemed off. Yanis prayed with them and asked them why they were unable to trust Jehovah to care for them. Joel said he would feel better once school got started and they could be assured that Priest Shimei wasn't going to try anything else. He said he was worried about the priest's reaction when he learned that they were teaching Gentiles. "Did Jehovah call you to lead the Gentile children to Jesus?" Yanis asked. He taught the parable, and everyone seemed to be in a better place. Joel prayed for all of their safety as they headed to their homes.



On Sunday, Yanis walked with Jenay to the market and pulled one of the milk carts. They could stock up on heavier items now that they had a root cellar. It would keep Jenay from having to go to the market so often. They filled the cart with supplies and headed home.

On Monday morning, Yanis walked to Jesse's to purchase more wood for making furniture. Jesse said he would have it delivered tomorrow. "Don't unload it on the foundation because the carpenters will start the walls next Sunday." Yanis paid Jesse for the wood and started back toward the house. He was stopped by two Roman guards who tied his arms and escorted him toward the prison. Jesse was just leaving his store when he saw the guards with Yanis between them. He quickly ran to Miriam and told her what he had seen. He asked her to send Tobias to tell the others and he would go and get Jenay and Abie. Miriam began to pray for Yanis' safety. Jesse ran most of the way and then slowed before he got to the tiny house because he didn't want to upset Jenay or Abie. Jenay was sitting in the courtyard weaving while Abie was playing in the yard. "Hi, Uncle Jesse. Abba's not here."

"Thank you, Abie. Is it okay if I talk with your mother for a few minutes?" Jesse asked.

"Sure," she said as she continued her play.

Jesse knew from Jenay's expression that she had already guessed the reason for his visit. "He had just left my store when two guards stopped him, and it looked like they were walking him toward the prison. I just happened to be walking out my door or I would have missed it."

"No, Jesse. Jehovah put you in just the right place at the right time so that I wouldn't have to go through that not-knowing stage again. I'll get a bag packed and we'll be ready to walk back with you. Do you mind telling Mr. Ezekiel?" She went inside and quickly put together their blankets and a fresh robe apiece and then called to

Abie. "Uncle Jesse wants to know if you'd like to go play with his children for a while."

"Sure," said Abie agreeably.

They started toward the store but after a few minutes, Jenay asked Jesse to slow down. "This baby is getting heavy, and I can't keep up. Sorry."

"No, I should have realized I needed to slow down. You aren't due for another month, are you?"

"That's what we estimated, but this one is certainly bigger than last time. Yanis says it's a boy," she said between huffing and puffing. Miriam took over and got her seated on a cushion and brought her juice. She sent Abie outside to play with the other children. Elizabeth and Joel had already arrived and soon the others gathered. This was getting all too familiar.

When Elijah and Hava arrived with their four children, Elizabeth sent Tobias to call her servants to help. The servants could watch the children and allow the adults to concentrate on prayer. Joel began to lead them. When Tobias returned, he reported that he had asked Jairus' servants to prepare dinner for Yanis so he could prepare dinner for this crowd. Everyone was certain that Jehovah would stop Priest Shimei again and this would be a short ordeal. All day they alternated between pleading for Jehovah's mercy and singing joyful songs of praise thanking Him for His provision. Jenay noticed that the baby was feeling heavier and heavier each time she needed to go out to check on Abie. She still hadn't told her that her abba was gone again. She thought maybe it would be easier for her to not know. Abie seemed to be playing happily in the back yard.

Talman had an early morning meeting, so he and Sarah walked home before sunset. But everyone else stayed. Ira helped Tobias prepare dinner, but no one wanted much to eat. Jesse returned from taking Yanis his dinner. Elizabeth's servants had reported to him that everyone was gathered at Jesse's house and Yanis reported that nothing had happened. He would probably be brought before the judge tomorrow morning, but he was worshipping and praying.

Elizabeth was getting concerned about Jenay, who was not looking good. She couldn't decide whether it was her fears for Yanis or whether the baby was trying to come early. She managed to sit close enough to her to ask if she was having tightenings. "I don't think so. The baby has just felt really heavy for the last three days."

"Let's walk outside and let me check and see if he's dropped into position. That may be what you are feeling. Sometimes second babies do it early." The ladies walked out into the yard and found a secluded place. Elizabeth put her hands on Jenay's belly and declared that the baby had definitely dropped into a lower position. "Let me know if you feel any tightenings, but it could still be a month away."

"It's not very comfortable, I feel a lot of pressure in my back."

"Okay. Let me know. We may have a race to see who comes first: baby or Yanis!" They walked back into the house and joined the others in prayer for Yanis.

Jenay was miserable all night. She felt guilty for not praying more for Yanis, but this pain was taking all her attention. Tuesday morning, Elizabeth took charge. Just as soon as the children were settled outside playing and the adults were all in the living room, she announced, "We need to make a change in plans. Jenay is very close to giving birth and we need to get her to my house. The walking will do her good. I don't have any of the birthing supplies here. I'm wondering if Miriam and Hava would mind walking with me and leaving the children with my two servants here. The dads can all stay here and take care of Yanis and keep the six children happy, while we ladies take care of Jenay. Both groups can be praying for both." Everyone agreed, and the ladies began to tell the children that they were going to have special time with their abbas. Joel, Jesse, and Elijah let them say their goodbyes and then began to entertain the children while their mothers left. Jenay apologized profusely for causing problems.

"What problems? Bringing life into the world is women's work. And we are all here to help." Jenay said that all the baby's things were at her house. Miriam packed some newborn things for Jenay to borrow for now. She also packed a bag for baby Yadon who was not yet weaned. The ladies began their walk to Joel and Elizabeth's place. They had to take it slow, and by the time they reached the house, Jenay said she was feeling small tightenings. The pains continued throughout the day without becoming regular. The women worshipped and prayed for Yanis and Jenay and for the men and children.



When Jesse took Yanis his dinner he instructed the servant to not mention Jenay being ready to birth. It would give him too much to worry about. Yanis' news was that he had been taken before the judge and heard Priest Shimei's charges. Apparently, Priest Shimei was claiming that he was building a place of worship on his farm without a license, and he was returned to his cell. Yanis was concerned that his home group had been discovered and asked the servant to contact the members of that group to tell them not to meet at the farm on the Sabbath. Jenay would know their names. They must be warned.

Jesse stopped by Joel and Elizabeth's to get the news on Jenay. He knocked and was admitted to the living room. The ladies were just waiting. He reported what the servant had learned from Yanis. Jenay told Jesse that the group was made up of the families of students that went on the Passover trip. "They are: Ruell, Immer, Michael, Parosh, Benjamin, and Nehemiah. You can probably just contact any one of the families and ask them to contact the others. How is Abie doing?"

"She's having a blast just like all the other children. Do you ladies need anything?"

"No, I think we are good. We don't know when this baby may arrive, but we are ready and won't be caught without supplies when the time comes," said Elizabeth.



“Oh, and I didn’t tell Yanis that the baby might be coming. I think it would drive him crazy. I hope I did the right thing,” stated Jesse.

“You did the right thing. He shouldn’t have to worry about me at a time like this,” assured Jenay. Jesse gave Miriam and baby Yadon a kiss and returned to his house which was filled with men and children. He was glad he had two of Elizabeth’s servants to help with the children because they had all been crying for their mothers. The servants knew just how to keep them busy and take care of their needs.



When Judge Hector sent Yanis back to his cell, he closed the court. The guards told all the people waiting that they would have to return later. Judge Hector sat and tried to figure out his best course of action. He walked over to see if his friend, Justus, was available. The Centurion’s office was crowded, but Judge Hector was escorted in to see him immediately. “Hector, how good to see you. But since it is still working hours, I don’t expect this is a social call. What’s going on and how can I help you?”

“I’m troubled, Justus. I’m not happy with this new priest at the synagogue. He’s trouble.”

“You mean Shimei?”

“Yeah. He’s brought five cases in the last two weeks, and they have all been wastes of my time. Shimei has a grudge against a guy, and I actually put him back in prison to protect him until I can figure out what to do.”

“Is he Roman?”

“No, he’s a Jew, but he’s not like the other Jews, and Shimei doesn’t like that. They are trying to make me get rid of him. The prisoner says he is a follower of Jesus, not a follower of the priest. Apparently, the priest isn’t very happy about that.”

“Oh, you’ve got someone from the New Way, a Jesus follower. They are all over Jerusalem. They don’t cause problems, but the Jews are always trying to stone them or incite the crowds to murder them. It’s ridiculous.”

“How do I protect the guy? I mean, he’s done nothing wrong, but this priest is determined to kill him one way or another. I told him if anything happened to the prisoner, he would be my first suspect. I guess I’d like patrols around this guy to protect him.”

“I could probably call in another cohort from Tiberius. Last I heard, they didn’t have a lot to do.”

“I think we’re going to have to do something. I really think the priest is determined to kill him.”

“So, who is this guy that is crosswise with the priest?”

“He says he’s a goat farmer out on the west side of town.”

“Oh, you mean Yanis?”

“Yeah. Do you know him?”

“He’s the one who supplies milk to August, the man who makes the sticks of cheese. And he worked with Alex and Quintus for a while as a butcher.”

“In other words, he’s different.”

“Yep. I’d be glad to try to protect him. I don’t want to lose my cheese sticks again. Here, you want one?”

“No, thanks. So, I guess I’m asking for more guards on the streets. The other cases were against the rabbis at the Hebrew School.”

“They should all be Jewish.”

“That’s what I thought, but Shimei wanted their heads to roll for quitting teaching at the Hebrew School. Apparently, they all three quit together and walked out. He wasn’t happy, and actually threatened to kill them while he was still in my court. That really made me mad. That’s the case where I threatened him if anything happened to them.”

“Yeah, I know where the rabbis live. I’ll put a guard on them, too.”

“Now, what I really want to know is whether or not to release this guy Yanis. I guess I need to investigate the claim that he’s built a place of worship without a license, but who cares? I’m just dreading searching through all the records. It gives me a headache thinking about it.”

“Just ask him. Yanis is a good guy. He’ll tell you whether he has a license or not and what the date is on it.”

“And you would believe him?”

“Yep. What I’ve learned about the New Way is that they are honest, and helpful, and really take good care of each other.”

“Okay, I think I’ll start by talking with Yanis. Thanks, Justus.”

“Anytime.” Since Judge Hector had already closed his court, he decided to walk home and call it a day.



All day Wednesday, the women waited and prayed with Jenay while the men waited, prayed, and tried to keep the children happy. They took turns checking on Yanis at the prison. On Thursday, Jenay birthed a healthy baby boy. She agreed that it was easier the second time because she knew what to expect, but Elizabeth still insisted that she stay in bed and let the others care for her. The ladies agreed that Abie should be brought to see her mother first thing on Friday morning.



When Tobias delivered Yanis’ breakfast, he told him that he had a healthy baby boy, and that Jenay was doing fine. Everyone was praying for him to be out soon. Finally, Yanis was brought before the judge again, but this time Priest Shimei was not present. “I just had

some questions about your case. You have been accused of building a place of worship without a license. Where is this building located?"

"To be totally honest, I have no idea. I have recently laid the foundation for a new home for my wife who birthed my second child last night. We have outgrown the little hut we were living in. It was getting a little too cozy," said Yanis.

"So, you have not built a place to worship?"

"We hope to invite our friends over occasionally and I'm sure we'll worship, but it's not a building for that purpose."

"So, you are hoping to scoot around the law and say it's a house, but it's really a place of worship?"

"No, sir. I'm saying that as a follower of Jesus, I worship every day, all day long. I've been worshipping in the prison cell. Does that make it a place of worship? Yes and no. It was not built for that purpose."

"Priest Shimei says that this place of worship will easily house fifty people. That seems a little large for a house."

"I don't see how you would get fifty people inside that house. I'm wondering if we'll have room for two children. Oh, hold it. The stone masons not only laid the floor, but they laid the foundation for the back courtyard at the same time. We love to entertain our friends. So, if you look at that foundation, you have to allow for both. The front half is the house and has three small sleeping rooms, a living area, and a kitchen prep area. Then, behind the back wall will be a courtyard that will hopefully seat fourteen."

"Okay, I need to check out your place and if it's a house, as you say, we'll get you out of here as soon as possible."

He sent his assistant, who had been listening, out to Yanis' farm. It was midafternoon when he returned. He said the foundation was obviously a house. There was even a root cellar filled with food to one side and there were charcoal markings of where the rooms would be. Yanis was released but wasn't sure where Jenay was. He went to Jesse's house, and everyone walked with him to Joel's. He knelt beside Jenay and cried at the sight of his son. He stroked her hair and held Abie. Now they were a family of four and he had a son. Elizabeth insisted they both spend the night and be together as a family. After a prayer of thanksgiving for Yanis' release and for Jenay's safety through birthing his son, Hava and Miriam led them in some Psalms of worship. Soon, the others started home.

Yanis asked Elijah if he would please let Salome know that he couldn't leave Jenay because his son had just been born and he was exhausted. "Please, don't tell them about the arrest. That would just worry everyone." Elijah assured him that he would let that group know.

A few minutes later, Talman and Sarah returned and said, "Did you know you have two Roman soldiers guarding your place?" Yanis and Joel walked out into the yard and saw that they did indeed have two guards in front of the house. Joel said it might deter Priest Shimei, but Yanis doubted it. He reminded them that their protection came from Jehovah.

Long before dawn on Sabbath morning, Yanis got up and walked to the farm. He needed to help with the milking. He looked around and everything seemed to be fine. He opened the barn doors and started lighting the lamps. Soon Mr. Ezekiel, Zokur, and Solomon joined him. Yanis announced that he had a new-born son and assured them that Jenay was doing fine, but it would be a while before she could help them. "I'll see if one of the milkers would 'volunteer' to help," said Mr. Ezekiel. It took the three of them almost two hours to finish milking the goats. Now that it was light, Yanis walked over to make sure the house looked okay. The carpenters had said they would be ready to start tomorrow. He hoped Elizabeth would let him bring Jenay home tomorrow. He felt certain that he could take care of her, and Abie, and his newborn son.

## Chapter 20

Sunday morning, Elizabeth suggested that Yanis go to the farm and supervise the building and let her care for Jenay for a couple more days. She said there was too much danger that she would overdo, since she had little Abie to care for also. It was Tuesday before Elizabeth relented and let them walk home. By then, Jenay was able to walk and lift the baby and didn't need so much assistance. Jenay assured her she would be fine, but once again Elizabeth promised that the ladies would take turns bringing the meals for the first week. Yanis watched the carpenters work and started building a table while Abie played nearby.

On Thursday late afternoon, everyone stood in the yard while Jairus performed the circumcision and naming of little Enoch. The ladies had brought honey bread and juice, and Jenay sat on a bench in the courtyard and visited with her friends. It was a special day and thankfully, the weather cooperated.

Yanis and Abie walked to Grandmother Salome's on Friday and asked her to let Jaden and Jonas know that he couldn't leave Jenay alone for group this week. He would plan to be there next week. He carried Abie on his shoulders and ran all the way back to the farm. When they arrived, Jeremiah and Kaleigh and their two young daughters were visiting with Jenay. They greeted Yanis and then asked if the girls could play outside for a few minutes. "Abie, stay in the yard. Don't go where the men are working. Sorry for the noise, but the carpenters are finishing up the outside walls. They should be finished before Sabbath, and we'll have a large enough house to meet in when the rains start."

"That's what we wanted to talk with you about. We have been praying all week, and we've made our decision. My brother moved to Caesarea Philippi about two years ago. He came to visit last week and reports that jobs are plentiful there. We are moving our entire group to Syria next week. We don't know how Jehovah will use us there, but we know that we have to get out of Capernaum. Everywhere we go, we are hissed at and spit on. The women are scared and now Jethro, Melchi, and I have lost our jobs. We all wanted to visit, but after hearing that you were arrested for meeting with us, we decided that I would just make a social call to let you know. Please pray for us. We plan to stay together as a group and maybe you and Jenay will decide to join us there."

"May Jehovah bless your journey. But no. Jehovah has called us to Capernaum, and we'll be staying here unless He tells us something different. Let the Holy Spirit guide you step by step and you'll do just fine. I'll let the apostles know that you are in Syria, and maybe they can stop and encourage you when they are traveling through. I think Peter may be there now. I'm not sure. I know there are followers in

Damascus and in Antioch, but I don't know about Caesarea Philippi. May Jehovah use you there to reach others."

"Thank you both for risking your lives to tell us about Jesus. Words aren't enough..." Jeremiah began to weep then quickly said, "Shalom."

"We'll be praying for all of you. Please tell everyone we send our love and prayers. Shalom."

After they had gone, Jenay noticed that Yanis had a faraway look in his eyes. She wondered if he was thinking about moving, too. She wasn't sure what that look meant. The carpenters finished up right at sunset and said they would return on Sunday to clean up the area.



Elijah and Hava brought a Sabbath meal to Yanis and Jenay. Hava cuddled with the baby and Elijah teased her about wanting another one. The older children came inside, took a peek at the baby, and then went outside to play with Abie. Elijah asked Yanis how his class preparation was coming. "Oh, man, I haven't even started. Did Joel ever find out the schedule?"

"Yes, they will plan to do a similar schedule to what we are used to. We'll start the first week of Tishrei and plan on six sessions with the one after Passover being short a week. So, you have to plan thirty-five weeks of classwork. If you meet twice a week, then you'll need to plan for seventy sessions. That sounds like a lot, but by the time you add in discussion and questions it really goes by fast, especially if you've got twenty students. But you'd better get started on it soon. You've only got seven weeks until school starts for the rabbis."



Yanis helped with the milking on Sabbath morning. He returned to the house to find Enoch screaming to be nursed, while Jenay was trying to clean up spilled milk that Abie had tried to pour for herself, and Jenay saying that she needed to get off her feet. He got Abie settled down to eat while Jenay nursed Enoch and sat down to eat his breakfast. When he was almost finished, Abie pulled on his arm and said, "Mother is hungry."

"Jenay, have you had breakfast?" Yanis asked.

"No. I was trying to get the children settled first and I haven't had time to eat." He took Enoch and wrapped him in a fresh shawl and laid him on a mat. He warned Abie to leave her baby brother alone and let him sleep while he fixed Jenay some overripe apricots that he found in the cellar. He had eaten the last leftover roll that Ira had sent. Jenay wasn't supposed to do anything strenuous or lift anything heavy for forty days. He wasn't quite sure how he would survive. By the time he got the dishes washed, Abie had woken up baby Enoch who was

screaming. He took Enoch to Jenay who nursed him back to sleep. She suggested that Yanis take Abie for a Sabbath walk. He laid Enoch beside her, and she assured Yanis she would be okay.

He checked on Jenay and Enoch periodically but decided that keeping Abie entertained was probably his best contribution. Once when he checked, Jenay was nursing Enoch and she asked if he could bring her a cup of something to drink. He realized that, when the sun set, he would need to prepare something for their post-Sabbath meal. He was glad that the cellar was well stocked with vegetables that he could quickly fry. He hoped that Jenay would be able to help more soon but realized that he needed to set aside time to take better care of her. He tried to pray, but Abie wanted his constant attention. *How will I ever find time to figure out my lessons before school starts?*

Just as soon as the sun set, Yanis took Abie with him to the cellar and found enough potatoes and onions to fry for dinner. Yanis carried Abie back to the house, cooked dinner, got everyone fed, and finally tucked everyone in bed. He prayed that Jenay would get stronger fast!



After breakfast on Sunday, Yanis put Abie in a milk cart and pulled her to the market. She giggled and laughed all the way. He bought a supply of rolls, fresh vegetables, and some fruit, and then bought a stack of papyrus, a brush, and some ink. He hadn't done much writing since he turned thirteen, so he dreaded having to relearn it, but he needed to sketch out his lesson plans. Jenay said that she thought she would be able to make bread by next week, but she had to wait until she healed a little more. He showed her the rolls that he had bought, and she agreed they were perfect. Yanis took Abie outside to play while he worked on the table for the new house. He didn't want to work on the inside walls because he wouldn't be able to hear if Jenay called for him.

On Wednesday, all the ladies arrived for their group and surprised Jenay. She loved having them around and they brought offerings of bread, soup, cheese, and butter. She assured them that it would really help Yanis out. The older children watched Abie, and Yanis was able to slip away to the new house to work. He realized he would need to purchase smoother lumber instead of the rough logs he had remaining from the outside walls. He sat down in the floor of the new house and cried. He had not felt this frustrated since their first year of marriage and all the problems with the farm. As he cried out his fears, he felt Jehovah's presence very close. He began to softly sing and quote Scriptures that reminded Him of Jehovah's faithfulness. He was reassured that Jehovah had brought him to Capernaum and that He had a plan for him even if he got discouraged, or exhausted, or even killed accomplishing it. It was a great afternoon of worship.

Late that afternoon, Miriam knocked on the door and asked if he was ready to take Abie since the ladies needed to get home before

sunset. He held out his arms to Abie and thanked Miriam for bringing the ladies to visit. "We'll be back next Wednesday for group. Shalom."

Yanis carried Abie back to the house and found the table loaded with food from the ladies. Jenay joined them at the table and talked nonstop about all the news she had heard. It was good to see her smiling again.

On Thursday, Yanis asked Jenay if they could talk. "Anytime. Abie, you may go play outside, but you must stay in the courtyard. You cannot go in the yard until Abba can watch you. Okay?"

"Okay, Mother." Abie went outside and Yanis asked Jenay how she managed to get everything done.

"It takes practice, Yanis. It's not always easy, but Jehovah gives me strength. You are doing a great job, and every day I will get stronger and can do more things. Is there something bothering you?"

"Yes, how am I going to do this class about the life of Jesus? I don't even know how to teach a class. I never went to Hebrew School. My Dad taught us at home."

"Well, I certainly didn't go to Hebrew School!" laughed Jenay.

"Elijah said I needed to divide the life of Jesus into seventy lessons. Where do I start? How do I do that?"

"Are you asking for my advice or just wanting to tell me your frustrations? I can tell you how I would do it, but it may not be the way you want to do it," said Jenay.

"Yes, I'm begging for your help. I can't figure out where to start. I'm just stumped."

"Well, I know you bought some papyrus and a brush. I would start by just writing down every event and every parable you can remember. Then you need to number them so you know which ones you are teaching in what order. I mean, hopefully, you'll write them down in order, but you might not want to teach them in order. Do you know what I mean?"

"You are brilliant! Now, the harder question. When am I going to do this, watch Abie, take care of you and Enoch, cook, build the new house, take care of the farm books, and..."

"Well, my suggestion is if you don't schedule a time, it won't happen. You remember we couldn't make time for studying together until we set Wednesday mornings as our time to do it. I suggest you set aside a couple of hours every day until it gets done."

"When do you suggest?"

"What about during Abie's nap in the afternoons? You could put her down and I could watch her while you go to the woods or even to the other house and start writing down ideas."

"I could take my papyrus and brushes to the other house and work on it. That would be perfect. Thank you, Jenay."

"No problem." She felt sad that he hadn't invited her to help with remembering Jesus' teachings but was grateful that he had asked for help at all. Right now, she needed to recuperate and do her own jobs.



On Friday late afternoon, Yanis and Abie went to Grandmother Salome's and Yanis shared the final parable taught by Jesus. He returned with a box packed with food for the Sabbath.

The men's group gathered and met at the new empty house on Sabbath afternoon. Yanis enjoyed being with the men, and taught them the next parable. Abie stayed with Jenay and Enoch, and Jenay claimed that she was a good helper. The men all left at sundown, and Yanis set out the things that Grandmother Salome had sent.

Each evening after Abie was asleep, Yanis and Jenay would stretch baby Enoch's arms. He loved batting at his abba's beard. It made Yanis laugh, and he thought his heart would explode with pride. He loved being an abba.



All week Jenay began to add activities, and she was able to take over most of her regular work. She sent Yanis and Abie to the market for supplies on Monday, and Abie insisted that she needed another milk cart ride. Jenay was able to make bread and showed Yanis how to churn butter. He was surprised at how much energy it required.

On Wednesday morning, they prepared the story of the last Seder and a few of the things that Jesus taught that they had personally heard. They included things they had heard from the apostles. At noon the ladies came and brought gifts of food again. It was very welcome even though Jenay was able to be up and about. It was strenuous to be taking care of two children at the same time. They laughed and giggled together, and it was healing for Jenay to be with her friends. She hated being so isolated and was getting eager to be out and about again. They encouraged her to put Enoch in a carrier and walk around outside with him. The sunshine would do them both good. She taught about the last Seder and admitted to the ladies that that was when she knew that someday she would marry Yanis. They agreed he was a good man. Once again, they left before sunset so they could be home by dark.

On Friday afternoon, Yanis and Abie walked to Grandmother Salome's and enjoyed the dinner and fellowship, and Yanis taught about the last Seder. During the sharing time, he asked for their prayers as he prepared his classes on the life of Jesus. Salome said, "If you want to know about His life before you met Him, I'll be glad to fill in those missing years." Yanis asked her if he could possibly come over on Wednesday afternoon to talk and she agreed.

When he got up early to help with the Sabbath morning milking, he left Jenay and both babies asleep. But when he returned afterward, he found Jenay trying to quiet Abie's crying. She was upset because she hadn't got to go milk with Abba and her heart was broken. Yanis apologized and promised to wake her up next time. He finally took her to see that the goats were already out grazing and weren't in the barn

anymore. She would have to wait until tonight to say hello to everyone. He promised to take her.

The men arrived and walked over to the new house after saying hello to Jenay and admiring how Enoch was growing. Elijah commented that the house walls weren't coming up very fast. "No, they aren't. I didn't realize how much work taking care of two children would be. Hopefully, this week I'll make some progress. But I am happy to report that I'm working on my lesson preparations," said Yanis.

"Would you like some help with the walls? I'm not a skilled carpenter, but I can put up walls," said Elijah.

"I could, too," said Joel. "Why don't we schedule a workday? You have been teaching us for over a year. It's the least we could do to help you out a little." They agreed that Monday would work for everyone. Yanis taught the lesson on the last Seder and the men started home before dark. Yanis ran to the little house and kept his promise to take Abie to the barn to see her friends.

Tobias had brought over freshly baked rolls, goat cheese, and a fresh vegetable dish for their dinner. What would they do without their friends?



On Sunday, Yanis took Abie with him to the Carpenter's Shop and ordered the lumber he would need for the inside of the house. They promised to deliver it before sunset. He and Abie hurried home and found Jenay making bread. She was feeling stronger since baby Enoch was finally letting her get longer chunks of sleep and she was healing. Yanis churned some butter but left milk for Jenay and Abie to drink. Elizabeth had said it would help Jenay heal faster. He and Abie walked over to the new house and re-marked the charcoal lines where the walls should go for each room. He would need to leave Abie with Jenay tomorrow while he worked with the men. He hoped that she would be able to handle both children. She assured him that it would be no problem.

All day the men worked on building the walls to the new house. How fun it was to work together. Yanis built the kitchen preparation area. They needed shelves for their dishes, a place to prepare fruits and vegetables, and a place to set the water and milk jars. While he worked on the kitchen, Elijah, Jesse, and Joel worked on building the sleeping room walls. The men sang and whistled and talked as they worked. It was soothing to all of them to be together. They discussed school starting and the preparation that they were putting into their new classes. Yanis picked their brains about how a typical class would be conducted. He was assured that there was a lot of variation, and it was up to the teacher.

Wednesday morning, Yanis and Jenay spent time preparing to discuss Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Neither knew much about it, and they didn't want to go into details. They had both been asleep in the

garden when the arrest happened. Maybe they should just share their impressions and not what they had heard from the apostles. Neither looked forward to teaching the topic, because it was too painful. They prayed together that Jehovah would show them how to present it.

The ladies arrived for their time with Jenay and once again, brought food for them to eat and enjoy. Yanis had already packed his bag with a couple of pages of papyrus, his brush, and ink. He ran to Grandmother Salome's. She told him things he had never heard: an angel appearing to Mary, His birth in a stable, shepherds seeing the heavenly host of angels, and later magi from the East visiting them and warning them to flee to Egypt.

"That fulfills the Scripture that Messiah would come out of Egypt. That's amazing. I didn't realize that it actually happened," said Yanis.

"Yes, they didn't return to Nazareth until two of Joseph's sons had been born. Jesus grew up working in the family's Carpentry Shop and didn't start His ministry until He was around thirty. That's when you met Him at His baptism. Did you know about the forty days that He spent in the wilderness getting ready for His ministry?"

"I've heard bits and pieces of it, but tell me what you know, if you are not too tired."

"I wasn't there, but John told me that Jesus was tempted by Satan himself for forty days in the wilderness." She described the three major temptations that she could remember, and Yanis wrote them down. When he noticed the sun was getting low, he thanked her profusely and gathered up his things to return home. Once again, Salome gave him a box of food that her servants had prepared.

"She's feeling better these days but seems to tire easily. I think the baby is keeping her awake more than she admits," said Yanis.

"Yes, sometimes the second baby is really stressful and makes it hard to recuperate. She's still got a week before her confinement ends, doesn't she? I know that you have done a great job taking care of her and two little ones. Shalom, and let me know if you need more information. I'll see you Sabbath night."

"Thanks so much. I've enjoyed our time together and this will be really helpful for my class. Shalom."

Yanis began to run and hoped the ladies were still there taking care of Jenay. He hated leaving her alone with the two babies.

The ladies had just left, but Jenay laughed when he brought in the box from Grandmother Salome. "What will we do with all this food?"

"I suggest we eat it and enjoy every bite!" Jenay agreed and they both ate heartily. Jenay promised that she would be able to cook more soon. She admitted she was having trouble juggling the two children. "I don't know how Miriam and Hava do it with three!"

"They both have a servant to help, and grandmothers who visit often. Maybe, I should hire you a servant."

"I'll be fine. I just need to get stronger and get Enoch and Abie sleeping better. I think she'll sleep better when the baby doesn't wake her up in the night."

“I didn’t know she was waking in the night.”

“Yes, you sleep through everything and I’m glad because you’ve got so much work to do around here. Did Grandmother Salome help you out?”

“Yes, I’ve got over seventy topics listed. I just need to decide what order to present them.”

“Did Grandmother tell you about John the Baptizer and his miraculous birth?”

“No, she didn’t. That’s something I should ask about. Who knows, I might have enough material for an advanced class after all.”

On Thursday, Yanis worked on finishing the house and began building benches for the table that he had already built. That afternoon, he took Jenay to look at the house and see if there was anything else he needed to build before they moved in. He showed her the three sleeping rooms and the preparation area that was separated from the living area. She declared it perfect, and he spent most of Friday morning carrying their mats and kitchen supplies over to the new house. He moved his school supplies to the little house so he would have a quiet place to continue preparing. Once Jenay and baby Enoch got settled, he declared it time for him and Abie to leave for Grandmother Salome’s. When he returned, he laid the sleeping Abie down on her mat in her very own room and covered her.

After Yanis and Abie went to the barn for milking, the four of them enjoyed a quiet Sabbath. They enjoyed a walk down to the lean-to and missed their friends. Yanis carried baby Enoch and they let Abie lead the way. Yanis realized he had not been collecting rocks for the fence and resolved to get back on that project soon. They walked back and sat in the grassy yard between their two houses. Jenay asked if he could move the oven and firepit closer to the new house. He had forgotten all about them. They discussed leaving the old ones intact so that someone else could live in the little house and they could live in the new one. Yanis promised to start building the outside cooking area on Sunday.

The men’s group arrived and decided to meet in the old house so they wouldn’t disturb Jenay. They enjoyed sweet fellowship, and Yanis told them what he knew about the crucifixion. He had forgotten about the period of darkness and the earthquake that followed. Since the rabbis had been in Jerusalem during the crucifixion, they began to all share together what they remembered. He realized that he had many details to add to his lesson plans. Yanis asked them about the tearing of the veil in the temple. At the time it happened no one realized how very significant it was. Now, they all knew that Jehovah had made a way for them to come directly to Him without needing to go through the priest or the temple. Yanis was beginning to feel confident that he would have enough material for an advanced course and just needed to decide which material would be presented when. He still had three weeks to prepare for school to begin.

## Chapter 21

“Sir, there is trouble,” reported a Roman soldier as he entered. “We need reinforcements fast!”

Centurion Justus grabbed his armor and started barking orders for soldiers to mount immediately. As they ran for their horses, the soldier reported that Priest Shimei and about thirty men were headed west. They were all carrying swords and it looked like trouble. “Are these trained soldiers?”

“I believe they are just Jewish men who follow Priest Shimei and his assistants.”

“We should be able to handle them; I have forty trained soldiers. Do you know where they are headed?”

“They left the synagogue and were heading west when I came to get you. They are on foot and seem to be pretty riled up.”

“Remember, men, we are peacekeepers unless we have to take further action. You know your jobs. Let’s go to the westside well and see if we encounter them.”

When they got to the well, they could tell that the action was at Yanis’ farm. Apparently, the whole west side was rushing to see what would happen. Centurion Justus could hear screaming and shouting and hoped that they were not too late. He yelled for the crowd to part and led his men through. He didn’t want to trample anyone, and the people complied when they saw the size of the horses. They arrived at Yanis’ house and half of the soldiers dismounted and followed Centurion Justus to the front door of the house where Priest Shimei was ordering Yanis to surrender his son. Yanis, of course, was resisting and protecting the tiny baby. The mother was crying and clinging to another small child who was screaming in fear.

“Priest Shimei, call your men off, or I will,” shouted Centurion Justus.

“Stay out of this! This is Jewish business. We are simply carrying out Jewish Law. We have a right to be here, and you do not.”

“Priest Shimei, I have warned you to leave this man alone. He is not part of your synagogue!”

“He is Jewish. That makes him part of my responsibility whether he likes it or not.”

“Call your men off and bring your complaint before the judge.”

“I have no complaint. This man is intent on bringing Jehovah’s wrath down on all of us. He is Jewish and must abide by Jewish Law or we will all be punished by Jehovah.”

“Either call your men off, or I will arrest all of you for this riot.”

Priest Shimei turned to his followers and lifted his hands to quiet them. Then he turned to Yanis and ordered him to give him the baby. Yanis clung even tighter to the baby and refused. “He has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus,” he said firmly.

“He has not been redeemed and must die. The Law is clear,” stated Priest Shimei.

“The Law has been fulfilled by the blood of Jesus,” refuted Yanis.

Centurion Justus realized that they were arguing again about whether Yanis had to obey Jewish Law. Centurion Justus had already discussed it with his superiors in Tiberius who agreed that he did not. *I need to decide whether to arrest everyone present, or to just send them home.*

“This party is over. No one is going to kill anyone under my watch. Priest Shimei, make your choice: Either go home or be arrested. The same goes for the rest of you. Go home or my men will arrest anyone who does not.”

Most of the men began moving toward the gate, but there was much muttering and complaining about Roman interference in Jewish affairs. Even Priest Shimei and his assistants began to move away from Yanis and baby Enoch. Then Priest Shimei turned and said, “May Jehovah’s wrath fall upon you and your unredeemed son. May He see and know that you and you alone have defiled Israel. May He destroy you as my abba should have destroyed you. May He see me as righteous in His eyes because I have attempted to carry out His Law. May His wrath fall on you and your descendants alone, and may I be found guiltless before Him.”

As Priest Shimei turned to leave, Yanis knelt and tried to comfort Jenay who was clinging to both her babies and crying inconsolably. Centurion Justus walked toward Yanis and said, “I apologize to you and your family for not posting enough men to protect you. I will leave five here at all times until Priest Shimei settles down.”

“I don’t know that he will settle down until I am dead. But thank you for your assistance.”

“It’s the least I can do for a fellow follower,” said Centurion Justus. “You need to take care of your wife tonight. She needs you. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Yanis’ head was reeling. The Roman Centurion of Capernaum was a follower of Jesus. That was incredible, unbelievable. He began to praise Jehovah for His blessings.

He went inside and found Jenay nursing baby Enoch and holding Abie on her lap. She wouldn’t let go of either of them and continued to cry. He wrapped them all in his arms and began to sing quiet Psalms over them. It took a while to get everyone settled and ready for sleep. He was afraid that Abie was old enough to remember, and he prayed especially that she would not be afraid. After she was asleep, Yanis told Jenay that Centurion Justus had posted five guards outside their home, and they should be able to keep Priest Shimei and his men away from them.

Jenay said, “I know that Jehovah has paid the redemption fee for baby Enoch, and I am not afraid of Him. But I am afraid of Priest Shimei. He is a very angry man, and I feel he would have enjoyed killing Enoch and you.”

“Yes, we need to keep praying that he will come to know Jesus.”

“Oh, Yanis, pray that I can be found faithful. My heart is not ready to pray for him. I just want him to leave us alone. I was so afraid. I want to trust Jehovah, but I didn’t tonight. I failed.”

“Jenay, Jehovah has given you a mother’s heart. Don’t ever be sad about loving us and wanting to protect us. That’s not failing. Jehovah knows your heart. Let’s try to get some sleep.”

Yanis stayed close to home and worked on building some more benches for the house. He moved the table from the little house’s courtyard to the new house. He caught up on the farm’s accounting and was pleased with Mr. Ezekiel’s work. The farm was prospering and, other than milking on Sabbath morning, Yanis was not tied down with any responsibilities for it. While Abie took her nap, he studied in the old house and felt that he was ready for school to begin. When she woke, he took her to help pick up rocks for the fence. They worked together and he listened to her chatter. She didn’t seem to be affected by all the trauma the night before.

On Wednesday morning, he and Jenay prepared the lesson on Jesus’ resurrection. That was a much more fun lesson to teach. Just as soon as the ladies arrived, Yanis told Jenay that he was going to run to the market and would return shortly. The ladies enjoyed visiting and were excitedly planning to return to Rachel’s house next week since Enoch would be forty days old, and Jenay’s confinement would be over. She was so excited to be declared clean and allowed to do all her work. But she admitted that she loved having the ladies come and dreaded going out into the streets of Capernaum again. She didn’t share about the incident on Sunday night. All the ladies reported that they felt uncomfortable any time they were away from their homes. They were especially worried about Priest Shimei discovering that the rabbis were teaching Gentiles. They wondered who the new rabbis would be at the Hebrew School and prayed that things would settle down once both schools were busy. Jenay was glad to teach about the resurrection and all the joy and wonder of that time. They ended with Psalms of praise and worship.

Yanis hurried to the market while the ladies were with Jenay. Afterward, he walked down to the lean-to and spent some time in prayer before he returned at sunset and as usual, found dinner already provided by the ladies.

On Friday, Yanis and Abie walked to Grandmother Salome’s for Sabbath dinner, and he thoroughly enjoyed teaching about the resurrection. Since Salome had been there, everyone enjoyed hearing her eyewitness account. Yanis knew that it would be valuable for his class and made a mental note to add it to his teaching plans.

On Sabbath afternoon, the men’s group met in the little house but suggested that next week they should meet at Talman’s. Yanis shared with them what had happened with Priest Shimei and that he was uncomfortable with Jenay being left alone. They suggested that she might enjoy visiting with Miriam during that time. Yanis agreed. They enjoyed discussing the resurrection. Everyone was excited about school getting started soon and wondered if Priest Shimei would make

trouble for everyone again. "I certainly hope not. The judge told him not to bother us and maybe he will listen."

"Just remember that it is Jehovah who holds us in His hands, and we have nothing to fear," said Yanis. "We serve Jehovah who brought Jesus back from the dead." After Jairus prayed a prayer of blessing, they all headed home.

On Wednesday, as they prepared the material for their groups, Yanis asked Jenay to share what she had seen at the ascension of Jesus. She agreed that that would be fun to teach, but he would have to teach the men's group. He asked if she would teach the family group at Grandmother Salome's, and she agreed. She packed little Enoch in his carrier and let Abie walk beside her as they walked to Rachel's house. Yanis walked with her since they would meet with Jairus first and let him declare her time of uncleanness to be over following Enoch's birth. Then she would stay and meet with the ladies. He asked if he should come and escort her home at sunset, but she insisted that she would be fine. Miriam would walk with her most of the way, and then she would only lack the last part of the road that was guarded by five Roman soldiers. She assured him they would be fine.

Jenay shared with the ladies' group about getting to see Jesus ascend into Heaven. They agreed it was a very special privilege. And she got to share it again with the family group on Sabbath night. Jenay enjoyed the sweet fellowship of being with the family again, but she thought that Grandmother Salome had aged a lot since she had last seen her almost two months ago. Laila said that Salome was taking longer and longer naps each day. She was happy to hold baby Enoch and invited Jenay to come over to visit and catch up. Jenay promised to visit more often once Yanis was busy with school.

Jenay enjoyed being able to help with the milking on the Sabbath again. She and Yanis spent a quiet day together and relaxed in the sunshine. Midafternoon, the family went with Yanis to Jesse's house. She and the babies visited with Miriam and her children while the two men walked to Talman's. It was so nice to be out of her own house, and she enjoyed the visit. Miriam would be birthing in a few months, and Jenay promised to be available to help. Soon after the post-Sabbath dinner that Tobias prepared for them, Yanis and Jesse returned. They said their good nights and started home.



On Sunday, Yanis and Jenay received a message from Aunt Salome's saying that her dad and Uncle John had arrived. Jenay was beside herself with excitement. They had not seen her parents since Grandpa Zebedee had passed at Sukkot a year ago. Abie had just been a baby. Jenay packed a bag for each child, and all of them walked to Grandmother Salome's for an extended visit. The apostles were never able to stay for more than a day or two, so they would spend the nights as long as they were there. Jenay fell into the arms of



her abba and cried tears of joy to see him. She showed him baby Enoch and told them their timing was perfect since she had just completed her forty days last week. James couldn't stop the tears as he hugged Jenay and held her babies. Abie of course, talked nonstop and charmed everyone. The entire family gathered, and they celebrated together all the good news to be shared. James and John and two young men, Moses and Zared, were on their way up to Damascus and then they were taking the route through Syria to Antioch to visit Jonathan, Jenay's twin brother. They planned to return from Antioch along the Great Sea and visit other Jewish settlers who were ministering to both Jews and Gentiles. They would share all the news with followers along the way. Yanis told them about the new group that had just relocated to Caesarea Philippi, and they promised to look them up.

After dinner, the men retreated to the rooftop and the primary discussion was how the four brothers could best take care of their mother. Salome had deteriorated since they had seen her just over a year ago. They talked and everyone agreed it would be best if Jaden and his wife moved in with his mother to oversee everything. James and John wanted her house to continue to be available to all followers who were traveling through Capernaum. It was a vital and comfortable place to rest.

The discussion turned to other topics. John asked, "How many followers do you estimate are in Capernaum?"

"We have fifteen, counting us, in our groups on the west side," said Yanis.

"We have sixteen, I think – not counting Jenay and Yanis," said Jonas.

"Are you having trouble with Priest Shimei?" asked James.

"Yes, all of the rabbis and I have been arrested and spent time in prison, but Jehovah has blessed us and protected us. The Roman Centurion here is a follower of Jesus. He has put a guard around our houses to protect us. Our biggest concern right now is what is going to happen when school starts. The largest pocket of followers here are Gentiles. They have become followers because of Orly's outreach program. They are starting a school, and the four rabbis and I are teaching there. We don't think that Priest Shimei knows that yet. He threw all the rabbis in prison for resigning from the Hebrew School. But we expect much worse when he discovers that we are teaching Gentiles."

"You are probably right. It could get really messy. When does school start?"

"In two weeks, the first week of Tishrei. It could get nasty, and we'd appreciate your prayers for all of us."

"That's the rabbis we met at Passover last year, right?" asked James.

"Yes, those three plus Rabbi Talman who used to be on the Sanhedrin."

"I've met him, too. He's the one who let me know about the hush-money paid to the Roman guards concerning Jesus' resurrection."

"I haven't heard that story. Sounds interesting," said Yanis.

"Priest Shimei also threatened to kill Enoch when I didn't pay him the redemption fee. The Roman Centurion showed up just in time. I'm so glad he's a follower of Jesus because the Holy Spirit is guiding him," said Yanis.

"So, are you still running the goat farm?" asked James.

"No. I still own the goat farm and it is profitable, but I've turned it over to a steward who is training an apprentice and together they keep it going without me. I've been able to build Jenay a larger house. It's not huge, but it has three sleeping rooms so we can spread out a little."

"How long will you four be able to stay?" asked Jaden.

"We really planned to just spend the night and move on, but I hurt my ankle yesterday and need to let it rest before we continue. I imagine we'll be out of here on Tuesday morning early," said James.

All day Monday, Yanis and Jenay and the children got to enjoy visiting with the apostles, Moses, and Zared. Sometimes Jenay and her abba walked along the beach and talked and he encouraged her to stand strong in the face of this persecution. She assured him that she felt safe right in the middle of Jehovah's will, but it was often hard when her children were threatened. He said he understood, and that he was praying for her daily.

That night after dinner, Yanis asked James and John to teach them about the last forty days with Jesus. "I'm collecting everything I can to teach my schoolboys about Jesus' time on earth."

The apostles told the family again about Jesus' meeting them and sending them out to fish after they had fished all night and caught nothing. They were reminded of Jesus' original call to "follow Me and become fishers of men." They also told about Peter's call that night to be a shepherd to the flock of new followers. Yanis knew that he was getting valuable information to share with his classes.

On Tuesday morning, James and John got on the road before dawn, but Yanis and Jenay and the children stayed for breakfast with Grandmother Salome before starting back to the farm.

As they walked back, Jenay asked if Zared had said anything to the men about Laila. "No, not that I know of. Why?"

"I just know that they were exchanging a lot of looks. I don't think he spoke to her, but he certainly was interested. Maybe he will talk to James and John about her. But I would hate for her to move to Jerusalem."

"Me, too."

On Wednesday, Yanis and Jenay prepared the lesson on Pentecost and wondered what Jehovah's plan was for the ladies' group and the men's group now that they were completing their study of the earthly life of Jesus. They hoped to continue meeting and just share and pray together like Grandmother Salome's group planned to do each Sabbath night.

## Chapter 22

The next week passed incredibly slowly. After the men's group was finished and Yanis had completed his teaching, they enjoyed a post-Sabbath meal. They dismissed with prayer and headed home. They agreed to meet at Joel's home in the morning at the first hour to walk to the school together. Elijah said he would meet them at the school.



Jenay laughed at how excited Yanis seemed. He tried to help Abie with her breakfast but ended up spilling her bowl of olives. Olives rolled everywhere, and Abie chased after them. Jenay washed them off and got her seated at the table again. "Yanis, pray for us before you leave. We will miss you today. Do you think you'll be home by midafternoon, or will it be sunset?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know. But I not only will pray now, but I'll be praying for you all day long. And Abie will need to be a big helper for you while I'm away." He kissed Jenay, Abie, and little Enoch and then encircled them with his arms and prayed a blessing on each one. He was out the door and walking quickly to Joel's house where they had agreed to meet. Talman and Jairus were just arriving, and they walked together to the New Way Worship Center for their first day of training. Joel would be in charge all day and they assured him of their prayers. Then the laughing and teasing began. They had grown very close in this past year and felt more like brothers than friends. They knew that Joel was nervous, and they wanted him to feel at ease.

They were greeted at the Worship Center by Gaius and Pollux. They welcomed the group of fifteen teachers and rabbis and re-introduced Hermes as the assistant and Joel as the headmaster. As Joel took over the leadership, he looked at Hermes and asked, "If I'm the headmaster, does that make you the neckmaster?" Everyone laughed and it helped to break the tension in the room. The name stuck and everyone called Hermes the neckmaster all week. Joel spoke to the men about making sure they were living their lives in obedience to Jesus and reflecting Him to the students. He asked that they spend their first half hour praying for each other as the new year began. He divided them into groups based on their core classes and sent them to get acquainted and pray together. When everyone had returned to the Center, Hermes asked them to follow him around the Worship Center as he pointed out the way the classrooms were named. "You may be teaching in multiple classrooms, so you need to know where all the classrooms are. You will also need to direct the students to various locations."

Joel handed each man his assignment for teaching. Each papyrus sheet contained the classroom location, the name of the class and which day and hour it would be taught. Joel reminded them, "Each day we will gather in this central area and one of us will share the verse and Psalm for the week. Then we will move quickly to our first two-hour class. A bell will ring to warn you that it is time to change classes." Hermes rang the very loud bell, and everyone covered their ears. "The bell will ring again to begin the second class. There will be a short break and the third class will last from noon until the eighth hour. It will take a few days to get the students trained to change classrooms quickly. We'll walk through the schedule tomorrow." Joel handed out their rosters for their first class on Sundays and asked them to move to their classrooms and pray for each of their students. "We will meet back here at noon and then continue. And yes, the bell will ring at noon."

Headmaster Joel was a great leader and by the end of the day, he knew each teacher and had put everyone at ease. As they completed their day and were gathered in the central area for final instructions, Joel asked them to pray especially for the rabbis as they walked home. "We are in great danger from the Jewish people who don't understand our position as followers of Jesus. Pray for our safety as we go to our homes." He then prayed a blessing over all of them and reminded them that they would meet again tomorrow at the first hour.

There was quite a bit of talking and sharing after the meeting was dismissed. Many of these teachers had taught together previously. Overall, everyone seemed pleased with their assignments and were looking forward to a different format and emphasis on Jesus. There was a good feeling of fellowship. Joel closed up the building and said shalom to Elijah, then the other four rabbis began their walk home to the west side. Everyone congratulated Joel on a great job and a successful first day as headmaster. "What would you think if I asked the students and teachers to just call me Rabbi Joel? Jesus didn't like fancy titles and I don't either."

"It's your call, but I like the idea. The apostles don't like titles either and very seldom use them." They talked of many things and gradually split off and headed to their own homes.

Jenay was glad that Yanis was home early and asked him to lift a soup pot for her to put over the firepit. "I'll have to remember that it's too heavy for me and you won't be around." They caught up on each other's day and Yanis said he thought he was going to enjoy the fellowship of the teachers even if he didn't enjoy teaching the students. She laughed and asked if Joel would let him just hang out with the teachers and not teach.

"You know I'll love teaching and I can't wait to meet my students."

Yanis took Abie and worked on collecting rocks for the fence. It was good to be home with his family. He listened to her chatter and found himself daydreaming about teaching his students. They enjoyed a wonderful dinner and he and Jenay worked together to get Abie

settled and then spent some time playing with baby Enoch before they all were asleep.

The rest of the week Joel had activities planned for each day. The men continued to meet at his house every morning and walked together to the Worship Center.

When Yanis arrived home on Wednesday, he was alarmed that Jenay was not home and then realized that she was probably meeting with the ladies at Rachel's house. Even though they had completed their study of Jesus, they wanted to continue their ministry to the needy women in Capernaum. They prayed together as they sewed and enjoyed the sweet fellowship. But Jenay and the other ladies hurried home before sunset.

They met for Sabbath dinner with Grandmother Salome and discovered that Jaden was planning on moving into the homestead just as soon as he could get his house ready to sell. He said he would talk with Jesse about its sale and also placing some of his servants. Yanis asked for his and the rabbis safety as school would officially start on Sunday. Laila asked for them to remember the four men traveling through Syria. It was a sweet time of fellowship and they spent time in prayer for one another. Yanis prayed a blessing over each one and they all headed home.

On Sabbath afternoon, the men gathered at Talman's house and caught the other three men up on their week of training. Everyone had prayer requests to share, and they enjoyed a time of worship, but agreed that they needed to be home soon to prepare for their first day of school. Talman and Yanis agreed to walk in with them tomorrow morning even though they didn't need to be there to teach until later. Joel wanted to introduce them to the students at the first hour. Everyone walked home while it was still Sabbath.



Sunday morning at breakfast, Jenay could tell that Yanis was excited about meeting his classes. They prayed together quickly, and he kissed them all goodbye. Jenay walked with the children to the market so that she could fix Yanis a special dish for dinner. It would be a busy day. She sensed an uneasiness in the market and quickly purchased her vegetables and fruit and hurried home. Once they were home, she relaxed and got busy. She needed to get the butter churned before she started bread. Enoch lay on a blanket at her feet and Abie played nearby. She sang Psalms and worshipped and prayed for Yanis to enjoy teaching his classes.

Yanis came home excitedly sharing about his first day with his students. He had taught fifty students in each of his two classes. He had been concerned that it was too large of a class, but the boys had been interested, and involved, and asked good questions. Jenay listened and continued with her dinner preparations. He took Abie with him to check on Mr. Ezekiel. Jenay was glad to see him so happy.



On Monday, Yanis worked from home and caught up on the farm books before leaving at the third hour for his teaching assignment.

He kissed Abie and Enoch goodbye and then lingered just for a moment with Jenay. He told her how happy he was and that he was content. She smiled and wished him a good day. It made her happy to see him so settled. He arrived early and was able to sit and think through his planned topic. It would be a repeat of the same material, but with one hundred different students, fifty at a time.



When school was over, the rabbis and teachers congratulated each other on surviving a second day, and all started home. They yelled shalom to Elijah as he headed toward his home, and the other four walked to the west side. They shared together funny incidents that had happened in their classes and enjoyed each other's company. Yanis felt like a part of the team. He had not felt that since he had left Jerusalem. It was deeply satisfying. Yanis broke off first and headed to the farm, while the three old friends continued further. Talman turned to the left and Jairus soon turned to the right while Joel continued to his house. They were all pleased with the response of their students and with the way the school year had started. Each was looking forward to a really good year.

Suddenly, and with no warning, Jairus felt a chain slip around his neck. Men were surrounding him and yelling like hoodlums. The chain was so tight he could barely breathe. He tried to call out to the other rabbis but could not get enough air to speak. He quit struggling and tried to figure out what was going on. *Who are these men?* He didn't recognize most of them, but he recognized one as a dad of one of his former Hebrew students. They were screaming that he was a traitor who was associating with Gentiles. "YOU WON'T TEACH OUR CHILDREN, BUT YOU WILL TEACH THE FILTHY, UNCLEAN ROMANS!" "YOU KNOW GOD'S LAW, YET YOU REFUSE TO FOLLOW IT!" "YOU WILL DIE!" "YOU WILL DIE!" "THIS IS HOW WE TREAT THOSE WHO WOULD POLLUTE ISRAEL!" "YOU ARE A TRAITOR!" "DIE, TRAITOR! DIE!" As the men pulled on the chain, Jairus had no choice but to follow. To resist was to be strangled to death. He knew that they were pulling him to the synagogue. How many times he had walked this path. He hoped that Rachel was not watching for him. It would kill her, and then he prayed that they would not harm her. He would gladly die if they would just leave her alone. Soon they were at the edge of the synagogue where hundreds of other men were screaming "TRAITORS!" "TRAITORS!" "KILL THEM!" "KILL THEM!"



Talman had just left Jairus and Joel when he suddenly felt a chain being slipped over his head and around his neck. He struggled and tried to fight off the attackers. He was grateful that he wasn't carrying money, but soon realized that they were not robbers. These were Jewish men who were angry because he was teaching Gentiles. There were only five of them, but they were too strong for him to fight. Besides, every time he pulled, he strangled himself and caused a coughing fit. The men were pulling him toward the synagogue and the crowd was getting thicker and louder with every step he took. The crowd was in a frenzy of hatred. Talman tried to look around to see what was happening, but the men kept yanking and pulling on him and the crowds were pummeling him with their fists. He kept thinking of the passage from Isaiah about the Messiah not opening his mouth but being taken to his death in silence. He resolved to quietly cooperate.



Joel had just said goodbye to Jairus and was walking toward home. *My summer of preparation is finally being carried out. I'm successfully leading this group into unknown territory. I have such a wonderful team working around me. It seems more like play than work.* He was jarred out of his daydream by a chain being slipped over his head and men yelling angrily about his teaching Gentile scum. He was so startled, he didn't know whether to scream for help, or try to reason with the men. But when he tried to scream, the chain just became tighter, and he realized that he was going to die. There was no way to talk with the men when he couldn't even get his breath. They were dragging him toward the synagogue. He was certain of that. He wondered what would await him there. He was glad that Elijah had not walked home with them. But as they drug him through the crowds and up toward the front, he plainly saw Priest Shimei swing a flagrum with all his might and he saw blood gush all over the body that was chained to a post. Joel was pretty sure that it was Yanis when he heard him scream in agony. When Joel tried to turn his head and back away, the men just held his chain tighter and yelled, "WATCH! WATCH! THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO DISOBEY JEHOVAH'S LAW!" Joel could taste the blood in his throat and thought he would pass out as he was forced to watch Priest Shimei swing the flagrum with all his might. All he could do was stand and cry. He wondered if it would make it worse if he sang a Psalm. He just kept hearing Jehovah's comfort inside his head. *Abba, Father, You see. You know. Give me strength.*

Just as Priest Shimei struck Yanis for the third time, Joel realized that the crowd was being dispersed by Roman soldiers on horseback. The men holding Joel's chains were being led off in shackles by

Roman soldiers. The Roman Centurion grabbed the flagrum out of Shimei's hands. "I OUGHT TO USE THIS ON YOU!" he shouted. "I COMMAND YOU TO RETURN TO YOUR SYNAGOGUE AND TAKE YOUR ASSISTANTS WITH YOU! I WILL DEAL WITH YOU LATER." Soldiers were removing the chains from the rabbis' necks and four were kneeling to help Yanis. They asked Joel if they could carry him to his home since it was closest, and Joel quickly agreed. Joel was sad to realize that Elijah had also been included, but at least they were all together. The Roman Centurion asked that the men stay at either Joel or Jairus' house tonight. "No, you are not under arrest. But you will be safer. I will send men to accompany your servants to notify your wives. I know that you often stay all together." And with that he grinned. "I know a lot of things. Praise be to Jehovah for His provision."

Joel led the way to prepare Elizabeth for Yanis' needs. They cleared out the guest room and sent servants to find rags to wash off the blood and bandages to wrap him. One of the guards carrying Yanis suggested that it would be best to just let the wounds air dry and then wash off the blood after a few days. If they washed them, he would begin to bleed again. And if they bandaged him, they were liable to become infected. Joel thanked them and ordered the servants to just let him rest. Servants and two soldiers were sent to each house to collect the rabbis' wives and children. Jairus asked that all his servants be brought over to help. When they arrived, he sent a couple to Jesse's Mercantile Store to tell him what had happened. He could choose whether to join them for the evening or not. Soon the entire group was together. The children were playing in the backyard and Abie quickly ran to play with them. Joel met Jenay and told her that Yanis was the only one who had been badly hurt. "The rest of us have sore necks, but nothing major. Yanis was scourged. Thankfully, only three times before he was rescued, but you need to prepare yourself."

Elizabeth said that she would go in with her and took her hand. Jenay still had baby Enoch in the carrier, and she handed him to Elizabeth. When she saw Yanis lying on the mat with his back a bloody mess, she felt dizzy and sick, but she remembered that Jesus had been scourged and He understood what Yanis was feeling. At least he was alive. Jenay ran to his side and knelt down and kissed his head. When he tried to raise himself, he groaned and returned to the mat. "Don't try to move or you'll make it bleed again. I'm right here and you are going to be fine." Elizabeth left them alone.

Servants brought Jenay a plate and she fed Yanis carefully so that he wouldn't choke. She gave him tiny bites of bread soaked in milk or wine to strengthen him, and soon he was asleep. She went out to check on Abie but found her already asleep in a room with Hava's children. Jairus and Rachel, Talman and Sarah had walked over to Jairus' house, and Jesse and Miriam had taken their children home. Guards had walked with them just for safety. Jenay slept with baby Enoch on a mat beside Yanis. She had to remind Yanis to lie still as he was restless during the night.





“Report!”

“Sir, the house remained quiet all night. One additional family was summoned. Jesse, the owner of the Westside Mercantile Store and his family joined them for dinner. Guards were dispatched to see them safely home. There were no further incidents.”

“What about Shimei and his henchmen?”

“They stayed in the synagogue for a while and then went to their homes. They stayed inside all night and had no further contact with anyone.”

“How many prisoners do we have?”

“There are thirty-five male prisoners. Twenty-five of them for attacking the rabbis, the other ten for refusing to follow direct commands to disperse.”

“Anything else I should know?”

“We escorted three rabbis to the school this morning, but two remained at Rabbi Joel’s house. They will be escorted when they are ready.”

“How is Yanis this morning?”

“Apparently pretty sore but determined to teach his classes today. He’s one of the men who will need an escort later this morning.”

“Continue to guard the families, the men, and keep an eye on Shimei. You are dismissed.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Silvanus, come to my office.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Go get Judge Hector. Ask him to come to my office immediately.”

“Yes, sir.”

A few minutes later Judge Hector arrived and was escorted into Centurion Justus’ private office. “Thank you for coming so quickly, Hector. You have a prison overflowing with Jewish men. Have you brought any of them before you?”

“No, I was waiting to hear your charges.”

“Good. I would like to see them sit for a while and think about what they have done. Maybe a week would make them think twice about doing what Priest Shimei tells them to do.”

“That can be arranged. I have a few other cases to deal with today, but I can arrange to be out of town for a few days if you wish,” said Judge Hector.

“No, you’ll be spending the next few days with me and Silvanus. We must come up with a plan to make Capernaum a quiet place again where innocent people are not getting killed. I don’t want to call for reinforcements again. I want to come up with a plan that works. Let’s meet tomorrow morning about the second hour and begin our discussions.”

“Yes, sir. I will meet you here at the second hour and leave the prisoners to wait.”



Joel had told Yanis to stay home and rest today, but Yanis was determined to teach his classes. Jenay helped him to get a robe over his head and while he was very sore and every step hurt, the bleeding had stopped. He asked her to bring Abie to him and he explained that he had some owies, so could she please just give him a kiss without a hug. She agreed and covered his face with kisses. He sent her back to eat her breakfast. Yanis and Talman started the walk into the school accompanied by four Roman guards. Jenay collapsed into Elizabeth’s arms and cried, “What will happen next? I just get over one scare and we have to deal with another. Pray for me to be strong. I’m so glad it was just Yanis and not all the rabbis. They had enough of a scare as it was.”

“I hope that they will be busy at school and forget all about it.”

“If I were taking care of 200 students, I would forget my name! I can’t even take care of these two!” said Jenay.



Yanis had a bench carried into his classroom so that he could sit while teaching. He apologized to the boys and told them that he had been punished by the Jewish leaders for teaching at a Gentile School. “Yes, Anthony, what is your question?”

“How were you punished?”

“I was captured like an animal with a chain around my neck and tied to a post and then whipped with a flagrum. Do any of you know what a flagrum is?” Several boys stood and Yanis let them describe it.

“I will show you what a flagrum does because it was used on Jesus just before His crucifixion. But I would need you, Anthony and Julius, to lift my robe so everyone can see. Please be gentle because I am very sore, and I don’t want to cry in front of you. I only received three blows because the Centurion stopped it. I believe that Jehovah sent him at just the right time.”

When Anthony and Jonah lifted Yanis’ robe to reveal his back, all the boys gasped in horror.

“Just for your information. Jesus received thirty-nine blows the night before He was crucified. We will study that later, but maybe this will give you a visual understanding of what that was like. Now, let’s get to today’s lesson.” Yanis knew that he had just been elevated to hero status for taking these blows. Now he had their complete attention and started the second lesson. He repeated the same visual illustration for the next class of boys and determined that he would do the same for his two classes tomorrow so that all 200 boys would

know what scourging did and be able to better picture what Jesus went through the night before His crucifixion.

All the rabbis walked to Joel's house with their Roman guards. The women were gathered there, and Talman helped Jenay get Yanis onto the mat. Once again, she fed him and prayed for him to get good rest and to heal without infection. The rest of the men needed to look over their lesson plans for tomorrow, but Yanis assured Jenay that he would be teaching the same material tomorrow, so he could just rest. He quickly went to sleep, and she left him while she ate dinner and got Abie settled to sleep. Then she sat and played with baby Enoch. All the mothers passed him around and gave him special love.



As the men were walking home on Friday, they were pleased with their first week of school, even though it had been a stressful week with their near-death experience. Talman shared that he had set up a meeting with Hermes to talk with him about places to apprentice his students.

"Are you up to going to Jenay's family tonight?" Joel asked Yanis.

"I plan to. And remember after we finish the meeting, we are going back to the farm to spend the Sabbath. I won't see you guys until Monday midmorning. So, don't worry about us, but pray for us."

Jenay offered to skip the Sabbath dinner, but Yanis assured her that he was ready to go and she'd better hurry. He couldn't lift Abie, so it would take them longer than usual. Everyone could tell that Yanis was not well. He explained that Priest Shimei had roughed him up a little bit, but he was healing. They ate dinner and Jenay shared with the ladies that they had been living with Rabbi Joel and his wife Elizabeth since Monday when Priest Shimei had scourged Yanis. "He's healing nicely and only has a few spots that are really deep. Everyone has been so helpful. But it's been a long, hard week. We are looking forward to getting home tonight and getting a good night's rest." Everyone was concerned for their safety and invited them to stay at Grandmother Salome's. After dinner they shared other prayer requests, and everyone prayed for Yanis' healing. Abira led them in some Psalms and Yanis and Jenay started across town with their two Roman guards. Jenay had to carry both Enoch and Abie since Yanis was too sore.

Early on Sabbath morning, Jenay helped Yanis get off his mat and stand upright. She woke Abie, who ran down to the barn in front of them. Jenay carried baby Enoch in the carrier and held tightly to Yanis' hand. He was still stiff and sore. He talked with Mr. Ezekiel and explained that he could probably milk, but he couldn't corral the goats. Mr. Ezekiel was amazed that he was even willing to try milking. He set up the pan and the goat and Yanis was very slowly able to help with milking a couple of goats while Jenay, Mr. Ezekiel, and Solomon did the rest. When they were finally through, Jenay took a jar of goat milk

up to the house to drink, and Mr. Ezekiel brought her a jar to make cheese. Maybe they would be home enough to use it this week. She found some plums that were still good, and she, Yanis, and Abie ate fruit and goat milk for breakfast. She wondered what she would cook for dinner but decided to wait until after the Sabbath to decide. Surely there would be something still usable in the root cellar. And she could make some quick bread.

“Jenay, I would like to talk with you about some things that are coming up. I want us to pray about it together.”

“Why don’t we sit in the yard, or do you feel like walking down to the lean-to?”

“I think I’d better stay in the yard. I hope that you can wash the wounds after the Sabbath is over this evening and see if everything is healing.”

“The guard said to wait three or four days, so I guess it’s been plenty long. I will wash it after the children are asleep and maybe it will feel better and not be so stiff.”

Abie was playing contentedly in the yard and baby Enoch was sleeping on a blanket beside Jenay. “Jenay, I need to share with you what is on my mind.”

“You know I want to hear what you are thinking.”

“Jenay, I love this farm, but the Holy Spirit put a thought in my mind last week and I haven’t been able to get rid of it.”

“I’m listening,” she said, but she was frowning.

“You know that Jaden is getting his home ready to sell so that they can move in with Grandmother Salome. His house is very near Talman’s. And it would be a lot closer to the Worship Center, and you and the babies wouldn’t be so far away from everyone if you wanted to visit. Anyway, I was thinking that we might look at Jaden’s house and see if there was any way that we could buy it.

“Mr. Ezekiel could run the farm without my help. I could make him the full steward and not even worry about the books. He’s kept the records when I got behind, so I know he can. I think Solomon is looking for a wife and might be willing to buy the big house, and Mr. Ezekiel has already said that he and Zokur would like to purchase the old hut. How would you feel about not being close to the woods? I mean, we could walk out here anytime you wanted, but it would be across town.”

“Living on that side of town would certainly make sense because all of your ministries are on that side. Are you enjoying teaching your classes? How did it go last week? We never had time to talk.” They spent the rest of the afternoon catching up. When the sun set, Jenay took a lamp down to the cellar and found some potatoes and onions that were still usable. She mixed up some quick bread and the family enjoyed a post-Sabbath dinner around their own table. They put Abie to sleep and Yanis studied his topic for tomorrow while Jenay played with baby Enoch and got him ready to sleep. Her mind was spinning with the thought of leaving the house Yanis had worked so hard to build.

## Chapter 23

Each night at dinner, Yanis talked with Jenay more about purchasing Jaden's house. She agreed that if the Holy Spirit was leading him, she would certainly follow. On Wednesday, Yanis announced that he was going to go and talk with Jaden after school while she was at the women's group. He said for her to wait at Rachel's until he got back, and they would walk home together.

Yanis knocked and was welcomed inside by servants. Laisha greeted him and said that Jaden was still at the Fish Shop. He remembered the house being about the right size and was pleased to see that there was a nice grassy yard for the children. It wasn't grand like Grandmother Salome's. Maybe he could afford it. He hurried to the Fish Shop and found Jaden talking with Jonas outside the shed. "Hey, Yanis. What brings you out in the middle of the week?" asked Jonas.

"You are certainly moving better. I hope that means you are healing," said Jaden.

"Yes, thank you. I actually came to talk over some business with you."

"I can disappear if it's personal," said Jonas.

"No, I'm fine with you both helping me think this through. Jaden, are you still planning on selling your house?"

"Yes, I'll be talking to Jesse by the end of the week, I hope."

"I was just wondering if it might be a good fit for me and Jenay. I love teaching school on this side of town, and I am still hoping that you'll ask me to teach a class at the Fish Shop for your employees. I don't like leaving Jenay and the children so far away with there being so much rough stuff going on. But the truth is, I don't even know whether it's the right size or price for me. I just keep getting a prompting that I should look at it."

"I actually think it might be a good fit," said Jonas.

"It's only got three bedrooms, but it has a nice kitchen and living area. We can fit about fourteen people in the living room, and about the same in the back courtyard. It's not huge. Oh, and there's slave quarters in the back to house six. I'm not going to need to take any of them with me, so that's negotiable. It's got a little room for a garden, but no barn for goats!"

"No, I'm not thinking of selling the farm."

"That would sure make Mother happy to have Jenay and the children closer, and you'd be closer to the school." They discussed the asking price and agreed to look at it on Friday afternoon before the Sabbath.

"He still looks sore to me," said Jonas as Yanis left.

"James said it took him a month to heal from his scourging. I'm glad to see Yanis moving around as good as he is," said Jaden. "I don't want to get my hopes up, but it would be nice to have them closer, and what's this about teaching our employees about Jesus?"

"I guess it was right after Dad died and losing Saul and Laban, we were talking about never sharing our faith with our employees and wondering if we could offer a class about Jesus to those who wanted to learn. We talked about it needing to be voluntary and on company time so that they would feel comfortable about it. But then, I forgot about it," admitted Jonas.

"I guess I forgot it, too. But I like the idea. Let's talk about it on Sabbath night and see what Yanis has in mind. Shalom."

"Shalom."



"Yes, sir, how can I help you?" the clerk at the Westside Mercantile asked Jaden.

"I was looking for Jesse." The clerk called Jesse and he welcomed Jaden back to his office. "Jesse, I thought I would be talking to you about selling my house, but I already have a buyer, so that won't be necessary. But I do have a problem."

"How can I help you, sir?" asked Jesse.

"I have four slaves that I need to sell, but I was hoping to place them in good spots rather than put them on the slave block. They have been good and faithful servants. There is one couple, a single female, and a single male. Do you do that sort of thing?"

"Are you sure you don't want to keep the male and use him at your business? That would probably give you more value."

"Yes, but he doesn't like the water!" The men laughed together that he wouldn't make a very good fisherman.

"I'll ask and see if Yanis might need him on the farm. But I'll be glad to list them. I keep a list of people wanting to hire workers. They might be willing to take on a slave if they have room to house them. But you may end up having to just put him on the block. Now what about the couple? I'm looking for someone to help Tobias and Miriam out since we'll be having baby number four this winter."

After some discussion, Jaden brought Joab and Amissa to Jesse's on Friday and they signed the papers. Miriam felt comfortable with Amissa immediately and the two older children welcomed her. Baby Yadon was a little more hesitant to be held by a stranger. Jesse prepared them a room in the back of the warehouse and furnished it with mats and blankets and a lamp.



On Friday after school was over for the week, Yanis walked to the market and met Jenay at the Textile Shop. They walked together to her Uncle Jaden and Aunt Laisha's house. Jaden showed them both around the outside and they were pleased with the grassy area for the children to play. There were a few trees to provide shade, and away from the house there was the slave quarters. Yanis and Jaden looked

inside while Laisha and Jenay walked up to the courtyard. “Now, the nice thing about buying this house is that I will leave most of the furnishings here. We don’t need to take a lot of things to Grandmother Salome’s. She already has plenty of furnishings. So, other than just some special things, most of this will stay here.”

The men caught up with them and they went inside and looked over the kitchen where two ladies were cleaning. It was not as large as Grandmother Salome’s but certainly was larger than anything Jenay had seen since she had left home. There were three good-sized sleeping rooms and they all had two mats apiece. The rest of the house was just open living area. There was a table with benches and then the area was scattered with cushions. Jenay could picture a large loom standing in one end of the living area. Then she could really keep up with the clothing this family needed. Uncle Jaden invited them to sit on the cushions in the living area while Abie explored. “Yanis and Jenay, we have a dilemma and wanted to talk with you two about it.”

“How can we help?”

“Well, if you decide to buy the house, then I need to talk with you about our servants.”

“I don’t think we need servants,” said Jenay. “If I don’t have the farm and thirty goats to take care of, this will be easy.”

“May I tell you our dilemma before you make up your mind?” asked Uncle Jaden.

“Yes, Uncle Jaden, I’m sorry,” apologized Jenay.

“Several years ago, we allowed two of our men servants to marry two of our women servants. If we put them on the slave market, there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to stay together. That would break a promise that I made to them that they could stay with us as a couple. All four of them still lack two years before completing their slavery and then they can be released or bonded. I have pledged to not separate them. Jesse and Miriam took one couple last week. So, if you buy this house, I’m going to insist that you allow them to stay with you for two years before you decide what you want to do. You already have the slave quarters, and I will not charge you for them. I will simply give them to you, and you will become responsible for providing their food and care for the next two years.”

“What do they do?”

“Pashhur keeps up the property and the grounds and grows a garden for us. Natania takes care of all the food and keeps the house clean. Jenay, that should free you up to visit Grandmother and sew and raise your children. I’m sure you’ll find some ministry projects that will keep you busy,” said Aunt Laisha.

“Let us talk and pray about it. We’ll let you know soon.” Jenay was amazed at how close the house was to Grandmother Salome’s and how easy it would be to take walks along the beach. That brought back sweet memories of her childhood.

The family gathered for Sabbath night dinner and their time of praise and worship. During the share time, Jaden asked what everyone thought about offering a class to teach the employees about

Jesus. Everyone liked the idea, but there were a lot of questions about the proper time and place for it. Jonas asked Yanis if he had thought about what he would offer.

“Well, Jenay and I attended the Gentile class that Orly wrote. I was very impressed with what it covered in just seven weeks. As you know, I’ve just finished teaching you everything I know about Jesus, and it took us over a year. I would really like to try to shrink it down to just the essentials. I’ll use Orly’s material as the basis, but modify it for both Jews and Gentiles since you are now hiring both.” After more discussion, the group decided on small classes that would repeat as necessary until everyone who wanted to attend had a chance. “We’ll definitely want to work out a few more details, but let me know what late afternoon would be best for you,” said Yanis. “Okay, let’s close in prayer. We’ve got a long walk, and I’m still healing.”



The guards walked with Yanis and Jenay as she carried the two sleeping babies. “Yanis. What are you thinking about Jaden’s house?”

“I don’t think it matters much what I think,” said Yanis.

“What! Why would you say that?” demanded Jenay.

“Because if Jehovah says move, we’re moving,” he grinned.

“Has He said move?” she asked meekly.

“I think so, but I want to be completely clear about it. I don’t want to confuse what I want with what Jehovah wants.”

They enjoyed a quiet Sabbath at the farm while Yanis looked over his topics for the next week of school. They remembered the lessons that Jesus taught them, and Jenay helped him to fill in some details that he had left out. They enjoyed working together.

Yanis discussed the possible move with Mr. Ezekiel before he left for school on Sunday morning. Mr. Ezekiel didn’t see a problem with it. He suggested that Solomon could probably keep the books since he had been to Hebrew School. “He’s also espoused to be married so he might be interested in buying or renting the big house. You remember that Zokur and I would like to buy your little house.”

“When we move, it’s yours. You’ve done enough around here to deserve it. It will need a good cleaning, but I think it’s in good shape.”

“Thanks, Yanis, I appreciate it. It’s hard raising a grandson, but Solomon works well with him, and I want to teach Zokur how to care for himself after I’m gone.”

“You may need to hire a servant to help him with cooking and stuff.”

“That’s true, I could. I hadn’t thought about that.”

“I promise I’ll keep an eye on him if anything happens to you. He’s been a good employee, and I think Jesus would want us to help each other out.”

“You are a good man, Yanis.”



“Jehovah is a good God. I’m just trying to figure out how to follow Him. I’ve got to get to school. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Yanis kissed Jenay and the children and hurried to the school. He had thought that fifty students would be too many to connect with, but he was enjoying the classes. There were always plenty of interesting questions to let him know that they were thinking deeply about the things he was teaching them.

When he got home from school, he told Jenay he was going to walk to the lean-to for some prayer time and he might be late for dinner. He followed the fence to his favorite prayer place and lay on his face in the grass. He worshipped and prayed and asked Jehovah for clarity about buying Jaden’s house. He felt good about doing so. It felt right. It made sense. It would shorten his walk. It would allow him to teach more classes and do more ministry. But he was looking for something more. He wanted absolute assurance that Jehovah was guiding him and not just himself. So, he waited. He returned each afternoon after school and worshipped and prayed and waited before Jehovah. He used his early morning time to prepare for his classes, and Jenay was praying for him as he sought to know Jehovah’s will.

On Thursday afternoon, he felt that Jehovah was asking if he would be willing to sell the farm entirely and move closer to his ministry. Yanis agreed that if that was what God wanted, he would do it. He knew it would be a financial bind, but he would do it if he knew Jehovah’s clear direction. As he worshipped, he felt certain that he heard God’s voice. “Go and be blessed. I will prosper you in both areas because you have faithfully sought to know Me. Talk to Jaden tomorrow and talk to Solomon about your home.”

Yanis told Jenay what he had heard, and they agreed to walk across town a little early tomorrow afternoon to let Jaden know.



The weather was beautiful and staying warm for this late in the fall. Jenay spent all morning on Tuesday packing their things, and Talman said he would send his oxcart and two men to help her move to the new place. Aunt Laisha was leaving just about everything they needed. All Jenay packed was Yanis’ favorite skillet that he took camping, their blankets and robes and the baby’s things. Everything else would stay for Solomon, who had agreed to buy the house. It was hard to leave all the furniture that Yanis had made for her, but there would be no place for it, and Solomon would need it. When she checked the little house, she discovered Yanis’ papyrus, ink, and brushes that he used to prepare for his classes. Once they were packed, she felt everything was ready and she sat in the sunshine with the babies waiting for the men to arrive. Moving was hard, but she was grateful that they were not selling the land so they could enjoy the

woods and use it for retreats and times of worship. That made it easier to leave.



School had been in session for a month and Yanis and Jenay were trying to figure out their new schedule. It was so easy to run to Grandmother Salome's, Sarah's, or Hava's. She could take the children to the market or to the beach. No longer did the Roman guards keep a constant eye on her. But they still made their rounds and guarded the area around their house.

It was an easy walk to Grandmother Salome's for Sabbath dinner and group. Much of the discussion was what Yanis would teach for the employees and when they would start these classes. Yanis was including Jenay more and more and each afternoon they worked on designing a class that would explain how to become a follower of Jesus. They finally decided on a six-week class.

Jaden and Jonas would announce the class at the next payday and then, depending on how many signed up, they would offer it once or twice a week with a limit of ten people in each class. Yanis was excited to see the new project started. All of his current groups had finished studying the life of Jesus and he had already planned out his classes for the schoolboys. He was eager for the challenge to present Jesus to new people. It made Jenay happy to see him so eager, but she wondered where Jehovah would use her. She, too, knew that God had called her to teach and encourage seekers and new followers. But she had a small baby and needed to support her husband right now, so she waited patiently.



School had finished its fifth week when Yanis announced to the Sabbath afternoon men's group that he would be teaching a class at the Fish Shop starting this Tuesday afternoon. They were excited for him. As they were praying together for the new group, Yanis felt a distinct urge to ask, "Would you say that you have been completely obedient to everything that the Holy Spirit has said to you?"

Jesse was quick to answer. "No. For the past month, as I've prayed, I keep seeing the old Mercantile Store that I trained in with Mr. Immer. It's very specific instructions, but I have been avoiding it."

"What were your instructions?" asked Talman.

"I get the impression that I'm supposed to check on the buildings that are between the old Mercantile Store and the main road. I hear the Holy Spirit instructing me to buy those old buildings and then the vision fades, and I don't know why I'm supposed to do that. I know I'm not being obedient, but I can't see any reason to waste good money on old rundown businesses that have no potential."

“Would you like for me to go with you and at least check it out tomorrow? You could meet me at the school at the eighth hour and we’ll take a look together.”

“Thanks, Talman, at least then I would be obedient to everything I’ve heard. Although I don’t know about buying them.”

“Don’t make up your mind until you look them over,” encouraged Yanis.



After school on Sunday, Jesse, Talman, Jairus, and Joel all walked past the old run-down buildings. They agreed with Jesse that they couldn’t see any purpose in wasting his money. But Jesse and Talman began to look around while the other men went home. As they looked behind the buildings, they discovered that the old Mercantile Store was closed and equally dilapidated. Jesse suddenly fell on his knees and began to worship. Talman knelt and praised Jehovah for giving Jesse understanding, but he couldn’t see how three defunct businesses could be of any interest to him. Jesse continued to pray and cry before Jehovah. When Jesse finally stood, Talman asked if he wanted to talk. “Thanks for coming with me, Talman. I need to talk with Miriam, and I need to find out who owns these three buildings. I want to be totally obedient.”

After the children were in bed, Jesse asked Miriam if she would be available to talk for a while. She was surprised, since it seemed that they were always so busy these days, but she readily agreed. “Do you remember us talking about wanting to be totally obedient to the Holy Spirit in our home and in our business even if it was costly?”

“Yes, that was a special day for me and for our marriage. It resulted in Elijah and Hava getting their dream home a lot sooner than otherwise possible. God had plans that didn’t hurt us at all, even though it didn’t seem wise at the moment.”

“Exactly. Yesterday, at the men’s group, Yanis asked if we were being completely obedient to everything that we had heard the Holy Spirit instruct us to do. I had to admit that I had not been.”

“I’m listening.”

“Well, what I’m hearing doesn’t make sense!” said Jesse. “I keep seeing this dream or vision or something. It’s weird. I keep seeing a new Mercantile Store on the East Side of town and it’s mine. It’s ours. It doesn’t belong to Mr. Immer. I feel that I’m supposed to take two old run-down buildings and combine them into a new Mercantile Store that will be bigger and better than the current store. I thought that I was probably supposed to add it to Mr. Immer’s properties and offer to run it, too. But that wasn’t right. Today, Talman went with me to look at the buildings and I had another vision. God showed me a third property that could be remodeled into a new home for us that would give us plenty of space. I’m not looking for luxury, but right now, we’re rather packed like sardines and the children are getting bigger. I felt that God was saying that I should buy all three of these run-down properties

and remodel them to become an Eastside Mercantile Store and have a nice home to go with it.”

Miriam asked, “How does that fit with your desire to not compete with Mr. Immer?”

“I’m not completely sure, but I think I would be the steward of his West Mercantile Store and the owner of the other one. I don’t think he would like that, but I can’t get clarity. I need to pray some more, and I want you to be praying, too. I don’t want to do anything until I’m absolutely sure that this is God’s leading.”

“I promise I’ll pray for you.”

“Let’s get some sleep tonight. Jehovah has blessed us with good finances to be able to afford room for a growing family.”

On Monday morning, Jesse talked with Viator in the judge’s office. “Sir, could you tell me who owns the Mercantile Store that is no longer in business on the street that leads to the bank?”

“Immer owns the property, but as you say, it is no longer in business.”

“How much would you say that property is worth?” Viator told him and Jesse nodded in agreement. “What about the two properties between the Mercantile and the main road?”

“They were both owned by Manasseh, but he died a couple of years ago and his son lives in Tiberius.”

They discussed the value of those properties and arranged to contact the son. Jesse was whistling as he walked back to the Westside Mercantile. He was hearing Jehovah say that He would bless him if he would continue to be obedient.

## Chapter 24

On Tuesday afternoon, Yanis walked around the room in the Fish Processing Plant and set up the benches. At the ninth hour, there was no one there. Yanis wondered if maybe this was a big mistake. *What if this was just my own desire and not the Holy Spirit's leading?* But a few minutes later, two guys slunk in and then a few more until he had welcomed the group of seven that had signed up. He felt the fear and tension in the room. "Let me tell you a little about myself and why I'm offering you this class. I was privileged to be raised in the home of a priest. I had four brothers, and we were not only taught The Law and The Prophets, but it was drilled into our heads until I can still quote it in my sleep. So, when I heard John the Baptizer's prophecies about Jesus, I recognized the truth from the Scripture. I saw him baptize Jesus and heard Jehovah's voice saying, 'This is my Son, listen to Him.' So, I did. I started watching Jesus teach, heal, and do miracles. When I became a man, I left home and became a follower of Jesus. I lived with Him and the apostles for three years and heard what He taught, saw how He lived, and watched how He loved people. I was there the night He was arrested. I ran and hid. I heard that He had been crucified and spent those three days in incredible sorrow and fear for my own life. Then He was raised from the dead, and I ate with Him, talked with Him, and knew for certain that He had conquered death. I believe without a shadow of doubt that He is the Messiah, promised throughout The Law and The Prophets. I believe that He was Jehovah Who came to earth to forgive our sins and put us in a right relationship with Himself and to set us free from the Law and traditions of the Jews. Now, I'm teaching this class because you deserve to know the truth and make your own decisions. Now, who has a question?"

"What happened to the fishermen that died last year?" asked one of the men who was obviously a fisherman. Several others around him nodded.

Yanis replied, "Your Jewish leaders teach that if you are a Jew, then you are guaranteed Heaven because you are Jehovah's chosen people. But a careful reading of the Scripture indicates that the phrase 'God's chosen people' means that the descendants of Abraham were 'chosen' to be the bearers of the Messiah. Moses also records in Genesis, the beginning of The Law and The Prophets, that Jehovah counted Abraham's faith in this coming Messiah as righteousness. As I traveled with Jesus, He continually taught that only those who were in a right relationship with Jehovah and had their sins forgiven would enter Heaven. It is my belief that that applies to all people, including Jews."

"So, put that in language that we can understand. What happened to those men?" demanded the fisherman.

"They went to Hell, you idiot!" yelled another.

“Shut up and let the man speak for himself!”

“Who do you think you are, telling me to shut up!” He spat on the fisherman and the brawl was on.

Yanis smiled as he remembered the many times that he had crossed the Sea of Galilee with Jesus and heard this kind of rough talk. It had been a long time, and right now, he was grateful for being comfortable with fishermen.

After a while, the men realized that he was not going to stop them, and he wasn't fazed by their behavior. They gradually took their seats but stared at him as if daring him to speak.

Yanis calmly continued. “Your question was: What happened to the fishermen who died in the shipwreck? I can honestly say that I only know for sure what happened to one. Mr. Zebedee had accepted Jesus as his Messiah and was following Jehovah obediently. But because he and the Apostle Peter were on that ship, I'm pretty sure that they were telling the crew about Jesus. I don't know how many of your friends may have decided to ask Him to be their Messiah. It doesn't take long and simply asking is all that is required. So, we won't know until we, too, die. This I can tell you: John told me that there was a thief crucified at the same time as Jesus. He asked Jesus to be his Messiah and Jesus told him he would go to Heaven when he died that very day. So, I don't think I can tell you for certain the decision that those men might have made concerning Jesus. But I can tell you that you need to investigate Jesus' claims and decide whether you want to ask Him to be your Messiah.

“I think it's getting late, and you men still need to eat before your shift. I'll see you next week at the ninth hour.” The seven men left quickly and Yanis had no idea whether they would come back. But he didn't feel discouraged. He hadn't covered anything that he had prepared, but it was okay. He knew he had been obedient and he headed home to Jenay and the children.



On Wednesday, the ladies all gathered at noon and were concerned because Miriam was late. When she arrived, she explained that it had just been one of those mornings when nothing went quite right. “How are you and the baby?”

“He's getting heavy, but I've still got another month to go, and I'm not getting any signs yet,” said Miriam. Soon the talk was on other things. Jenay reported that Yanis had started his class at the Fish Shop. Everyone enjoyed catching up, and then they spent some time singing Psalms and praying for each other.



The following Wednesday at noon, Jesse met with Viatar and the son to purchase the two storefronts. He asked Viatar about purchasing Mr. Immer's property. "Is there any way that I can buy it without him knowing who is purchasing it? I don't think he will sell it to me."

"I don't know of any way because both parties have to be present at the time of the transaction."

"And there's no way around that?" pressed Jesse.

"No, not that I know of."

"Okay. Thank you for your time and all your help. I hope to build up that area and make you a lot of taxes!" said Jesse.

"I wish you well, my friend."

"Thank you." An idea was forming in his head that he thought would work, but he wanted to be absolutely sure that this was God's leading. Every time he prayed, he felt a definite urgency to move ahead with his plan.



On Sabbath afternoon, the men met, and everyone was talking about the upcoming school break. As they shared, Jairus said, "I think it was a great first six weeks of school. For the first time in a while, I think I'll miss my students during break." All the others agreed that it had been the best school year yet.

As they sat down for the post-Sabbath meal, Jesse began to tell them his plan. He told them that he had bought the front two buildings along the main street. They would need a lot of repairs, but he intended to combine them into one large store. Then he planned to purchase Mr. Immer's original Mercantile Store and turn it into a home for Miriam and the babies. "But here's the problem. Mr. Immer will never sell it to me. I talked with Viatar at the tax office and asked him if he could arrange the sale without Mr. Immer knowing the buyer. He said he could not. I got the strangest thought in my head. What if a friend purchased the property and then I simply buy it from him?"

"So, I could purchase the building from Mr. Immer, and then you could buy it from me. That sounds good," said Talman.

"Yes, but no. That's the idea, but it won't work. In the first place, Mr. Immer knows that you are my father-in-law and would probably be suspicious. It would have to be someone outside of our group, and that's where I'm stumped. But I need to know if being devious is the way I want to do business. It would help him since it's just sitting there empty. But I don't want to disobey God. I don't want to go against Jesus' teachings. Yanis, did Jesus say anything about being sneaky in our business dealings?"

"Actually, He did. Jesus was sending us into the surrounding villages to teach about Him. He warned us to be as wary as serpents, but as harmless as doves. I wasn't sure what he meant, but now that we're experiencing some persecution, I think it applies here."

"So, you think it would be okay to buy Mr. Immer's property without him knowing that it was me?" asked Jesse.

“I think you should really pray and be certain about it. Have you looked for any other properties in the area to build a house?”

“No, because I felt the Holy Spirit was specifically directing me to Mr. Immer’s store.”

“If the Holy Spirit is directing you to do this, then you need to be obedient,” said Yanis.

They began to discuss who might be available to help them purchase the old store building. They considered some of their Gentile friends, or someone from the Fish Shop, and finally decided to ask Hermes from the school.



Yanis and Jenay had lived in their new home for just about a month and enjoyed getting used to having the servant couple helping with all the work. At first Yanis and Jenay felt they were living in the servants’ home instead of the other way around. But things were settling into a comfortable relationship, and Yanis wanted to talk with them about future plans. He discovered that they, too, were happy with the relationship and were interested in becoming bondslaves after their freedom date. Yanis spent his school break remodeling the slave quarters to become a nice home for Pashhur and Natania. They could hardly believe how Yanis and Jenay treated them as equals, and they were soon asking questions about Jesus.



Hermes agreed to the plan to purchase Mr. Immer’s property and resell it to Jesse. His only stipulation was that he would not lie to Mr. Immer. Jesse agreed and forwarded him the silver that he would need to make the purchase. Viator had arranged for Mr. Immer to meet Hermes and show him the property on Monday at noon. Jesse and the rabbis were waiting behind the Worship Center for Hermes to return. When Hermes arrived, he reported, “I liked the property and feel it could be modified into a very nice home. Maybe I will keep it for myself.” All the rabbis groaned. “See what a good actor I am! You believed me! No, my wife and I have a lovely home south of the school and would not think of moving. I made my first offer and he said he would get back to me. I told him I would stop by his office on Thursday since I was on school break and would like to get it settled before school started again.”

“You are amazing! We’ll continue to be praying that this will all work out.”

“It will, because the Holy Spirit told you to do it this way. I’m just hoping it is settled by the Sabbath,” said Hermes.





Even though school was out for break, Yanis still needed to prepare for his second class at the Fish Shop. He arrived a few minutes early in case there were any men who wanted to talk, but at the ninth hour there was no one there. Yanis refused to panic but used the time to pray. In a few minutes, the men began to straggle in two and three at a time until all seven had arrived. Yanis welcomed them and began the class by asking if any of them had seen Jesus do a miracle. Several of them nodded, and Yanis called on an older fisherman who stood and told about back in the good old days when Zebedee, Jaden, James, John, Andrew, and Peter were all crew captains. "There was a night that we fished all night and caught nothing. I'm not talking about a short catch. I'm talking about nothing. All we had was sea slop and net debris. There was not a single fish in those nets. We went out five times and couldn't find a fish anywhere."

"You call that a miracle? I call that poor fishing!" challenged one of the younger men.

"Keep your trap shut. Those were some of the best fishermen who ever fished these waters. Don't be trash talking them. Anyway, while we were washing out the nets, Jesus was teaching a large group of people on the seashore, and they all wanted to touch him, and he was getting pushed back into the water. He asked Peter if he could borrow his boat. He sat in Peter's boat and taught from there. I don't remember what he said, but we all sat on the beach and listened. It was hard to hear because everyone was yelling about there not being fish to buy at the market. Zebedee was yelling back that he couldn't make fish appear if there weren't any fish.

"Then Jesus came to shore and Peter called for us to go back out. We had some choice words for Jesus and Peter because we were ready for sleep. Peter said we were just going to do one more round net since all the big nets were dirty. We rowed out to where Jesus had said to drop the net and waited for it to settle on the bottom. Then they tried to pull the net up. It wouldn't come. It was so full of fish that they couldn't lift it. Zebedee's crew came and tried to help us tow it between us to shore, but we couldn't do that either. They held onto that net for dear life, while men in each boat started dipping fish out. The next thing I knew, both boats were completely full of fish and almost sinking. Peter ordered us to start rowing to shore. I've never rowed so hard in my life. Half of the men were hauling the round net, and the rest of us were rowing, and we couldn't keep our footing because we were sitting totally surrounded by fish up to our necks. Looking back, it was pretty funny. Zebedee and his crew sorted fish all day and actually ran out of barrels. He finally gave away the rest of the fish. Now, that's what I call a miracle."

"And if I remember right, that's the day that James, John, Andrew, and Peter decided to follow Jesus as their Messiah. Am I correct?" asked Yanis.

"Well, they left with Jesus. We got all new crew bosses after that — well, except for Zebedee and Jaden."

“Thank you for sharing that miracle with us. And I believe that our time is almost up. Quickly just tell me in a few words — not the whole story — what other miracles you have seen.”

One man said that he saw Jesus cast out a demon in a man at the synagogue. “That was Samson and Solomon’s dad.”

“I remember that,” said another.

“Okay, anyone else?”

Another man said quietly that he was there when Jesus raised Arian from the dead.

“Okay. Next week I want to hear about those two miracles. If you guys get here on time, maybe we’ll have time for more. But I want to ask you a question. How did Jesus do these miracles? Think about it and we’ll talk more next week. Have a great night. Shalom.”

“Shalom,” replied most of them.

Yanis just sat and thought about the group. In a little while Jaden came in to see if everything was all right. “I was afraid they might have beat you up,” laughed Jaden.

“No, I think I may actually be getting through to them. I’m very comfortable around fishermen because of traveling with Jesus. I had forgotten how very brutally honest they are.”

“And quite nasty and brawling and ribald,” said Jaden.

“Yet, Jesus chose them and goat farmers to follow Him,” said Yanis. “I’ll never understand. But I’m so grateful for this opportunity to remember the good times with Jesus. It may take me more than six weeks. I may have been a little optimistic about that.”

“We can make the next class as long as you wish.”

“Thanks, Jaden. I need to get home. I’m enjoying your place. It’s really helped to not have to walk four miles every night after groups.”

They said shalom and started home.



Jesse talked with Pollux about building the Mercantile Store. He agreed to look it over and give him a price. After the children were tucked in bed, he and Miriam again discussed all the reassurances that they had received that God was at work and leading them forward. They agreed that Jesse should resign as steward for Mr. Immer just as soon as the new Eastside Mercantile Store was ready to open. Jesse felt that Amos, his former accountant, would be ready to step into the steward position at the Westside Store and wouldn’t put Mr. Immer in a bind. “All I can tell you is that I’m sure that this is the direction Jehovah is leading me.”

“Jesse, that’s all we can do,” said Miriam. “I’m so proud to be your wife, and I trust you to lead us one step at a time.”



On Wednesday morning, Jesse met with Pollux who had promised to give him a price for building the Eastside Mercantile Store. Pollux suggested putting the offices upstairs to allow more floor space. He also suggested extending the warehouse all the way to the property line since that would allow the oxcarts access from the road and not waste space. It was an expensive plan, but Jesse agreed that it would allow for future growth. Pollux said he would have a crew begin on Sunday.

As Jesse walked back to the Westside Mercantile Store, he committed again to being obedient no matter where it led. Amos had everything running smoothly at the store, so Jesse walked to Talman's bank and hired his oxcart and four servants to help with the cleanup tomorrow. He needed to have the buildings cleared of rubble before Pollux's crew could start on Sunday.

As the ladies gathered at Rachel's house at noon, everyone commented that Miriam was getting close to delivery. Her mother, Sarah, thought that it was time she just moved in with her and let her help with the children since Jesse would be busy with the new store. "But we've just got a new servant to help me with the children, and I want the children to get used to her."

"Bring her, too. We've got plenty of room. I don't want you having to hike across town after the tightenings start. It's a long walk, and you never know how fast a fourth baby will arrive."

"That's true. I'll talk to Jesse and see what he thinks." Others shared their prayer needs. The ladies enjoyed their time of worship and fellowship while the children played happily upstairs.



"Welcome to our home. Abie, the children are upstairs if you want to join them." Corina hugged Jenay and asked if she could hold little Enoch. "How old is he?"

"Three months and growing so fast. I won't have an infant long. He wants to catch up with Abie."

"That's so true. Second babies grow up so much faster or at least seem to." They continued to girl talk while Gaius and Yanis talked about how the groups were going.

Yanis told Gaius about his group at the Fish Shop, and they laughed about how much different it was from polite schoolboys. The men continued to share about groups they had taught. They had much in common.

Dinner was called and everyone enjoyed the lively conversation with just the four adults while the servants took care of feeding the children. "Are you getting settled in your new home?" Gaius asked. Yanis told him about his servants, Pashhur and Natania, accepting Jesus as their Messiah. "So, you are no longer working at the farm at all?"

“Pashur and I help with the Sabbath morning milking. Jenay and Abie love going with us, but it’s too dangerous on these cold, rainy mornings. I don’t want her or the children to get chilled.”

“When we first met, you indicated that you had both traveled with Jesus and that you were willing to teach our groups about Him. Everyone is pleased with your teaching the schoolboys.”

“I’m so glad to hear that. But you know Who is at work. It’s not me! I’m just teaching as the Holy Spirit guides me.”

“I’m wondering if it is time to offer an adult class with exactly the same content. I would like you to pray about it.” The four of them discussed whether it should be a large gathering at the Worship Center or whether it might work best to teach it in the same style as the groups. They agreed to pray about it and meet again next week to discuss it more.

As they walked home, Jenay asked, “Do you think it’s time for me to start a group for Gentile ladies?”

“I know that Jehovah has called you to teach here.”

“Thank you. I enjoy the Wednesday group, but I’m eager to teach about Jesus and we’ve completed our study. I didn’t want to mention it without talking with you first.”

“Let’s both pray about it, and we’ll talk with them next week.”



On Thursday morning, Hermes was invited by Mr. Immer to take a seat in his office. “I’ve thought about your offer, and I’ve checked with others who know what homes in the area are selling for. I think it’s definitely worth more than your offer.” He stated his price. Hermes got up to leave.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “I can’t pay that and do all the necessary renovations to turn your building into a home. It’s in too much disrepair, and I withdraw my interest in your property. I’m sorry I have wasted your time.” And with that he headed for the door.

Mr. Immer said, “Wait! You are right. My price is based on houses in the area, not stores that need to be renovated. Can you make a higher offer?”

“I believe the highest I could possibly go would be to add ten denarii to the original offer. I know it’s not near the price you want, but if I go any higher, I will be unable to renovate it and sell it.”

“Hermes, you have yourself a deal. You said you were wanting to buy before the fall break ends, so are you prepared to pay this sum tomorrow? We could meet at the Westside Mercantile Store and my accountant would facilitate the sale. You will need to provide three witnesses and I’ll do the same.”

“That’s agreeable with me. Would the third hour be acceptable?” asked Hermes.

They agreed and Hermes said, “Good night, and I’ll see you tomorrow.” Mr. Immer shook his head. He knew that he could get more

money for that store, but he couldn't explain the feeling that had come over him to get rid of it as soon as possible. *I have plenty of successful stores and don't need a run-down one that has never done well to tie me down. I can't imagine anyone wanting it for a house. But that's his problem.*



When Jesse arrived home for dinner, Miriam was thrilled to hear the good news. But Jesse knew her well, and asked, "Is it time for us to take a walk to your parent's house? I think they would enjoy a visit."

"Yes, I think that would be a good idea. I already have a bag packed. Amissa will stay here with the children. Let me kiss them goodnight, but we need to be going."

Her mother was not surprised by their arrival. She and her servants helped get Miriam settled in the guest room that they had turned into a birthing room. She allowed Jesse to stay for a while and he and Miriam rested from their walk. Miriam said the pains had settled down, and she didn't think she would be birthing tonight. He should walk home and make sure the children were okay, and he needed to get his sleep. She would probably be up and down all night. They gave Talman the choice of walking home with Jesse or possibly getting kicked out in the middle of the night. Sarah said she had no idea how to predict fourth babies. When Talman agreed to go, she asked them to stop by Elizabeth's and ask her to check on them.

Elizabeth and a couple of her servants arrived and checked Miriam. They agreed the baby was in place for birthing, but it could be hours, or it could still be days. Everyone settled down to try to get some rest.

On Friday afternoon, Tobias and Amissa brought the children to visit Miriam. She promised she would send for them just as soon as the baby was born. The family gathering on Sabbath night ended early since Miriam obviously was uncomfortable. After dinner Jairus prayed a special prayer for her safety through birthing and then prayed for the rest of the family to have a happy and restful Sabbath.

Early on Sabbath morning, a servant was sent to let Jesse know that he had a son and to bring the children to visit. The servants fed the children, and Amissa packed a bag for them. She would be staying at Sarah's to help with the children while their mother recuperated. Miriam wanted them close by. Jesse was glad that it was the Sabbath so that he would have a day to focus on Miriam and the children.



On Sunday morning, Jesse was a little late arriving at the Westside Mercantile Store. It had taken longer to walk from Talman's house, and his mind was still thinking about becoming abba to a third son. He was daydreaming about his plans for the Eastside Mercantile

Store and praying about how that would all work when he entered the store. He was immediately startled by the presence of Mr. Immer.

“Good morning, sir. How are you?”

“I need to see you in your office, now!” barked Mr. Immer.

“Yes, sir.”

“Where were you?”

“I was a little late this morning because Jehovah blessed me with a third son yesterday, and I had to walk in from Talman’s. Amos was aware that I might be late and had agreed to open the store this morning. Did you need something?”

“You are fired. I expect you to get your personal items and leave now.”

Jesse’s head was reeling. *What have I done wrong? What is happening?*

“Yes, sir.” He was amazed at the calmness in his voice. He simply stood and began to pack a small box of items that belonged to him from the office. Mr. Immer continued to sit and stare at him.

He picked up the box and took the cloak from behind the door. As he started to walk out, Mr. Immer began to soften. “Jesse, you are the best steward I have ever known. I am sorry to let you go. Priest Shimei has made it clear that I cannot employ someone who follows Jesus. And I know that you do.”

“Yes, sir. I believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent from Jehovah and that Priest Shimei is wrong. I believe he is leading many people astray.”

At these words, Mr. Immer covered his ears and began to yell, “GO! GO! I DON’T WANT TO HEAR IT!”

Jesse walked out of the office and nodded to Amos and his two clerks. He walked through the warehouse and out the door, then up the steps to his own house. He set the box down and was greeted by Tobias and Joab. He told them what had just happened. “God is so good. Please, pray with me.” The three fell to their knees and prayed as brothers in the living area. Each one prayed aloud, and the worship was sweet. Jesse thanked Jehovah for giving him a head start on being ready to provide for his family. He was amazed that now he didn’t have to try to explain his actions to Mr. Immer. *God told me to prepare the Eastside Mercantile Store and it will soon be ready to open. No explanation will be necessary. Oh, God is so good to me, and my heart is overflowing with gratitude. It will be hard to be without a salary, but it won’t be long, and I think I have enough saved to survive without too much of a problem. I know that Jehovah has a plan for us. He can always see much farther than we can. And now, I have the time to spend with Miriam and the new baby, or work at the new store.* “Tobias, you need to start packing this house to sell. Joab, you need to pack and clean your sleeping area in the warehouse. Just put your things in the boys’ room. We’ll figure it out later. I think Miriam will need to stay with her parents until we actually move. I’m going to walk back to the new property and work, or I’ll be at Talman’s if you need me.”



Pollux sent a large team to begin the building of the new Eastside Mercantile Store. When he heard that Jesse had been kicked out, he added as many workers as he could. Jesse asked Pollux not to put up the sign. He knew that once it went up, he would have customers. He had no doubt of that. But he also felt that it would attract unwanted attention from Mr. Immer and Priest Shimei. He didn't want to deal with that until he had to.

Jesse and Hermes met with Viatar on Monday after school and Jesse purchased the property for the house. On Tuesday, Jesse and Pollux walked over the property and Pollux made some suggestions. Jesse wanted to add a fireplace to the living area. He wanted four sleeping areas for his family and guests, and he wanted two nice-sized sleeping areas, one for Tobias, in case he wanted to marry someday, and the other for Joab and Amissa. Pollux agreed to get a separate team working on that renovation and expected to have it done by the end of next month.



Yanis was amazed that just a few minutes past the ninth hour, he had all seven of his Fish Shop students in class. He suddenly felt led to challenge them with a question first instead of letting them tell their stories. It was risky because he knew they liked to talk, but he felt certain that that was what the Holy Spirit was saying. So, he welcomed them to class and asked, "Have you thought about the question I asked you last week? How did Jesus control the fish? How did He cast out the demon? And how did He raise the little girl from the dead?"

"He was God!" shouted one of the fishermen.

"Yes, He was. Are you comfortable with that answer?" asked Yanis.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, do you really believe He was God, or are you just saying it? Because if you believe He was Jehovah, then hadn't you better figure out what else He taught and what He wants you to do?"

The men squirmed in their seats and there was some whispering among themselves. "And there's another problem. Even though you are correct, Jesus is God in the flesh, and He claimed repeatedly to be Jehovah, He also said that while He was on earth, He was fully human and had no more power than you and me. Now, we have a dilemma. If He was just human, then how did He do those miracles?"

"He was a liar," said one man tentatively.

"I don't think so," replied Yanis. "And if He's Jehovah, you better hope He's not a liar or we're all in trouble." Everyone laughed nervously.

Yanis began to explain that Jesus had a human body with a human self, but inside He was filled with Jehovah's Holy Spirit. "Jesus often told us that it was not Him doing the miracles, but Jehovah doing the miracles through Him. Don't you use gloves when you are handling the fishing net ropes?"

"Yeah, or we wouldn't have any skin left."

"Gloves without hands inside of them are empty. They are limp. They are dead. They can't do anything. Jesus said that we humans are like that. We have a body. We have a self. And deep down in the very core of our being we have a lifeless, limp, empty spot that is dead. Every single day of our life, we feel that deadness inside of us and we crave for it to be filled. We try to fill it with wine, or women, or trying to catch the most fish, or make the most money, but deep down, we can't run from the fact that we are empty and dead on the inside. Jehovah is the only one that can really fill that spot. This week your question is just simply to think about your inner core. Is it empty? We'll talk about that next week. Shalom."

"Shalom," said most of the class as they left quietly.

Yanis stayed and prayed for each man in the group. He asked Jehovah to help him have the right words next time to show them the truth.



Jesse contacted the purchasers that he had used at the Westside Mercantile Store and was told that Mr. Immer had ordered them to not work for him. However, they had a plan that they hoped would help Jesse out. They offered to train some new men for him, if they had their own wagon and as long as Mr. Immer or Priest Shimei didn't get wind of it. They traveled to Cana every Sunday morning and always tried to be at the half-way well around the first hour. If Jesse's men just happened to be there, they would show them their route and introduce them to their sources. Jesse thanked them and said he would find men as soon as possible.



## Chapter 25

As Yanis and Jenay walked toward Gaius and Corina's home on Thursday, Jenay said, "Yanis, don't mention my wanting to teach the Gentile women. I believe Jehovah is calling me to work with another group of women first."

"I'm listening."

"Natania and I want to teach the other slaves. Do you think our Jewish group would allow their women slaves to meet with me? They are a totally overlooked group. Well, I know we include Ira and Tobias in the men's group, but all the others are not hearing about Jesus. Oh, Yanis, that would make me so happy."

"So, you don't want to talk with Corina and Gaius about starting a women's group with the Gentiles?"

"No, not right now. I feel certain that working with the slaves will be my next ministry, if that sounds right to you."

"Jenay, you know that I will support you completely if you are sure that that's Jehovah's direction. I'll mention it to the men on Sabbath if you wish, and you can talk with the women next Wednesday."

When they arrived at Gaius and Corina's home, they found that Pollux and Salacia had joined them. The men quickly began talking about the work at Jesse's new store and home. It was coming along nicely. Salacia admired baby Enoch, and the ladies caught up on news about the children. As they sat around the dinner table, the six of them wanted to hear Yanis' ideas about teaching a group. "Well," he said, "I believe you have two distinct possibilities." They discussed Yanis presenting a lecture at the New Way Worship Center or teaching it in the same manner as the small groups had been taught. They agreed that Yanis would begin teaching a small group of leaders. Corina and Gaius would host the dinner after work on Thursdays, and would invite twelve others to join them. They insisted that Jenay come and bring the babies.



The men gathered at Joel's house for their group time on Sabbath afternoon. Jesse shared that he was in financial trouble and needed their prayers. Priest Shimei was warning everyone to not do business with any Jesus follower. Jesse had already used his savings to build the Mercantile Store. If he could not sell the house, he would not be able to stock the store.

Pollux had stopped work on the house. Jesse and Miriam, the children, and the servants would need to camp inside the old store building until Jesse could save enough to continue the remodel. The guys agreed they could help put up some temporary walls to make it

more comfortable for them. "I appreciate it, but if I can't stock the store, there will be no income. Period."

"You need to be able to sell that house and we need to pray that God will make a way for you," said Joel.

"Do you have enough money to finish the Mercantile Store?" asked Talman.

"Yes. Pollux and I have already set aside some projects that can wait until later. The warehouse and store are mostly complete and paid for. But without the sale of the house, I won't be able to hire workers for the store, either. I need to at least hire purchasers, an accountant, and clerks."

"Sounds like we need God's help in getting that house sold. All of our ideas and plans are useless without His help," said Talman.

"Can we spend some time in worship? I need that more than anything else right now. Thanks for letting me dump on you guys. I haven't talked with Miriam. She's got her hands full with the little one, and I don't want her fretting over it. Thanks, Talman, for keeping her out of it and providing for my family."

"Hey, it's my family, too!" said Talman. "Sarah couldn't be happier. And Jesse, we all hit hard times. I don't want you to think I'm disappointed in you. I'm really pretty impressed that God had everything started and well on its way before Mr. Immer fired you. He's going to be surprised when you suddenly open a competitive store," gloated Talman.

"I never wanted to do anything to hurt him. But I've got to provide for my family," said Jesse sadly.

Yanis began, "Guys, let's quote Psalm 34:

I will extol the Lord at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.

I will glory in the Lord;  
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.  
Glorify the Lord with me;  
let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me;  
he delivered me from all my fears.  
Those who look to him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame.  
This poor man called, and the Lord heard him;  
he saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him,  
and he delivers them.

Taste and see that the Lord is good;  
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

The rabbis quoted the passage with Yanis, while the others listened with bowed heads. When they had completed the Psalm,

Yanis led them in prayer. "The first part of this Psalm says that God's praise shall continually be in my mouth. Let's continue this time of worship by naming some things that Jehovah has provided this week." The men began to praise God for His provision. Jesse praised God for the safe birth of his third son. Soon the mood in the room was lifted and everyone was relaxing and realizing how amazingly God had blessed them. They continued to sing praises and songs of worship. Yanis reminded them that this should be an exciting time as they got to witness God's provision for Jesse and for each of them.

On Sunday after work, the family plus Yanis and Jenay gathered at Sarah and Talman's home for Jairus to circumcise Jesse's third son. He named him Daniel.



Yanis was pleased that all seven fishermen were on their benches by the ninth hour on Tuesday. "Thank you for being on time and welcome to our fourth class. Last week we talked about having an empty, dead core at the center of our lives that only Jehovah can fill. When Jesus was asked by people how to be in a right relationship with Jehovah or to get their inner core filled, He replied that all they needed to do was ask. It's really that simple, but very profound.

"You see, God can't tolerate sin. He is holy. Throughout The Law and The Prophets, Jehovah gave us rules to show us how unholy we are. The Scripture teaches that if God comes in contact with sin, He just destroys it. So, you wouldn't want to invite Him into your lives. I think it would be a little dangerous."

The men laughed and agreed. "From the very beginning, Jehovah knew that we would need a Messiah, a rescuer, who would pay for our sins for us. Then we can be in a right relationship with Jehovah and He can send His Holy Spirit to live inside of us. Does anyone know what the payment for sin is?"

"Isn't that why they go to the temple and make a sacrifice?"

"Yes, that's a picture and a promise of a coming Messiah, but Jehovah said it wasn't a permanent remedy. I mean, you have to make a blood sacrifice every time you sin. That's a lot of lambs!"

The men were following his every word and laughed nervously with him.

"After Adam and Eve sinned, He promised to send a Messiah. Later, He promised Abraham that He would send a Messiah. And eight years ago, that Messiah was crucified, and His blood was spilled out for your sins and for mine. He suffered, and bled, and died to pay for all your past, present, and future sins. I was following Jesus, but when I saw Him alive after His terrible death, I knew without any doubt that He was the Messiah promised by Jehovah since the beginning. I simply asked Jehovah and He forgave me and sent the Holy Spirit to make my empty core alive. I know my sins are forgiven because I wouldn't be alive if they weren't!

“Now, this is a personal decision. No one can make that decision for you, and you can’t do it as a group. So, we are going to dismiss for tonight, but I’ll stick around if anyone has questions or wants me to pray with them. And I’ll see all of you next week.”

Over the next hour, four of the men prayed with Yanis and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Yanis could see the wonder and awe on their faces as they were cleansed and filled with the Holy Spirit. He could see their joy, and he felt a satisfaction that comes from seeing a person transformed.



Thursday afternoon Yanis sprinted home from school and spent time playing with Abie and Enoch. He and Jenay quickly reviewed his notes for what he shared with the schoolboys on day one. He would be sharing the same material, but with a different emphasis. Tonight was the night he would start teaching the Gentile group leaders. Then they would pass the material on to their own groups. He had to keep it simple enough to remember, yet not talk down to them. It would be a challenge. They arrived at Gaius and Corina’s home and Abie quickly ran to play with her friends. After a fellowship meal, Yanis spent a few minutes getting acquainted with each of the fourteen leaders who were present. Yanis spent his teaching time talking about Zechariah and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptizer. The group seemed to enjoy the lesson and the prayer time and support that they received from each other. Yanis and Jenay needed that support, too, and reminded them that this would be a long-term group — probably lasting about a year. They would really get to know each other during the year.



On Sabbath night, at Grandmother Salome’s group, Yanis felt led to share Jesse’s need for a purchasing agent and other workers for the Mercantile Store. The Holy Spirit spoke to Jaden’s heart and reminded him of a promise that he had forgotten. He would take care of it when Sabbath was over.

Just as soon as the post-Sabbath meal was complete, Jaden excused himself and went to the slave quarters. He called for Urias. “Urias, I want to make sure that I haven’t wronged you in any way. What was your arrangement with my dad? Are you a bondsman, or did I miss your freedom date?”

Urias replied, “I became your dad’s bondsman after his brother Lemuel’s death. So, I have no freedom date.”

“Thank you. I would like to meet with you tomorrow. Will you have some time around noon to talk with me?”

“Yes, sir. I usually close up the Fish Market at noon and return here to help Noah. Where should I meet you, sir?”

“I’ll meet you at the shed around noon tomorrow. Shalom.”  
“Shalom.”

On Sunday morning, Elam, Peter’s son, arrived at the Fish Market and discovered that Urias was there early. He had already prepared the market area and was sitting on the beach watching for the first boat to arrive. None of the other workers were present, and Elam plopped down beside Urias and asked why he was so early. “Jaden said he wanted to talk with me at noon. I couldn’t sleep.”

“Thanks for getting everything set up.”

“Yeah, now we can sit and enjoy God’s masterpiece — watching the sun rise over the Sea of Galilee.”

“Have you always lived here?” asked Elam.

“No. I was born and raised in Jerusalem. Then I lived in the forest south of Jerusalem on the Quishon River. The forest was very beautiful, too, but in a different way. God has many, many masterpieces.”

Elam replied, “I’ve never been outside of Capernaum. My dad travels all over, but I’ve always been here with Laila and Shem. I see a boat coming now. We’ll soon be busy.”

All morning the fish sorters brought them barrels filled with fish that they sold to their customers. Urias had worked there for six years and delighted the ladies by remembering what they liked. Elam was just a little boy when Urias began teaching him all about the fish they were selling. When Elam was assigned to the Fish Market on his thirteenth birthday, Urias knew Elam would soon become his boss. But that was just life. He was a bondsman to Mr. Jaden, and Elam was a free man. Urias couldn’t think of a better man to work under. Now, he wondered if he was being transferred to work somewhere else. He would miss the Fish Market and his customers. But slaves didn’t have choices in where they worked. And he’d better pay attention. He had almost messed up Mrs. Anna’s order. That wouldn’t do at all!

Just before noon, they put the almost empty barrels on carts and took them to the Processing Plant. Elam stayed there and worked a couple more hours with Malachi before heading home each day. Urias walked toward the shed. Jaden greeted him and Urias waited for Jaden to begin the conversation. Even though they were both followers of Jesus, Urias was still Jaden’s slave. He knew the proper protocol.

“Urias, how old are you and how long have you worked for us?”

“I became your dad’s bondsman when I was twenty-one. That was six years ago, so I guess I am twenty-seven.”

“I seem to remember that while you worked for my Uncle Lemuel, you were his purchasing agent. Please tell me about that.”

“Your Uncle Lemuel had a small Fish Processing Plant on the Quishon River. Every week, I would take a load of pickled and smoked fish into Jerusalem to sell, and I would purchase all the items that we needed for the following week. It was a pretty small operation compared to yours, and we purchased weekly because we didn’t have the money to do otherwise. I also kept the books for the tax collectors.”

“You were awful young to become a bondslave.”

“Yes, but I had no family. My abba died when I was almost thirteen and a man from my synagogue cheated me out of my house in exchange for an apprenticeship that never really happened. I ended up on the slave block voluntarily. When Master Lemuel and Mrs. Beth offered me a bond arrangement, I jumped at it, because I loved working for them, and they had become my family. Your dad picked up my bond and promised to care for me until my death. So, I am your willing servant.”

“Thank you for your service. I have a question for you. Please answer me as a fellow follower of Jesus and not as a servant.”

“Okay. I would hope that the answer would always be the same.”

“True. What do you think of Elam? Does he have the potential to become a purchasing agent? I need to apprentice him somewhere and you probably know his capabilities better than anyone.”

Urias breathed a sigh of relief. *This meeting is about Elam, not me.* He assured Jaden, “Elam has great potential and will succeed wherever you place him. He reminds me of a young Zachary.”

“That’s the impression that I have, too. My friend, Jesse, is trying to establish a Mercantile Store on this side of town. He will need to hire a purchaser. I’m proposing to you something that Jehovah has placed in my head. I would like to apprentice you and Elam to Jesse. He will teach you both what he will need for the Mercantile Store. But I also need you to apprentice Elam. You will need to teach him everything from how to care for his oxen, how to survive on the road, how to keep his records, how to find the best deals, and set prices. Jesse’s current purchaser is willing to introduce you to his suppliers, but you two would be on your own after that. I need to know if this is agreeable to you and to Elam.”

“As your servant, you know I will do whatever you ask.”

“Yes, I know, Urias, but there’s something more. I’ve prayed about this, and I want you to know my intentions. I will pay for your apprenticeship to Jesse, and also supply everything that you need to apprentice Elam for the next two years. But if, at the end of the two years, you and Elam have established a viable business and it is your desire, I will grant you your freedom. I believe that God is leading me to allow you another chance at freedom. Let’s meet here tomorrow and let me know if you feel you are interested in taking on this job. Please don’t mention it to Elam. Pray about it and we’ll talk tomorrow. Do you have any questions?”

“I am overwhelmed by your generosity and more than a little surprised by this new direction. Please forgive me for feeling dazed. So, you are saying that I supervise Elam, and the two of us begin working as Jesse’s apprentices to become his purchasers. If that is successful, we can continue our business, and I’ll be a free man. Is that what I just heard?”

“That’s pretty much it. And I will take care of all your expenses for the next two years. Let me know tomorrow at noon after you have had time to pray about it, and we’ll go from there.”

“I am amazed at Jehovah’s kindness to me, first through your dad and now through you. Thank you, sir.”

“You are a good man, Urias. You are a hard worker. You are young and I want you to be free. And Elam needs to be trained to support himself and a family. Pray about it. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Urias ran quickly to Mrs. Salome’s house. He shared with Noah what had happened, and they prayed together. Unless God had other plans, they knew that Urias was starting a new life.

## Chapter 26

On Monday at noon, Urias met Jaden and assured him that he was ready to begin the new assignment. "I will talk with Elam and let you know before dinner if he is interested." Jaden walked to the Processing Plant and called for Elam. Elam was surprised and hurried into the little room and greeted him. "First of all, my apologies for not dealing with your situation sooner. I should have apprenticed you so that you could prepare for your future. You seemed to excel at the Fish Market, and I've been very pleased with your work there. But it's time we arrange something more permanent."

"I guess I haven't thought much about the future. I supposed I would just continue to share expenses with Shem, and we are doing okay since we own the house."

"It is my desire that you do better than just okay. My friend, Jesse, has an opening for a purchasing agent and I believe that Jehovah has given me a plan that would take care of several different needs. But the first question is whether you are interested in apprenticing as a purchasing agent."

"I've never done anything like that. I would need someone to show me how to start."

"Well, it doesn't start out glamorous or wonderful. It starts out with an oxcart and wagon and lots of time traveling to all the port cities, and Jerusalem, and possibly Damascus. I have a man that is willing to teach you, if you are willing to give it a try. Essentially, it is a two-year apprenticeship. I will cover all your expenses for two years and let you see if you can establish a business. If it is not profitable, we'll discuss something else."

"Jaden, I think I would love it. And if you think it sounds good, I'm willing to trust you."

"Okay, you get back to work. I've got some business to take care of. I'll let you know the details later. Okay?"

"Yes, sir. And thank you. It sounds exciting."

Jaden walked to Jesse's new buildings to see if he could locate him. He found Jesse in his office making a list of essentials that he needed to purchase before he could open his business. He greeted Jaden and asked how he could help him. "Jesse, that's where I'd like to start. Every time I've had a need, you are ready to help me. Now I would like to help you. On the Sabbath, Jehovah put a crazy idea in my head, and I would like for you to just listen and see if you agree that it would work for everyone. Do you have the time to listen?"

"How could I not be interested? You obviously know that I am desperate for Jehovah to open a door for me," said Jesse.

"Okay. First of all, Yanis shared your need for purchasing agents. I have a man named Urias. He was the purchasing agent for a small Fish Processing Plant before becoming a bondslave for my dad. He's only twenty-seven years old and needs to establish a business instead



of being a slave all his life. He was apprenticed as an accountant, so he can handle the numbers. I was wondering if you would be interested in apprenticing him to learn to be a purchasing agent for your Mercantile Store. I would pay you the standard apprentice fee which would give you some silver to start your business.”

“That sounds good so far,” said Jesse.

“Then I have the Apostle Peter’s son, Elam. He’s a really hard worker at the Fish Market. He’s fifteen and needs to learn a trade that will support him. He’s finished Hebrew School and is smart with numbers and with people. He needs an apprenticeship also, and of course, I will pay you the standard fee. I believe these two men will make an excellent team for you. Now, both of them are fully supported by me, so there will be no cost to you for two years. I will provide them with a pair of oxen and a cart to help them get started. I will continue to house them and care for them for two years. At the end of the two-year apprenticeship, you will be under no obligation. My hope is that they will be ready to establish their own business as purchasing agents. If not, it’s my problem, not yours. Would you be willing to provide this apprenticeship for them?”

“Jaden, how could I not agree? This would be ideal! I am overwhelmed by your generosity.”

“Well, maybe it’s selfish. I want to see a Mercantile Store on my side of town. It will certainly be more convenient than the west side store. The sooner you are up and running, the sooner I can quit walking across town every time I need something!”

“When could they start?” asked Jesse.

“Would tomorrow be okay?”

“Tomorrow at the first hour?” asked Jesse.

“That should work.”



Yanis met with the seven men at the Fish Shop on Tuesday afternoon. Every man was there before the ninth hour. Yanis started out by asking if any of the men would like to share what had happened to them last week. All four of the ones he had prayed with reported to the group that their lives had been totally different this week since they had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. A fifth man reported that he had thought about it and asked Jesus to be his Messiah while he was out on the boat fishing. Yanis assured him that was perfect and told the others that they, too, could pray at any time to invite Jesus in. “You can ask Jesus to be your Messiah anytime while you are still alive, but Jesus taught that it’s not something you can straighten out after you are dead.” The men laughed.

“There are people who seriously believe that they will negotiate with Jehovah after they die. I’m sorry, but that’s not going to happen. Jehovah cannot tolerate sin, and you will be cast out of His presence before you even know you are dead! Now I need to know if you have

any questions. I have a lesson we need to cover, but it's more important that I know what your questions are."

"Won't I have to give up partying if I invite Jesus to be my Messiah?"

"Well, that leads us into the lesson, so I'll just start there. There are many purposes for the Holy Spirit living inside of you. The first one is to make your core come alive after you've asked Jesus to be your Messiah. After that He will begin to direct you to do things that will be good for you. You see many people think that Jehovah is waiting to zap you if you do something wrong, but that's a lie straight from Satan and comes from a lot of the pagan religions around us. One of Jehovah's major characteristics is that of love. He loves you and wants what is best for you. His Holy Spirit is going to be directing you to do things that are best for you and your family. I don't know what kind of partying you are thinking about, but most of the partying that I know about wouldn't make my wife very happy." The men agreed. "It generally causes fights and trouble and unhappiness. Do you think Jehovah wants that for you? And if you are not a married man, you are still left with a miserable day afterward trying to recover from your partying. What a way to live! A lot of what we call fun is really damaging to our bodies and destroys our lives, our marriages, our jobs, and our relationships. The Holy Spirit will begin to instruct you and change you so that you can have a better life."

"Yeah, but how does the Holy Spirit speak to you? Do you hear a voice? What do you mean, He instructs you?" asked one of the new followers.

"You know that I told you that the Holy Spirit comes into your core. That's even deeper than your self, which is inside your body. I like to think of it as three concentric circles, and the Holy Spirit is right in the middle. I hear Him most often when He puts ideas in my self. It's like I just have thoughts that I know are not my own. When I start to do something that He doesn't want me to do, I feel a little jab. I can't explain it. But I know it's Him. It will take practice to learn to recognize Him. And sometimes, I hear Him speak to me in my body — I actually hear Him speak with my ears. I don't think anyone else hears Him when He does that, but I certainly do. It's like He's in the room speaking to me. That's pretty rare, and usually when I've got a big decision to make."

Yanis spent some time teaching about Jehovah God's attributes. "Next week will be our final class. I'll try to be here early, if you have any questions. Shalom."

"Shalom," most of them replied.



Yanis was a lot more relaxed as he prepared for the second Gentile group meeting. Now they knew who to expect. They spent time sharing prayer needs and praises. They enjoyed the fellowship meal

together and then Yanis shared what Grandmother Salome had told him about the Holy Spirit's role in Mary's conception of Jesus. They discussed the troubles that Joseph and Mary experienced as a result of people not understanding. Yanis shared the stories that they had heard about Jesus' birth that confirmed that He was indeed the Messiah.

"Next week," Yanis said, "we will talk about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and the following week we will begin to share accounts of events that Jenay and I have personally witnessed."



Jesse began training Urias and Elam. He showed them his list of essentials to open the Mercantile Store. He didn't need fancy things, though he hoped to someday stock them. He needed practical, everyday things that people would buy from his store. On Sunday morning, Urias and Elam left Capernaum with their oxcart headed to Cana. They arrived at the designated meeting place, watered the oxen, and eagerly hoped that they would connect with the purchasing agents from the Westside Mercantile Store. Marcus and Eli had established a good business, but they would lose many customers if Mr. Immer or Priest Shimei found out that they were helping Jesse. They had simply agreed to let Urias and Elam tag along with them on their weekly route and introduce them to their suppliers. Urias and Elam showed them the list that Jesse had prepared for their first purchases. Urias explained that money was really tight, and they needed to be as careful as possible. Marcus and Eli understood and told them that they could pick up quite a few things in Cana today but would need to travel to Tiberius tomorrow to purchase more items. Cana was a small village, but the Metal Shop made a lot of the items that were on their list. Marcus explained, "We have a standing order at the Metal Shop and then they will make just about anything we need. We pick it up the following week. Once you learn what Jesse's customers are buying, you'll know better what to order."

After the oxen had been watered, Urias and Elam followed Marcus and Eli to the Metal Shop and a Candle Shop where both teams purchased items for their stores. Before they left Cana, Marcus and Eli pointed out stores where they might find custom-made items for special occasions. They agreed to meet at the well on the way to Tiberius at the second hour tomorrow. Then they traveled back to Capernaum separately while Urias and Elam looked around Cana.

Urias and Elam arrived at the back of Jesse's new warehouse and found the doors standing open waiting for them. Jesse showed them where to unload the goods as tears ran down his face. It was almost sundown, so he raced to Talman's house to tell Miriam. He helped get the children settled and spent time with baby Daniel. He and Miriam talked about plans, and he assured her that God was providing everything they needed.



On Monday morning, Urias and Elam were waiting at the well to Tiberius when Marcus and Eli arrived. Urias thanked the men for their help yesterday and told them how grateful Jesse was. He also informed them that he had never been to Tiberius. It was much larger than Cana, and since both Marcus and Eli knew the city well, they agreed to split up to make sure no one got lost. Marcus and Urias took Urias' cart and Eli and Elam took Eli's cart of oxen. As the men talked, they learned about the particular route they followed in Tiberius and the pattern of cities they visited on a regular basis. They agreed to continue to work together until the new men were comfortable with their routes. It was a long day and once again, they traveled home separately. They parked the oxcart at Jaden's home and took care of the oxen. On Tuesday morning, they delivered the goods to Jesse. They spent the day helping him unpack the items and placing them on the warehouse shelves. Then they carried items into the store and Jesse arranged them just as he had imagined they would look. The Eastside Mercantile Store was ready to open.

Jesse had obediently followed everything the Holy Spirit had led him to do. But now that he had finally arrived at his goal, he felt uncertain and afraid of the consequences. He walked to meet the rabbis just as school was over for the day. The men walked back to the store with him and surrounded him with their prayers and words of encouragement. They reminded him of God's leading and His promises to provide for him. Together they decided that Friday would be the first day to open. Talman and Yanis agreed to stop by and help him hang the sign at sunrise. Then his purchasers would be ready to resupply the shelves on Monday.

Since all was in readiness at the store, Jesse planned to spend Wednesday and Thursday moving into the new house. He would use his two slaves and the two apprentices to help him. It wouldn't be as nice as he had originally planned, but he and Miriam had agreed that the most important thing was that they have a place to call their own.



On Tuesday afternoon, Yanis rushed to the Fish Shop, but the men didn't show up until the ninth hour. *At least they are on time.* He welcomed them and thanked them for listening. He reminded them that they could ask questions of any of the other followers of Jesus that worked around them. Then he began to teach. "The very last command that Jesus gave to His apostles before He left and returned to Heaven was for them to go and tell the whole world about Him and to baptize them. Baptism for a follower of Jesus is just a symbol to show a picture of what has happened in your life. For those of you who have chosen to follow Jesus, I would like to schedule a baptism. We

can either do it with just you and me, or we can schedule a special celebration where you can invite your family and friends to come and watch. It's entirely up to you. Let me know if you want to do a public ceremony or a private one."

"Where would we do it?" asked one of the men.

"What would it look like? I have never seen a baptism," asked another.

"We can do it right out here on the beach." He explained what would happen and what each step meant. They talked some more and all decided that they wanted to invite their friends and family. "Do you want to do it next Tuesday afternoon, or would you want to do it on the Sabbath? When is best for you?"

They decided to do it next Tuesday afternoon. "So, bring a dry robe because you'll be wet and cold." The men roared with laughter and Yanis agreed that that was a pretty stupid thing to say to a bunch of fishermen. He laughed along with them and stated, "I'll bring a dry robe and a blanket to wrap up in because it's freezing out there!" And they all laughed again.

Yanis said goodnight to the five followers but asked the two who had not accepted Jesus as their Messiah to stay. He could tell that they were really nervous and looked quite defensive. "I just wanted to thank you for listening and considering Jesus. If you want to take the class again or if you have any questions, just let me know. I'm here to help you. I just want you to know the truth. Shalom."

"Shalom," they both replied.



Jenay was pleased that the Thursday Gentile group already felt like family. She looked forward to being with them and hearing their news and how God was at work in their lives. Yanis shared about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness that Salome had told him about. Yanis encouraged each one to rest assured that Satan would do everything he could to stop the spread of the gospel, but that Jesus had said that the wildfire could not be stopped. It was a powerful message, and everyone was sobered by the weight of their responsibility to share the New Way.



Late in the night, Salome's servants answered a knock at the door and greeted Zared. He apologized for the late hour and asked if he could secure lodging for the night and talk with Jaden in the morning. The servants took him to a guest room and helped him get settled. On Tuesday morning, he was waiting at the breakfast table for Jaden. He thanked Jaden and Salome for their hospitality and assured them that James and John were doing well in Jerusalem. He asked when he could speak to Jaden privately about a matter and was told

that he would return home at noon to meet with him. *I know what this is about*, thought Salome excitedly. *Women just know these things*.

At noon, Jaden and Zared met on the rooftop and the servants brought them juice and some cheese rolls. Zared told Jaden that he would like to marry Laila but didn't know if Jaden was her guardian or if he would need to locate Peter. He stated that he had talked with James and John after their visit last summer and they had hoped to encounter Peter, but they did not. Jaden said that he felt that since Laila was old enough to make up her own mind about such things, he would consult her and let her decide if she wanted her abba's permission. Zared agreed, and Jaden began to ask the questions that a dad should ask. Zared indicated that he was a scribe and could easily find work anywhere. He had felt God's call to Caesarea Philippi while on their ministry trip and planned to return there in order to strengthen the church and to share the New Way. He planned to secure a job and home, and then return for Laila if that was agreeable with Jaden. Jaden said that he would discuss it with Laila and get back with him before Friday.

Mid-afternoon Jaden asked, "Mother, would you like to take a walk with me to Laila's house? Are you up to it? It's not very cold today, although you will need to wear a cloak."

"Yes, I would like that. Do you have time to walk slowly?"

"Of course, Mother. I always have time for you." Arah brought Salome's cloak and asked if she should walk with her.

"No, I want to be alone with my son," said Salome as she tucked her arm into Jaden's.

"So, I suspect you already know what this is about, and you know that I want your opinion."

"I am just so happy for her. Laila has been a faithful daughter and sister and now Jehovah has rewarded her with a good man."

"But, how do you know he's a good man? He may be worse than Laban. How can I be certain that he will treat her properly and care for her and not just use her as a servant?"

"Because of the way he looks at her."

"You mean that when he visited last summer, you were already suspecting this might happen."

"Of course. Jenay and I talked about it. It was quite obvious."

"I'll never understand women! But I'm grateful for your intuition. It reassures me when I have to make a decision about a man that I know very little about."

"Call it what you like, but God reveals His plan if you'll just watch and listen. Let's sit and rest for a few minutes and let me catch my breath." They sat by the side of the road in a grassy area. "Will you pray for us before we continue?"

"Of course, but Mother, I have been praying ever since I heard his request."

"I'm glad, Son. Has God given you clear direction?"

"I feel that it should be primarily Laila's decision since He has not shown me an obvious reason to say no."

“Do you think Peter will be available for the wedding, if there is a wedding? I guess the wedding is the groom’s problem.”

“Yes, the wedding will be Zared’s problem. But let’s talk with Laila first and see what her response will be.” He helped his mother to her feet, and they continued their walk to Laila’s house. She was busy churning butter but left her work to welcome them in the living room. She was alarmed by Jaden’s arrival since she knew that her brothers worked for Jaden. He assured her that all was well.

“Laila, I actually have happy news to report to you,” said Jaden. She felt confused and looked to Salome for an explanation. “A young man has asked my permission for your espousal and marriage.”

Laila gasped and cried out. “Oh, Jaden. Aunt Salome. Oh, has Jehovah heard my prayer?”

“Do you remember when James and John visited last summer? They brought a young man by the name of Zared.”

“Yes, sir. I have been thinking a lot about him. I confess that I have been praying that he would remember me and be interested.”

“Are you interested in him?”

“Yes, sir. I feel that Jehovah has said that I should accompany him on his journey and help him with his ministry. I don’t know where God is leading him, but I feel that it will be spreading the New Way outside of Israel.”

“You are correct. Zared is a scribe and wants to secure a job in Caesarea Philippi. He would be able to support you, but his primary purpose would be to spread the good news there and strengthen the home churches. Am I hearing you correctly, that God has already prepared your heart?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I would like for you and your brothers to eat dinner with us on Wednesday. I’ll arrange for Shem to be off work, so we can all get acquainted. If you and your brothers agree, we’ll arrange for an espousal before Zared leaves and set a date for the wedding. Let me pray for you right now and you spend this time in prayer until we talk again on Wednesday. It’s up to you if you want to share it with others,” said Jaden.

“Aunt Salome, what do you think?” asked Laila tentatively.

“I think that God has a very, very good plan for you.” Laila ran to her and gave her a hug.

“Oh, Aunt Salome, is this really happening? Can it possibly be coming true?”

“God knows you’ve had a rough life so far, but He knows your needs and your heart’s desire. I think your mother and Zaydee would be very happy for you right now.”

“We’ll leave you now but will look forward to visiting with you and your brothers on Wednesday. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

## Chapter 27

Jaden, Jonas, and Benji waited with Yanis at the beach on Tuesday. They stood talking about when to start the next class and what size limitation to put on it. Yanis said definitely no more than ten men. The other guys laughed at his insistence. He told them he thoroughly enjoyed being around the fishermen, but ten against one was enough odds against him. They reminded him that Jehovah was on his side, so he should be able to handle 10,000. "Yeah, but I bet they weren't fishermen!" Everyone laughed.

Soon the men began arriving and introduced the friends and family that they brought. When everyone had arrived, Yanis noticed the two men who had not made their decision were hanging around in the back. Yanis welcomed the small gathering and explained very simply the reason for the baptism. Then he called the first man into the water. After all five were baptized, he asked Jaden to lead them in a prayer of blessing. Yanis made a big deal about wrapping up in his blanket and all the fishermen laughed and called him a landlubber. He ran back into the classroom and quickly changed to a dry robe then headed home.

He was looking forward to a good dinner, when two Roman guards approached him. He greeted them and called them by name. "Sorry, this is official business," they said. They tied his arms, though not very tightly, and told him that they were taking him to prison. He knew the routine and didn't ask for an explanation. He did ask if they would let Jenay know and they said they couldn't. So, he spent a hungry, cold night on a hard stone floor in a filthy Roman dungeon.



When Yanis wasn't home by dinner, Jenay wasn't terribly concerned. She had planned to go to the baptism so she could meet some of the wives, but baby Enoch was cutting his first tooth and was miserable. So, she had stayed home. But as it got later, she realized that something had to be wrong. She called for Pashhur and asked him to check with Jaden to see if he knew where Yanis was, and if he didn't, to check with Elijah. Jaden told Pashhur that Yanis had left after the baptism and was headed home as far as he knew. Jaden went with Pashhur to check with Elijah. Elijah said that Jesse usually knew where Yanis was. All three men rushed to Talman's where Jesse and Miriam were staying. Jesse said he would go with them to the prison. They walked quickly to the prison and other than being told that he was there, they weren't allowed in. The guard told them that Pashhur could bring him breakfast, but that was all. The men respectfully left and split up to let the others know that Yanis was in prison again. Jaden went to Jenay's to let her know. Soon all the other families were



arriving to begin praying. Sarah stayed with Miriam and the new baby but promised that they would be praying. They hoped that this would be just a quick and easy skirmish with Priest Shimei. Elijah encouraged Hava to stay home with the babies since they were all asleep. He left Ira with her. Soon, the rest of the group was surrounding Jenay. Jaden sent word to Laisha and Salome and Jonas. Jonas joined them. The men prayed together and let Rachel and Elizabeth minister to Jenay and help her and Natania with the fussy Enoch. Abie stayed asleep through it all. Jenay encouraged all the men to go home, since they would need to work tomorrow. Rachel and Elizabeth stayed in the living area with Jenay while Jairus and Joel stayed in the guest room. The others went home and promised to return and check for news before school when Pashhur took Yanis' breakfast. Everyone was present when Pashhur returned and said that Yanis was feeling fine but was glad to get breakfast since he had missed dinner and was hungry. He said he was rejoicing in baptizing the five fishermen yesterday and had spent most of the night praying for them and their families. He sent his apologies to Joel for missing school and said if he was released in time, he might make it for his later class. And he sent his love to Jenay, the babies, and the whole group.

Rachel promised to spend the entire day with Jenay and the children. The men headed off to work.



Yanis was taken into the court to appear before Judge Hector around noon. Sure enough, his accuser was Priest Shimei. When the judge called for the priest to state the charges, he very ceremoniously walked to the judge's bench and declared, "This man is a murderer and since I cannot get a fair trial in this city, I respectfully request he be moved to Jerusalem."

"And what is the basis for the trial to be held in Jerusalem rather than Tiberius or Damascus?" asked Judge Hector.

Priest Shimei seemed to be stymied, but only for a moment. "The murder occurred just outside of Jerusalem."

"I will contact the Centurion concerning your request. Report back to this court at the second hour tomorrow."

Priest Shimei gave a smirk to the judge and waltzed out of the courtyard clearly celebrating his victory.

The judge motioned for the guards to return Yanis to his cell. Yanis could not imagine what was happening. He knew that the High Priest had hired false witnesses to testify against Jesus. He wondered if that was what was happening to him. And what was this about Jerusalem? There was no way he would get a fair trial there. When they left him alone in the cell, he fell to his knees and cried out in prayer. He knew that Jehovah, and Jehovah alone, could rescue him.

When Pashhur delivered his dinner, Yanis told him what had happened and begged him to let the others know to be praying because Priest Shimei was up to something, and it didn't look good. "Please take good care of Jenay and the babies," he said and began to cry. When Joel heard the news, he walked over to Gaius' house to let him know to inform all the Gentile groups to be praying.



On Wednesday, as it approached sundown, Elam, Shem, and Laila walked to Aunt Salome's. Laila was surprised that it was just the three of them seated with Aunt Salome, Jaden, Laisha, and Zared. Jaden and her brothers had questions for Zared, and she listened eagerly to his description of the area where they would live. Zared continued to assure her with his eyes that he cared for her and would make a good husband. After dinner, they continued to visit, and Jaden led them in a time of prayer. He encouraged them to all continue to pray and to let him know how the Holy Spirit was leading them. Everyone seemed to be pleased with Zared's request, but Jaden wanted them to get to know Zared better and spend more time seeking God's will. Zared agreed to stay for a couple of weeks before continuing his journey to Caesaria Philippi. Laila wanted to make sure that her little brothers would be okay without her. They were both men now, but she had always taken care of them. On Sabbath night, when they met together, Laila said that she was ready for Jaden to announce that he had pledged her to Zared and the espousal would be as soon as they could arrange it. Laila was still in shock, but her joy was overflowing.



Just as soon as the court was cleared, Judge Hector walked to Centurion Justus' office. "What's the Priest up to now?" he asked.

Judge Hector replied, "Oh, nothing major. He's just claiming that Yanis is a murderer."

"A murderer! How is he going to prove that — kill someone?" demanded Centurion Justus.

"Oh, that's not the worst of it. You are going to love this. He says he can't get a fair trial here, so he wants Yanis transferred to Jerusalem because it's closer to the scene of the crime," said Hector.

"Okay. That's a problem. You know that the Roman Centurion there will just kill Yanis to get rid of another Jew. Talk about not getting a fair trial. What have you learned about the case?"

"Absolutely nothing. I was so shocked, I just told him to return to court tomorrow."

"So, Yanis is still in prison?"

"Yes, I have no choice. I can't let a murderer go home and get a good night's sleep."

“But that means he can’t teach at the school. I think I will escort him to class tomorrow and let him teach his classes,” said Centurion Justus.

“Don’t you think we ought to at least find out what Priest Shimei is claiming?” asked Hector.

“Well, he’s accused him of murder, and he’s accused you of not fulfilling your duties. I’ve a good mind to notify Tetrarch Antipas. I understand he’s in Tiberius these days. He knows more about Jews than anybody. I think our only option is a very public trial under Tetrarch Antipas, or we are going to be forced to ship Yanis to Jerusalem, and I don’t like that at all,” said Centurion Justus. He called Silvanus into his office.

“Silvanus, take ten men and ride to Tiberius. See if Tetrarch Antipas can come and help me with this case. Explain to him the trouble we’ve been having with Priest Shimei. He wants us to send a perfectly innocent man to Jerusalem to have him killed by the High Priest. I’m certain it’s some kind of vendetta against him. Request his expert opinion concerning the Jews. I am not comfortable exporting the man. We have been more than fair with Priest Shimei, but we need backup. Make sure he knows that I will make it worth his time to come and help. He hasn’t been to Capernaum in a while, and a murder trial might be the way to attract a crowd. I can set up the trial in the town center and welcome him with great pomp and ceremony. He loves that kind of stuff.”

“Yes, sir. I understand. But you do know, we’ll have to abide by whatever he rules. You won’t have a chance to rescue Yanis if he decides to send him to Jerusalem,” warned Silvanus.

“So be it! Go!” ordered Centurion Justus. He felt certain that Tetrarch Antipas would be able to figure out a way to release Yanis. He knew that his hands were tied.

Centurion Justus and Judge Hector continued to discuss how to handle the details. “You’ll need to delay your meeting with Priest Shimei until I receive word from Tetrarch Antipas,” said Centurion Justus.

Judge Hector sent a servant to let Priest Shimei know that the morning meeting was canceled due to other pressing business. The prisoner would remain in prison until a new meeting could be scheduled, hopefully sometime on Friday.

Centurion Justus walked to the prison, and the guards snapped to attention. He ordered the guard to open Yanis’ cell. Yanis raised up to welcome him. “Guard! Take this man’s shackles off. He is to remain here until we can get to the bottom of this, but it could be a long wait. I don’t want him to lose a leg in the meantime. Remove the shackles, but make sure they are replaced whenever he appears in court. Do not let anyone except his servants enter this room at any time.”

“Yes, sir.” The guard took the key and removed Yanis’ shackles.

“Thank you. You may wait out front. I wish to speak to the prisoner. Yanis, what is this all about?” asked Centurion Justus.

“I have no idea! I keep remembering that the High Priest hired false witnesses to testify against Jesus, and He was crucified. I don’t know what we can do if he’s done that.”

“So, you have no clue as to what murder you’ve committed?” asked the Centurion, sarcastically.

“No, sir. I have never killed or even injured a man that I know of.”

“Well,” sighed Justus, “it’s a serious charge, and I am required to take it seriously. Therefore, I have sent for Tetrarch Antipas to come and help me hear it. He is more familiar with Jewish Law, and he is very proud of his Galilean appointment. He won’t be pleased with Priest Shimei’s request to take the case to Jerusalem which is in Pontius Pilate’s jurisdiction. I should hear something tomorrow about when or if the Tetrarch will come. Until then, maybe you’ll be a little more comfortable without the shackles.” Then he leaned in and whispered, “All the Gentile groups are praying, and I know your friends are. Our Jehovah will prevail. Be strong and courageous.” And he left.

When Pashhur brought him his dinner, Yanis had much news to give him, and Pashhur shared it with the rabbis and friends who were gathered around Jenay.



It was midafternoon on Tuesday when Silvanus and his men returned to the Centurion’s office. “Report!” commanded Centurion Justus.

“Sir, Tetrarch Antipas will be arriving on Wednesday of next week and will expect accommodations. He wants to hear the murder trial on Thursday and plans to leave on Friday.”

“Thank you, Silvanus. You can dismiss your men and then return for another assignment.”

“Yes, sir.”

When Silvanus returned, Centurion Justus shut the door and asked him to take a seat. He poured them both a cup of wine and inquired about the tetrarch’s reaction. Silvanus shared that he felt the tetrarch was pleased to be asked to help with such an important trial. “He was adamant that the murderer and priest be given a fair trial in Capernaum.”

“Good work, Silvanus. I’m assigning you to take care of the details on this,” said Centurion Justus. “I will stay with my son and let the tetrarch take over my entire residence. My servants are well trained and will be able to put up with his demands. Or maybe he will bring his own servants. Did you ask how many would be traveling with him?” asked Justus.

“No, sir. I’m sorry,” said Silvanus.

“That’s okay. We’ll make accommodations for whatever he needs. I’ll let Priest Shimei and Yanis know the plans for the trial tomorrow. Thank you for your long trip and your information. I’m sure you will be ready for him on Wednesday. I assume he would be arriving around noon or later.”

“Probably, since it is a four-hour ride.”

“Thank you, Silvanus; get some rest.”

“Thank you, sir.”



On Thursday, Salacia and Corina dropped off food for Jenay’s family and spent time visiting and praying with her, Rachel, Elizabeth, and Natania. They assured her that the Gentile group would spend time in prayer for each other and especially for Yanis. “If you need anything, please let us know.” Jenay’s Jewish friends were fascinated by the love that was evident between them.

After Salacia and Corina had gone, Jenay told the ladies about the unity and oneness that Orly and Gabriela felt with their Gentile friends. Jenay reminded them that Jesus had prayed, “Father, make them one as We are one.” The ladies agreed that they had all felt surrounded by their love and care.



At the first hour, Centurion Justus knocked on Judge Hector’s door. “Judge Hector, I am informing you and your staff that Tetrarch Antipas will be arriving in town next Wednesday and will hear the case between Priest Shimei and the murderer. I will be vacating my house to accommodate him, and you should be prepared to do the same for his retinue. I don’t know how many he will bring, but since our houses are so close, that would be the ideal place to lodge them.”

“Yes, sir. What other preparations would you like made?” asked Judge Hector.

“Silvanus will be in charge of details. I’m fairly certain that he will use the area in front of the marketplace for the public trial. I have promised Tetrarch Antipas a crowd, and I would like room for all of Capernaum to witness it. My feeling is that it will settle things down once and for all. I am on my way to inform Priest Shimei now, and then I will inform the prisoner. Please assist Silvanus in whatever he needs to set up a public courtroom. I want it to be ready and waiting and attracting as much attention as possible for Tetrarch Antipas.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good day, sir,” said Centurion Justus.

Centurion Justus and his three guards rode to the synagogue. He dismounted and one of the guards stayed with the horses. An assistant invited the centurion to the back courtyard. The two guards stood on each side as the centurion sat with Priest Shimei in the courtyard. “I came to let you know that Tetrarch Antipas has been informed of your request and your charges of murder. The tetrarch will be arriving on Wednesday and will hear your case on Thursday of next week. It will be a public trial and all of Capernaum will be allowed to witness it. We do not usually have such important cases, and the

tetrarch was eager to be of assistance to make sure that your needs were met.”

Centurion Justus could tell that he had hit the right spot. Priest Shimei wanted to shame Yanis in front of all Capernaum for some reason. He felt deep inside that the Holy Spirit was not going to let that happen, but he also knew that many totally innocent followers had been killed in Jerusalem. He hoped that this would not turn into a similar situation.

The centurion and his men rode to the prison. He told them to wait outside while he informed the prisoner of the trial date. He asked to speak with the prisoner. “Sir, your trial date has been scheduled for next Thursday. Tetrarch Antipas will be arriving to conduct it. It will be a public trial held in front of the market. Guard, I will let you know the time of the trial on Wednesday so that you can have the prisoner dressed and ready. Of course, he will need to be shackled on Sunday so that my partiality will not be revealed. He will need to be tied to protect the tetrarch and Priest Shimei, since he is such a dangerous prisoner.”

“Of course, sir.”

Centurion Justus exited and returned to his men. They rode immediately to the school and informed Joel of the situation, since Yanis would not be allowed to teach school until his name was cleared. He then asked if school could be released so the boys could witness the trial. It would add to the crowd, and they should see their tetrarch while he was in town. Joel agreed and asked that he be told the hour of the trial so that they could all attend together.

Hermes had already taken over Yanis’ classes and was asking various leaders in Capernaum to come and talk about their decision to follow Jesus. He was also encouraging the boys to pray for Yanis and his wife and children.

Soon the whole town of Capernaum was abuzz with the news that Yanis was a murderer and Priest Shimei had caught him and was bringing him to justice under Tetrarch Antipas. But all the followers, both Jewish and Roman, were praying for a man that they knew was totally innocent.



On Friday before sunset, Jenay and the children walked to Grandmother Salome’s accompanied by Roman guards. The rabbis gathered with their families at Joel’s house. Both spent time in prayer for Yanis.

Each day Pashhur brought Yanis breakfast and dinner and news from his family and friends. As he returned, he brought the report that Yanis was spending his time in worship and prayer and asked for prayer that he could stay strong and represent their Messiah well. He told Pashhur to tell Jenay, Abie, and Enoch that he loved them and missed them terribly.

The days passed slowly for Jenay and the children, but she was grateful that her friends and family took turns spending each day and night with her. She always had someone to pray with. She felt enveloped in Jehovah's love and care. The days passed much more slowly for Yanis, but he used his time as wisely as he could to pray and seek Jehovah's face and tune himself completely to God's will.



“Sir, Tetrarch Antipas has been sighted one hour from town.”

“Good work, Silvanus. I will join you shortly.”

Centurion Justus finished the paperwork he was working on, called for the cohort of guards and rode to meet Tetrarch Antipas.

The guards carried flags to honor the tetrarch and were in full ceremonial dress. The tetrarch seemed pleased with the welcome. The guards escorted him into town with great fanfare. Centurion Justus showed him the venue for the trial, and the tetrarch nodded with approval. They made a complete circle of the town of Capernaum and then returned to Centurion Justus' home. Since there were only thirty men traveling with Tetrarch Antipas, the two houses of Centurion Justus and Judge Hector would be sufficient. Their staff could easily accommodate the tetrarch and his men. “Centurion Justus, this will be adequate. I will contact you if I need you further.”

“Sir, what time would you like the trial to start tomorrow? We have not announced a time, and the people are waiting to hear.”

“The second hour should be fine.”

“Yes, sir.”

Centurion Justus sent out the town criers to announce that the murder trial conducted by Tetrarch Antipas would be heard at the second hour tomorrow in front of the market. He knew that Priest Shimei would hear but felt it his duty to inform him. He rode to the synagogue and simply informed his assistants. They assured him that they would let him know. He then rode to the prison and informed the guard regarding the time for the trial. He said it loud enough for Yanis to hear. Since Yanis had been put back in leg shackles on Sunday, his legs were grotesquely swollen, and he was in pain. He had gotten very little sleep, and he was glad to know that the trial would happen soon. He was ready for something — anything — to happen.

On Thursday, Pashhur not only brought him breakfast, but also a loincloth. The guard had told Pashhur that Yanis would only be allowed a loincloth for modesty. Pashhur helped him remove his robe and showed him how to wrap the loincloth. His body had never been exposed and he felt naked. He remembered that the prophet Isaiah had written that Jesus was humiliated yet was silent before his accusers. He prayed for strength to represent Jehovah well. He ate a little breakfast but did not feel good. His stomach was churning, and he hoped he wouldn't lose his breakfast in front of everyone. At the second hour, Roman guards arrived to walk him to the trial. His eyes

were unaccustomed to the bright sunshine, and he was grateful that they were holding him on both sides. His legs were still shackled so he could only scoot along. His arms were bleeding from being tied so tightly. He was unceremoniously thrown to the ground to the left of the raised platforms that had been built for Tetrarch Antipas, Centurion Justus, and Judge Hector. Priest Shimei was standing with his two assistants to the right.

Centurion Justus rose and greeted the crowd and welcomed Tetrarch Antipas to Capernaum. "Unfortunately, I needed your help to hear this trial because Priest Shimei accused my judge of being partial. While I do not feel that it is an accurate accusation, I felt that it was right to ask for your assistance. You have always ruled the people of Galilee with fairness and have been a benefit to all. We are grateful for your taking the time to assist us today in this serious accusation of murder."

Tetrarch Antipas received the applause of the people while remaining seated. He raised his hands for silence. "Be it known that I have not been briefed on this case. I understand that Centurion Justus and Judge Hector removed themselves from the case immediately because of the accusation of partiality. So, they have also not been briefed. Be it known that all parties will need to include all pertinent information, but make it as brief as possible. Let the record begin. Priest Shimei, approach and state your charge."

"Murder, sir. This man murdered another and by Jewish Law he should die."

"You realize that you are under Roman law, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, tell me about this murder. Who was murdered, when, and where."

"Sir, the man he killed was my father. He died ten years ago on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev in his home."

Yanis groaned and his head reeled from what he now knew.

"And where was his home?"

"Near Hebron in Judea, sir."

"And that is why you requested that Pontius Pilate be the judge, I assume."

"That, and the fact that Centurion Justus and Judge Hector have protected this murderer and other law breakers every time I have brought them to court. They do not rule fairly for the Jews in your jurisdiction."

"Which case would you like for me to deal with today?" Tetrarch Antipas roared. "I thought you were bringing a murder charge; but if you prefer, I will hear the case you have now presented against my appointed officials."

Priest Shimei blanched as he realized that he had made a mistake in angering the tetrarch. "The murder case, because I know that you will judge fairly, O Tetrarch of Galilee."



“So, you are accusing this man of murdering your father ten years ago. Why have you waited so long to avenge his death? That seems strange to me.”

“I did not know where this man was until I arrived in Capernaum just over a year ago. I was busy getting settled here and when the anniversary of my father’s death came, I dealt with it by filing the charge.”

“Proceed. Tell me what weapon was used or how your father came to be killed by this man.”

“There was no weapon, sir. He broke my father’s heart. He killed him by leaving him and never returning. My father was never the same after he left and died soon after. A disobedient son, according to Jewish Law, is to be stoned to death.”

Tetrarch Antipas rolled his eyes and stared at Centurion Justus. Centurion Justus continued to keep his face totally straight, but inside he was screaming with relief. *Now I can breathe. The Tetrarch will surely see that this priest is pursuing a private grudge and is nothing but trouble.*

“Centurion Justus, did you not question this man about the so-called murder? You brought me all the way here, to hear the charges of a mad man!” demanded Tetrarch Antipas.

“Sir, he is the priest of Capernaum and declared that he did not want my judge to hear his case. I obliged him as befitting his position, sir.”

“Well, he does not deserve his position! He is insane!” The crowd gasped, some in relief and most in horror. The entire town of Capernaum heard, and Priest Shimei was alternating between shades of red and purple.

“So, I assume that this man, that you will not name, is your brother?”

“No, he is not. He is dead to me,” replied Shimei.

“Okay, let me word it to suit you. Was this man born to your father?”

“Yes, he was,” replied Priest Shimei.

“Centurion, what is the prisoner’s name?”

“Yanis, sir.”

“Guards, help Yanis to stand!” barked the tetrarch. The guards helped Yanis to his feet. “Yanis, why don’t you tell me what happened.”

“Sir, I am the youngest of five boys and beloved of my father. When I began to investigate the claims of Jesus, my father declared me dead and ordered me to leave his home on my thirteenth birthday. I am greatly saddened to learn today of his death.”

“I am sorry for your loss, but surprised by your grief,” said the tetrarch.

“Sir, if I may speak,” requested Yanis.

“Certainly.”

“Jesus taught me to forgive my dad and my brothers. Priest Shimei is my oldest brother, even though he does not acknowledge it,

and I have forgiven him. I am sorry for any pain that I have caused him.”

“Guards, release the prisoner. Priest Shimei, the Jewish Law, which you like to judge others by, says that you should be executed in the same manner that you intended to put this innocent man to death. Since you were not successful, I could just imprison you for the rest of your miserable life. But since you are not from Galilee, I am exiling you. Go where you wish, but do not ever place your foot on Galilean soil or you will be beheaded. It is decreed, let it be recorded.

“And that goes for any of your cronies who intend to cause disruptions in this fine city. I don’t mind putting up with Jews who want to isolate themselves and be left alone, but if you intend to cause trouble for my assigned officials, or any other citizen, you will be severely punished. The rest of you Jews are free to leave Capernaum or to comply with the rules of Rome. If you stay, you will be under my authority and the authority of those that I have appointed. I have decreed, let it be recorded.”

## Chapter 28

Yanis was surrounded by his friends, both Jew and Gentile. Jenay was sobbing quietly beside him. Pashhur had brought him a robe and helped him to slip into it. His legs were still unsteady as his friends helped him walk home. There Abie ran into his arms as he sank to the floor to hold her. Everyone moved outside to allow him a few minutes alone with Jenay and the two children. He couldn't believe how much Enoch had grown in just over a week. He was delighted with his first tooth, and it looked like another one was starting beside it. The four of them clung to each other and thanked Jehovah for keeping them safe once again. Finally, Abie pulled her abba out into the yard and they sat in the grass and enjoyed the winter sunshine. Their friends surrounded them. Together they began to sing Psalms and worship and thanked Jehovah for bringing him home safely. Joel suggested that Yanis take tomorrow off from school. Next week was a scheduled school break and Hermes had already arranged speakers to cover his classes for tomorrow. He could return to his classroom at the end of the fall break.



On Sabbath night, the family gathered for their usual fellowship meal and worship time. Grandmother Salome lit the candles, and Jaden led in prayer for each one. He announced that before the meal, they were all invited to witness the espousal of Zared and Laila. Jaden presented Zared and told of his plans to move to Caesarea Philippi to secure a job as a scribe and to support the followers of the New Way. He planned to return before Passover, to take Laila with him as his bride. Elam presented his sister, Laila. Zared gave Elam and his brother Shem small knives that he had purchased at Jesse's new store. He presented Laila a supply of beautiful thread to make herself a wedding robe. He stated that since they would be traveling and carrying everything they owned, it would not be wise for her to prepare a lot of household goods. He simply wanted her to have one project to keep her busy until he could return for her. He would return just as soon as the rains stopped and winter was over. He would definitely return before Passover, and they could travel to their new home together. Yanis sat on a stool while he presided over the espousal and pronounced them man and wife awaiting their marriage in the spring. It was a special night and there was singing and celebrating.

Much of the talk was about the future of Capernaum with Priest Shimei gone. Many felt that any priest from the Pharisees would have similar views and would not necessarily be an improvement. Others felt that anyone would be better than Priest Shimei. They would just have to wait and see.

Zared stayed at Grandmother Salome's and Laila went home with her brothers, but they returned for the Sabbath and spent the day together getting acquainted under Jaden's watchful eyes. Laila expressed that she wished her abba knew. Jaden promised that Urias and Elam would be traveling to Joppa and Jerusalem soon. Hopefully, they would be able to locate the Apostle Peter and let him know the news.

On Sunday morning, Zared accepted the food bags that Salome's kitchen staff had prepared for him. He left before dawn for the journey. He would be busy preparing a house for his bride, and he was eager to get started. Unfortunately, the rainy season was already beginning, and the journey took longer than he anticipated. How he wished he could have just brought Laila with him to help prepare the house. He hated being away from her even for one more day. Hopefully, they could be wed before Passover.



Yanis and Jenay could not remember a sweeter time in their marriage. They had a whole week off from school and it was too cold and rainy to work at the farm. All week, Yanis focused on Jenay and the children. Pashhur and Natania took care of the cooking and chores around the house, which gave Yanis and Jenay time to work on what she would teach if she was allowed to start a class for the slave women. She wanted to teach a one-year-long class focused on Jesus' life. It would be similar to the one that she had taught the ladies' group, but many of these servants had not yet become believers. Yanis began to pray about starting a class for the men servants, but wondered if Ira and Tobias were ready for leading that group. The next Fish Shop class was scheduled to start next week. They rejoiced together that their dreams of ministry to the people of Capernaum was finally happening. How quickly time was flying by.

The Gentile group was not meeting this week, since school was out for fall break. Yanis and Jenay invited their men's and women's groups over for dinner to thank them for their incredible friendship and support. They were like a second family to them, and it was a sweet time of fellowship. Hava announced that she was carrying Elisha's baby, and all the women were excited for her. After dinner, the men helped carry the table and extra benches back to the courtyard, and everyone settled in the living area.

Yanis had earlier asked Hava and Miriam to pick out some joyful Psalms to sing together for a short time of worship. Then he said he had a question he needed to ask. "Jenay and I have felt a calling from God that we want to share with you. We need your confirmation that this is indeed from Jehovah and the direction for our next ministry."

"As long as it doesn't involve leaving Capernaum, we will be supportive," said Jairus, and everyone laughed and agreed.

"As you know, I've been teaching at the Fish Shop because Jaden and Jonas felt that there was a group of employees who had

not heard about Jesus. We feel that God has shown us another overlooked group, but we need your permission to minister there. Jenay feels led to start a new group for your women servants. Would you allow them to attend once a week? I am praying about starting a group for the men servants, but don't have clarity on that yet." said Yanis.

"When I look at the numbers, I believe that we have twenty-three women servants among us. Of those, we only know of Natania who has accepted Jesus as her Messiah," added Jenay.

"The tricky part is that we want to make this available to them, but not make it a requirement, just like the Fish Shop group. I will need your help to ascertain how to do that. Can we please spend a few minutes talking about your thoughts about this possible new ministry?" asked Yanis.

"I'm ashamed to admit that I've never even thought about their need to hear about the New Way. I am certainly willing to set aside time for them to learn and grow," said Joel.

"I would think it could only benefit our families. They impact everything we do — including raising our children," agreed Sarah.

"I do think it will be hard to make sure that they feel complete freedom to accept or reject Jesus," said Jairus.

"I'm so sorry that I've failed to think of them as people. I say one thing and do another," said Talman.

"I'm not trying to make you feel guilty. We just feel Jehovah's call to this people group and wanted to share it with you," said Yanis.

"Where will you meet, and when?"

Rachel spoke up quickly, "I'll be glad to watch Abie and Enoch while you teach. I'm assuming you would meet one morning a week for about an hour and a half?"

"Yes, and that would be so helpful if you could take the children. They love you and it would be special for them to have time with Grandmother Rachel," responded Jenay. "We could meet here each Thursday morning at the fourth hour and definitely have them home again by noon. Would that work?"

Everyone agreed. Jenay said she would like to start next week and everyone said they would speak to their maidservants. She and Yanis had decided to start off with the six week presentation of the New Way and then go right into the year-long class about Jesus.



On Sunday morning, Yanis and Jenay spent time preparing for the servants' group that would start on Thursday morning. Jenay had never taught the history lesson and needed to study. Yanis left for school and Jenay spent the afternoon with the children.

On Tuesday afternoon Yanis started a new class for Fish Shop employees. This time the class was full with several more on the waiting list. He got acquainted with them and shared his story before

he summarized the significant Jewish history. Since he only had an hour, he had to keep an eye on the time and remember not to keep them late. The Fish Shop class needed to be very tightly structured to fit into the one hour, and yet, was probably the most casual. God had a sense of humor and wanted Yanis to give Him complete control.

On Wednesday, Jenay met with the women's group, and they prayed for the servants who would be meeting tomorrow. Jenay was so excited. On Thursday morning, Joab took the babies to spend the morning with Grandmother Rachel. He was going to run some errands and then would work outside until the ladies were done. Jenay welcomed all twenty-three of them to her home and they gathered in the living room. Jenay also began with an apology for not sharing with them sooner. The tension was palpable. Jenay began by telling them her story of asking Jesus to be her Messiah after His crucifixion and resurrection. She shared the Jewish history, and several of the ladies indicated that they had heard bits and pieces of the story, but appreciated hearing the story in chronological order so that it made sense. Jenay told them that their time was up but if they had questions, she would be available to them all week. All indicated that they were eager to learn more and would return next week. Jenay was thrilled that it went so well and that they seemed to relax more as the morning progressed.



Each week, Jenay enjoyed the sweet fellowship with the Wednesday women's group. They made it a special point to pray for their maidservants to become followers of Jesus. After Jenay had covered the introductory classes with the maidservants, she felt that God was leading her to offer them the opportunity to invite Jesus to be their Messiah. She was amazed that all twenty-two women were ready, but realized that they had been watching the changes in their owners for many years. As they discussed a baptism service, they agreed that it would be special for each couple to baptize their own servants. They met at the beach on Sabbath morning and watched as Jairus and Rachel baptized their maidservants. Then the other couples followed. That afternoon, there was a sweet worship service at Talman's house as slave and free worshipped together. Everyone indicated that they were looking forward to continuing their lessons on the life of Jesus and the New Way that He taught. Yanis was still trying to figure out how to reach the men servants when Ira, Tobias, and Pashhur volunteered to teach the class if Yanis would provide them the structure and answer their questions. So, Yanis began to meet with the three servants each week and teach them how to teach their fellow slaves.

Yanis and Jenay had waited in obedience for the Holy Spirit to open doors and now they were busy teaching others what they had learned from following Jesus.



It was the middle of winter in Capernaum. Jesse had not spoken with Mr. Immer but made it a point to refer customers to the Westside Mercantile Store if he was unable to supply their needs. There was a general softening of animosity at the wells and other places where the groups needed to interact. Everyone seemed to be on their best behavior and if not comfortable with the other's beliefs, at least tolerant.

Jesse was happy with his purchasing agents, and Urias and Elam were beginning to feel that they would be able to support themselves by the end of the two years. Jesse was not yet making a profit, but he was not losing money either. He and Miriam were living as frugally as possible so that they could continue to stock the Eastside Mercantile Store, but Jesse knew that unless God sent another miracle, he would be unable to support his growing family. He was still unable to hire the workers he needed. And being the only employee was exhausting. He couldn't buy or sell property because he couldn't leave the store. But he praised Jehovah that the store was always busy. He dreamed of the day when he could fully stock it and hire the workers he needed. He continued to feel that the Holy Spirit was assuring him that he needed to wait in obedience and not fret. It was exhausting but thrilling to finally own his own business and to go home each night to Miriam and his babies. He wondered when five-year-old Zach would be old enough to begin helping customers.

It was a cold, rainy day when Amos, the steward from the Westside Mercantile Store entered Jesse's new store. Jesse greeted him and insisted he come in and warm himself. Very few people were out and about in such weather. The two men who had been such good friends before the split found it awkward. After a few minutes of polite, but stilted attempts, Amos said, "I have a buyer who is interested in your house. Is it for sale?"

Jesse could hardly believe his ears. "Certainly," he replied.

"What do you want for it?"

"Actually, I haven't been keeping up with the housing market recently. You would probably know best. What would you recommend?"

Amos made a suggestion, and then said he would like to see the inside again before setting a definite price.

"I can't leave my store, since I don't have any workers, so let me just give you the key and let you explore it on your own."

"Is it okay if I show the prospective buyer this afternoon?"

"It should be ready. Tobias has been checking on it occasionally, so the spiders don't carry it off."

Amos bundled up to face the weather. Jesse fell on his knees before Jehovah and began to sing His praises. Tears ran down his cheeks as he realized that God had carried him and his family through a hard time, but He had strengthened them and sustained them

incredibly and miraculously. Now, things were changing, and Jesse was already making plans for the future.

Within the week, the house was sold, and Jesse hired Pollux to finish the work they had planned to accomplish on the new house. Miriam and the children spent their days with Grandmother Sarah or friends. Jesse talked with Talman about securing a clerk and an accountant. Jesse and Miriam rejoiced together as their dreams began to come true. It would be a few years, but they felt certain that Jesse would be able to hire a steward who would free him to be able to do more work with the followers of Jesus.



Zared arrived at Salome's house on Thursday in the middle of Adar. It was still winter, but the rains had stopped. It was earlier than anyone expected. He said he wanted it to be a surprise for Laila. He worked out arrangements with Yanis and Salome. On Friday he went to the market and stocked up on traveling supplies for the trip. Salome's servants prepared fresh bread for their journey. At noon, Zared claimed his bride. He gave her time to prepare herself and then returned for her an hour later. She had everything packed into a travel bag and wore the beautiful wedding robe. They walked to her Aunt Salome's and visited all afternoon. He had hired musicians to play wedding music. They enjoyed the Sabbath dinner with her family and then Yanis led the wedding service and announced the marriage could commence. Zared spoke and said that contrary to tradition, they were going to begin their journey tonight under the full moon. Laila said goodbye one last time to her little brothers and hugged Aunt Salome. She joined hands with Zared, and they confidently walked off into the night. Everyone gathered around the front courtyard to wave and wish them well. Once they were out of sight, Jaden asked if they could spend just a few minutes in prayer for the young couple. Many prayed for them as they began their long journey to Caesarea Philippi and their even longer journey of marriage. They prayed for God's blessing and for their ministry and unity. It was a strange wedding, but very special.

Yanis asked Jenay if he was getting old and set in his ways. "It seems these young people don't respect the old traditional ways of doing things."

Jenay laughed and said, "And you think my parents were happy with our choices?"

They both laughed as they walked the short distance to their home, each carrying a baby in the bright moonlight. Jenay wondered when she was going to find time to tell Yanis that baby number three would be arriving in the spring.

## **The End (Or Only the Beginning?)**